Liberty University School of Divinity

The Impact of Writings by Grace Abounds Association of Pastors That Provocatively Concatenate Biblical Events and Current News Topics to Ignite Christian Bible Reading

A Thesis Project Submitted to
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in Candidacy for the Degree of
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by

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Acknowledgments

“Do not be afraid for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)

The Lord God showed Himself strong to my daughter and me. He brought us on a life journey that only the mighty God could successfully accomplish. Along the way, the Lord spoke to us His truths to strengthen us, to help us, and to uphold us. He told us to be not afraid. He upheld us with His righteous, right hand. His grip was upon us.

The Lord showed to us His glory. The Lord showed us His strength – and strong is God! The Lord protected our family, the Lord delivered our family from evil, and the Lord provided for our family. The Lord God did these great things all by His righteous, right hand - all by Himself. It was not the work of my hands; it was the work of God’s hands. All the glory belongs to God.

The Lord God positioned my family in places through which the Lord advanced our family in Him – such as West Angeles Church of God in Christ. My family learned how to praise God, and the Lord lifted our family at West Angeles Church of God in Christ. I am thankful to Bishop Charles E. Blake, Sr. (The Presiding Bishop of the Church of God in Christ and the Pastor of West Angeles C.O.G.I.C), and Ms. Charletta Benjamin (Previously, the Executive Assistant in the pastoral office) for providing my daughter and me the recommendations to Liberty University’s Master of Divinity program and Doctor of Ministry program.

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God. I am thankful to Mrs. Laverne Young Smith (within the Doctor of Ministry department) who succinctly guided me through the remaining steps of my project. I am thankful for the participants who took time to contribute to the study. They participated even though it was a challenging time for Californians. The Lord blessed me with great participants. From the professors to the participants, everyone added to the Lord’s light in my heart throughout the research.

Through my professors and my courses at Liberty University, the Lord God brought me higher in Him. I am thankful to my mother Patricia Perdue, LVN. Through her, the Lord gave me a great start upward toward the Lord.

To my wonderful, precious daughter, Reverend Dr. Albany Stephens: The Lord God loves you. You are a mighty woman of God. The Lord God is upholding you with His righteous, right hand. The Lord’s grip is upon you. The Lord God is your Father, and you are His daughter. You come from Him, you belong to Him, and you belong with Him. You are, literally, the daughter of the King. A Precious Angel, you are the second, greatest gift the Lord has given me (The greatest gift God has given me is the gift of knowing Him and the gift of having a special, close walk with Him. Equally, the greatest gift God has given me is the gift of blessing and choosing my daughter also to know Him and to walk closely with Him).

You are the beloved of your mother. Remember the Lord’s message: TAILY. I praise the Lord for His goodness and His wonderful works to my family (Psalm 107:31).
ABSTRACT

As Christians are becoming increasingly secularized by the teachings within their communities, it is critical to address how to creatively ignite, encourage, and inspire daily Bible readership among Christians. Teachers of God’s word must creatively ignite Christians to read their Bibles daily. This will arm Christians with God’s word so Christians can effectively counter pervasive secular teachings and the consequential impacts of secular teachings that have infiltrated the Christian lifestyle.

The researcher utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design and selected five participants by purposive sampling. Participants represented Christian-centric and goal-centric communities. By telephone, the researcher provided participants with pre and post questionnaires along with material written by Grace Abounds Association of Pastors (GAAP) that emphasized God’s mercy. The researcher examined the levels of Bible readership among participants and observed how participants responded to the biblical teaching emphasized within the writing, determining whether Bible reading interest was ignited. The results were that participants recognized biblical and modern-day parallels within the GAAP writing and expressed that the parallels coupled with the emphasis on mercy reminded participants to apply God’s mercy to the contexts of today’s events.

The researcher recommended that pastors and ministry workers creatively ignite congregants to read, daily, their Bibles. The researcher also recommended that pastors re-establish two things with congregants: To read, daily, God’s word to counter the growing phenomenon of secularized Christianity and to apply God’s teachings within the contexts of today’s societal events.

Word Count: 236
Key Words: Bible Reading, Christian Identity, Christian Formation, Discipleship
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Chapter 1: Introduction

If Christian identity is fashioned by the Word of God, then the conviction that Bible reading is essential for the spiritual formation and spiritual growth of those who profess to follow Christ is on target.\(^1\) The Bible enables the Christian reader to identify “the major biblically-based expectations incumbent upon all believers.”\(^2\) One of many critical statements the Bible makes regarding formation and God’s expectations for those who are Christ followers is simply stated as such, “Be Holy.”\(^3\) This specific teaching is located both in the Old Testament (Lev. 9:12) and the New Testament (1 Pet 1:15). Within the Old Testament, the mandate instructs the Christ follower to maintain a close relationship with God that is recognizable by its fruit. It mandates the Christ follower to be “set apart, unique, and distinct from the non-believers’ lifestyle.”\(^4\) The mandate also directs, “imitating and being in service to God.”\(^5\) Within the New Testament, the directive to “Be Holy” emphasizes righteousness.\(^6\) “Its fundamental ideas are separation, consecration, devotion to God and sharing in God’s purity and abstaining from earth’s defilement.”\(^7\)

Given the absoluteness that Christian identity is fashioned by God’s Word through the instruction and guidance of the scriptures, it is justifiable to auspicate that without the regular,

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\(^1\) Christopher J.H. Wright, *How to Preach and Teach the Old Testament for All its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 73.


\(^3\) Cox, Peck, "Christian Education,” 254.

\(^4\) Ibid., 254.

\(^5\) Ibid.

\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^7\) Ibid.
continual reading of the scriptures, Christians will apostatize. It is a valid testimony that becoming a follower of Christ requires more than the simple acknowledgment and belief that Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. “Even the demons believe and tremble,” (James 2:19). Along with believing that Jesus is the Son of God, Christians must make the deliberate decision to begin a continual, transformative process - through which God changes the individual into a person whose life, both inwardly and outwardly, reflects the life of Christ by establishing within the individual the light, the Spirit, and the characteristics of Christ. Through the transformative process, Christians “cease to be conformed to the values and patterns of this world, they present their whole lives and being to God, which means to place themselves at the disposal of God to have his way in them through and through.” Such a process demands "deliberate and decisive commitment." That means transformation comes from exercising daily reading, daily study, and daily fellowship with God. As God warned Joshua to meditate on God’s Word day and night (Joshua 1:8), Christians must read and study the Word of God daily. Daily fellowship with God’s Word provides “Christians with the means to resist the particular worldviews and practices of the cultures” within the Christian’s surrounding community or society.

God’s desire is to declare His glory in all His creation (Psalm 19:1-4) and to glorify Himself within the individual life of each follower of Christ (Isaiah 43:7). The transformed lives

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8 Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the New King James Version.


of Christians bring glory to God. Christians must make the decision to be a part of God’s lifelong, developmental work that results in bringing glory to God. Therefore, Christians must become and live as disciples of Christ,\textsuperscript{12} displaying God’s glory through the transformation of their lives and living as a community of believers \textsuperscript{13} all for God’s glory.

The Word of God is imperative for God’s developmental and transformational process because it is the living Word of God at work within oneself that transforms the Christian into the image of Christ.\textsuperscript{14} The means through which God shapes and builds the Christian include God’s Word, God’s Spirit (which is present within God’s Word), and God’s people (the church).\textsuperscript{15} Many Christians accede to gathering together in fellowship; however, when Christians do not meditate on and study the scriptures, daily, the Christian identity does not accumulate – and, even, is in jeopardy of becoming warped because of the constant barrage of false teachings in a society. Neglecting to read the scriptures with steadfastness, Christians will ebb Gods’ Spirit and power, which is the oil that is needed within their lives to not only generate growth in God but also needed to protect their lives, to keep their lives physically and spiritually healthy, and to buffer their lives during life’s events. The Spirit of Christ within the Christian is what powers these God-given benefits, and it is the Word of God that enables the Christian to grow the Spirit of Christ within himself.\textsuperscript{16} Lacking the Word of God, the Christian’s growth will not simply be

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{12} Steve Smith and Ying Kai, \textit{T4T A Discipleship ReRevolution: The Story Behind the World’s Fastest Growing Church Planting Movement and How it Can Happen in Your Community} (Monument: WigTake Resources), 2011, 10.
\bibitem{14} Paul Pettit, \textit{Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ} (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications), 2008, 50.
\bibitem{15} Pettit, \textit{Foundations}, 51.
\bibitem{16} Klaus Issler, \textit{Living into the life of Jesus} (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012), 42.
\end{thebibliography}
stagnant; rather, the Christian is in danger of ultimately succumbing to, and being misled by, the false teachings that are rampant in societies. Speaking to every level of Bible learner, the book of Ephesians urges the believer to remove himself from old ways and from a society’s ways.

“Learning Christ entails a break from the ways of the nations. The writer urges the Ephesians to ‘put away your former way of life, your old self ... to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God’ (4:22-24).” A Christian without the guidance of the Word of God is a candidate for a destiny of becoming one who professes Christ; yet who lives a secular, powerless lifestyle.

Christians who are self-describing their walks with Christ as “falling short” are becoming rampant among believers in Christ. This suggests that Christians have not simply decided to turn away from God’s teachings; rather, Christians are becoming increasingly stalked and challenged by a variety of evils which are presenting themselves within varying contexts. Whatever the causes, Christians are falling behind in their ability to carry out the teachings of Christ, which are what the scriptures call the disciple’s ‘reasonable service’ (Romans 12:1). Falling behind with the teachings of Christ within this post-modern era, Christians have placed themselves in a vulnerable position within secular society. Christians are losing their closeness to God, which results in the Christian’s diminished capacity to trust God, to walk with God, to increase in God’s Spirit, and ultimately results in the diminished capacity of Christians to give glory to God within their lives. In short, Christians are God’s handiwork on display, and the devil is trying to steal God’s glory. Being a child of God, chosen for an eternal life with God, is an inheritance from God. It is obligatory of teachers of God’s Word to provide Christians who are inadvertently

backsliding from God’s Word the creative assistance needed to regain their foothold on biblical reading and biblical teachings so that Christians can return to their status as vessels that God made to demonstrate His glory. Without God’s daily Word, Christians are in jeopardy of becoming lightly esteemed by God as reprobate silver, rejected by God (Jeremiah 6:30), and Christians are in danger of consequently serving as vessels that God will use to demonstrate His wrath (Romans 9:22).

Grace Abounds Association of Pastors (GAAP) believes it can creatively ignite and encourage Bible reading in passive Christians, by engaging in provocative subjects relevant to a community and composing aggressive biblically-based newswriting on those subjects. GAAP will examine the current levels of Bible reading and interest among participants. Following, GAAP will test whether GAAP’s creative approach has the fire, excitement, and the speed of light needed for each participant’s event horizon - to pull Christians back from an impending abyss and to bring Christians back to their Bibles. The study will also examine whether participants experience an increased desire for greater practical application of God’s Word. Either of these outcomes experienced by Christians can bring greater glory to God as Christians read more and apply more of God’s Word within their communities and shine ever brighter as living, walking exhibitions of God’s handiwork.

**Ministry Context**

The time is ripe for creativity. Teachers of God’s Word do not have the luxury to rely solely upon past methods of engaging Christians, especially in an age when sin appears to have reached a level that is unsustainable. Examining the times, it appears the ax may be at the root of the tree. For this reason, a strong response is needed against elements that threaten to swallow up
God’s people. Teachers of God’s Word may not have time to quietly remind and encourage believers in Christ to read their Bibles.

To address adult Christian education needs, the researcher believes there is an urgency to venture back into the communities to engage biblically uneducated Christians, by any biblically endorsed, creative means necessary. To attract adult, Christian community members back to biblical reading and education, creative methods must include incorporating new ideas that extend beyond pulpit teaching and church Bible studies.

Engaging professing followers of Christ within the communities of Hollywood, Pasadena, Sunnyvale, and La Jolla California, and Monterey County, California’s Central Coast, Grace Abounds Association of Pastors has observed five common themes present among the community members where GAAP has carried out community engagement activities:

- The community member affirms regular church attendance; yet, the individual knows extremely little about the teachings of God’s Word. This group represents a segment of Christians whom research data describes as having “low biblical literacy.”

- The community members affirm church attendance, are versed in common passages, rely heavily upon scripture for daily living; yet, acknowledge the writings of GAAP served as a reminder to apply compassion toward others. This segment of Christians represents Christians who “understand the kind of kingdom life elucidated in the Sermon on the Mount is the foundation for each Christian's personal discipleship to Jesus.”

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• Community members do not attend church, are not knowledgeable about the scriptures, confess a secular lifestyle, and attest to a variety of spiritual practices that are non-Christian disciplines; yet, claim to be followers of Christ. For this group of community members, viewing themselves as Christians either stems from an earlier experience of attending church at some point in childhood, or stems from having an immediate family member who was involved in the church during childhood, or stems from having parents who have worked in ministry. Such individuals fit the classical experience of being “in danger of trusting the wrong things - programs, techniques, ideologies, even theologies - instead of fearing the Lord, walking according to his word, and pursuing in Christ.”

• Community members who demonstrate self-application of God’s Word; however, they appear to have a need for increase in effective, practical application of God’s healing Word toward those beyond themselves who, likewise, need to experience God’s presence, strength, and compassion, within their lives. Stated simply, some Christians are skilled with seeking God’s grace and compassion within their own lives; however, they may demonstrate impatience, may lack grace and compassion toward others, or may need to develop skills for applying God’s Word, outward. This Christian group demonstrates a strong understanding of Hebrews 7:25, that God “ever lives to make intercession for those who draw near to God through Him,” and, equally, Hebrews 9:24, that God “appears in the presence of God on our behalf.”

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They demonstrate knowledge of how to lean on and rely upon God; yet, they do not immediately demonstrate a strong, prayerful stance toward others.

- There is also a group of community members that state they are Christians; however, their actions are evil. These individuals desire to call themselves Christians, but they carry out a variety of evils against others within a community that include hatred and violence.

GAAP writings have taken into consideration some of these recurring themes and produces written material with a focus on healing low Bible reading issues among adult Christians by bringing into view exciting biblical perspectives on current issues within the community or society. Considering the first two groups (Christians who attend church; yet, have little knowledge of the scriptures and Christians who do not regularly attend church and who are experiencing low Bible readership), GAAP hopes the writings will spark interest in biblical teachings and the positions the Word of God takes regarding today’s societal issues. For Christians who already understand the importance of Bible reading for powerful, daily living, but fall short in practical application of God’s Word within their interactions with fellow community members, the researcher hopes to move these Christians beyond self-application of God’s Word toward practical application of God’s Word within their communities, bringing glory to God. For individuals who do not attend church, who willingly confess to living secular lifestyles, and who do not read God’s Word - yet, who still refer to themselves as Christians - the researcher anticipates GAAP writings to be one of many seeds planted by the Holy Spirit that will ultimately lead the individuals to God’s Word. The fifth group, hate-filled and violent individuals who desire to call themselves Christians, GAAP does not address. These seem to be children of Satan attempting to pose as children of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).
Spiritual growth that brings glory to God is centered on change that is powered by the Word of God. Recognizing these recurring themes of low Bible readership among portions of a community, GAAP produces writings focused on healing those recurring themes by producing writings that are relevant to a specific community. The critical element is to produce writings that display God’s responses to those societal events, drawing Christians to God’s exciting Word, the Bible. Hearers need to see relevance and resonance “in order to grow alert to the Holy Spirit’s movements of power and comfort and God’s voice of guidance and direction...”

The Writings of Grace Abounds Association of Pastors

Grace Abounds Association of Pastors primarily approaches its writings and teachings through inspirational, fiction, or strong warning writings. The researcher considered which genre of writing to utilize for the study. Because some community members find GAAP writings to be strong teachings, the researcher was cautious to respect and protect the comfort level of the participants in choosing an appropriate teaching for the project. For the study, the researcher chose an inspirational teaching. However, this precaution is not considered with GAAP writings that are distributed throughout a community and that are designed teachings meant to shake GAAP readers out of their comfort and complacency.

Strong warning writings are GAAP’s preferred method of writing. Responses from GAAP readers indicate that community members are willing to read GAAP’s strong warning

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writings; however, desiring to remove any possible agitation from the participants’ environment during the study, Grace Abounds Association of Pastors chose an inspirational writing for the study. GAAP also selected an inspirational writing that was presently most relevant to the participants’ community. Readers love inspiration and love to hear that God loves them. Given the harshness within today’s society, this is understandable. However, God’s love must be understood within the context of God’s laws and God’s call to repent and turn away from one’s sins. This feeding of Christians’ desire to hear about God’s love, without hearing God’s requirement of repentance that is a part of God’s love, creates a “preference pattern” which leaves the Christian to “languish unattended and unnurtured.”25 This form of teaching that solely relies upon feel-good lessons prevents Christians from forming into strong Christians.

Grace Abounds Association of Pastors is community engagement focused, engaging the community through social media platforms and by daily, telephone campaigning efforts. Through these campaigns, GAAP invites community members and community leaders to its news website to read and hear its writings and teachings. The publishing branch of Grace Abounds Association of Pastors digitally publishes written works that are solely produced by GAAP: Articles, columns, profiles, and excerpts from any of GAAP’s magazines and teaching series. Addressing national issues as well as issues specific to each community, GAAP urges community members to read God’s perspectives on that community’s societal issues. Grace Abounds Association of Pastors also urges community leaders to legislate according to God’s laws and urges community leaders to guide their constituency according to biblical teachings. In addition to the writings on GAAP’s publishing website, Grace Abounds Association of Pastors

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provides audio versions of its writings, inviting community members, also, to hear the audio versions of GAAP’s news items.

Grace Abounds Association of Pastors engages a variety of communities. Some community members engaged by GAAP have become contributors to GAAP’s endeavors to teach God’s Word. The GAAP contributors are inspirational community members who are achieving career objectives and dreams; they are individuals who desire to thrive and prosper. They are family structured. Many have received higher education, and some are current university students, both graduate and undergraduate levels. Some are community college students.

From among these previous GAAP contributors, the researcher selected a portion of participants for the research. The GAAP contributors were specifically chosen from GAAP’s publishing branch. Other selected participants are community members who believe in Christ and are newly introduced to GAAP. The participants selected from GAAP’s publishing branch are previous contributors to GoalGetters-SuperHeroes Magazine (GGSH Magazine), an inspirational, digital publication published on GAAP’s news website. The contributors served in a variety of capacities within GGSH Magazine. Some were featured within the magazine, speaking about their amazing journeys to achieving their career objectives and goals. They discussed their trust in God that served to urge them forward and that served to counter discouraging “dream killers” as they worked to achieve great dreams. They shared their inspirational journeys and provided words of wisdom, encouraging fellow Goal-Getters forward to achieving their dreams. Some GGSH Magazine contributors are small business owners who previously placed advertisements within the magazine.
Community members who are newly introduced to GAAP were introduced to GAAP through telephone campaigning. These community members and previous GGSH contributors make up the participants in this study. Working with a focus group of five participants, GAAP’s objective is to examine the Bible reading levels of participants and to test whether GAAP writings creatively ignite or increase Bible reading among the participants.

The biblical position of Grace Abounds Association of Pastors is that those who profess to follow Christ must experience continual transformation until the day of Christ’s return (Romans 12:22), and the Bible is God’s tool to educate His disciples about God’s kingship. The Bible is God’s tool to guide and transform His disciples.\(^{26}\) Without daily reading and engaging of God’s Word, believers in Christ remain merely believers. These believers languish at a point of expressing faith in Christ, but do not graduate from this point to decidedly become disciples of Christ. “Another way to think about this is to say that what we believe as Christians needs to be linked to how we go about our lives each day.”\(^ {27}\) Christians must make the decision to take part in this process which will link what they believe to how they live their daily lives. This important decision initiates a transformation process that transforms the Christian into Christlikeness. This transformation process moves Christians into a closer union with God’s Spirit, enabling Christians to live increasingly in obedience to God’s laws, and this process grows Christians into fellowship with one another. The Word of God is the catalyst for this ongoing transformation and discipleship. However, many Christians incorrectly believe this process is optional – or they simply choose to opt out of this process, as if they had an option.\(^ {28}\)


According to the Pew Research Center, thirty-seven percent of Christians state the Bible is important but not essential to being a Christian, and twenty-one percent assert the Bible is not an important part of their Christian identity. This incorrect thinking is aided by local churches that are remiss in teaching congregants to become transformed disciples who are obedient to God’s Word.

If the Spirit of God is the oil, and the Spirit of God (the oil) is within God’s Word, then followers of Christ need God’s Word to be filled with God’s Spirit and God’s golden oil. Those who profess to follow Christ must fill their lamps with God’s oil to ready themselves for the coming of the Bridegroom. Those who are not prepared with lamps filled with oil will be shut out of the wedding (Matthew 25:1-13), and they will generate no glory for God.

Although current research shows that sixty-three percent of evangelical Protestants read the Bible only one time per week, some study participants self-define as consistent readers of the scriptures. Study participants define consistency as multiple times per day, daily, and weekly. The participants demonstrate varying levels of walks with Christ. GAAP will test whether its creative writings saturated with God’s Word will creatively ignite greater interest in Bible reading among the selected participants.

According to Pew Research Center, forty-two percent of Christians researched agree the Word of God is critical to Christian growth and assert that “reading the Bible or other religious


31 Pew Research Center, “Facts on How Americans View the Bible and Other Religious Texts.”
materials is an essential part of what being Christian means to them personally;” yet, there appears to be little research about how to ignite Christian interest in reading God’s word daily - which is critical to their spiritual development.

Because GAAP participants are working to achieve career and other objectives, GAAP emphasizes to participants that Bible readership will not only strengthen their lives in Christ but also Bible readership will translate into greater power to achieve career and lifetime goals. Understanding that passions can serve as a driving force to lead Christians ever closer to Christ, the researcher emphasizes this message within its writings to guide participants to what God intends for their lives.

The provocative writings produced by Grace Abounds Association of Pastors that teach the sovereignty of God and remind Christians of God’s perspective on today’s issues are a creative path toward inspiring Christians to read their Bibles daily. The Bible is God’s will and testament provided for His children, instructing His children about their inheritance. It instructs God’s children in The Way to secure their inheritance, instructing them how to prevent the Thief from entering in and stealing their inheritance of eternal life with God - that the Father, Himself, has provided for His children.

**Problem Presented**

When engaging community members, Grace Abounds Association of Pastors asks an individual if he has a relationship with Christ, if he understands what Christ came to achieve on the earth, and whether he confesses that Jesus is the Son of God. Most responses are unusually

32 Pew Research Center, “Facts on How Americans View the Bible and Other Religious Texts.”


34 Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be*, 33.
affirmative, and community members all profess over their lives that they are blessed. If GAAP probed no further, it might appear that all is well with those who profess to believe in and follow Christ. Everyone is a Christian. Everyone believes in Jesus. Everyone has faith that Jesus is the Son of God. Everyone attends church; every Sunday. Everyone is blessed.

However, when GAAP delves a little deeper, further inquiry begins to expose that many of those professing to follow Christ are unknowledgeable of the purpose of Christ’s birth on the earth. Many are unknowledgeable about the message that Christ came to teach and what Christ began His ministry teaching. Pew Research Center supports this finding, showing that fewer than half adults (45 percent) were able to name all four Gospels.  

Many community members engaged by Grace Abounds Association of Pastors will confess they live secular lifestyles. They have live-in boyfriends and girlfriends, and premarital relations are common-place and acceptable to many of those whom GAAP engages. Pew Research Center supports this finding as well. The data show that thirty-seven percent of Americans stated, “The Bible is important but not essential to being a Christian.” Additionally, twenty-one percent state, “Reading the Bible is not an important part of their Christian identity.” When considering The Pew Research Center data with the statements of community members who live secular lifestyles, the findings suggest a correlation between individuals who do not read the Bible and individuals who self-define as living secular lifestyles.

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36 Pew Research Center, “Facts on How Americans View the Bible and Other Religious Texts.”

37 Ibid.
Some community members even confess to disliking other groups. Many of them are apathetic to the sufferings of others. Yet, these community members place themselves within the category of “Christian.” However, what is most telling about the state of the individual’s relationship with Christ is that the community member sees no need for growth. A community member who drinks, “parties,” and who participates in pre-marital relations feels his level of Christian growth is acceptable, comparable, or even better than others who profess to follow Christ within his community. This segment who profess to follow Christ but who live openly, secular lifestyles “has no compelling sense that understanding of and conformity with the clear teachings of Christ is of any vital importance to [their] life and certainly not in any way essential…Such obedience is regarded as out of the question or impossible.”

Grace Abounds Association of Pastors has also encountered a portion of community members who consider themselves “Christians;” yet, they reject the teachings of Christ. When GAAP presses the biblical truth that Jesus is the Only Way, these same individuals who claimed they are Christians, also exclaim, “No! Jesus is not the only way!” It appears there exists a segment of individuals who desire to be called Christians, though they practice religions that are not centered on Christ. Pew Research Center data possibly provides insight to this group: Data show that thirty-six percent of Americans assert the Bible “should not be interpreted literally…” and the data show “A separate eighteen percent of Christians view the Bible as a book written by men, not God.” This data may be shining some light on contributors to the

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40 Pew Research Center, “Facts on How Americans View the Bible and Other Religious Texts.”
phenomenon of professing to be a Christian but practicing religions that deny Christ. The lack of a foundational, theological understanding of the Bible while also desiring to embrace the Christian culture may be creating this segment of non-believing “believers.” This concerning group of people who desire the status of being called Christian but who emphatically reject the teachings of Christ, have neither any true desire to know Christ nor do they have any true desire to live according to Christ’s teachings.

“I’m a Buddhist, but we’re all Christians,” one anonymous community member stated. It appears that Christianity is becoming a melting pot in the eyes of some community members. Believers of Christ who live on the fringes of Christianity and non-believers of Christ, alike, refer to themselves as Christians. The desire of this latter type may be two-fold: The desire for the equal right to be called Christians because they can perceive the status of Christians, and the desire to come in by stealth to spy out the liberty Christians have in Christ Jesus, that they may bring the Christian into bondage (Galatians 2:4). Hence, they preach, “We’re all Christians.”

On the surface, it appears that community members are all mixing together in one, big, happy, beautiful melting pot called, “Christians.” Within the melting pot are some who worship false gods, some who believe in practicing sorcery, some who attend satanic rituals, some who believe they are “good” when they help the wicked to advance evil schemes, and some who believe that to acquire gains by trickery, guile, and deceit is to be a good steward.

In such a melting pot, community members exercise their options to either believe in Jesus or to not believe in Jesus. They all agree to believe in a variety of gods and teachings. When those who desire a life with Christ become more secularized, mixing into the melting pot of “Christians,” it becomes difficult to distinguish them from the non-believers in Christ. These
barely recognizable (if recognizable), secularized Christians are representatives of what some call, “non-discipleship Christianity.” 41

However, there are some community members who understand they must be transformed and there are some who recognize and confess they have fallen short. They acknowledge they must turn back toward God. While Christians fall behind in reading their Bibles and fall behind in becoming transformed into Christlikeness, the non-believers of Christ are claiming they are the Christians. They are working to establish a new narrative, they are attempting to make a mockery of what it means to follow Christ, and they are waging, and engaging in, an identity theft scheme - attempting to steal the distinctive identity of the Christian.

These non-believing, melting pot “Christians” are beginning to present this narrative: ‘There are Christians who are followers of Christ – and there are Christians who are not followers of Christ. Each Christian does what is right in his own eyes. Each Christian determines his type of Christianity: To be a follower of Christ Christian who worships Jesus – or to be a non-follower of Christ Christian who chooses to worship other gods.’ These ideals are evidenced in the Pew Research data - which convict Christians, themselves, as agents contributing to the spread of this narrative. The Pew Research data state this, “Among Christians, two-thirds say many religions can lead to eternal life, and most of them (fifty percent of all Christians) say some non-Christian religions can lead to life everlasting.” 42


When Christians remain unknowledgeable about God’s Word, refuse to commit to life as a disciple of Christ, and neither blossom into a life of obedience to God nor excel into a character of Christlikeness, Christians keep this mockery of Christ alive and growing. Out of respect for Christ and the Spirit of God within the Christian, Christians must begin making a distinction between their Christian lives and the lives of other “Christians” who worship and believe in false gods. The distinction begins with knowing who is God, and it begins with the process of becoming transformed by the Spirit of God – which increasingly makes the follower of Christ distinct from other “Christians” who are worshipers of false gods. “The practice of spiritual formation matters. Without it - we are beginning to learn - church, and even the Christian faith, simply does not work.”43 The distinguishing process of separating the wheat from the tares (transforming one’s mind, heart, and spirit) begins with consistent reading and studying God’s Word – the Bible.

As individuals with new ideals pave the way for calling “virtually anything that gives you a good feeling …a spiritual experience,”44 it is critical for Christians to read their Bibles and to commit to becoming transformed believers in Christ who are distinguishable from non-followers of Christ (2 Corinthians 6:17). Reading the Bible plays a significant role in establishing the Christian’s identity, in building the Christian’s character, and in transforming the Christian’s old lifestyle to a biblical lifestyle (2 Timothy 3:16). Reading the Bible guides Christians to live as a community of believers who give glory to God. Throughout the scriptures, living as a

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community of believers is integral to Christian formation and growth.\textsuperscript{45} God works out His plan for redemptive restoration within the context of Christian community.\textsuperscript{46} God’s call for Christian community is found throughout the scriptures. When Christians neglect reading the scriptures, Christians miss this important call. When Bible readership is neglected, Christian formation and growth languish, and Christians lack many important messages that God has for His community of followers. God intends to bring glory to Himself through His creation. It is imperative that Christians increase Bible readership because knowledge, power for growth, information for transformation, and information on the redemptive restoration that must take place within the Christian community are found within the scriptures.\textsuperscript{47} Because God forms Christians by His Word (which is filled with the Spirit of God), if Christians do not begin or increase in Bible reading, then Christians will not become transformed followers of Christ who are distinguishable from non-believers. Christians will not be able to fully experience a life that gives glory to God. Because Christians think transformation and discipleship are optional, and they believe Christlikeness is impossible or unimportant for their Christian walk, Christians continue to fall behind in consistently reading their Bibles and fall further into apostacy. Therefore, the problem this project will address is how to creatively ignite, encourage, and inspire Bible readership among those who profess to follow Christ - to grow their understanding of the Sovereign God and His ways.

\textsuperscript{45} Paul Pettit, \textit{Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ} (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008), 75.

\textsuperscript{46} Pettit, \textit{Foundations}, 75.

\textsuperscript{47} Klaus Issler, \textit{Living into the life of Jesus} (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012), 43.
Statement of the Purpose

The researcher will examine if the writings of Grace Abounds Association of Pastors are igniting or raising adult, Christian interest in Bible reading, or if the writings are impacting current, Christian Bible readers in any way among community members in the Hollywood, Los Angeles, and Monterey Bay, Central Coast areas. The researcher will first determine Bible reading levels of participants, based upon the self-assessments of participants. Provided with this self-assessment, the researcher will test if GAAP writings increase or ignite Bible reading or Bible interest among these select Christians. The researcher will also observe for any additional themes or outcomes experienced by participants. Pew Research data show that sixty-three percent of evangelical Protestants (63%) read their Bibles only one time per week.48 A creative and exciting fire is needed to ignite, inspire, and encourage Christians to increase (or to begin) Bible reading so that their lamps will be filled with oil when the Bridegroom arrives.

This problem must be researched not only to discover and develop creative ways to inspire Bible reading among communities that GAAP engages, but also it must be researched because Bible reading is the source for Christian identity, transformation, and discipleship for all Christians. This problem also must be addressed because of the increasing advancement of false teachings which creates an increased danger of secularized Christianity, resulting in Christians becoming indistinguishable from non-followers of Christ. Christians have a negative impact on the community of Christ when Christians are viewed as living secular, non-flourishing lifestyles. A non-flourishing Christian lifestyle not only diminishes the capacity of the individual to thrive but also the larger Christian community is negatively impacted. The greatest impact, perhaps, is

that God’s glory is not reflected as God intends within the Christian community. The negative repercussions also greatly impact Christians individually. The Christian community member experiences a diminished, spiritual capacity because his spiritual development has languished, rendering the Christian vulnerable to both spiritual and non-spiritual attacks. The Christian’s belief system, or lack of a secure belief system, will shape the Christian’s responses to life events.⁴⁹

The researcher will select a combination of community members newly introduced to Grace Abounds Association of Pastors and previous contributors to *GoalGetters-SuperHeroes Magazine*. The participants will represent a specific sampling of community members within Hollywood, California, and the Monterey Bay area, located along California’s Central Coast. The researcher will test whether GAAP writings are effective in enhancing interest in Bible reading among educated, goal oriented, and career oriented adult Christians. GAAP will also utilize participant responses to gain insights to trends that may be present among the participants and will examine the responses for insights to factors that contribute to low Bible reading.

Discovering causes to low Bible readership will assist the researcher’s ability to further strategize GAAP writings in its endeavor to ignite interest in Christian Bible reading. The researcher will test GAAP writings for effectiveness in bringing Christians back to their Bibles, will look for insights to better strategize GAAP writings, and will incorporate any gained insights. The ultimate purpose of the study is to use GAAP writings as a platform to proclaim that God is King and to bring God’s people to living their lives in accordance with and in alignment with the King. The research will provide insight to whether GAAP writings are

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⁴⁹ Ros Stuart-Buttle and John Short, *Christian Faith, Formation and Education* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 13-27.
accomplishing the researcher’s objective of igniting interest in Bible reading among Christians. The researcher’s joint-objective is to bring Christians to increase in applying God’s Word, not only within their personal lives but also within their communities.

There are a variety of factors and events that work to hinder Bible readership among Christians. Some of those common factors include plain disinterest in reading, the sense of the Bible’s lack of relevance to society today, the fear of conviction of sin, and growing secularism among Christians. Secular individuals often try to shame Christians for their reliance upon God’s Word. These secular individuals do not understand the power of prayer and often accuse Christians when Christians rely upon prayer and God to provide solutions to life’s problems.

Some Christians may be feeling pressured to rely upon “science.” As the exhortation to trust in science appears to be heard more often than the exhortation to trust in Christ, some Christians who are not well-rooted in the Word of God interpret these exhortations to trust in science as a call to exchange the teachings of faith, trust, and reliance upon Christ for the empirical method of believing only what one can see, hear, feel, taste, and smell. In short, as various teachings are advanced within the society, non-Bible reading Christians lack the biblical foundation to properly respond to teachings that are promoted within the society.

Hinderances to Bible readership among Christians also includes complex issues. These more complex factors will vary from cultural factors, gender factors, socio-economic factors, age factors, to the modern issues of a society that is ever-increasing in hostility toward Christian beliefs. Through the literature review, the researcher, briefly, examines literature that brings to light intrinsic elements that play a role in Bible readership blockage. The researcher acknowledges the existence of elemental factors; however, the research will focus primarily on addressing the more visible hinderances to Bible readership that are more evident to the eye.
Even factors within the local church contribute to low Bible readership among Christians. The message of repentance is a stumbling block for some pastors, resulting in avoidance of the scriptures. Some local churches lack “a concrete plan and practice for teaching people to do ‘all things whatsoever I have commanded you.’” Some pastors are fearful of speaking strongly about the need for congregants to repent. These fearful pastors are concerned about angering the congregants with a message of repentance. Some pastors fear such a message of repentance will result in loss of congregants and a loss of revenue for the church. Therefore, these fearful pastors do not firmly assert the need for congregants to repent and to be transformed. Instead, some pastors greatly highlight works within the community to redeem the congregant of sins. Such a message is so frequently taught that many Christians believe works can cancel the need for repentance.

One anonymous congregant stated that her pastor, who pastored a large church, preached that repentance was only necessary once in a Christian’s lifetime. Therefore, according to the congregant, there was never again a need for the congregant to ever repent of anything else in her lifetime. This suggests a resistance to acknowledge sin. This type of teaching validates the Christian who desires to refrain from reading the scriptures, knowing the scriptures will convict him of his sins. Avoidance of the scriptures puts Christians at risk of secularization.

Hosea 7:8-9 states this: “Ephraim has mixed himself among the peoples; Ephraim is a cake unturned. Aliens have devoured his strength, but he does not know it.” Similarly, today, some Christians are becoming half-baked. Some Christians have avoided God’s Word, have avoided discipleship, and they are losing their strength as they become inter-mingled with the customs of those who do not follow Christ. This is what Hosea 7:8-9 describes as becoming half-

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baked – a cake unturned. In Hosea 7:8-9, after much encouragement to repent and turn back to God’s teaching – and after much refusal of the people to return - God’s response was judgment.

It is scriptural to exhort Christians to repent of their sins. Both Jesus and the prophets taught, strongly, God’s message of repentance, zealously exhorting the community to turn from their sins. God said this, “And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat?” says the Lord. “Is not My word like a fire?” says the Lord, “And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets,” says the Lord, “who steal My words everyone from his neighbor.” (Jeremiah 23:28-30). It is a message the Bible continually replays. The rejected message of repentance plays a significant role in Christians becoming intermingled with teachings that are in opposition to Christ, resulting in Christians turning away from the Bible.

A multitude of layered conditions are contributing to the follower of Christ turning away from the Word of God. Following Christ’s example of providing wisdom and knowledge to those who desire to be followers of Christ, the researcher’s objective is to urge and ignite Christians to read their Bibles to become armed with God’s Word so that God can direct their paths toward becoming transformed Christians through whom God will glorify Himself.

**Basic Assumptions**

There are basic assumptions the researcher will rely upon in testing the effectiveness of GAAP writings. The primary presupposition is that God is King (Psalm 47:7). The strength of Christians depends upon having a strong knowledge of this truth. That strong knowledge is gained by daily reinforcement of God’s kingship by reading the scriptures (Psalm 1:1-3, Joshua 1:7-8). Another presupposition is that everything is achieved only by the Spirit of God: “Not by
might nor by power but by My Spirit,” says the Lord of hosts (Zechariah 4:6). All of God’s creation relies upon the Spirit of God to operate.

God’s Spirit is the spiritual force that is required for all life. The life giving and life sustaining Spirit of God is required to propel human beings forward for every endeavor. It is God’s Spirit that enables man to live, to walk, to speak, and to thrive. The third presupposition is that Christian character is formed by God’s Spirit which is found in the Word of God. Fourth, is the presupposition that the Spirit of God is living and is present within God’s Word, the scriptures. Last, is the presupposition that God’s Spirit is accessible by reading God’s Word.

These basic assumptions and presuppositions mean it is vital that followers of Christ daily read the Bible which is inspired by God and which brings about understanding of doctrine, provides reproof and correction, and guides Christians in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). This suggests that biblical teachings are necessary for spiritual development, for transformation, and for living as a transformed community of believers in Christ through whom God intends to display His handiwork. God made them for His glory (Isaiah 43:7).

Reading the Bible trains the Christian’s awareness on God’s sovereignty. Because God’s kingship is an anchor to Christians, Christians must cultivate a strong understanding of God’s sovereignty which enables Christians to trust God and to stand in God’s power. Knowledge of God’s sovereignty empowers Christians to maneuver life’s challenges as Christians hope and trust in God’s power for deliverance.

Bible reading powers the Christian’s ability to flourish. Although God “also provides humankind with opportunity for growth into Christlikeness through other conduits, including the development of morality and virtue, the refining seasons of suffering, participation in the body of
Christ, and even stewardship of one’s physical body,” Christians must read the scriptures in which the Spirit of God is present so that God can direct His purpose for their lives.

These basic assumptions and presuppositions inform the problem and purpose by providing foundational, biblical evidence that followers of Christ, daily, must be engaged with God’s Word for spiritual formation and for spiritual growth. However, solely understanding the importance of Bible reading for Christian growth has not been enough to create a surge in Bible reading levels among Christians. Creative measures must be taken to spark Christian Bible reading. The presuppositions and assumptions result in the determination that teachers of God’s word must successfully spark and increase Christian interest in Bible reading for the sake of Christian endurance and advancement.

Definitions

Community Engagement

Community engagement within this study refers to multiple events that Grace Abounds Association of Pastors designs to meet, interact, and engage with community members.

Goal – Getters

Goal-Getters are aspiring individuals who are working to achieve their career, life, and educational objectives and who contribute to GoalGetters - SuperHeroes Magazine.

GoalGetters - SuperHeroes Magazine (GGSH Magazine)

An online publication written, published, and distributed by Grace Abounds Association of Pastors. GGSH Magazine is a part of the publishing branch of GAAP.

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GoalGetters - SuperHeroes Magazine (GGSH Magazine) Contributors

GGSH Contributors are individuals who have previously participated in GoalGetters - SuperHeroes Magazine. Contributors participated in either of these areas: They were featured in articles or they were writers, advertisers, and community business owners.

Grace Abounds Associations of Pastors

Grace Abounds Association of Pastors (GAAP) is currently established in Norfolk, Virginia. However, GAAP has been, primarily, a California – based association. GAAP teaches the Word of God to community members, utilizing a variety of creative platforms. GAAP also provides practical services - such as emergency grants to students and mothers in the community.

Grace Abounds Association of Pastors Participants

Community members whom Grace Abounds Association of Pastors has newly engaged, who have participated in GAAP activities, or who have participated in receiving GAAP writings.

News

News within this study refers to articles and columns written, produced, and distributed by Grace Abounds Association of Pastors. The news items respond to societal news topics from a biblical perspective, emphasizing repentance and God’s sovereignty.

Secularized Christianity

The secularization of Christians occurs when secular ideologies, brought into the local church by its congregants, begin to impact the church to such a degree that those ideologies change the focus of the church to a focus that embraces and represents the secular society.
Limitations

The primary anticipated limitation to the study is that the research must be conducted by telephone because of the Coronavirus. GAAP participants will be required to respond to pre and post questionnaires and will be required to listen briefly to a news item read by the researcher. These procedures must be conducted within one telephone session because, currently, participants may be experiencing highly fluctuating and unreliable schedules. Additionally, because some GAAP participants may be experiencing greater challenges resulting from the Coronavirus, it may be problematic for these participants to focus on a study when such difficulties are occurring within their communities.

Delimitations

These delimitations will be imposed by the researcher. The participants will represent only a segment of their communities. Participants will be 20 years or older and will self-define as believers in Christ. Participants will be previous GAAP contributors - or community members newly introduced to GAAP. Additionally, participants must be working toward educational objectives - or toward other life and career objectives. Participants must have knowledge of societal challenges, resulting from experiencing an unusual societal event - or participants must express individual challenges in one of the following areas: financial, family, or career challenges. GAAP written material will be utilized.

The study will gauge and record how GAAP writings impact participants. The study will gauge interest levels in Bible reading through pre and post questionnaires. Pre - questionnaires will assess the participants’ current levels of Bible readership and current interest in Bible reading. Following a reading of a GAAP writing, participants will answer post - questionnaires to measure how much new biblical information was learned from the news items and how their
interest was impacted. The researcher will compare interest levels from the pre-questionnaire with interest levels expressed within the post-questionnaire.

Experience of Participants

By limiting research participants to adults 20 years and older, the data collected will reflect the experiences and perspectives of individuals who have a greater range of experiences to incorporate into data.

Faith of Participants

The faith of the participants within the research is the most significant of the delimitations. Although the participants will vary in their relationships with Christ, the study will determine if participants experience a spark in their interest in Bible reading, signifying an interest in learning more about God after encountering GAAP writings. The researcher anticipates that a Christian group will be willing to hear and discuss biblical matters and will have enough biblical knowledge to discuss the biblical topics.

Participant Anonymity

Stakeholder anonymity will allow participants to contribute freely. This delimitation gives the researcher greater confidence in the gathered data.

Method of Data Collection

Data will be collected by a telephone questionnaire and reading session. Although no recording devices will be utilized, telephone data gathering will result in full and complete expressions of participant experiences.
Thesis Statement

If Grace Abounds Association of Pastors introduces community members to God’s sovereignty and biblical truths through writings filled with biblical teachings and that are relevant to current, societal events, then GAAP will ignite participants’ interest in Bible reading. GAAP writings highlight the parallels between biblical events and modern events, emphasizing that God’s power is present in modern times as it was in biblical times. GAAP anticipates that showing God’s power in modern contexts will ignite community members to begin or to increase in reading God’s Word.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

Review of Literature

Christians must walk with a continual focus on transforming into an identity that resembles Christ. Since Christian identity is rooted in the scriptures, the Christian life must be a life of daily delving into the scriptures to develop into the identity of Christ that is derived from the scriptures. The developmental process is facilitated by God’s Holy Spirit through the deliberate exercise of reading and becoming knowledgeable in the scriptures and through the intentional exercise of spiritual disciplines. An understanding of Christ’s identity is ascertained through God’s promises, through God’s mighty works that demonstrate God’s kingship, through Christ’s resurrection, and through God’s plan for redemption. When Christians neglect scripture reading, development of Christian identity is hindered and skewed. Christians must read the

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Bible so that Christians can experience the proper, spiritual formation that God requires for the disciple of Christ.

God requires Christians to become disciples and to submit to God’s training - which is spiritual formation. Both Paul Pettit and John Ortberg posit that God made individuals to flourish and that spiritual formation is essential to Christian living. Reading the scriptures is a key element to the spiritual formation process. If Christians are not reading the Word of God, how can their lives be transformed to the resemblance of Christ – whose identity is found within the scriptures?

Although authors understand that Bible reading impacts Christian discipleship, there is a gap in the research. There seems to be minimal research that addresses how to creatively increase Bible readership among Christians. This Literature Review will examine four, specific themes that emerged from the literature and that reinforce the importance of Christian, Bible readership: Christian Identity, Spiritual Formation, Transformation, and Christian Sustainability – avoiding backsliding and secularization. The Literature Review will also provide an historical pan of previous and present societal events that have contributed to insufficient Bible readership among Christians. These significant themes that emerged within the Literature Review will underscore the need to address the gap in the research.


Spiritual Formation

According to Paul Pettit, spiritual formation involves a change or maturing of the Christian from one form to another.\(^{58}\) Pettit asserts the most basic discussion on spiritual formation will address the idea of life change, the need for Christians to become transformed into the likeness of Christ, and that this transformation process is not optional for those who profess to believe in Jesus Christ.\(^{59}\) One of Pettit’s primary objectives is to explore what the Bible says about spiritual formation.\(^{60}\) Realizing that spiritual growth comes from God and that communities of Christians should live as representatives of God’s Kingdom, Pettit establishes a strong foundation for turning to the scriptures. However, what is missing in Pettis’s discussion is how to bring believers in Christ to overcome their reluctance toward reading scripture.

While Pettit lays out the argument for spiritual formation, John Ortberg provides the reader detailed steps about how to bring about spiritual change.\(^{61}\) Ortberg agrees with Pettit that Christian identity is found within the scriptures and comes from the Work of the Holy Spirit.\(^{62}\) However, like Pettit, Ortberg does not address how to creatively engage Christians to begin reading the scriptures so that Christians may begin forming their identities based upon God’s Word.

Similar to Pettit and Ortberg, Klaus Issler examines Christian transformation and the ingredients essential to transformation and growing in Christlikeness within the context of one’s


\(^{59}\) Pettit, *Foundations*, 103.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 19.


\(^{62}\) Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be*, 132.
relationships and communities. Issler concludes this: Christian transformation occurs by the Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and God’s love. Issler advocates discovering Christian identity from the scriptures and compels readers to harness the power of the Holy Spirit to bring about lasting, character changes that are in alignment with the scriptures.

However, also like Pettit and Ortberg, Issler neglects to address insufficient Bible readership among Christians and how to increase Christian readership of the Bible. For Pettit, Ortberg, and Issler, Bible reading is imperative for bringing about transformation and discovering Christian identity. However, the authors leave a gap for studying how to ignite Christian interest in Bible reading to achieve their objectives.

Christopher Wright emphasizes the need for inclusivity of the Old Testament writings. Wright argues that an understanding of the full gospel is critical in making disciples and forming Christian identity. To Wright, it is imperative to include the writings of the Old Testament for proper spiritual formation. He supports reading the Old Testament; however, as with Pettit, Ortberg, and Issler, the recurring theme of neglecting to address how to ignite Christian readership is present.

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64 Issler, *Living*, Chpt. 4.

65 Ibid., Chpt. 4.

66 Ibid., Chpt. 5.

67 Christopher J.H. Wright, *How to Preach and Teach the Old Testament for All its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 18.


69 Ibid., 62-81.

70 Ibid., 15.
Like Wright, Smith and Yo Kai frame a discussion on spiritual growth and transformation within a specific context; in this case, they examine spiritual growth within discipleship. The authors present their case for accurately measuring transformation by examining the impact of discipleship. Smith and Yo Kai believe the measure of transformation stems from the scriptures. They, too, are proponents for going to the scriptures. The authors all provide important arguments for delving into the scriptures to be transformed; however, they all leave a gap that overlooks how to engage Christian interest in Bible reading.

### Christian Identity

Christopher Wright also emphasizes preaching, teaching, and developing Christian identity through hearing the Gospel. Asserting the identity of Christ is developed from the Bible and Christian identity is rooted in scripture, Wright emphasizes bringing the scriptures to the hearts of Christians through the tool of preaching. Wright recognizes the necessity of the scriptures in developing Christian identity, and he delves further into examining how to bring the scriptures to Christians; however, hearing God’s Word solely through preaching and hearing the occasional reference to scripture during the sermon still falls short of providing Christians with

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72 Smith, Kai, *T4T*, 79

73 Ibid., 79.

74 Christopher J.H. Wright, *How to Preach and Teach the Old Testament for All its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 39-51.


76 Ibid., 36-37.
the necessary, complete reading of scripture. Like his peers, Wright also lacked the provision of a path that will lead Christians to open their Bibles.

Jeff Christopherson examines the character of Christ and how to disciple Christians toward developing a character that resembles Christ’s character. Christopherson asserts the importance of taking on the character of Christ and examines what Christ looks like, according to the scriptures. Christopherson agrees with Pettit, Ortberg, and Wright that the character of Christ is found within the scriptures. Christopherson advocates that Christ followers must grow into the character of Christ; yet, Christopherson’s work does not address the need to creatively engage Christians in Bible reading. What was missing from Christopherson’s discussion was how to ignite within Christians the desire to pick up and read the scriptures.

Transformation

John Ortberg frames a discussion on transformation from the perspective of the individual who is working to build in spiritual growth and who desires to manifest a flourishing life. Jeff Christopherson, Christopher Wright, and Paul Pettit also frame discussions on transformation - agreeing that transformation is not optional for Christians, that Christ’s identity is found within the scriptures, and that God requires Christians to live out transformed lives as communities of Christ believers.

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78 Christopherson, *Kingdom First*, 200.

79 Ibid., 35.

80 Ibid.

The authors are aligned; however, the authors neglect to provide creative solutions to address declining, Christian readership of the scriptures. This suggests there is a gap in the research. While authors assess that scripture reading is critical, there seems to be very little research that addresses how to move Christians from infrequent readership of the Bible to a routine study of scripture.

The Importance of Scripture Reading in the Church

God reveals Himself through the scriptures. When Christians experience sporadic Bible readership, Christians lack understanding of God’s revelations about Himself. Similarly, Christians who view the scriptures as a book of legalities, likewise, demonstrate a lack of understanding of God’s revelations. However, Christians who view the Word of God as the source for comfort, for nurturing, and for strengthening - but who practice selective reading, perusing portions of the scriptures, and reading only when they need God’s assuring Word – these Christians, also, lack the majority of revelations needed to flourish as followers of Christ.

What will prove to be critical to Christians growing more inclined toward reading their Bibles is simply this: A continual introduction to the scriptures by daily reading the scriptures, from beginning to end. Christians who read portions of the scriptures are receiving, likewise, a very small portion of the understanding of God. Daniel I. Block makes these important assessments: God reveals Himself through the written record of past revelations. God revealed Himself through the incarnation of Christ. God reveals His mind and speaks authoritatively to the hearer through the scriptures. Most importantly, the normative way to access these important revelations is through reading the scriptures.  

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In some evangelical churches, scripture reading has been replaced by the sermon that makes occasional references to the scriptures. Block presents the argument for bringing back a more complete reading of the scriptures to worship in the evangelical church. The continual presentation of scriptures to Christians by reading the scriptures during worship enables the hearers to continually hear the revelations that God makes about Himself throughout the scriptures. It enables Christians to gain a larger perspective of God and His purpose for their lives. Hearing the scriptures read in worship will serve to draw the hearers to discovering more books of the Bible and ultimately will expand the Christian’s knowledge of God’s revelations about Himself which results in directly impacting the Christian’s spiritual growth and transformation.

The Importance of Understanding the Bible as One Story

Understanding the Bible is one story and discovering how the biblical story applies to one’s personal life is achieved through reading and studying the Bible in its entirety, from beginning to end. Learning and knowing the grand story of God and His creation is a progressive walk that leads to knowing God. Tom Steffen makes some critical assessments: 1) Doctrine can only be understood if taught according to their historical revelation and development and 2) There must be adequate Old Testament preparation for the Gospel.

Christians require full exposure to the scriptures to apperceive the Bible is one entire story; Christians must grasp how the Bible’s one, grand story impacts their personal lives.


85 Steffen, "Discoveries," 160-83.
Falling away from presenting the scriptures as one entire story has hindered the ability of Christians to relate to the scriptures and has hindered the Christian’s ability to tell the story of their faith. If Christians do not know the story of their faith, how can Christians properly relay the story of their faith to others. The lack of knowledge of the biblical story has resulted in the inability of Christians to share their faith story. This inability to relay God’s story has played a great part in creating a generational-type gap between believers in Christ and the current society which still needs to hear about Christ. Steffen’s objective is to expand the significance of the biblical story, equipping Christians to learn and to teach their faith.

The chronological telling of God’s story is a skill that teachers of the scriptures and believers of Christ will have to master. Paul was a master at telling the story of God. Paul was skilled at re-telling the story because Paul knew the story. Additionally, Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7 demonstrates the knowledge that Christians should aspire to achieve for re-telling the biblical story. Paul and Stephen knew their history. Christians, likewise, must learn this history because they share this history. When Christians understand their history and become versed in their biblical history within the scriptures, like Paul and Stephen, Christians, too, will develop the mastery of relaying their faith. Knowing the story of God is a significant element to the Christian’s spiritual formation.

The Question of the Soul

Lewis Ayres brings complexity to what might be classified by some as the usual discussion on spiritual growth. Ayers brings to the table the discussion about the soul and the impact Bible reading and spiritual growth has on the soul.\(^8^{6}\) Although the discussion on the soul

may seem to be simply a discussion on spiritual growth utilizing different terminology, Ayers appears to believe that there should be a distinction made between the soul and spiritual growth. Ayers examines the works of Henri De Lubac which appears to add a nuance to spiritual growth. According to Ayers, De Lubac believes the process of spiritual growth is what culminates in the state of the soul. Stated this way: The state of the soul is the ultimate objective of spiritual growth. The importance of spiritual growth is still relevant; however, spiritual growth is more likely viewed as a process of transformation of the soul – not just the transformation of one’s spiritual beliefs and ultimately one’s spiritual walk with Christ. Ayers brings a legitimate observation. The term that God and Jesus utilize to discuss the preparedness of the individual has often been the term, soul. Like other discussions on spiritual transformation, reading the Bible is the primary factor in developing and transforming the soul.

A Proper Perspective in Reading the Scriptures: Ethics in Bible Interpretation

Gary A. Phillips and Danna Fewell take on the complicated discussion of ethics, the Bible and how one reads and interprets the scriptures. Although Phillips and Fewell open their discussion with a simple juxtaposition of what can be considered poor methods of interpretation of the Bible, the expressed need for ethical reading and interpretation of the scriptures is not lost. Phillips and Fewell seem to want the reader to understand the problematic nature of interpretation; however, given the examples that Phillips and Fewell introduce, there is an easy solution to the ethical problem they pose: Interpreting the Bible by reading and understanding the grand story of the Bible.


Phillips and Fewell open with a story about the call of Jesus to turn the other cheek. Fewell interprets this message as the call to avoid violence. Fewell then suggests that such a message can be utilized to keep abused individuals in abusive environments. However, having a more complete understanding of the scriptures would easily point to such topics as these: Having life in abundance, being set free from bondage, and not joining the spirit of God within oneself with those who do not have the spirit of God.

Ethics in Bible reading is a valid discussion. Probably most ethical dilemmas in Bible reading can be resolved by obtaining a complete understanding of the concepts that Christ teaches.

The Role of Women in the Scriptures

Another discussion about the scriptures that requires a proper perspective and a firm grasp of ethics is the role of women in the scriptures. Amnon Shapira brings a refreshing perspective to the role of women in the scriptures.\(^\text{89}\) Quite often, one may hear the recited verse that women are not permitted to serve as teachers (preachers) of God’s Word. Or, if women are permitted to teach, women must not be teachers to men. However, one of the primary lessons Jesus provided in support of women teaching the Word of God and that also supports women serving in the capacity of teachers to men is John 20:11-18. When Jesus rose from the grave, it was the women to whom Jesus gave the message, the gospel, that Jesus was risen from the dead.

The resurrection is the critical element in Christology, and it was women to whom Jesus entrusted this message to be carried to the apostles, who were men. It was women who proclaimed to the apostles that Christ was risen from the dead. It was women whom Jesus

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instructed to go and tell the apostles the good news – that Jesus was ascending to His father. The scriptures show significant acts that God performed that were contrary to the teachings of the day: Jacob and Esau, the second born receiving the birthright. Manasseh and Ephraim, again the second born receiving the birthright. Jesus allowing the disciples to pick and eat heads of grain on the Sabbath to demonstrate that Jesus was Lord even of the Sabbath. Even Christians today worship on Sunday when God clearly states the Sabbath is on Saturday. Christians argue what is important is recognizing God’s day of rest. Therefore, in alignment with that argument, one can conclude that what is important to Christ is that this message of Christ risen from the grave reaches the apostles – and reaches others today. In choosing women, Jesus, immediately, demonstrated that Christ was Lord over all human customs and, most importantly, men and women were now free from previous ideals that only served to keep human beings in bondage.

Certainly, Christ did not conquer death and rise from the grave only to be immediately restricted by the customs of human beings. Jesus rose from the dead, and immediately, established Himself as Lord over all earthly customs that serve to keep individuals in bondage. Nothing of Christ’s actions is insignificant. Jesus clearly provided an intended message that women, too, will carry God’s message of reconciliation to the world – and women will teach that message to both women and men.

Christ risen from the grave is one of the most critical elements within the New Testament, and this critical news was placed in the hands of the women. One of the most important ingredients to reading the scriptures is understanding the intentions of Christ. We see Christ’s intentions when Jesus allowed the apostles to pluck and eat the heads of grain on the Sabbath: that Jesus is Lord even of the Sabbath. We see Christ’s intentions when Jesus talks about David eating the showbread – even though the showbread was to be eaten only by the
priests: that God tempers the law with mercy. Understanding the intentions of Jesus (and God’s intentions) comes by reading the scriptures in its entirety – and gaining an understanding of the grand story. When one reads the grand story of the scriptures, we understand Christ’s (and God’s) intention is that God will call those whom He chooses. God will be gracious to whom He will be gracious, and God will have compassion on whom He will have compassion (Exodus 33:19). In this case, Jesus (and God) chose the women to bring the Good News of Christ’s resurrection to the men. Jesus rose from the grave and immediately made a profound statement by selecting women to carry the message to the apostles (to men). Not even the grave could bind Jesus; therefore, certainly Jesus did not rise from the grave only to put on shackles – only to be bound, immediately, by the customs of humankind. Quite the opposite, Jesus rose from the grave and, immediately, made the statement that Jesus is Lord over all the earth.

The Significance of Mary and Martha for African American Women

For women, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes opens the door to scripture reading by providing women a view to the scriptures that encourages women to teach the Word of God and encourages women to be active participants in the Work of God. Gilkes examines the significant work of Mary and Martha. Gilkes examines, specifically, how the presence of Mary and Martha have contributed to women who have an African-American experience. Gilkes asserts that Mary and Martha were not marginalized; rather the women played significant roles in carrying God’s message to the world.90

Gilkes asserts the biblical presence of Mary and Martha serves as a strong counter argument to the tendency of reading the scriptures solely from a patriarchal perspective. Gilkes

states that the placement of Mary and Martha within the scriptures overturns and defies the singular, masculine perspective of scripture reading which opposes the ordination of women. Primarily, Gilkes directs her beneficial insights to African-American women. How Mary and Martha interacted with Jesus, equally, is important in understanding the character of Christ.

The Power of the Word of God

Did God literally speak a word and the world was created? This is the critical truth of the scriptures that David MacLeod addresses. The Word of God proclaims foundational truths that are not easily grasped unless one has fully gone through the scriptures and has been filled with the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is the indwelling Holy Spirit that enables readers to understand such spiritual concepts as God’s Word being Jesus and Jesus being the incarnate Word of God.

Spiritual matters are only ascertained by a spiritual nature. Spiritual concepts are a different way of knowing, seeing, and understanding. What some worship as scientific method is truly the most archaic way of knowing. One must consider this: To know things that are spiritual one must know without seeing with the eye, and one must know without the existence of evidence. This is the complete antithesis to a scientific way of knowing. This suggests that spiritual knowing is a greatly heightened method of knowing. This heightened method of knowing is what Jesus calls those who are His followers to strive to achieve. God demonstrates such a heightened level of knowing when God calls those things that are not into being. It is this heightened level of knowing that enabled God to call into existence the entire world simply by speaking. God calls His followers to this heightened way of knowing, which God calls faith.

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Faith is a core element of the Christian identity. Learning how to apply faith and how to grow in faith is found within the scriptures.

**How to Trust in the Miraculous Things of the Bible**

The man who needed healing called out to Jesus, “Lord increase my faith!” How does one come to trust in the incarnate Word of God? Joel Beeke addresses this task. Trusting in God is accomplished by the easy steps of repenting of one’s sins, becoming filled with the indwelling Holy Spirit, and feeding one’s mind day and night with God’s Word. It is by the engraving and the inscribing of God’s truths continually within oneself that trust in God is enhanced and nurtured. It is by seeing God’s deliverance and witnessing God’s faithfulness as God shows Himself strong to those who rely upon God.

Trusting that Jesus is the incarnate Word of God is a miraculous knowing that can only come by God’s Holy Spirit. We see this within the scriptures when Jesus tells Peter that it is God’s Spirit that enabled Peter to understand that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Like David MacLeod’s discussion, spiritual knowing comes only by the Spirit of God.

We can understand that things of the Spirit are only ascertained by an anointing of the Spirit from this example: Persons who are non-believers in Christ claim to read the Bible several times over; yet, they can never grasp the things of God. They never develop faith. However, persons who believe God and confess that Jesus is the Christ continually grow in faith as they continually read through the Bible. This is evidence that the Spirit of God must be present within an individual to grasp things that are spiritual and to grow in faith in God.

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Didier Pollefeyt and Reimund Bieringer examine the increasing disinterest in Bible reading in various European countries among primary and secondary students for whom the Bible has become irrelevant even within religious education. Pollefeyt and Bieringer analyze the causes of the growing disinterest in Bible reading within European religious studies, and they developed an approach to making the Bible relevant. Similar to the assessments that Steffen makes, Pollefeyt and Bieringer have assessed that lack of full exposure to the scriptures is a primary cause of low interest in Bible reading among European students of religious studies.

Pollefeyt and Bieringer were able to strategically identify specific biblical teachings that modern students feel are in opposition to their ideals – and that cause these young Europeans to lose interest in Bible reading even within religious studies. According to Pollefeyt and Bieringer, when young European students read the scriptures without the full context of the biblical story, many of these young students conclude that the Bible supports patriarchy, anti-Judaism, slavery, anthropocentrism, violence, or intolerance. These false conclusions that develop from an incomplete understanding of the Bible are also prolific within Western society. These same misconceptions and concerns about the scriptures that are voiced among the youth in European societies are also expressed within Western community members who may also be negatively reacting against the Bible because they feel the Bible is in opposition to their ideals. Religious teachers in Western society must strategically devise methods to address these misconceptions.


94 Pollefeyt and Bieringer, “The Role of the Bible,” 118.

95 Ibid., 118.

96 Ibid.
which are derived from incomplete, biblical knowledge. Religious teachers must also embark on
the campaign to impress upon community members that it is imperative to study the Bible within
its full context – which will include studying and understanding the Bible in its entirety.

The Passive Aggressive Secularization of North American Children

Kathleen Holscher explores the alliance that formed between Protestants and Catholics in
the fight to keep group prayer and group Bible reading in public schools. It was a fight that both
Protestants and Catholics realized was a battle against the secularization of America.

Young students in Europe and America nobly desire to pursue “good” causes and
denounce such societal ills as anti-Judaism, violence, and intolerance. However, without the
guidance of the scriptures these noble efforts toward a just society were cut off at the root when
prayer and public reading of the scriptures were removed from the public school system. Without
the guidance of God’s truths found in the scriptures and without the understanding of God’s plan
for mankind as it is defined within the context of the full Gospel, school children have been left
to self-define purpose and truth. Before the Supreme Court ruling in 1962 against state organized
or sanctioned prayer in schools, most school – age children were able to receive early
introduction to the scriptures and prayer.97 Because this was group prayer and group reading of
the scriptures, this introduction to prayer and scripture reading was accepted by school children
and, likely, accepted by many of their peers. According to Holscher, one-third of public schools
sponsored formal prayer in homeroom.98 Students and teachers prayed together in homeroom
and more than a quarter of the students participated in lunchtime grace.99 Certainly, parents were

97 Kathleen Holscher, “A Decision that Spits in the Face of Our History”: Catholics and the Midcentury
Fight Over Public Prayer and Bible Reading,” The Catholic Historical Review 102, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 340-368.


99 Ibid., 340-368.
able to continue biblical education within the privacy of their homes; however, it may be that separating children from among their peers during a critical time of prayer and biblical formation may have greatly, negatively impacted school children’s comfort with prayer and the Bible. The removal of group prayer and group Bible reading from public schools may be one of the most significant, contributing factors in the secularization of North American children. It is reasonable to hypothesize that Bible reading levels and interest in Bible reading have been negatively impacted by the secularization of North American children.

The Pastoral Duty to Call Congregants to Scripture Reading

Jared Wicks adulates Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation in which Pope Paul VI exhorts Catholics to practice frequent and prayerful scripture reading. Wicks encourages today’s pastors to appreciate and to continue to apply Vatican II’s Dei Verbum that insists Pastors should introduce believers to reading the scriptures which will result in personal encounters with God.

Pope Paul’ VI’s Dei Verbum was promulgated in 1965 - shortly after the Supreme Court ruling against state organized or sanctioned prayer and scripture reading in public schools. Although it appears to be a response to the Supreme Court ruling, Wicks asserts that research demonstrates that as early 1956 scripture reading was being promoted by the Catholics in Venice. The Catholics already had an established history of addressing the great importance of

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100 Kathleen Holscher, “A Decision that Spits in the Face of Our History: Catholics and the Midcentury Fight Over Public Prayer and Bible Reading,” The Catholic Historical Review 102, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 340-368.


102 Wicks, “Scripture Reading,” 555-580.

103 Ibid., 555-580. (Needs a space between this footnote and the next)
scripture reading among believers. According to Wicks, Cardinal Patriarch Angelo G. Roncalli made a pastoral call to Venetians to follow the example of St. Lorenzo Giustiniani (1381 – 1456) who immersed himself in scripture reading. The Cardinal urged the Venetian believers to take up the scriptures and turn to Bible reading. Wicks’ objective is to encourage pastors and believers to appreciate and to apply Dei Verbum number 25 and, thereby, become rejuvenated by the practice of devout reading of the scriptures.

The Powerful Benefits of Bible Reading Among Youths in England and Wales

Leslie J. Francis examines Bible readership among 13-to-15-year-olds in England and Wales and concludes that Bible readership impacts these youth’s perceived purpose in life. Francis concludes that teens within 13-to-15-years old experience a sense of purpose resulting from reading the Bible. Francis also cautions that Bible-reading and perceived purpose cannot be viewed separately from belief in God and church attendance. Francis provides the methods for measuring the sense of purpose among 13-to-15-year-olds and includes pertinent studies on the impact of religion among teens in England and Wales. Francis believes studies demonstrate religion has a positive impact upon youths from childhood to adolescence.

According to Francis, the data show a correlation between religion, church attendance, and Bible reading, and students who exhibit openness, empathy, and positive dispositions toward

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105 Wicks, “Scripture Reading,” 556.
106 Ibid., 571.
English, music, math, religious education, and assemblies. These students also indicate a less accepting disposition toward destructive practices, such as substance use.\(^{109}\) The studies on the correlation between religion or Bible reading among teens validate what other research fields also conclude: Reaching children at a young age with positive influences can positively impact their views of themselves. Specifically, the positive influences of Bible-reading and church attendance provide youth with positive outlooks and establishes youths with the sense of purpose.

The Bible can be utilized as a positive influencer in the lives of youths. As Francis notes, Bible reading enhances belief in God. Thus, it is a combination of Bible reading and the increased belief in God that work together to bring about the changes described by the teens in England and Wales.

**Bible Reading Among Youths in the United States**

There is a true battle for the minds, hearts, and attention of Christians in the current society, especially among children. “Public schools today are overtly hostile to Christianity and the Bible.”\(^ {111}\) Public schools may not be a good path for school-age, Christian children. There is a “spiritual danger of allowing children to sit in secular, anti-God public schools for over a dozen formative years.”\(^ {112}\) Removing children out of such hostile environments is one creative method for re-establishing and securing Christian education and Bible learning among the younger

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\(^{110}\) Leslie J. Francis, “The Relationship Between Bible Reading and Purpose,” 28-32.


\(^{112}\) Moore, “Christians Urged,” 8.
citizens. Homeschooling and Christian education enables parents to meet the biblical command “to raise their children up in the ‘culture’ of the Lord.”

It is unrealistic to impose upon young children who are still in training themselves the burden of standing against an entire educational system and the burden of combating hostility daily. Such an approach places a child in danger. Homeschooling allows parents to train children in the Christ-like qualities the Bible commands while providing a safe environment for children to learn about God. "These kids that are homeschooled, and their peers in Christian schools, are a different breed, it's a different culture.”

The Attempt to Create Morality Without the Word of God

Some human rights organizations have an understanding that the Word of God is foundational to a moral, just, and equitable society. Some of these human rights organizations attempt to incorporate the Word of God into their processes for drawing support for their causes. David McIlroy researched how Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) and International Justice Mission (IJM) can better harness the Word of God to promote their human rights efforts. McIlroy asserts that both CSW and IJM must incorporate and provide its audiences with a greater amount of scriptural understanding of select passages to enhance public understanding of the CSW and IJM moral stances.

McIlroy provides an exploration of the writings of two authors on the relationship between Christianity and human rights. Although, McIlroy’s endeavor is to learn how to better

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114 McIlroy, “The Use of the Bible By,” 8.
115 Ibid., 467.
116 Ibid., 468.
wield the scriptures in the human rights efforts, McIlroy contributes to the important question of whether moral values can be maintained in a society minus the in-depth teachings of the Bible. McIlroy’s attempt to create a biblical and theological framework for the moral stances of CSW and IJM raises the issue of breaking up the Gospel into parts and pieces to support an objective (proof texting) – rather than understanding the Gospel is one, complete story that requires understanding of the complete story as discussed by Daniel I. Block and Tom Steffen.

Like David McIlroy’s approach to the scriptures, Maxine Howell approaches the scriptures with an objective to alleviate social ills. Howell has developed and instituted four, hermeneutical approaches to the scriptures that will benefit marginalized British, Black women.117 Howell defines these approaches to interpreting the scriptures as anti-oppressive strategies for reading the Bible.118

As Howell describes, dominant storytellers have silenced or buried certain voices and events within the scriptures that require a re-telling in order to empower marginalized women who have been oppressed by certain interpretive methods.119 Howell anticipates that hermeneutical approaches that re-examine and institute story-telling from the perspectives of the marginalized characters within the scriptures and examines story-telling from the perspectives of marginalized hearers will help churches that desire to integrate marginalized groups into their congregations.120


119 Ibid., 88.

120 Ibid., 86-99.
Howell defines the Womanist’s Pneumatological Pedagogy (WPP) as a spirit-led pedagogical approach developed for and by the marginalized.\textsuperscript{121} WPP utilizes the experiences, history, and cultures of African women.\textsuperscript{122} McIlroy’s objective to apply scripture to address societal ills was incomplete because he simply pulled biblical text to support an agenda. However, Howell’s hermeneutical approaches to address societal ills were more effective. Research on the impacts of Bible reading on community members experiencing societal ills are conclusive: Bible reading is essential to bring forth God’s light and essential to deliver community members from social bondage.

Faith and Empiricism

Driven by the objective to recover a spiritual approach to scripture reading, Gerald Bilkes provides a brief perspective of how spiritual reading of the scriptures has become marginalized by the desire for empirical knowledge.\textsuperscript{123} Bilkes discounts a variety of incorrect understandings regarding spiritual reading of the scriptures and calls for returning to the authority of the scriptures.\textsuperscript{124} Bilkes asserts the correct view of spiritual reading insists the locus of meaning remains within the scriptures and one’s heart remains the receptor of meaning and not the inventor of meaning.\textsuperscript{125}

Science is a method of knowing. Science studies the systems and creations that God, Himself, created. Faith is also a method of knowing. However, faith is the method of knowing


\textsuperscript{122} Howell, “Toward a Womanist Pneumatological Pedagogy,” 86-99.


\textsuperscript{124} Bilkes, “Heart-Reading,” 12-22.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 12-22.
that God calls believers to live by and to embrace. God does not call believers to live according to evidence. God calls believers to live by faith in God. Faith is the method of knowing that requires God’s creation to trust in and to rely upon God. Throughout biblical history, mankind has become enraptured with elements of God’s creation in a way that is idolatrous, worshiping the creation rather than worshiping the Creator. Enraptured with the sun, moon, and stars, men began worshiping those elements. This is the same path that some Christians have fallen into as they hear what sounds to some as the preaching of “science.” Science is merely a system designed for studying and understanding God’s awesome creation. What some Christians must be guided away from is incorrectly viewing empiricism as the method for knowing God’s teachings or the method for believing in God’s Word. God said it is only the Holy Spirit that reveals knowledge of God to the individual. One is only able to proclaim that God is the Messiah, the Son of the living God by the power of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 16:15-17). Bilkes’ purpose is to bring believers back to the authority of God’s Word which, among many things, will provide Christians a biblical starting point to biblically frame and to biblically test whether societal teachings are heretical.

The Impact of Secularism on Bible Reading

An increased secularization of the local church has potentially helped to maintain low Bible readership among Christian congregants. Joseph Effiong addresses the impact of secularism on African Pentecostalism. The author attributes what has been called prosperity teaching to the growing secularization of the African Pentecostal church. Udo believes the various impacts of secularization on today’s churches have not been fully examined and has been more damaging to the local church than the church is willing to acknowledge.126 Udo points to

the secular notion of prosperity and how the secular concept of prosperity bears greatly upon the messaging of the African Pentecostal churches. The damaging impacts of secularization to the African Pentecostal churches that Udo observes may also be present within Western, local churches.

As Udo observes within the African Pentecostal churches, the ideology and the messages of today’s Western, local churches are being re-shaped by secularism. Udo suggests that a deeper look at the impacts of secularization may show much greater damages to the church than what is perceived from a surface examination. A growing disinterest in Bible reading may be one of the greatest impacts of secularization within today’s local churches. If the source for growth is severed, not only is individual, spiritual formation impacted but also the ability for the church to flourish is jeopardized.

The Impact of Individualism on Bible Reading

Like Udo, Igor Bahovec seeks to provide a deeper look at the impacts of secular ideologies, but Bahovec’s emphasis is on today’s Western society. Bahovec addresses the impact of individualism on the citizen, the culture, and the community. Also, like Udo’s view of secularism and the church, Bahovec sees a grave impact of individualism within the Western society, viewing and addressing individualism as a crisis within the Western culture.

Bahovec describes individualism’s impacts as nihilism, immanent narcissism, and the lack of a common good within the society.\(^{127}\) Bahovec also describes the impacts of individualism as a confrontation to Western society. The impact that Bahovec sees advancing upon the Western society are the ideologies that Christian believers are bringing into the church.

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This is significant because what Christians bring into the church begins to form, as Udo has observed, the mission of the Church. The local church begins to embrace these ideologies that have entered the churches through its own members who serve like hosts carrying harmful viruses. Like other secular ideologies, it is likely that individualism will negatively impact Christian interest in Bible reading.

The Impact of Relativism on Bible Reading

Avery Dulles quotes Benedict XVI’s 2005 homily Pro Eligendo Papa, viewing the destructive rise of relativism as a ‘dictatorship of relativism.’ Dulles examines the origins of Relativism which Dulles says Benedict XVI traces to Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Jean-Paul Sartre – philosophers whom Dulles describes as having no moral absolutes.

Addressing the impact of relativism beyond the local Church, Dulles believes relativism has a corrosive effect not only on the Church but also on the believer’s soul. Dulles asserts the solution to Relativism’s corrosive impact upon the Church and the Christian believer is to boldly proclaim God’s truths, without fear.

Today’s equivalent to Benedict XVI’s ‘dictatorship of relativism’ might be a dictatorship of political correctivism. As with Relativism, Dulles’ solution of boldly proclaiming God’s truths would be effective, also, in combating political correctivism. The way to proclaim God’s truths is to know God’s truths. Secularism, individualism, and relativism have infiltrated the local churches, through its own members, placing the life of the church at risk of secularization; however, these teachings can be corrected by guiding and creatively restoring Christians back to reading the Bible.


The Impact of Bible Reading on Service Within the Community

What some Churches are abounding in is the ideology of Community Service. However, is this a good indication of spiritual growth or a negative implication of the spiritual down-spiraling into a secular embrace of works over spiritual growth? According to Christopher J. Einolf, data from the Midlife in the United States (MIDUS) study indicates that biblical teachings are the driving force that encourage community service for some Christians.¹³⁰

Einolf recites data that show Christians are motivated by the teachings of Christ to serve their communities. The MIDUS study provides insight to the critical impact Bible reading has on Christian believers. According to Einolf, in the MIDUS study, participants state they are impacted by the examples of Jesus regarding love and goodness toward one’s neighbor. The study suggests Christians are inspired to help others from reading the teachings of Jesus. The study supports that Christian Bible reading can be linked to the strong sense of God’s purpose within Christians’ lives. Participants also reported an increased commitment to God that resulted from scripture reading.¹³¹ The data from the MIDUS study can serve as a validation that Bible reading does impact the behaviors of Christian Bible readers and impacts Christian spiritual growth.

Bible Reading and the Old Testament

Terence E. Fretheim correctly believes the Old Testament (or 1st Testament) must be consulted for discussions on morality and ethics. However, Fretheim believes discussions on morality and ethics that look to the Old Testament are either too difficult or completely


unfruitful. Fretheim’s view of difficulty and unfruitfulness is in opposition to scholars who view the Old Testament as the critical foundation for the Grand Story of the Gospel.

Although Fretheim does not appear to have a full understanding of the Old Testament, which leads Fretheim to view the Old Testament as difficult or unfruitful in dialogues in morality and ethics, he still attempts to consult the Old Testament for discussions on ethics and morality. Fretheim tackles Old Testament discussions on these issues by developing a list of items gleaned from the Old Testament that he believes Pastors should address. In his quest for answers regarding morality and ethics, Fretheim turns to the Bible. Fretheim’s resolve to seek and to find answers from the Old Testament regarding today’s moral and ethical issues affirms that Bible reading does provide Christians with necessary wisdom for living out Christ’s call to turn (repent) and to bear fruits worthy of repentance.

Factors That Have Hindered Christian Bible Reading

M. Eugene Osterhaven examines previous attitudes of the Catholic church that blocked congregants from scripture reading. Although the scriptures were regarded in high regard, early Catholic congregants were viewed by Priests as not educated enough to take part in Bible reading and interpreting scripture. The high regard for the scriptures in the case of Catholics served as a hindrance to congregants developing knowledge in God’s word and hindered congregants in practicing reliance upon the Word of God through scripture reading. Osterhaven reviews the changes that became evident in the Second Vatican Council that opened the door to

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scripture reading for Catholic congregants. Catholics were now exhorted and encouraged to read the Bible.\textsuperscript{134}

The Second Vatican Council greatly pushed for Catholic congregants to read their Bibles and to rely upon the authority of the scriptures during a time when modern society was causing significant damage to Bible reading in the public schools. Catholic congregants were eager to read the scriptures for themselves and worked along with Protestant Christians in pushing back against the rising, modern efforts to suppress Bible reading in public schools.\textsuperscript{135}

The Bible and Public Universities

Another obstacle to Bible reading as noted by Mark A. Pike was like Osterhaven’s observations: The Bible being held in high regard worked to counter readership of the Bible. Pike notes the Bible’s significance has served to create a resistance to Bible reading among modern, secular society as well. In this case, because the scriptures are held in such high value to believers in Christ, entities such as public universities have almost banned the scriptures from being studied like other literature. Pike argues the Christian position that the scriptures must not be regarded and classified as non-literature status by educational entities because Christians affirm the scriptures as the authoritative Word of God.\textsuperscript{136}

Within public universities, the belief in the scriptures has led some public university officials to inappropriately label studies of the scriptures as proselytizing. When public universities do attempt to examine the Bible as literature, these public entities attempt to separate


\textsuperscript{135} Osterhaven, “The New Catholicism,” 54-59.

the Christian belief that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. In such a case, this turns any study of the scriptures into a bland work that is completely non-representative of the miraculous literature that is the Bible.

Factors That Have Encouraged Bible Reading

Andrew Davis delves into the sensitive area of the role of the scriptures in policy-making. Davis believes that conservative Christians must incorporate scripture reading and biblical beliefs in the political area of one’s life. Davis argues the inclusion of the scriptures within the political aspect of one life makes biblical sense. Scriptures demonstrate that God is to be incorporated into every area of man’s life. Such a so-called separation of one’s belief when making decisions is a man-made concept. It is even a concept that secular, modern society has developed to bind and to compel the Christian believer to put down his sword.

Davis argues against such a concept. Davis asserts the conservative Christian must bring her biblical beliefs to the political area of her life. Davis reminds the believer in Christ of the power of faith in God’s Word, exhorting believers to apply this power to the political arena. He reminds Christians of the presence of scripture in policy-making among those who were followers of Christ in biblical ages. The Christian in biblical ages applied the truths of the scriptures to the political arena to the point of death.

New Ways of Reading the Bible: Combining Historical-Critical and Theological Methods

Like Gilkes, Stephen Plant suggests a new way of viewing the scriptures. Plant Combines the historical-critical with the theological method. He believes there is significant value to

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understanding the historical aspects behind the biblical text. Several others share Plant’s approach to Bible reading. Although the historical-critical method may be more widely undertaken by biblical students, congregants have begun to participate in deeper learning and reading of the scriptures and are now advancing in various methods of scripture reading.

Plant believes Christians must be open to new ways of reading the scriptures. To some degree, Plant’s position is acceptable. However, what Christians must guard against is pursuing methods of scripture reading that directs the reader away from God’s established, biblical truths. Disagreement on biblical interpretation can increase disinterest in Bible reading among followers of Christ as Christians often hold widely varying understandings of the scriptures and what God’s plan of redemption means for their respective lives regarding freedom, equality, and security. Although Plant’s suggestion may be more appropriate for Christians who presently have a firm understanding of God’s foundational truths, Christians who are new to Bible reading must still be encouraged to pick up the Bible and read. Again, as Bilkes insists, the interpretation is drawn from the scripture itself, and the reader’s heart receives its meaning through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, every interpreted Word of God should be validated by examining further scripture. Throughout biblical history, untrained believers in Christ have become disciples and have been transformed by God’s Holy Spirit through meditating on God’s Word and through the practical application of God’s Word - whether they were mature in God’s Word or babes.

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Conclusion

The themes of Christian Identity, Spiritual Formation, Transformation, and Christian Sustainability that arise from the literature review support the contention that Christian readership of the Bible is significant for Christian transformation. Although hindrances to scripture reading and causes of insufficient Bible reading among Christians vary, the authors are unanimous in their acknowledgment that Bible reading is a critical element for the Christians’ spiritual growth and transformation.

However, all authors have left a gap within their respective research. The gap that needs to be addressed within the research is the development of models to creatively engage Christians so that interest in Bible reading is ignited among believers in Christ. The review of the literature also highlights there are a multitude of intertwined factors that evolve within societies, and those intertwining events progressively lessen Bible readership among followers of Christ. This decline in Bible reading interest is even reported by Pollefeyt and Bieringer to be present among students of the Bible. However, through their various research approaches, the authors validate the significance of Bible reading in Christian discipleship for transforming disciples into Christlikeness.

Theological Foundations

God is King. God’s kingship and how God interacts with His creation as King is the core teaching of the scriptures. As seen within the scriptures, God demonstrates His kingship through His interactions with mankind. It is essential for Christians to read the scriptures to develop a full understanding of God’s sovereignty and kingship. Throughout the scriptures, God utilizes His interactions with mankind to demonstrate His power and mighty works, His judgments, His covenants, His prophesies, and His plan of redemption for all mankind. Through the scriptures,
Christians understand the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ, and other critical events. The Bible is an entire story with a beginning, middle, and future. Within this grand story, God teaches about a fallen creation and His plan of redemption for the fallen world. The teachings that emerge from the narratives of these events are not merely good information. These teachings are critical for understanding the Christian heritage which comes from the sovereign God and which is the foundation for developing the Christian identity. Biblical teachings have implications for the Christian faith. Biblical teachings directly impact the Christian’s ability to rely completely upon God. Christ lived His life on earth relying fully upon God. The Word of God empowers Christians to be transformed into the new identity of Christ - so that Christians can walk in full reliance upon God as Christ so walked.

Some authors argue for focusing the Gospel on the centrality of the resurrection. Gary Habermas argues for the centrality of the resurrection based upon 1 Corinthians 15. Referring to Apostle Paul’s statement, Habermas states, “the entire Christian faith would be ineffective if it were not for Jesus’s resurrection.” Habermas also asserts, “So the truth of the resurrection makes a claim on our present actions, as well as our future existence. Both are integrated and meaningful in Christian theology and ethics.” However, centralizing the scriptures on any single event greatly neglects the story of why the redemption is needed in the first place - and neglects to show God’s demonstrated loving-kindness throughout all the narratives that depict a long-suffering God who has suffered for generations with a people who rejected God for centuries – and who were continually relapsing into a backslidden state. How God interacted

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142 Habermas, *The Risen Jesus*, ix.

143 Ibid., ix.
with a rebellious and stiff-necked people provides Christians an understanding of the kingship and character of God. It is essential that Christians read all the narratives throughout the scriptures, gaining an understanding of both the Old and New Testaments.

When Christians lack the understanding of the grand story of the Bible, Christians are not able to properly respond to God’s requirement of repentance, God’s call for transformation, and God’s call to live as a community of believers through whom God is glorified. A limited knowledge of the scriptures that emphasizes one small portion of the biblical story – such as narrowing down the Bible’s grand story to the death and resurrection of Christ, has created a generation of Christians who have narrowed down Christianity to a mere belief in Christ. Such Christians lack the understanding that believers of Christ must make the deliberate and intentional decision to become disciples of Christ. A narrowed version of the Bible’s grand story, caused by a lack of ongoing Bible reading that does not encompass both the Old and New Testaments, has created a generation of Christians who think discipleship and transformation are optional.144

“In most Episcopal churches less than 5 percent of the membership attend a weekly Bible study, and perhaps even fewer read the Bible on a daily basis. In most Episcopal churches you will not find a Bible in the pews. No one is ever asked to open one and turn to a given chapter and verse… rarely are Bibles actually used. Hence, we do not equip and train our members how to benefit from daily Bible reading”145


According to Zabriskie, the Bible-reading status of the Episcopal Church explains why individuals who are not reading the Bible, who have no commitment to discipleship or transformation, and who rarely attend church still view themselves as Christians.\textsuperscript{146} It is a curious phenomenon. It provides insight to why many individuals who profess to be followers of Christ do not resemble what the scriptures portray as Christlikeness. Jesus seeks and expects a higher level of Christian walk for those who profess to believe in Christ.\textsuperscript{147}

Some attribute low Bible readership to an overall decline in all forms of reading; however, the impact of removing Bible readership from the Christian community is like an untrained person haphazardly cutting away at electrical wiring. When Christians cut off scripture reading as insignificant and disregard the importance of the Grand Story of the Bible, such untrained Christians are effectively cutting off and dismantling their very access to the anointing oil, the Spirit of God which God uses to sustain His creation.

God provides this essential message within the scriptures about the Spirit of God: It is by the Spirit that all things are created, exist, and are sustained (John 1:1-4). It is by the Spirit that God provides for His creation. It is by the Spirit that all things are possible (Zech 4:2-14). God’s Spirit is the anointing oil. Zechariah 4:2-14 provides a visual of God’s golden oil serving as the empowering, enabling ingredient to the lamps. In the passage, God’s empowering, enabling, golden oil drips from the olive branches. It drips into the receptacle of the two gold pipes from which the golden oil drains. This golden oil is the anointing Spirit of God. God’s people are the vessels and lanterns into which God pours His golden oil.

\textsuperscript{146} Dallas Willard, \textit{The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’ Essential Teachings on Discipleship} (San Francisco, Ca: Harpers, 2006), 297.

Several scriptural passages speak about God’s anointing that empowers individuals to carry out works - such as when God anoints Aaron and his sons to serve as God’s ministers in Exodus 30:30. The scriptures also point to this important message: God’s empowering oil, which is the Spirit of God, can and must be accessed by God’s people because God’s oil, (God’s Spirit), is the driving, enabling power for all things. Therefore, God’s people must be filled with God’s oil.

In several passages, the following concepts are linked together: God’s spoken Word, God’s Spirit, God’s anointing oil, and God’s provision. In 1 Kings 17:13-16, Elijah speaks God’s Word, prophesying the bin of flour shall not be used up nor the shall the jar of oil run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the earth. This passage and others (2 Kgs 4:1-7; 2 Kgs 4:42-44; Matt 25:1-13) point God’s people to the understanding that God’s empowering Spirit is required for provision, for establishing, for sustaining all things, and for knowing God. God’s oil, which is God’s Spirit, is the empowering, sustaining, life-giving and life-building force that God provides for His people until Christ’s return.

God also illuminates that through God’s Word, believers in Christ can access God’s Spirit and God’s empowering oil. When the believer fills herself with the Word of God, she is filling herself with God’s anointing oil – the golden oil – just as the widow filled up the vessels with the oil in 1 Kings 17:13-16. When an individual believes the Gospel and responds appropriately to the Gospel, she is filling herself with God’s anointing oil – and God’s Spirit and power begin to be at work within the life of the individual. John 1:14 states the Word was made flesh. When the individual takes in God’s Word, the individual takes into herself Christ and the anointing oil. This means that when a believer of Christ fills up on the Word of God, the believer fills up with the empowering, anointing oil and Spirit of God. For this reason, it is imperative
that believers fill up on God’s Word, day and night. As the widow, believers must fill up their vessel with God’s enabling oil – and the oil will not run dry. God has given His people the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven in showing His people how to gain access to God’s empowering, golden oil and Spirit. When the believer in Christ fills up with God’s Word (by reading the scriptures) the believer in Christ fills up with God’s anointing oil. The scriptures show that the empowering oil that sustained the widow is God’s Spirit – and the believer can access God’s Spirit and experience fresh oil through the Word, as the scriptures show in Zechariah 4.

Theoretical Foundations

According to Philip Goff, Arthur Farnsley, and Peter Thuesen’s research on the state of Bible reading in America, ninety-five percent of Americans are reading the Holy Bible. These researchers assert that Americans demonstrate a favorable view of the Bible. However, the readers self-report as reading the Bible only monthly. Nine percent of American Bible readers report reading the Bible daily, according to Goff, Farnsley, and Thuesen. Beginning with the Old Testament, Christians must be creatively ignited to increase in Bible readership. Creatively re-training Christians to embrace the Grand Story of the Bible can bring a new excitement to the scriptures that Christians have been trained previously to overlook.

The Old Testament Building Block

The Old Testament is the critical building block for understanding the scriptures are a Grand Story of God’s plan of redemption for the world. In Isaiah 5, The Old Testament provides


150 Ibid., 10.

151 Ibid., 6.
an overview to God’s plan of redemption that begins with the Jews. God poses this question regarding His vineyard: “Why, then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes did it bring forth wild grapes?” God proceeds, then, to explain what He will do to His vineyard - the house of Israel. Throughout the scriptures, God states that God’s plan of judgment and redemption is also extended to the Gentile nations: The books of Genesis, Daniel, and Revelation are three, well-known sources that inform the reader of God’s intended plan of redemption for His world.

Reading and preaching the scriptures from beginning to end provides Christians with a great understanding of God’s mighty power, God’s mighty plan for His creation, and God’s intimacy with those who are God’s children. Often, Christian readers will select out common areas of scripture to read during times of tribulation; however, reading through the scriptures from beginning to end provides the Christian reader with a much deeper sense of security. Reading the scriptures from beginning to end provides the Christian reader with a foundational understanding of God’s power, kingship, sovereignty, grace, love, and care that the Christian can apply to every area of life during times of challenge. More importantly, reading the scriptures from beginning to end gives the Christian reader a complete foundation on which to stand.

The Impact of the Resurrection of Christ

A life altering, miraculous event altered the trajectory of a group of people from a destiny of death to a destiny of life. A life altering, miraculous event transformed a group of sinners into followers of Christ who gave their lives to preach Jesus was raised from the dead. Authors who view the resurrection of Christ as the central focus of the scriptures argue the miraculous event of Jesus rising from the dead and conquering death is the central teaching of the scriptures because this miraculous event of the resurrection was so powerful that it affected change within the witnesses.
The Children of Israel likewise witnessed miraculous events during the build-up to the exodus. Why, then, did the Jews soon forget God’s miracles and backslide? They quickly reverted to their disbelief and turned back to their old habits and desires for Egypt, even after God performed such mighty miracles in Egypt and at the parting of the Red Sea. Yet, regarding the life-changing resurrection of Christ, Habermas notes this: “These experiences transformed the lives of the disciples. They were willing to die for this belief that Jesus was risen from the dead.”

The disciples’ lives were so altered by the miraculous event of Christ’s resurrection, that even years following the death and resurrection of Christ, the Jews continued preaching the Gospel and even endured persecution because of their deep belief that Christ rose from the grave to sit at the right hand of God. This validates the appropriateness of placing great significance on the resurrection of Christ.

Throughout the scriptures, God continually demonstrated His power to mankind through a variety of events. Yet, the surge of disciple-making resulted directly from the resurrection. This testifies to the uniqueness of the resurrection miracles. The changed lives of those who witnessed the resurrection provides insights to what is needed to create a life-changing event within the lives of Christians: The story of the resurrection.

The story of the resurrection has great significance; however, the Jews had a significant understanding of this King who was to come to the Jews. The Jews understood their history, and they anticipated the King. A history of storytelling preceded the birth of Christ. Christ was the anticipated Savior of the Jews. This demonstrates the Jews, themselves, relied heavily upon the foundational story of the scriptures, which put the Jews in great expectation of their coming

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King. The Jews’ understanding of scripture is the model for Christians today: Christians must know the complete, background story and work of God to appreciate fully the coming of Christ and the work of Christ on the cross. Christians must delve into the full gospel of the scriptures. For Christians today, the full gospel of the scriptures consists of the entire canon, from Genesis to Revelation.

The same miraculous resurrection event that empowered disciples to endure persecution and empowered Christians to preach the Gospel can also compel Christians back to the Gospel when Christians understand the full story of a Christ who was anticipated and who was prophesied to come for several generations. The resurrection is the symbol of rising from death to life in every area of one’s life, in each individual life. Therefore, it is fitting that the story of the resurrection be employed to revive Bible reading among Christians. However, any fragmented story can only be a disservice to its reader. The miraculous resurrection of Christ served to increase faith; conversely, narrowing down the grand story of the Bible solely to the resurrection of Christ would greatly hinder the growth of faith.

Authors can justify placing a significant focus on the resurrection; however, there is no justification for Christians living with only a fragmented knowledge of the grand, biblical story. How can one understand a story when significant portions of the story are missing? Truly, the only way to appreciate the significance of the resurrection is to understand the entire, grand story of the Bible. The miraculous resurrection of Christ impacted the Jews and Gentiles so greatly that they gave their lives for the Gospel. The answer to encouraging Christians back to the Gospel must be found within this same story; however, the entire grand story of the Bible must be told. Some teachers of God’s Word recognize the importance of employing the grand story of the Bible and are developing strategies to build Christian interest in reading the complete gospel.
A Theoretical Model Utilizing Reading Strategies

One model that has been implemented to increase Bible engagement among Christians is the planning and implementation of Bible reading strategies. The objective of planning and implementing Bible reading strategies seems to focus on scheduling congregants and ministry participants in Bible reading sessions designed to increase Bible knowledge. Participating congregants will undertake Bible reading daily for a specified amount of time. Facilitators then gauge whether there is an increase in Bible knowledge among participants or whether participants experience increased spiritual growth. However, this process does not address igniting or increasing interest in Bible readership; it tests for knowledge, but not for interest.

Devotional and Individual Application

Franzen describes two ways of Bible reading: Devotional ways of reading the Bible – reading until something strikes the individual that is relevant to the individual’s life and then applying portions of the text to the individual’s life.153 The author describes the second method as individuals reading the Bible with the understanding the biblical author wrote within a specific context; the reader then attempts to draw out the understanding of the text given the author’s audience and context. “However, the typical interpretive approach to the Bible that tends to focus on the search for a selected text’s meaning as a historical, static entity shaped by the historical contingencies of its particular context has too often left the church wondering what the Bible might actually say in contemporary settings.”154


Another Bible reading method entails the consistent study of the entire canon which gives the reader the ability to understand greater themes, messages, and God’s greater purpose; it is the Grand Story. This method draws readers increasingly further into the scriptures, precept upon precept. Understanding the Grand Story of the Bible empowers the reader. This is the manner of Bible reading that Grace Abounds Association of Pastors desires to ignite in individuals who profess to believe Christ.

A Theoretical Model Utilizing the Grand Story of the Bible to Ignite Christian Bible Reading

Some followers of Christ understand the scriptures tell God’s plan for the redemption of the world. This Grand Story includes both the Old and New Testaments. Having this foundational understanding of the Grand Story of the scriptures moves the reader beyond the view of scriptures as simply a book of rules, regulations, and laws. Such a limited view of regulations and laws hinders the Christian reader’s interest in Bible reading. Re-framing the overall message of the scriptures (from merely a book of laws to the Grand Story of God’s plan of redemption) is essential in developing Christian interest in Bible reading. Improving the understanding of what is contained within the scriptures may be the initial objective to achieve in the effort to bring Christians forward in Bible reading.

Bible reading has been linked, primarily, to spiritual formation; however, even spiritual formation is only a fragment of what needs to be understood about the contents of the scriptures. It is the Grand Story that must be understood. Christians will, then, begin to contemplate how the Christian, himself, fits within God’s Grand Story. Creative measures must be taken to provide Christians a glimpse into the Grand Story of the scriptures – inspiring Christians to pick up their
Bibles and read. Michael W. Goheen also expresses the importance of moving away from a fragmented form of Bible reading and stresses reading the Bible as one story.\footnote{155}{Michael W. Goheen, \textit{A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).}

Marek Zabriskie believes The Bible Challenge creates a practical method for Christians to read the complete gospel.\footnote{156}{Marek P. Zabriskie, "The Bible Challenge and Why it Matters," \textit{Anglican Theological Review} 97, no. 4 (Fall, 2015): 647-55.} Reading together as a group, group members read through the entire canon by assigning daily readings.\footnote{157}{Zabriskie, "The Bible," 647-55.} The method can be utilized for individuals, churches, and other entities. The group-scheduled readings make reading consistency easier to achieve when groups read the assigned readings together. The method includes reading three chapters of the Old Testament and additional small portions of scriptures, and the Psalms which is the most utilized book of the scriptures, for both Jews and Christians.\footnote{158}{R.W.L. Moberly, \textit{Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible As Christian Scripture} (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 211.} The participants read through the assigned books until they read entirely through the Bible within one year.\footnote{159}{Zabriskie, "The Bible Challenge," 647-55.} The Bible Challenge is a simple design; however, its significance lies within the group approach which allows group members to encourage each other through the readings.

Viewing and reading through the Bible as a grand story is both a method and a necessity. The success of the Bible Challenge testifies that some Christians desire to incorporate more scripture reading into their daily schedules; however, they require a method and support.
“It seems that many who already count themselves as believers are hungry – famished, really – for a rudimentary knowledge of the truth.”\textsuperscript{160}

Traditionally, the lost have been viewed as those who blatantly reject Christ. However, studies are showing that the “lost” are more subtle. They are those who do not read the scriptures consistently and regularly, they have no Bibles within their churches, and they have opted out of discipleship. There is no transformation occurring within their lives; yet, they view themselves as Christians. They have been swept away by secularization, and they do not even know it. Hosea 7:9 states their dilemma in this way, “Aliens have devoured his strength, but he does not know it. Yes, gray hairs are here and there on him, yet he does not know it.”\textsuperscript{161}

In Luke 15, the lost are placed into three classifications by re-stating one parable in three, different ways: The lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. The lost sheep represent those far and wide who are lost. The lost coin represents those closer to home who are lost. The prodigal son represents those who are within God’s own inner circle who are lost.\textsuperscript{162}


\textsuperscript{161} Hosea 7:9.

\textsuperscript{162} Kenneth E. Bailey, \textit{Jacob and the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel's Story} (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2003).
Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Methodology and Rationale

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design, selecting participants by purposive sampling. The researcher proposed to discover what are thematic elements or events experienced by individuals who profess to know Christ or profess a desire to know Christ. Examining these themes, the researcher sought to discover what can ignite, inspire, encourage, or increase Bible reading, given the expressed themes. Employing a phenomenological approach, the researcher pursued the evaluation of shared experiences of Christians who self-measured their level of Bible readership. The researcher chose the phenomenological approach to gain an insightful look at what motivates Christians to read their Bibles and what is hindering those who profess to follow Christ from reading their Bibles.

Intervention Design

The researcher selected a sampling of five individuals representing a Christian-centric or goal-centric portion of the community. Participants identified as believers in Christ and demonstrated varying levels of Christ knowledge. Some participants served previously as contributors to *GoalGetters-SuperHeroes Magazine* (GGSH). GGSH is an online publication of Grace Abounds Association of Pastors. Through its online publishing branch, GAAP publishes writings through a variety of its publications.

The researcher conducted a pre-questionnaire, a reading of a GAAP writing, and a post-questionnaire to all participants. The questionnaires and readings were conducted by telephone. The questions were designed to measure levels of Bible readership and to determine if the writings of Grace Abounds Association of Pastors ignites Christian interest in Bible reading.
Qualitative research allows the researcher to systematically search for answers or interpret phenomena by examining individuals within their social settings. "Qualitative research is grounded in the social world of experience and seeks to make sense of lived experience." The phenomenological approach was the best approach to achieve the researcher’s objective of gaining insight to the participants’ experiences. “Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon (e.g. grief is universally experienced). Additionally, “The basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence…To this end, qualitative researchers identify a phenomenon.” This approach to the study allowed the researcher to focus on the “lived experiences” of the participants, examining both the subjective and objective of shared experiences with others. To enable the researcher the ability to examine the phenomenon of low interest in Bible readership among Christians, the researcher chose a qualitative research design for the study.

Another aspect that makes the research best suited for a phenomenological approach is the number of participants within the research. The phenomenological approach allows the researcher to work with a group of three to four individuals or a group of ten to fifteen individuals. Data collection procedures of open-ended questionnaires and data analysis of

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164 Sensing, *Qualitative*, 57.


166 Creswell, *Qualitative*, 76.

167 Ibid., 76.

168 Ibid.
examining statements and determining their meanings also make the phenomenological approach most applicable to the research. Given these conditions, the researcher determined a qualitative phenomenological approach was the best intervention design for the research problem.169

Setting

By telephone, the researcher provided participants with pre and post questionnaires along with reading material. The researcher administered the questionnaires by reading the questionnaires to participants, writing out participant responses, and reading the GAAP writing to participants. Some participants answered the questionnaires and listened to the readings while at work. Some participants answered the questionnaires and writings by phone, but within their homes. Other participants received the questionnaires, by phone, during break hours at their work locations. This may have some impact on the participant’s ability to freely express his responses; however, the researcher believes each participant provided responses fully to each respondent’s satisfaction.

Participants were free to answer the questionnaires without being encumbered with writing out their own responses. This was a positive attribute of the study and encouraged participation, allowing participants to answer the questionnaires while on work breaks. It was also a positive attribute of the study to have the written material read to participants. This created more patience among participants. For the researcher, this ensured that every portion of the written material was read thoroughly and that every question of the questionnaire was efficiently read. Participants were free to answer questionnaires according to their interpretations. The researcher did not guide participants to the meaning of questions or expound upon questions.

This allowed the researcher to demonstrate respect for the individual interpretations of participants while also allowing participants to feel a sense of autonomy.

Population

The locations of the participants played a significant role in the population samples. The locations were Hollywood, California; Los Angeles, California; and the Monterey Bay area in California. The researcher focused on the specific area of Hollywood within Los Angeles county. Within this demographic are populations of individuals who are dream-filled and working to toward great, life ambitions as actors, musicians, film-makers, dancers, screenwriters, artists, models, producers, students, business owners, and more. The Hollywood area is intensive with desire, belief, hope, and daring spirits. Many of those within this specific population are individuals who may be considered as having the ‘odds’ against them, but who possess fire, passion, and fortitude to step out on faith to achieve their dreams. It is from this segment of the Hollywood population that writers, business owners, and a variety of talented individuals are selected to contribute to GoalGetters – SuperHeroes Magazine. It is from these contributors that the researcher selected some participants for the study.

The practice of hope in God is evident and active among these individuals. A sense of being called to achieve their dreams and goals is a driving force that compels Goal-Getters forward in their endeavors. For some Goal-Getters, this powerful, driving force is what connects them to faith in God. Their faith in God is then expressed and cultivated in different ways. The levels of Bible reading vary. The researcher’s objective is to determine whether a current event, laced with biblical teachings, can ignite greater interest in Bible reading among some participants within this group who already demonstrate a strong faith and actively walk in their faith as they trust in God to actualize their dreams.
Another sample group is located within the Monterey Bay area, in Central California. Through previous GAAP community engagement activities, the researcher made these observations: For the Monterey County Bay Area, the population consists of retired persons as well as families with school-age children. The addition of California State University, Monterey Bay has increased the number of college age students within the 20 to 30-year-old age range; however, this area ebbs and flows with incoming and outgoing students. The area also includes farmers, field workers, construction workers, and some information technology workers that commute to the tech communities, such as Sunnyvale, California. There are also general, career employees, and office workers.

Within the Monterey Bay area, similar to Hollywood, numerous churches exist; yet, both areas have been previously rated by Pew Research Center to be high, unchurched areas. However, among those who do attend church, there is a contrast between the population of Hollywood Goal-Getters who rely upon God and Monterey County, Central California community members who rely upon God. Among those in Hollywood, the Goal-Getters rely heavily upon God to answer and accomplish their dreams. Their trust in God is highly energized, and perhaps adrenaline-filled, as they take great risks, trusting in God to achieve their goals. Among those in the Monterey County, community members rely upon God for sustaining their families, but also they rely upon God for their hopes and dreams for their families.

Some participants in Monterey County have a rooted history in church attendance, church activities, and some Bible reading. Residents that do not attend church tend to have a long history of non-church attendance. At least one resident teenager said he never heard of Jesus. The population appeared to be either consistent Christ followers or strongly opposed to Christianity, pursuing a conglomeration of spiritual beliefs.
It is from the population of those who firmly believe in Christ and who show signs of being dedicated followers of Christ that the researcher has sampled a portion of the population within the Monterey Bay Area. The researcher hypothesized that Bible reading levels would range from low to mid-level Bible reading within a self-defining question. However, the researcher considered additional factors might make this group less receptive to GAAP’s creative writings. An important difference between the two areas is that creatives in Hollywood, California tend to demonstrate more openness to creativity; while the Monterey Bay Area population which has office workers, farm workers, construction workers, and general career employees may not be receptive to creativity. To compensate for this differential, the researcher selected a highly controversial writing that was not only relevant to the Monterey Bay Area population but also was controversial and relevant to the Hollywood population. Although the areas contain two different populations, both populations have a stake in the controversial issue of family separations at the border.

Sampling and Processes

The researcher primarily implemented purposive sampling in selecting participants; however, the researcher also employed maximum variation sampling. What purposive sampling means within the study is that within a specific community, the researcher has selected individuals who understand the importance of Bible reading and who are aware of the phenomenon of low Bible readership among individuals who profess to be Christians. The participants are representative of what Sensing describes as “A typical population that is generally knowledgeable about the subject at hand.”¹⁷⁰ Within the study, the participants self-describe their Bible readership in a range of levels.

To gather more participants and to include a variation of participants, Lincoln and Guba suggest utilizing maximum variation sampling.\textsuperscript{171} According to Lincoln and Guba, maximum variation sampling allows the researcher to include a broad range of perspectives while also enhancing inclusivity.\textsuperscript{172}

Implementing methods of purposive sampling and maximum variation sampling, the researcher selected a group of Christians of varying ages, cultures, genders, marital status, and employment. One area in which the participants were similar was in their belief in Christ. However, in selecting previous contributors of GGSH Magazine as one set of participants and selecting additional samplings from Monterey County, Central Coast, the researcher developed two sets of Christian groups.

The first group which represented contributors of GGSH Magazine had unique qualities – in addition to professing to be believers in Christ. This selection of participants were community members who were actively working to achieve career objectives. This group represents a distinct group of Christians because they share a unique journey of risk-taking within their daily lives, and they share the enhanced ability to trust God as they strive to achieve career objectives and to build their lives. Although all Christians rely upon God throughout the daily, Christian life, this group of Goal-Getters demonstrate a heightened ability to trust in God as they endeavor in risk taking. This ability to take risks, while relying upon a heightened trust in God, is an active part of the daily lives of Goal-Getters as they work to achieve life and career dreams.


\textsuperscript{172} Sensing, \textit{Qualitative}, 84.
The second sampling group also represents a group that is distinct in some measure. The second group represents Christians who not only profess to have a relationship with Christ but also who exhibit active participation in seeking God through studying God’s Word and through additional means. This second group expresses an ongoing, active desire for Christ. The Christian participants within the second group acknowledge the importance of Bible reading and read the Bible at varying levels. They speak of reliance upon God’s Word for daily living, and they are knowledgeable about varying portions of the scriptures.

Where the samplings all varied was within the levels of Bible readership. The level of scripture reading each participant expressed or experienced was of significance to the researcher. The researcher believed a participant’s current level of Bible readership might play a part in how much impact the writings would have among participants. The researcher believed it is within the group of Christian community members who demonstrate an intermediate to high level of Bible readership that GAAP writings would witness the most impact among Christians. However, among the samplings of Goal-Getters participants, the researcher believed GAAP writings would impact Hollywood, California participants in a variety of ways - regardless of their existing levels of Bible reading.

Role of the Researcher

“Hermeneutic theory argues that one can only interpret the meaning of something from some perspective, a certain standpoint, a praxis, or a situational context, whether one is reporting on one’s own findings or reporting the perspectives of people being studied.”173 Within the study, the role of the researcher is an inclusive stance.174 An inclusive stance means the


174 Sensing, *Qualitative*, 91.
researcher had a stake in the research and its outcome. This stance required the researcher to identify potential for biases and agendas to mitigate the reasonable human component that the researcher works from presuppositions and “already possess convictions and preconceived ideas about God, ecclesiology, and pastoral ministry.”  

The inclusive stance also required the facilitator to view the participants as individuals rather than subjects. Because some participants served as previous contributors to GGSH Magazine, the researcher had some familiarity with some participants; therefore, it was critical for the requirements of an inclusive stance to be observed by the researcher – and to “view the context and the people not as objects to be studied, but as people deserving of respect, dignity, and reciprocity.” The facilitator’s role included ensuring that each participant had his narrative equally presented, cultivating “an environment that is free from any form of harassment, intimidation, victimization, or discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, color, ethnic or national origin, disability, religion, sexual orientation, age, marital status, language, social origin, political opinion, property, birth, or status.”

Rights and Well Being of Human Subjects and Ethical Principles

Working with human subjects requires the researcher to establish protections of the rights and well-being of human participants. It is the researcher’s aim and obligation to do no harm to participants or to community populations from which participant samplings are conducted. This


177 Ibid., 33.

178 Ibid.
endeavor includes implementing four, core, ethical standards of research: Respect for persons, beneficence, justice, and respect for communities.\textsuperscript{179}

“Ethics is concerned with the principles of right and wrong. Questions of morality and what it means to be honorable, to embrace goodness, to perform virtuous acts, to generate goodwill, and to choose justice above injustice constitute the study of ethics.”\textsuperscript{180} To conduct a safe and ethical study that includes interactions with human subjects within the study, the researcher is obligated to ensure the privacy of participants and to ensure minimal risks to participants. Those risks include political, personal, and other risks. Privacy includes protecting the anonymity of the participants and protecting participant data. Before initiating work with human subjects, the researcher completed all Institutional Review Board requisites and established ethical safeguards to ensure research standards and human subject protections were met. Approval to conduct the study was granted by Liberty University’s Rawlings School of Theology Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher completed CITI training, as required by the IRB for conducting study with human participants. See Appendix A for IRB approval.

Study Announcement and Recruitment Script

Utilizing the database of \textit{GoalGetters - SuperHeroes} previous contributors, the researcher recruited participants by telephone who previously contributed to the magazine between 2000 and 2004. Employing the recruitment template, the researcher announced the upcoming study, the purpose of the study, and described why previous GGSH contributors would be suited for the study. Also, utilizing the same recruitment script, the researcher contacted by telephone community members at local churches.


\textsuperscript{180} Tim Sensing, \textit{Qualitative Research}, 33.
The recruitment script was also employed to cold-call additional community members, to provide community members information about the study, and to screen community members for participation. The researcher implemented the template to meet precise language and protocol expectations when contacting community members and previous contributors to GoalGetter – Super Heroes Magazine. The recruitment script template was designed by Liberty University.

Informed Consent

“Inform[ed] consent means the knowing consent of individuals to participate as an exercise of their choice, free from any element of fraud, deceit, duress, or similar unfair inducement or manipulation.”¹⁸¹ There are two purposes for which the researcher employed the consent form: First, to request participants’ permission “to use their words, insights, and actions” within the study. The consent form provides the researcher with written acknowledgment of the stakeholders’ agreement to participate. Second, to provide information to participants about the research. Information provided includes written information to potential stakeholders about the purposes and processes the study, data collection procedures, voluntary nature of the study, protection of anonymity, and the conflict-of-interest disclosure.

Purpose of the Study

The researcher invited first-time participants in Grace Abounds Association of Pastors, and those newly introduced to GAAP, to participate in a research study that seeks to ignite and increase Christian Bible reading. Selected Participants met these specific criteria: Participants were previous or current GAAP contributors or newly introduced to GAAP. Participants professed to be followers of Christ. Participants currently hold or are completing a Bachelor's

Degree or participants are working toward other career or life objectives. Additionally, participants may express current challenges in any one of the following areas: Financial, family, or career challenges.

Seeking to measure the impact of writings by GAAP to determine if the writings ignited interest in Bible readership among participants who profess to follow Christ, the researcher evaluated Bible readership among participants, before and after listening to a writing by Grace Abounds Association of Pastors. The researcher’s supposition was that increased interest in Bible reading among Christians will positively impact spiritual formation and Christian identity, giving glory to God.

**Processes of the Study**

Participants were asked to participate in the following activities: Verbally responding to a pre-questionnaire that contained eleven questions, listening to one written item by Grace Abounds Association of Pastors, and responding to one post-questionnaire that consisted of four questions. The combined, total amount of time required was fifteen minutes.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Potential participants exercised the right to refuse participation in the research. Participants also exercised the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The voluntary nature of the researched allowed participants the option to withdraw from the study and to exclude the participant’s data from the general collection, provided the data was not entered previously into the general collection of questionnaires. All data pertaining to the participant would be destroyed immediately.
Data Security

The consent form will also inform stakeholders that data is securely stored where it cannot be viewed by others. The consent form will inform stakeholders that no identifying information will be made public without the stakeholders’ written consent.

Risks to Participants

The risks to participants were minimal, which means any risks were equal to the risks participants would encounter in everyday life. Consequently, that means the study would not negatively impact participants in any way.

Benefits to Participants

Participating individuals would potentially experience an ignited interest in Bible reading.

Anonymity

To protect the privacy of participants, participation in the study was anonymous. The researcher did not collect any personal, identifying information from participants.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure

The researcher serves as founder of Grace Abounds Association of Pastors. To limit potential conflicts, information that identifies the participants was not collected. This disclosure was made to give autonomy to participants to decide if the relationship would affect participant willingness in the study. No action was taken for or against any individual based on his or her decision to participate, or not to participate, in this study.
Implementation of Intervention Design

Overview of the Intervention Process

The researcher conducted by telephone a pre-questionnaire, a reading, and a post-questionnaire. After seeking modification approval by the Institutional Review Board, to encourage willingness to participate, the researcher reduced the total time of data collection from one-hour sessions to fifteen-minute sessions. Participants were free to end the questionnaire and reading session if data collection extended beyond fifteen minutes. All participants continued with the sessions that extended beyond fifteen minutes. The researcher recorded participant responses utilizing a laptop computer. The reading session was conducted by the researcher reading the GAAP writing to the participants. This helped to lesson participant impatience.

The researcher sought IRB approval to make the following modifications to the intervention process to generate higher response from potential participants: The researcher shortened the length of the questionnaire session from one hour to fifteen minutes. The researcher typed in participant responses to pre and post questionnaires. The researcher read participants the GAAP writings. The researcher also generated a wider diversity of participants to include participants who were newly introduced to Grace Abounds Association of Pastors.

These IRB approved modifications generated a greater level of willingness to participate in the study. Additionally, rather than breaking up the data collection process into two or three questionnaire and reading sessions, the researcher collected all data in one telephone session. This ensured the researcher would be able to collect all information necessary for data analysis.

To design an inclusive study, by generating a broader group of participants in the study beyond GoalGetters – SuperHeroes Magazine contributors and professing Christians from local
churches, the researcher also cold-called professing Christians from multiple zip codes within the Monterey Bay area and the greater Los Angeles areas.

Selecting specific zip codes, the researcher focused cold-calling efforts on areas which would best garner qualifying participants for the study. Some zip codes represented areas with medium annual incomes of 70k. Some zip codes represented areas in which demographics show higher numbers of college graduates.

**Intervention Processes**

Utilizing Purposive Sampling, Grace Abounds Association of Pastors selected five participants among previous contributors to *GoalGetters – SuperHeroes Magazine*, individuals from local churches, and a variety of community members who profess to be followers of Christ. Interactions took place by telephone and required the following steps:

- Utilizing the GGSH database, the researcher contacted by telephone previous contributors to the magazine. Previous contributors consist of writers, layout designers, artists, individuals featured within the publication, business owners with ads placed, and readers.
- Utilizing an online telephone directory of the entire United States, the researcher cold-called community members within specific zip codes.
- The researcher selected numbers specifically within the 90028 area of Hollywood, California, 95045 of San Benito County, Central Coast, in California.

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183 United States Census Bureau, “Monterey County, Ca.”
and 90019 in Los Angeles, California. Some of these participants were classified as newly introduced to Grace Abounds Association of Pastors.

- Initial contact was informative and neutral. Some individuals immediately chose to participate.
- When participants agreed to participate in the study and agreed to immediately complete the questionnaire and reading during the same initial contact call, the researcher proceeded to review the consent form.
- The researcher briefly reviewed each section of the consent form. The study provided anonymity of participants. Participants were able to agree verbally to the consent form.
- The researcher established a convenient time for a follow-up call for some prospective participants to further discuss the purpose of the study. For individuals who agreed to participate during the initial contact, the researcher established a convenient time for a second contact to complete the questionnaires and reading.
- The researcher read the pre-questionnaire, followed by the reading, and culminated with the post-questionnaire. The researcher endeavored to spend no more than five minutes on each questionnaire and material. In some cases, the study was completed during the fifteen minutes scheduled. In some cases, the data collection was lengthier, depending upon participant answers.
- By using a desktop computer, the researcher recorded all responses provided by the participants.
• During questionnaires, participants self-measured their levels of Bible readership. Participants also described their experiences with Bible reading.

• After gathering data from both pre and post – questionnaires, the researcher extracted information from the questionnaires. Participants discussed and defined their experiences with Bible readership. Participants discussed their views of the relevancy of the Bible in today’s context.

• The researcher examined responses to interpret themes among the data, to evaluate for increases in Bible reading interest, and to evaluate responses for additional impacts of GGSH writings on participants.

Instrumentation

Pre-Questionnaires

Some participants were selected to correlate with the research questions.\textsuperscript{184} This means some participants may experience low-Bible readership, while other participants express either an interest or need for Bible reading and incorporate Bible reading within their daily lives. Participants were provided open-ended, pre-questionnaires that enabled participants to construct their own responses.\textsuperscript{185} The participants were not provided instructions or guidance on how to respond to the questions, except to frame the response according to each participant’s interpretation of the question. The researcher took this approach to prevent leading the participant in any direction.\textsuperscript{186}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[185] Sensing, \textit{Qualitative}, 91.
\item[186] Ibid., 89.
\end{footnotes}
The researcher field tested the questionnaire\textsuperscript{187} to develop a flow to the questionnaire that would provide the researcher a sense of developing the narratives of the participants. Rather than having participants describe their Bible reading experiences and the researcher assigning a coded level, the researcher enabled each participant to self-assign his or her own Bible reading level. The pre-questionnaires consisted of eleven questions designed to provide background experiences of the participants:

1. How much Bible reading do you consider to be a high level of Bible readership?
2. How would you describe your level of Bible readership?
3. How do you measure a strong walk with Christ?

The first three of the eleven questions serve to gauge a level of Bible engagement, based upon the participant’s self – defined level of Bible readership. The researcher refrained from defining what is low, medium, or high Bible readership. The first, three questions seek the participants’ views on the subject of Bible reading. In question two, the researcher asks the participant to self-describe what is his or her level of Bible readership. Because the life structure of each participant will vary, this variance will dictate what is low, medium, or high Bible readership to each participant, within the varying life contexts of the participants.

In question three, the researcher immediately asks the participant to state whether the participant views himself or herself as having a strong relationship with Christ. The researcher sought to move the participant to examine his or her level of Bible readership in connection with the participant’s relationship with Christ. In short, the researcher’s intent was to challenge the participant’s view of his or her relationship with Christ, given the answer the participant

provided in question two, if these two responses failed to correspond. The researcher was seeking to detect if levels of described Bible readership corresponded with self-professed strength of walk with Christ. That means this: If the participant professed to Bible reading of zero percent, specified by the participant, then the researcher anticipated a participant’s response to question three to be in proximity to question two. If the participant professed to spending ninety percent of Bible reading time, likewise the researcher anticipated a participant’s response to question three to be in proximity to question two.

4. What do you feel about reading the scriptures?

5. What is your experience with reading the scriptures?

Questions four and five seek to delve into the participant’s feelings, heart, or life perspective in relation to the scriptures. The researcher’s intent was to enable the participant to express any long, held views of the Bible. In essence, questions four and five allowed the participant to have the microphone and to express his or her accumulated insights and inner thoughts about the Bible and Bible reading as a follower of Christ.

6. How do you feel about the Bible as a source of transformation for believers in Christ?

7. How much impact do you feel the scriptures can have in your life?

With the intentional designs of questions six and seven, the researcher first focuses on whether the participant believes the Bible is the source of transformation for the believer in Christ. Second, the researcher focuses on observing the participant's response for indications of the Bible’s impact on the participant’s daily living and spiritual growth.

8. Describe your experiences with learning about the Bible.

Question eight is a stand-alone question. Although it appears to repeat question five,
question eight asks about the participant’s training. The researcher sought to discover what the participant was taught about the Bible from childhood and over the course of his or her life.

9. How relevant do you feel the scriptures are in today’s society?

Question nine is also a stand-alone question. However, unlike question eight which is a passive question, the researcher employed the hot button term, “relevant” in question nine. The researcher’s expectation was that discussions on relevancy may invoke strong stances about post-modern society and uncover any implications on Bible reading within the participant’s life.

10. How would you rate your interest in the scriptures?

11. What do you feel would enhance your interest in reading the scriptures?

Questions ten and eleven served to measure existing, professed interest in Bible reading. The two, remaining questions were direct questions to enable the researcher to measure clear, distinct interest increase. The researcher based this discovery upon the participant’s previous level of interest in comparison to an expressed, positive experience following the reading of GAAP’s writing.

**Selected Writing for the Study**

Grace Abounds Association of Pastors produces writings that contain controversial views and provocatively draws parallels between biblical narratives and today’s post-modern societal issues. The writings are composed based upon this presupposition: The selected writing’s relevance to a community’s unique issues would impact community members’ interest, and could ignite further Christian interest in Bible reading.

For the study, the researcher selected a GAAP writing that provided four, critical elements the researcher believed were needed to encourage Bible reading among participants: A
hot button, controversial item, a relevant issue, a softer message delivery, and numerous biblical passages that support the author’s assertions within the written material.

“Respect for people requires you to choose the appropriate tools for your particular project.”188 Keeping in mind the obligation of the researcher to safeguard participants from psychological pressure by ensuring minimal risks to participants’ psychological well-being, a key element the researcher implemented specifically for the study was a GAAP writing that represented a softer message delivery. The GAAP writing selected for the study addressed the hot button issue of child separation at the boarders of California and Mexico. This controversial subject was relevant in the locations of the Monterey Bay area and the greater Los Angeles area. This controversial writing impacts two areas that demographically represent polarity in social, educational, and career groups. What ties together the two contrasting communities is the presence of asylum seekers. Monterey County serves as an asylum city, offering numerous legal services to asylum seekers, while many community members within the Greater Los Angeles area are asylum seeker sympathizers.

The selected GAAP writing impresses upon the reader God’s compassion and grace toward individuals in need. The writing opens with chastisement against weaponizing the Word of God to oppress the vulnerable and chastisement against utilizing the Law to deny help to those who are greatly in need of help. The GAAP writing exhorts the reader to measure in justice and mercy with the laws of a land. Through the employment of biblical narratives, the writing demonstrates that Jesus tempered the Law with mercy. The biblical passages cited were 1 Timothy 1:8-11, Matthew 12:3-8, Matthew 12:1-2, Mark 2:27-28, Matthew 12:9-14, John 8:1-11, and Hebrews 4:15-16.

Post-Questionnaire

The purpose of the post-questionnaire was to examine if and how the GAAP writing contributed to the participants’ experiences with the Bible, such as increased interest in Bible reading, ignited interest in Bible reading, and any additional experiences with Bible reading. Participants were asked to explain how the GAAP writing contributed to his or her experiences with the Bible. Stakeholders were asked about their views of the relevancy of the Bible in today’s context.

Each participant expressed any new experiences resulting from reading GAAP writings, utilizing his or her own language. The researcher analyzed and described the themes extracted from the questionnaires in terms that were representative of the participants. That means the researcher measured any experience in Bible reading according to the self-described terms of each participant. The researcher devised four questions to gather participant experiences with the GAAP writing.

1. What new biblical information did you learn from reading *Grace Abounds News*?

2. What familiar biblical information did *Grace Abounds News* discuss?

Questions one and two focused on each participant’s familiarity with the scriptures. The researcher endeavored to follow the evidence or signs that might indicate the participant’s level of Bible readership. The researcher believed such clues would be made visible in the participant’s demonstration of Bible knowledge or in the participant’s demonstration of the lack of Bible knowledge. Based upon the commonly referenced narratives utilized within the GAAP writing, questions one and two allowed participants to demonstrate knowledge of commonly referenced biblical narratives.
3. How can any of the news that Grace Abounds News discussed help your walk with Christ?

4. What did you find most interesting reading Grace Abounds News?

Questions three and four were broader questions to wind down the session. These questions enabled participants to close out the session with a lighter focus on analyzing the written material rather than ending the session with such an intense self-focus. Question three provides the participant with a broad range of topics to discuss. Question four equally provides the participant an open array of topics to pursue, again drawing the participant’s thought process to a lighter focus.

The researcher designed the post-questionnaire to have fewer questions to prevent exhausting the participant’s patience. When entering the post-questionnaire stage, the researcher made participants aware they were entering the last four questions. This enabled participants to maintain focus to the completion of the session.

Data Gathering Sequence

A series of GAAP questionnaires and readings were conducted over the course of six weeks to carefully examine the experiences, truths, and realities of the participants regarding Bible readership – and measured any increased interest in Bible readership experienced by participants. The sequence follows this order: An initial pre – Questionnaire containing eleven questions, a reading of a GAAP writing, and concluding with a post – questionnaire, containing four questions.

Stakeholders were asked to discuss and define their experiences with Bible readership. Participants were asked about their views of the relevancy of the Bible in today’s context. The post - questionnaires measured any increases or other positive experiences in Bible reading that
resulted from reading GAAP writings. The participants expressed their experiences utilizing their own language and terms. The researcher analyzed and described the themes extracted from the questionnaires in terms that are representative of the participants. The researcher measured any increased interest or positive experiences in Bible reading according to the self-described interest of each participant.

Data Collection Details and Obstacles

Most office space was closed during the Coronavirus event. In-person meetings were no longer tenable, and potentially because of emotional experiences brought on by the coronavirus, some community members demonstrated shortened patience. The researcher adjusted the study in response to those issues.

Upon receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University, the researcher made modifications to the data collection processes. The researcher shortened the overall length of time required to complete the sessions from one hour to fifteen minutes, designed sessions to be conducted completely by telephone, and read GAAP writings to participants. The researcher also recorded participant responses on a laptop computer, conducted all components of data gathering within one session, allowed for a verbal consent, and included participants from community members who were newly introduced to GAAP.

Community stress and trauma were at heightened levels in the Los Angeles and Hollywood, California areas because of the coronavirus. To gain greater participation in the study, the researcher re-designed the procedures in consideration of the current stress levels within the communities. However, within the Monterey Bay area, stress levels were lower. Possibly, because the coronavirus was not as prevalent in the Central Coast area.
GAAP community engagement was restricted to telephone engagement during the nationwide virus. Employing an online, nationwide telephone directory, the researcher contacted specific zip coded areas in which the researcher would be most likely to find qualifying participants in the Los Angeles, Hollywood, and Monterey Bay areas.

The researcher initially anticipated individuals who were in their homes during the pandemic would have the time and space to comfortably participate in the study. The researcher did not anticipate, initially, that community members whose lives were disrupted would be under heightened levels of stress and would, consequently, be less eager to participate in the study.

The researcher miscalculated the mood of the community during the coronavirus and adjusted the sampling process, covering only areas in which community members would be less affected by the Coronavirus. After implementing the IRB approved modifications, and selecting areas less affected by the coronavirus, the researcher experienced a higher volume of willingness to participate in the study. The modifications improved the success of contacting and gathering potential participants.

As GAAP writings concatenate biblical events to modern news topics, GAAP expected impacts in the primary areas: First, the researcher anticipated participant interest in the noticeable parallels between biblical events and modern events. The researcher sought to determine whether the parallels demonstrated the relevancy of the scriptures in today’s context. The researcher expected participants to observe how the scriptures can inform community responses regarding today’s events. The researcher also anticipated the participants to be inspired by the fascinating connections between the scriptures and today’s social contexts, with the outcome of drawing Christians to do more Bible reading.
For participants who self-defined as experiencing a non-discipled relationship with God, the researcher anticipated increasing knowledge about the Sovereignty of God and increasing knowledge that the God of the scriptures is the same God who is present within today’s events. The researcher also anticipated impacting their Christian identity.

Within the context of reading strategically designed, GAAP biblically-based news, the researcher expected to measure the described components by implementing the pre-and-post questionnaires and the GAAP writing. The researcher empowered participants to self-describe levels of existing Bible reading and to self-measure any perceived, ignited, or increased interests in the areas of Bible reading, God’s sovereignty, Christian identity, and transformation. The researcher did not provide insight to participants’ prolonged or sustained interest in the studied areas; however, the researcher sought to demonstrate a preliminary spark in interest in the specified areas.

Triangulation

To ensure the credibility of the research, the researcher employed data triangulation. The researcher compared and contrasted data from the Pew Research Center, the Barna Research Group, observation, and questionnaires that demonstrated interest in Bible reading among Christians can be enhanced through creatively concatenating Biblical events with the post-modern events of today’s society. Triangulating participants’ lived experiences with the researcher’s findings along with additional credible sources, the researcher was able to cross-check data and increase the validity and reliability of the research.\(^{189}\) Participant responses, Pew

Research Center data, and Barna Research Group data provided both valid challenges and compliments to the researcher’s insights, presuppositions, and conclusions.

Chapter 4: Results

Analysis and Interpretation

The researcher examined the experiences and realities of the participants, identifying themes. In the evaluation process, the researcher determined whether participants’ experiences were impacted – and in what ways. The researcher identified themes and significant features expressed within the pre and post questionnaires. The process enabled the facilitator to identify common experiences and differences among participants and to interpret how those experiences can inform the writings of Grace Abounds Association of Pastors in its efforts to create exciting, biblical writings that inspire Christians to read God’s Word.

The researcher began analysis by examining and identifying selected expressions made within key questions in the pre-questionnaire. These expressions were examined for identifying themes and elements experienced by participants.
Key Questions, Responses, and Observations

Pre-Questionnaire, Question One: How much Bible reading do you consider to be a high level of Bible readership?

Question One was chosen as a key question because it enabled each participant to self-describe his level of Bible readership. Many of the participants felt they read consistently and had high readership of the Bible. Many of the participants expressed reliance upon God’s Word for daily life. Therefore, Bible reading was necessary for their healthy existence. One participant responded that daily Bible reading was required to prepare her day. Therefore, daily Bible readership was imperative.
Pre-Questionnaire, Question Two: How would you describe your level of Bible reading?

In question two, the participants affirmed they had high Bible readership. Participants were confident in their experiences with the Bible. Some of the participants appear to have exposure to regular Bible study and were confident in their level of Bible experience. The researcher did notice that participants stated Bible reading was necessary to endure life’s daily challenges. It appeared the Bible was a lifeline for maintaining peace within their lives.
Pre-Questionnaire, Question Three: How do you measure a strong walk with Christ?

Participants had the standard understanding of what it means to have a strong walk with Christ. They expressed that it was necessary to demonstrate the teachings of Christ within their lives and within their communities. Most of their responses were the standard, often repeated words about having a close walk with Christ. On one hand, the researcher was encouraged to see that community members were reading God’s Word and were holding onto God. However, there was an element missing that the researcher was seeking. The researcher was seeking to move beyond the standard, proper messaging about walking with Christ and demonstrating the ways of Christ.
Pre-Questionnaire, Question Four: What do you feel about reading the scriptures?

Like question three, the participants provided the standard, responsible answers. They love the Lord. They love God’s Word. Perhaps, the researcher needed to find a way to encourage the participants beyond the standard responses. Again, it was refreshing to hear community members were loving and walking with God. However, their standard responses raised a question within the researcher: Why is there such a disparity in what is seen within a community if there are individuals, like the participants, who are loving God, holding onto God, and reading God’s word with some frequency? Is what the participants profess translating into their daily interactions within their communities?
Pre-Questionnaire, Question Five: What is your experience with reading the scriptures?

With question five, the researcher wanted to hear what kinds of journeys the participants experienced that led them to Christ and to God’s Word. There are usually experiences that lead individuals to Christ. The researcher wanted to delve into those experiences. One participant did provide more significant insight with this question than with the previous questions. The participant stated that when one is young, one listens more to God; however, when one becomes older and becomes more exposed to the world around himself, he begins to listen to what is around him. The participant believes God’s word serves to bring back those individuals to a place of listening to God rather than the world around him. This is precisely what the Word of God does. It turns one’s attention to God like a rudder. The participant opened and shared from a deeper place with this question.
Pre-Questionnaire, Question Six: How do you feel about the Bible as a source of transformation for believers in Christ?

What the researcher was saying in this question is this: There needs to be transformation among Christians that becomes evident within their respective communities. Are you becoming transformed? Read the Bible and become transformed! Again, each participant answered politely, correctly, and confidently provided the standard spiel. Yes, the Bible is good for transformation. The researcher began to formulate another question from all the proper, standard responses that were being presented: If there are Christians who are reading the Word of God and applying God’s Word to their lives and there are so many churches everywhere – why are these Christians un-noticeable on a daily basis within a community? The answer to this question became evident in the post questionnaire on the very last question.
Pre-Questionnaire, Question Seven: How much impact do you feel the scriptures can have in your life?

What the researcher desired to know in this question was this: Will you be changed so that you can be a noticeable Christian when you are out and about within your community? Again, where are all the Christians when one goes out into one’s community? Even to be an agitated Christian who is always arguing about an injustice in the grocery store or in Target is better than a Christian who is unnoticeable. Where are the angry Christians who will stand up and say in the grocery store when witnessing unrighteousness, “Don’t you dare do that to that man (or woman)!”

The Christians are all reading their Bibles and comforting themselves with God’s Word; however, where is their presence within their communities where injustices are looming so greatly?
Pre-Questionnaire, Question Eight: Describe your experiences with learning about the Bible.

Again, the researcher desired to hear the journeys of Christians. How have Christians come to know the mighty God? What was the learning process of these participants? One of the participants allowed a deeper look into his journey. The participant spoke about having confusion about the Bible. The participant shared that he was confused because the Bible taught one way of life; however, what he saw exhibited within the community of Christians was another way of life exhibited. The participant also shared that his aunts all held a variety of beliefs. These things made the participant confused about God and the Bible. It sounded as if the participant, himself, were asking, ‘where are those who profess to be Christians?’
Post Questionnaire, Question Four: What did you find most interesting reading Grace Abounds News?

Post Question Four was the last question in the post questionnaire and the final question of the session. It was within the answers to this question that the researcher gained some insights to the question that began to develop as most respondents continued, confidently, to provide a proper answer to each question.

On this question, the confidence or standard presentation of some participants was moved. Each participant responded, humbly, to the mercy Jesus showed to the disciples. Each responded made a similar response: The writing reminded the participant to demonstrate mercy toward others. The participants were reminded. Why were they reminded - as if to suggest they had forgotten?

This is the researcher’s interpretation of participant reaction to post-question four: The participants may be well practiced in applying God’s anointing oil within their own lives. They all demonstrated that they know how to turn to God’s word for God’s healing and for God’s protection in a wicked generation. However, perhaps, what the participants may be lacking in
their loving, kind relationship with God, Himself, is the same softness and loving, kind relationship toward others. However, the researcher does not view this lack as a fault of the participants; rather the researcher views this as a need for healing within the participants’ hearts. The outcome of the study is as the researcher anticipated. However, the answer surfaced in an unanticipated way. The writing of Grace Abounds Association of Pastors inspired the hearers back to God’s Word. Although the participants all believe themselves to be greatly immersed in the scriptures, the participants were all reminded back to a message from God they seemed to momentarily forget: To temper the law with mercy. So much wicked behavior is abounding within communities that the hearts of Christians must be healed. Christians must remember their first love, as God calls believers to do. Additionally, Christians must begin to be noticeable within their communities. They must become practiced in applying God’s anointing oil not only to their own lives but also to the lives of those within their communities.

**Chapter 5: Conclusion**

As Christopher J. Einolf noted in the data from the Midlife in the United States study (MIDUS), community members are moved by the teachings of Christ and are encouraged to show more compassion toward others when reading about Christ’s mercy. Also, biblical teachings are the driving force that encourage community service for some Christians.¹⁹⁰ Christians are impacted by the examples of Jesus regarding love, goodness, and mercy toward others. Additionally, Christians are inspired to help others when they hear the teachings of Christ. The outcomes of this study agree with the MIDUS study in this respect. However, this study delves even further as it seeks to determine creative ways to encourage and inspire

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Christians to increase in Bible reading. What the researcher’s study demonstrated is that not only must Christians increase in Bible reading but also Christians must increase in applying God’s Word outward into the community – beyond the standard community service that is discussed within the MIDUS study. The researcher’s study encourages Christians to heal their own hearts by not only delving into God’s Words for their own growth and prosperity but also to share and apply God’s Word within their communities. Christians are adept at reading through the scriptures to remind themselves of God’s love and mercy toward their own lives; however, the study showed that participants all needed to be reminded of God’s mercy that extends toward others as well. The participants all commented on the parallels between biblical times and the current times. They expressed that God’s word was valuable for addressing the current issues within their communities. The participants were all reminded of God’s mercy, and they were reminded to apply God’s mercy toward their neighbors regarding today’s societal issues.

Findings

The researcher observed that participants were impacted by the teachings of Jesus regarding compassion and mercy. Even though participants ranged from infrequent readers of the scriptures to seasoned and knowledgeable teachers of God’s Word, all participants were moved by the compassion and mercy of Jesus. What was significant was that although the participants were aware of God’s mercy actively at work within their own lives, the participants were reminded to apply this same mercy to other individuals within their communities. This suggests to the researcher that GAAP writings must strongly urge the readers toward Christian discipleship along with urging Christians toward reading the Bible. Some participants demonstrated that although many are aware of God’s Word as it applied to themselves, the
participants also must be guided toward the practical application of God’s Word within one’s community.

Additionally, the researcher observed that hearers of God’s Word are impacted by the gentle and understanding spirit of Christ’s nature; however, the researcher would like to conduct research to study how God’s warnings, God’s wrath, and God’s call to repentance impact hearers of God’s Word.

Recommendations for Pastors and Ministry Workers

The researcher recommends that pastors and ministry workers find creative methods to ignite congregants to read their Bibles. The researcher also recommends that pastors re-establish two things with congregants: To read, daily, God’s word to counter the growing phenomenon of secularized Christianity and to apply God’s teachings within the contexts of today’s societal events.

Perhaps, also, pastors should keep their livelihood separate from their preaching roles. This will allow pastors to preach God’s word, fully, without the fear of losing their housing. Additionally, Pastors must focus on perfecting those who are already within their congregations rather than focusing on expanding and filling pews.

Recommendations for Further Research

There were three recommendations for further research identified by the researcher.

A Study examining Christian response to writings on repentance or writings in which Jesus issues strong rebukes

The same Jesus who demonstrated such great compassion toward the sick, the poor, the hungry, and the outcast is also the same Jesus who warned the people to repent. He is the same Jesus who overturned the tables of the money changers and drove the buyers and sellers out of
the temple (Matthew 21:12). For further research, the researcher would like to study how the hearers respond to the harsher teachings of Christ by providing participants with writings that focus on narratives in which Christ speaks harshly to individuals or when Christ rebukes individuals. One such example is Christ’s rebuke of Peter when Christ says, “Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

This is a very strong rebuke. How do Christ’s teachings of repentance and Christ’s strong rebukes impact the hearer or the reader?

A Study to compare varied genres of writings within one study

To accomplish this, the researcher recommends conducting a comparison study in which the researcher provides both types of writings to participants, conducted within the same study: Writings that emphasize Christ’s mercy and writings that emphasize Christ’s rebukes to examine the types of responses the varied writings evoke within the participants. How do these varied writings compare?

A Study exploring how to encourage Christian Bible readers to not only embrace God’s gentler teachings on mercy but also to embrace God’s call to repentance and to embrace God’s strong rebukes

How can Christians come to embrace the prophet rather than foster the desire to kill the prophet? How can the message of God’s plan of redemption for humankind be presented to teach Christians to embrace God’s chastisements along with God’s gentler teachings? Does Christian maturity determine whether the Christian can accept stronger teachings of Christ?

The study supports that Christians respond to the gentler teachings of Christ. Since the scriptures already demonstrate that God’s people so greatly disliked the message of repentance

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191 Matthew 16:23
that they killed the prophets who brought these messages, and then killed Jesus Himself, it
suggests to the researcher that even today’s Christian hearer and reader of the Bible will not look
favorably upon the message of repentance or messages that issue strong rebukes.

Christians love to hear they are blessed, and the study shows that Christians are receptive
to messages of God’s mercy; however, all teachings within the scriptures are inspired by God –
the chastisements as well as the messages of grace and mercy. Christians must grow toward the
maturity to embrace all God’s teachings.

Final Thoughts

God says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will
also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the
Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Galatians 6:7-8).

If believers live as secularized Christians, being deceived into following secular teachings
and being deceived into focusing on secular desires, Christians will lose their inheritance of
everlasting life that God intended for their lives. God’s children must not be sidetracked by
Satan’s crumbs and pennies. What are crumbs and pennies in comparison to the power of an
endless life?

Leave the wicked to scramble on the ground for Satan’s embarrassing crumbs and
pennies. God’s children must stay focused upward because God’s children have the great
inheritance of eternal life to secure - that God, Himself, has established for their lives.
Appendix A

Liberty University
Institutional Review Board

July 24, 2020

Patryse Brown
IRB Exemption 4166.072420: The Impact of Grace Abounds Association of Pastors’ News That Provocatively Concatenates Biblical Events and Current News Topics to Ignite Christian Bible Reading

Dear Patryse Brown,

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

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

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

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

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

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

Sincerely,

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

Informed Consent

Consent Form

The Impact of Writings by Grace Abounds Association of Pastors That Provocatively Concatenates Biblical Events and Current News to Ignite Christian Bible Reading

Rev. Patryse Brown

Liberty University
Rawlings School of Divinity

Rev. Patryse Brown, a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, invites first-time participants in Grace Abounds Association of Pastors (GAAP), and those newly introduced to GAAP, to participate in a research study that seeks to ignite and increase Christian Bible reading. You have been selected as a possible participant because you meet these specific criteria: You are a GAAP participant, or someone newly introduced to GAAP, who professes to follow Christ. Additionally, you currently hold or are completing a Bachelor’s Degree or you are working toward career objectives, and you have expressed current challenges in one of the following areas: financial, family, or career challenges. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before you agree to participate in the study.

Rev. Patryse Brown, a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: Evaluating Bible readership and developing creative ways to engage and increase Bible reading among GAAP participants, and among those newly introduced to GAAP, will give GAAP associates the power of the Holy Spirit to grow, to prosper, and to positively impact their communities.

Procedures: If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following activities. The combined, total amount of time that will be required is 25 minutes:

1. Pre-Questionnaire: Verbally answer questions to a Pre-Questionnaire that will require approximately 10 minutes of your time.
2. Reading Session: Listen to 1 GAAP News column, read by the researcher. The GAAP News reading will be a brief, 5-minute reading.
3. Post-Questionnaire: Verbally answer questions to 1 Post-Questionnaire. The Post-Questionnaire will require approximately 10 minutes of your time.
Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants may experience an ignited or increased interest in Bible reading.

Compensation: There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

To protect the privacy of participants, participation in this study will be anonymous. The researcher will not collect any personal, identifying information from the participants. The data collected through this study may be used in future research or presentations. The data collected will be retained for at least three years from the completion of this study.

Conflicts of Interest Disclosure: The researcher, Rev. Patryse Brown, serves as founder of Grace Abounds Association of Pastors. To limit potential conflicts, the study will be anonymous. Information that identifies the participants will not be collected.

This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Grace Abounds Association of Pastors. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to the conclusion of the phone call.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please inform the researcher of your decision prior to the conclusion of the phone call. Because names will not be included on the data, it will not be possible for the researcher to remove data for individuals once each phone call has ended.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Rev. Patryse Brown. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact Rev. Patryse Brown at PJBrownstephens@Liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty mentor, Dr. Reginald Weems at rdweems@liberty.edu.

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

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.
Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.
Bibliography


Wicks, Jared, SJ. “Scripture Reading Urged Vehementer (DV No. 25): Background and Development.” *Theological Studies* 74, no. 3 (September 2005): 555-580.


