

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Biblical Literacy: An Expository Christ-Centered Approach to Bible Study

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

by

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Thesis Project Approval Sheet

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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This action research aimed to examine biblical literacy from an expositional Christ-centered approach to Bible study. Using a triangular curriculum design focusing on scriptural theology, Bible study methodology, and a transformative approach to Christ-centered learning, the action research results revealed that an expositional Christ-centered approach increases biblical literacy. The researcher garnered data by hosting four bi-weekly Bible study sessions employing pre-and-post assessments to capture participants' current and post-state of biblical literacy. The validity and reliability of the pre-and-post assessments were determined by a focus group that reviewed the measurement tools and provided feedback confirming the trustworthiness and dependability of the assessments.

Key Words: adult learning, andragogy, assessment, biblical literacy, biblical illiteracy, Bible study, Christ-centered, exegesis, exposition, hermeneutics, homiletics, Pentecostal, transformational learning

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Abbreviations

ABS	American Bible Society
DMIN	Doctor of Ministry
IT	Identifiable Theme
LO	Learning Outcome
RCCG-NA	Redeemed Christian Church of God-North America
SCC	Schaumburg Community Church
WPG	Women's Prayer Group

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The most significant purpose of Bible study is to apply what is read into the lives of Christians.¹ When approached with humility and an open heart, Bible study convicts, restores, and heals so that people are challenged and changed by the Word of God. Additionally, studying the Word has been and continues to be an avenue in which people are brought into a transformative, nurturing relationship with God. Therefore, people should not presuppose meaning into the sacred text yet, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, allow text to illuminate meaning, application, and truth into the lives of the hearers and doers of the Word.² As Christians become more scripturally engaged, they soon discover an overarching redemptive narrative of God's love and His desire to be present among His people. Bible study requires readers to be attentive to where they are in the redemptive narrative as they discover God and how He deals with His people.

The goal of this action research is to present an examination of expositional Christ-centered Bible study. Chapter One will begin by discussing the ministry context related to the subject in question. A discussion of the research problem, purpose, and basic assumptions of the study will follow. Next, definitions are provided and described based on the usage of the current literature. The researcher's limitations and delimitations are presented to discuss the researcher's boundaries and imposed constraints, concluding with a statement of the desired outcome of the study.

¹ Tony Evans, *Introduction*, in *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary: Advancing God's Kingdom Agenda*, (Nashville, TN: Hollman Bible Publishers, 2019), 11.

² *Ibid.*

Ministry Context

Schaumburg Community Church (SCC) is a church located in the northwestern suburbs of Chicago, Illinois. The church is a Pentecostal ministry of The Redeemed Christian Church of God under the global leadership of Pastor E.A. Adeboye. Since 2010, under the auspices of Senior Pastor Wale Akinosun, SCC has established itself as a landmark within the local community as a place where God's love reigns and dreams come true. The congregation is predominately African, with a mixture of various ethnicities. Praise and worship services are energetic and spirit-filled, culminating in an exuberant sermon preached with the inerrant Word of God. Though SCC offers ministries that provide various avenues to serve God (1 Pet 4:11), there is an opportunity for SCC to address biblical literacy in the church through the ministry of Bible study.

Currently, Bible study sessions are held between the 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. service. Congregants who join Bible study are attendees from the 9:00 a.m. service or congregants who choose to attend the Bible study prior to the 11:00 a.m. service. Before the start of the session, Bible study attendees receive a plan that outlines the topic of the day. After opening prayer, the Sunday school teacher begins the lesson. As part of the facilitation, the teacher solicits engagement by requesting congregants to read the opening scriptural text and explain its meaning. During the session, volunteers are frequently asked to read excerpts from the lesson outline and supporting scriptural references. Based on the reading, the teacher provides his or her interpretation and requests volunteers to do the same. Unfortunately, as the session progresses, the discussion develops into an "endless swap of opinions," resulting in "sharing fatigue."³ While Sunday school teachers meet prior to upcoming sessions to discuss future lessons and how

³ Jen Wilkin, "How to Prevent Bible Study Dropouts," *Christianity Today* 61, no.6 (2017), 28.

facilitation should occur, there is uncertainty about whether teachers effectively employ exegetical principles to facilitate Bible study sessions. Nevertheless, despite weekly church attendance, mid-week services, and Sunday Bible study sessions, the level of biblical literacy in the church warrants attention as voluntary Sunday school teachers are contributing to the biblical illiteracy of the church by facilitating Bible study sessions based on the misinterpretation of Scripture.

As a church member, one of the ministries this researcher has been most fascinated in was Bible study. Attending adult Sunday school before church service was an essential step and having owned several resources to guide personal study was paramount to biblical engagement and spiritual growth. However, as the researcher became a regular Sunday school attendee, it became apparent that during the sessions, there did not appear to be a level of biblical engagement as was expected. Instead of discussing biblical narratives and their underlying principles, the study sessions consisted of conversations centered on specific scriptural verses philosophically interpreted to be topically applied to everyday life. As the researcher became increasingly discouraged, instead of ceasing Bible study attendance, the researcher became a Sunday school facilitator.

In early 2016, the researcher joined the Bible study ministry. In collaboration with the other facilitators, the researcher's goal was to study the Word of God and, as a group, decide how to teach the lesson. In preparation for a Sunday session, the facilitators would schedule weekly conference calls, pray, then go over the lesson plan. However, during the preparation calls, it became apparent that the other facilitators were unaware of how to approach Bible study. During the conference calls, the lead facilitator would inquire what the selected verse meant to each facilitator. How each facilitator responded determined how the lesson would be taught. As a

result, the lesson plan was unstructured, lacking a unified cohesion that led back to the foundational Scripture. Because the researcher is an educator, recommendations were provided on how to approach the Bible study lessons. However, the recommendations were unwelcomed as one facilitator stated, “We’ve always done it this way.” Therefore, after less than six months of serving as a Sunday school facilitator and the lack of biblical knowledge displayed by the group, the researcher ceased Sunday school attendance altogether. Just as preachers understand that at the end of every sermon, there is a call for salvation that leads back to the sermon application, Bible study sessions should follow a similar pattern in which foundational Scripture circles back to the lesson text. Since then, the context in which Bible study is facilitated has remained unchanged. In a recent example, a Sunday school facilitator was asked how a particular subject ties back to the lesson text, in which the facilitator replied, “We’ll get back to that.” Leaving the question unanswered.

The Bible study ministry at SCC has great potential. If structured appropriately, there will be an authentic commitment to the Bible which will encourage members of SCC to reexamine the sacred text to recover the experiences as displayed and witnessed at Pentecost. As a Pentecostal church, the congregation is already spiritually sensitive, and the increased knowledge of appropriately engaging, interacting, and interpreting Scripture will heighten their spiritual senses. Most importantly, as maintained by Robert Menzies, “Pentecostals have an important theological contribution to make to the larger church world and that this contribution directly impacts a theme of great importance for all Christians: the Holy Spirit’s contribution to spiritual formation.”⁴

⁴ Robert P. Menzies, *Christ-Centered: The Evangelical Nature of Pentecostal Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020), 105.

In another example, 1 Corinthians 9:11-27 was distributed to congregants for review. As part of the lesson outline, the subject of “Part A” was about eating. Per the lesson, God gives us an appetite for food and a stomach for digestion, yet it does not mean Christians should overeat. Further, the lesson stated that the Bible warns Christians not to emphasize eating because God will eventually do away with stomach and food. In support of this idea, the lesson used part of 1 Corinthians 6:13, “You say, ‘Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.’” Another supporting verse was Philippians 3:19, “Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.” Based on these Scripture references, it is not surprising that there are several issues with this lesson.

First, 1 Corinthians 6:13 was not used in its entirety. The rest of the verse states, “. . .The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” In the letter to the Corinthians, starting at 1 Corinthians 6:12, Paul talks about sexual immorality, and “food for the stomach and stomach for the food” is how the Corinthians justified their pleasure-seeking lifestyle, hence the quotation marks. When Paul wrote this letter, the relationship between the Corinthians and prostitutes came as natural as eating and drinking. Food and the stomach fulfill their proper functions when interacting according to their intended relationship with each other. The human body performs its proper function when it acts in accordance with its relationship with the Lord. Since Jesus Christ is the Lord of believers, they belong to Him and do what He commands. For that reason, it is unacceptable to be sexually immoral.⁵

⁵ D.A. Carson, *1 Corinthians*, NIV Biblical Theological Study Bible: Following God’s Redemptive Plan As It Unfolds Through Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 2060.

Next, in his letter to the Philippians, starting at 3:15, Paul encourages the Philippians to be attentive to those living in the pursuit of Christ, modeling Paul as an example. Enemies of the cross live lives of physical gratification and self-centeredness as they praise themselves when they should be praising God.⁶ Hence, for enemies of the cross, their worldly desires will lead to their ruin.

Finally, based on this lesson, congregates who are biblically illiterate could have taken this lesson at face value to understand how gluttony and obesity impact their lives. While there are societal influences on overindulgence, the above Scriptures do not reference eating habits yet how the flesh affects Godly living. Therefore, commensurate with Ephesians 4:12-16, it seems plausible that SCC should have a sense of urgency to address biblical illiteracy so that congregants can learn to be biblically fluent.

In 2016, in collaboration with the American Bible Society (ABS), the Barna Group conducted research on the state of the Bible in the United States. According to the study, as Americans determine how to live their lives, biblical literacy declines as Americans dismiss the authority of sacred texts to guide them through their lived experiences.⁷ The research exposed that within the changing context, Americans are not as familiar with the background, the people, stories, and principles of the Bible.⁸ Likewise, in 2018, evidence of this pattern continues to emerge as the Barna Group research revealed a 7% decline in the perception of the Bible and its applicability to life.⁹ However, despite the 2016 results, the 2018 research uncovered that 66% of

⁶ Tony Evans, *Philippians*, in *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary: Advancing God's Kingdom Agenda*, (Nashville, TN: Hollman Bible Publishers, 2019), 1234.

⁷ Barna Group, *Biblical Literacy*, *The Bible in America: The Changing Landscape of Bible Perceptions and Engagement* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2016), 47.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Barna Group, "State of the Bible 2018: Seven Top Findings" July 10, 2018, Accessed August 26, 2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/state-of-the-bible-2018-seven-top-findings/>

Americans are curious to know more about the Bible, of which 29% expressed a strong desire to learn more.¹⁰ These curiosity seekers identified within the study were non-college-educated adults, parents with young children in the home, or regular weekly church attendees.¹¹

Critical to this inquiry is the level of biblical engagement among Americans. Between 2018 and 2019, the Barna Group reported a 4% decrease of biblically centered Americans, a 2% increase of biblically engaged Americans, and a 9% decrease of biblically disengaged Americans.¹² In this regard, as biblical centeredness was decreasing, biblical skepticism was increasing.¹³ Furthermore, in alignment with 2 Corinthians 9:7, one of the most salient findings of the 2019 study was that biblically-centered Americans were more apt to give financially as scriptural engagement influences higher giving levels.¹⁴ In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul encourages cheerful giving, and those who give generously reap both a spiritual grace and the material prosperity that God provides.¹⁵ Individuals who are biblically centered understand this principle and apply it accordingly. For this reason, findings from the Barna Group's 2016, 2018, and 2019 research support the need for SCC to address biblical literacy and recover expositional Christ-centered teaching.

Problem Presented

Currently, Bible study sessions are conducted between the 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. services on Sunday mornings. Before the session starts, attendees are provided with a sheet that

¹⁰ Barna Group, "State of the Bible," 4.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Barna Group, "State of the Bible 2019: Trends in Engagement" April 18, 2019, Accessed August 26, 2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/state-of-the-bible-2019/>

¹³ Barna Group, "State of the Bible 2019."

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ D.A. Carson, *2 Corinthians*, NIV Biblical Theological Study Bible: Following God's Redemptive Plan as It Unfolds Through Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 2093.

outlines the lesson plan for the day. The lesson plan includes the memory verse, lesson text, lesson introduction, and lesson outline. However, the lesson text and supporting Scripture do not occasionally align, causing the “Bible study” discussion to veer in different directions. Instead of discussing the context of the lesson text, God’s role within the text, and the meaning behind the text, the study session discusses what the lesson text means to the group. This approach to Bible study is not Bible study and, unfortunately, leads to the insertion of presuppositions into the biblical text. When this occurs, the Bible study group demonstrates biblically illiterate behaviors by using the Bible as a book to be read instead of a book to be experienced.

There are several contributing factors for a biblically illiterate Bible study session that warrant attention. First, group members receive instruction from Sunday school teachers who are volunteers of the church and not formally trained educators of the Bible. They are not aware of the resources used to aid in biblical interpretation, therefore unable to share them with the group. Though these volunteers have good intentions for actively engaging in church ministry, the lack of formal Bible training impacts biblical literacy.

Next, Bible study lesson plans and the supporting scriptural references do not always align. As one example, members received a lesson text for the story of Joseph, Genesis 39:1-14. The lesson, “The Cost of Purity,” was designed to discuss that salvation is free, yet value has a cost. A few supporting scriptural references were 1 Peter 3:2, Psalm 24:3-4, Ezra 10:1-11, and 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. However, if the lesson designer employed proper hermeneutical and exegetical principles, the lesson designer would have uncovered that the story of Joseph is not about the cost of purity but about perennial discord, reconciliation, and how God navigates works in and through situations of human conflict to bring about life and well-being.¹⁶

¹⁶ Psalm 1:3; 51:4; Proverbs 6:29; 1 Samuel 16:12

Furthermore, congregants are pastor-dependent on biblical interpretation. After the pastor preaches Sunday and mid-week services, congregants presume the learning is final without further exploring the biblical text. Nevertheless, when services are over, the onus remains on the congregants to continue their study from the Sunday and mid-week services, even if it results in a shift in thought, if it is scripturally aligned. Other factors contributing to biblical illiteracy are the absence of adult learning principles oriented within weekly sermons and the lack of a comprehensive structure that enables all demographics to become biblically literate.

First Corinthians 2:13 says, “This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words.” Though Paul may have had some people opposed to his message, Paul begins to make the case that the gospel was not given to them from words of human wisdom because human wisdom cannot explain the wisdom of God. To speak the message of the Spirit, believers must use the words that are given to them by the Spirit. To explain spiritual truths, believers must use spiritual words. Paul spoke from a position of authority because he was guided by the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ In this regard, biblical literacy is not simply picking up the Bible to read it. Biblical literacy is actively engaging with the Bible by reading, comprehending, and speaking a language guided by the Holy Spirit along the journey of discovery through the Scriptures. The problem is that members of Schaumburg Community Church who read the Bible misinterpret Scripture due to biblical illiteracy.

¹⁷ Bruce Barton, Greg Asimakoupoulos, Jonathan Taylor, David Veerman, & Neil Wilson. *1 & 2 Corinthians*, Life Application Bible Commentary, eds. Grant Osborne & Phillips Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1999),42.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the DMin action research thesis is to examine Bible study sessions taught from an expositional Christ-centered approach to increase biblical literacy. This approach will increase the level of biblical literacy such that members of Schaumburg Community Church will experience the Bible from the perspective of revelation instead of interpolation. As a professional educator, this researcher believes that as part of instruction, learners must engage with the subject of discussion to apply theory to practice. Similarly, to increase biblical literacy, Christians must engage with the Bible's content to apply theology to living. Otherwise stated, Christians must familiarize themselves with the overarching redemptive narrative and the historical-cultural context of the Old and New Testaments to arrive at a theology based on the Bible and not a philosophical understanding.¹⁸

This revelatory evaluation of the Bible is exegetical. The evaluation reveals the historicity in which doctrines were introduced and examines a biblical author's theology or specific time in history.¹⁹ Therefore, a comprehensive approach that recognizes the theology of scripture, Bible study methodology, and the experiences that motivate learning behaviors of adults will enable pastors and teachers to help the congregation grow spiritually by encouraging them to apply what they learn to support a biblically driven lifestyle via an expositional Christ-centered Bible study designed to increase biblical literacy.

¹⁸ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 23-24.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

Basic Assumptions

The primary hypothesis of this action research comes from the assumption that there is a logical response to teaching Scripture, which is to do so expositively. Otherwise stated, teaching the sacred text the way God intended. If Bible study teachers err in their knowledge and understanding of Scripture, they become unqualified to be teachers of the Word of God. Still, those who volunteer to teach in a Bible study ministry do so with good intentions. The challenge, however, is that the expectations Bible study teachers set for themselves are presumably based on biblical truths. When approached correctly, these biblical truths require a deep dependence on the Holy Spirit. For public ministry to be directed based on God's purpose, engaging hermeneutical and expositional principles reinforced by prayer will aid in a thorough comprehension of Scripture. Notwithstanding, formal theological training in support of a church subscribed biblical education. Presumptions of Bible study teachers' view of the Word could be considered if they are open to employing an andragogical approach to Bible study in which teachers are sensitive to and encourage learners to incorporate their shared experiences as part of the learning process.²⁰ Conversely, learners should freely question their instructors, ultimately resulting in further study.²¹

Given the benefit of studying expositional Christ-centered Bible study, this action research assumes to receive full support from senior leadership of the church. Moreover, this researcher assumes to have the opportunity to work with the Women's Prayer Group (WPG) as the representative demographic who are also regular church attendees that participate in various other ministries such as children's church, protocol, and welcome committee. Most importantly,

²⁰ Romans 15:15

²¹ 1 John 4:1-6

since the researcher is a member of the WPG, participants are assumed to be familiar with the researcher, thereby reducing the chance for conflict and encouraging cooperation.

Definitions

African Biblical Hermeneutics. The rereading and analysis of the biblical text from the perspective of the African culture and worldview.²²

Andragogy. The practice of teaching adult learners. A leading theory of adult learning. Adult learning is defined as the activities designed to bring learning to “. . .those whose age, social roles, or self-perception, define them as adults.”²³

Biblically Centered. Frequent interaction with the Bible resulting in transformative relationships and biblically influenced decision-making.²⁴

Biblically Disengaged. Minimal interaction, if at all, with the Bible resulting in diminished spiritual growth.²⁵

Biblically Engaged. Regular engagement with the Bible resulting in transformative relationships with God and others.²⁶

Biblically Fluent. To recognize and use what the biblical writers say or conclude about important issues devoid of eisegesis, overlooking the text’s fundamental literary components, or otherwise misconstruing relevant passages.²⁷

²² David T. Adamo. “What is African Biblical Hermeneutics?” *Black Theology* 13, no. 1 (2015): 63.

²³ Sharan B. Merriam and Laura L. Bierman, *Adult Learning: Linking Theory to Practice*. (New York, NY: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 11.

²⁴ Barna Group, “*State of the Bible 2019*,” 2.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Celina Durgin, “Are You Bible-Literate? How about Bible-Fluent? These Terms Explained” February 18, 2021, Accessed September 3, 2021, <https://hebraicthought.org/bible-literacy-fluency-explainer/>

Biblical Literacy. The ability to read, comprehend, and understand the Bible as a series of connected books that reveal God's plan for salvation, using tools that aid readers to become acquainted with the characters and content of the sacred text.

Biblical Theology. The study of every text in the Bible and its relation to the gospel of Jesus Christ.²⁸

Eisegesis. The insertion of one's assumptions and opinions into the biblical text instead of allowing the text to illuminate its own meaning.²⁹

Exegesis. The interpretation of the historical and literary contexts of the biblical text.³⁰

Exposition: Communicating the context of the biblical text and its relevance to the postmodern audience.³¹

Hermeneutics. The practice of obtaining meaning from the biblical text.³²

Homiletics. The practice of abstracting relevant meaning from the biblical text in which to communicate in a preaching situation.³³

Pedagogy. "The art and science of teaching children."³⁴

Pentecostal Hermeneutics. A hermeneutical approach emphasizing the interrelationship between the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures, and a believing community.

²⁸ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 2012, 44.

²⁹ Daniel Akin, Bill Curtis, & Stephen Rummage, *Engaging Exposition* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 41.

³⁰ Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1991), 20.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 20.

³⁴ Victor C.X. Wang, "Understanding and Promoting Learning Theories," *International Forum of Teaching and Studies* 8,2 (2012): 6.

Pentecostal Theology. A form of Christianity in which believers believe in the work of the Holy Spirit and their direct and collective worship encounters with God.³⁵

Limitations

Although this action research focuses on addressing biblical literacy from an expositional Christ-centered approach to Bible study, this researcher is not without limitation. Beyond the relevant work that will proceed from this study, several researcher constraints must be acknowledged. To begin, the researcher anticipates a challenge attracting volunteers to participate in the study as most congregants work various odd jobs resulting in inflexible schedules. As such, congregants willing to participate in the study cannot due to work obligations. Second, congregants who agree to participate in the study during the intervention phase may be noncommittal—specifically, start-stop engagement. Therefore, those who agree to participate in this action research will be respectfully advised that while their participation is appreciated, they are encouraged to engage during the entirety of the process. Moreover, since this research is about Bible study, another limitation is that in an honest attempt to contribute to the Bible study discussion, active participants will deviate from the subject lesson and begin inserting presuppositions and Scripture that do not align with the lesson plan. Consequently, these insertions will narrow down the integrity of the text.

As part of the intervention design, pre- and post-assessments will be distributed to capture the participants' Bible study experience. For this reason, the researcher expects participants to be unwilling to complete the assessments citing a lack of time to answer the questions. Furthermore, participants may expect compensation for their commitment to the

³⁵ Jacqueline Grey, *Three's A Crowd: Pentecostalism, Hermeneutics, and the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 15.

study. With this in mind, and at the risk of losing volunteers, the researcher will have to explain that the study is non-incentivized, participation is voluntary, and the results from the study (good or bad) are geared towards increasing biblical literacy in the church while simultaneously encouraging and promoting their personal spiritual growth through transformational learning.

Finally, the last limitation of the study is signing the consent form. This limitation is significant because the church has a predominately African congregation in which some may not have residency status in the United States. Their apprehension of giving consent may be interpreted as giving accessible information to immigration services, resulting in permanent removal without recourse from the United States. Therefore, the researcher must explain the purpose of the consent form and their rights as protected human subjects. Once clarification is provided, it may reassure potential volunteers that their participation is safeguarded, and their contribution is valuable to the outcome of this study.

Delimitations

To secure the most optimistic conclusion possible, the researcher will conduct Bible study sessions to equip believers in becoming biblically literate. For this to occur and to reduce the likelihood of stop-start engagement, the ideal participants for this study will be the WPG that will meet for approximately four to six weeks successively on Tuesdays from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm. As previously mentioned, pre- and post-assessments will be given, capturing the participants' Bible study experience. Additionally, the Bible study curriculum will be a selected biblical narrative. Participants will engage in an inductive study session developed using a triangular approach focusing on scriptural theology, Bible study methodology, and a

transformative approach to Christ-centered learning. During the intervention phase, participant contribution and engagement with the researcher will be encouraged.

Thesis Statement

If members of Schaumburg Community Church participate in weekly expositional Christ-centered Bible study sessions, then there will be an increase in biblical literacy. The expositional Christ-centered Bible study sessions will better equip congregates to discern and draw conclusions based on God's perspective, not their own.³⁶ Doing so will result in evangelism and a fellowship of believers in which everyone will be involved.³⁷

³⁶ Proverbs 3:5-6

³⁷ Acts 2:42

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of the literature review is organized to provide an analysis of supporting Scripture and the relevant work done to reinforce the need for biblical literacy. The examination consists of pertinent findings that focus on the onset of biblical illiteracy and ideologies to prevent an increase in the inability to read Scripture. A review of biblical and theological concepts underpinned by scriptural theology, Bible study methodology, and andragogical learning principles leading to an expositional Christ-centered approach to Bible study will be explored.

Literature Review

This literature review serves as an exploratory investigation of biblical illiteracy and an expositional Christ-centered approach to Bible study. The analysis provided herein represents an exhaustive search on findings relating to the practical and theological significance of addressing biblical literacy in the church. Investigative research strategies were intentional in that Google Scholar was used to jump-start the investigation by narrowing down the search settings specific to the researcher's university library. The results presented secondary and tertiary scholarly sources derived from books, dissertations, and journals focusing on adult learning theories, Christian education, expositional principles, and theology. Primary sources were also referenced to provide a backdrop of current theory.

Biblical Literacy

In a preliminary effort to explore biblical literacy, Todd Leach examines the probability that Churches will become increasingly deficient in their knowledge of the Bible.³⁸ Though Christians acknowledge the importance of familiarizing themselves with Scripture,³⁹ unfortunately, most pastors and their congregants are not up to the painstaking task of learning to interpret Scripture effectively.⁴⁰ Moreover, since most Christians would rather enjoy instant gratification instead of patiently waiting and allowing God to work in their life,⁴¹ people become more unwilling to dedicate the time and effort to educate themselves spiritually to understand Scripture.⁴²

The Case for Biblical Literacy

There is a level of psychological comfort in reading the Bible, particularly with those who read the Bible to deal with adversities in life. This psychological comfort can be interpreted as spiritual rest⁴³ or peace.⁴⁴ In the face of challenges, the Bible can serve as an essential coping resource that helps one come to terms with navigating through life on the journey toward spiritual formation.⁴⁵ According to Mark Maddix, "formational reading includes opening ourselves to the text to allow the Bible to intrude into our life, to allow ourselves to be addressed

³⁸ Todd Leach, "Encouraging Word: The Pastor's Role in Increasing Biblical Literacy in the Local Congregation" (DMin diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2016), 3, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

³⁹ Deuteronomy 11:8

⁴⁰ Leach, *Encouraging Word*, 3.

⁴¹ Philippians 4:6

⁴² Leach, *Encouraging Word*, 3.

⁴³ Psalm 46:10 and Matthew 11:28-26. Scriptures supporting the psychological comfort of spiritual rest.

⁴⁴ 2 Thessalonians 3:16 and Philippians 4. Scriptures supporting the psychological comfort of spiritual peace.

⁴⁵ Neal Krause & Kenneth Pargament, "Reading the Bible, Stressful Life Events, and Hope: Assessing an Overlooked Coping Resource," *Journal of Religion & Health*, 57, no. 4 (2018): 1429.

and encountered by it.”⁴⁶ Similarly, Nelson asserts that the sensibilities we bring to reading the Bible influence our interpretation; that is, “it determines not just how we read but what we find when we read.”⁴⁷

Being a thoughtful reader of scripture necessitates a prerequisite ability to engage a biblically literate Christ-centered approach to read the Bible. Thus, biblical literacy "is something we all need in our lives and our congregations."⁴⁸ In fact, Nelson offers that if the Bible is a text speaking to its readers, then readers should listen carefully to that voice.⁴⁹ Further, John Grayson contends that biblical literacy is in no way an academic endeavor yet a conscious effort to know God as He is revealed through the scripture.⁵⁰ As such, one of the paths to developing and nurturing a relationship with God is through biblical literacy.

Cause and Effect of Biblical Illiteracy

Failing to recognize the importance of biblical literacy is an injustice to scripture. To be biblically illiterate does not suggest one cannot read the Bible yet posits that one does not have the foreknowledge to employ the proper tools to understand Scripture. Biblical illiteracy, according to Austin, "contributes to the failure of churches to present Christ to the world in a life-changing manner."⁵¹ An illustration of this reality is the 2010 study conducted by the Barna Group, which uncovered contributing factors that influence biblical illiteracy. First, Barna's

⁴⁶ Mark A. Maddix, “Rediscovering the Formative Power of Scripture Reading for the Church,” *Christian Education Journal*, 15, no. 1 (2018): 36.

⁴⁷ Judith Stack-Nelson, “Beyond Biblical Literacy: Developing Readerly Readers in Teaching Biblical Studies,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 53, no. 4 (2014), 295.

⁴⁸ Kimberly S. Ashby, “Learning the Bible Together: A Presbytery Experiment in Biblical Literacy,” *The Presbyterian Outlook*, 199, n. 13 (2017): 28.

⁴⁹ Stack-Nelson, *Beyond Biblical Literacy*, 296.

⁵⁰ John Grayson, “The Bible and Spirituality: The Decline in Biblical Literacy among Evangelicals and the Future of Quiet Time,” *Anvil*, 19, no.2 (2002):105.

⁵¹ Joseph Austin, “The Role of Biblical Literacy in Discipling Believers in the Local Church” (DMin diss., Liberty University, 2019), 2, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

analysis shows that the church has become theologically illiterate, and few adults believe that although they are Christian, their faith is not integrated nor a focal point in their lives.⁵²

Moreover, as millennials and Gen-Xers are increasing in number and assuming more church authoritative roles, there is an expectation that biblical illiteracy will be on the rise.⁵³

Next, Barna reported that despite advances in technology used to share and spread Christianity, Christians are becoming spiritually isolated from non-Christians. As one example, Christians no longer invite non-Christians to church or invite them to participate in community outreach events.⁵⁴ As noted by Cecilia Dennery, it is astonishing that biblical illiteracy flourishes in an environment where there is an expectation of "solid knowledge of the biblical text."⁵⁵ Barna further reports that people who become Christian "do so in response to a personal crisis," followed by the reality that Americans are not impressed with the level of societal contributions and engagement of Christians over the past several years.⁵⁶

According to Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Americans are biblically illiterate simply because they do not read the Bible. Mohler argues that there is biblical ignorance among Christians because they are "products of churches that marginalize biblical knowledge."⁵⁷ Mohler maintains that from a secular perspective, Americans should not be expected to be biblically knowledgeable. The author contends that the nation is

⁵² Barna Group, "Six Megathemes Emerge from Barna Group Research in 2010" December 13, 2020, Accessed June 22, 2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/six-megathemes-emerge-from-barna-group-research-in-2010>.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Barna Group, *Six Megathemes*, 2.

⁵⁵ Cecilia Dennery, "A Correlational Study of Biblical Literacy and the Level of Leadership, Discipleship, and Demographics in an African American Church in Delaware" (EdD diss., Wilmington University, 2012), 13, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

⁵⁶ Barna Group, *Six Megathemes*, 2.

⁵⁷ Albert Mohler, "The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy: It's Our Problem," January 20, 2016, Accessed June 22, 2021, <https://albertmohler.com/2016/01/20/the-scandal-of-biblical-literacy-its-our-problem-4>.

responsible for withdrawing the biblical conversation and stripping away all biblical content resulting in a Scripture-free public space.⁵⁸ As a result, the rise in biblical illiteracy is caused by the inattentiveness of biblical content in a "post-Christian America."⁵⁹ R.C. Sproul would support this idea by maintaining that the real problem with the motivation to read the Bible is not because it is dull, boring, lack of intelligence, or passion; people have to work to read it.⁶⁰ As Sproul states, "our problem is that we are lazy."⁶¹ J.I. Packer would agree.

Essential to the idea of biblical illiteracy, Satan knows scripture and the power it has when Christians are fortified in truth. In R.C. Sproul's book, *Knowing Scripture*, J.I. Packer wrote the forward that states, "If I were the devil, one of my first aims would be to stop folks from digging into the Bible. . . I should do all I could to surround it with the spiritual equivalent of pits, thorns, hedges, and man traps, to frighten people off."⁶² Ironically, this is what Satan has done and continues to do when he puts thoughts in the minds of people who endeavor to read their Bibles resulting in an increase in biblical illiteracy. Woodrow Kroll posits that biblical illiteracy keeps us on the short end of life's continuum, and if we want the abundant life that Jesus spoke about in John 10:10, then we must tackle biblical illiteracy so that it does not keep us in spiritual infancy.⁶³

⁵⁸ Mohler, "The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy."

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ R.C. Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 20.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² J.I. Packer, "Forward," in *Knowing Scripture*, R.C. Sproul (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 5.

⁶³ Woodrow Kroll, *Taking Back the Good Book: How American Forgot the Bible and Why It Matters to You*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books), 2007, 114.

The Pastor's Role in Biblical Literacy

In 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Paul provides the qualifications of overseers and deacons of the church. While in Ephesus, Timothy is tasked with the congregational care of the church to include the identification and appointment of church leaders. Though a complete job description is not provided, Paul sets out to remind the people of Ephesus that character traits and spiritual maturity are required, which must be reflected in people seeking church leadership positions. One of which explicitly involves church leaders to preach and teach, ideally, from a Christ-centered perspective.

One of the essential tasks of pastors (i.e., church leaders) is to preach and teach scripture. In addition, pastors must understand and communicate scripture effectively and passionately due to the "implications for the role of Scripture in the lives of God's people."⁶⁴ Because "Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service,"⁶⁵ He did so because the goal is to equip the saints. As such, for pastors to play a vital role in biblical literacy, Joseph Austin, in his research titled, *The Role of Biblical Literacy in Discipling Believers in the Local Church*, posits the following:

The pastor and the local churches in America must have this fundamental question of the value of Biblical literacy answered and must find a way forward to make any real, eternal change in believers. What is the goal for any church and Christian ministry regarding interaction with believers? The goal of every Christian and the church should be to develop biblically literate disciples; disciples who are convinced and convicted of taking that gospel to the entire world.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Leach, *Encouraging Word*, 47.

⁶⁵ Ephesians 4:11

⁶⁶ Austin, *The Role of Biblical Literacy*, 1-2.

This view has led to the idea that pastors must be biblically literate to guide their congregates to understand who God is. Then, through faithful Christ-centered exposition, pastors can work toward recovering biblical preaching and teaching.

Pastors often fail to recognize that their primary responsibility is to teach the congregation what has been spiritually deposited into them so that they may preach and teach the Word of God. Unfortunately, when dealing with scripture, Joel Breidenbaugh posits that “many pastors simply do not take the time to mine the biblical text for all of its rich resources, especially the doctrinal substance.”⁶⁷ Regrettably, the attentive concerns of pastors focus on the size of their ministry and church growth. However, pastors need not burden themselves with aesthetics because the success of pastors is dependent on the glory given to God, faithfulness, the ability to preach and teach, and stewardship.⁶⁸ As such, pastors as teachers are responsible for laying the foundation on how the congregation receives and perceives God, which requires them to employ expositional principles, hermeneutics and exegesis, that illuminate scripture to “explain to God’s people what the Bible means.”⁶⁹ Failure to execute expositional principles is characteristic of pastors whose presuppositions serve as the primary means to biblical interpretation, prefer the simplicity of topical preaching, or lack theological training.⁷⁰

Hermeneutics

Interest in exposition as a vehicle for effective preaching and teaching the Word of God demonstrates a consensus among expositional scholars that to preach and teach the gospel

⁶⁷ Joel Breindbaugh, *Preaching for Bodybuilding: Integrating Doctrine and Expository Preaching for the 21st Century* (Las Vegas, NV: Remote Publishing Group), 2016, 111.

⁶⁸ Acts 2:47, 1 Corinthians 10:31, 2 Timothy 2:15, 2 Timothy 1:6, & 1 Peter 4:10.

⁶⁹ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 8.

⁷⁰ Akin, Curtis, & Rummage, *Engaging Exposition*, 41.

ferently, a foundational understanding of hermeneutics is at best warranted to apply understanding to the biblical text. Hermeneutics, if done faithfully, aids in the exposition of God's message for the hearers and doers of the Word.⁷¹

Hermeneutics in Action

The initial step towards a faithful expositional Christ-centered Bible study is the practice of hermeneutics, the goal of which leads to the application of meaning to the contemporary audience.⁷² The challenge, however, is that a review of the literature reveals that scholars differ on how to evaluate the varying theological perspectives of the execution of sound hermeneutics. Daniel Block posits that one of the benefits of hermeneutics is that it seeks to draw attention to the overarching metanarrative of the Bible. Nevertheless, he also states that attempting to draw Christ from the text poses challenges. Not all Scriptures speak of Christ, and therefore, readers must work towards improving their hermeneutic of the Old Testament Christotelically instead of Christocentrically.⁷³

In agreement with Block, David Murray corroborates with Block that the Christotelic methodology of interpreting the Old Testament is valid. Despite this, Murray also states that this Christotelic way limits hermeneutics to one method of interpretation because it is too focused on rushing through the Old Testament to arrive at the New Testament fulfillment.⁷⁴ Therefore, Murray favors approaching hermeneutics via typology with the understanding that people in the

⁷¹ James 1:22

⁷² Akin, Curtis, & Rummage, *Engaging Exposition*, 37.

⁷³ Daniel Block, David Murray, Walk Kaiser, & Bryan Chapell, *On Christ-Centered Hermeneutics*, Christ-Centered Preaching & Teaching. ed. Ed Stetzer (Nashville, TN: LifeWay Press, 2013), 6.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

Old Testament had the “help of previous revelation and of the earlier promises of God that the types build upon and expanded.”⁷⁵

In addition to the seeming contradictions of Block and Murray, Walt Kaiser opposes the Christocentric method of hermeneutics because, for him, it emphasizes the whole Bible, focusing on God’s redemptive work by substituting the specificity of the individual passages that lead to the final work of God in Christ.⁷⁶ Kaiser believes that applying hermeneutics effectively requires a scriptural focus on soteriology because what God has said in the past remains steadfast in the present and future.⁷⁷ Though most expositional scholars would agree, there is an alternative form of hermeneutics to consider for this study, one that interprets the Bible from an African perspective.

African Biblical Hermeneutics

According to some African Bible scholars, there is a need for the African community to engage in biblical interpretation using an African hermeneutical approach to scripture.⁷⁸ David Adamo supports this approach by submitting that the purpose of African biblical hermeneutical is twofold: to understand the Bible in the context of the African experience and break from the hermeneutical hegemony and the ideological stronghold enjoyed by Eurocentric Bible scholars.⁷⁹ From the African viewpoint, Eurocentric hermeneutics includes various methodologies to engage with the biblical texts from a culturally Eurocentric worldview. Consistent with this argument, though Eurocentric Bible scholars strive for a genuine attempt at

⁷⁵ Block, Murray, Kaiser, & Chapell, *Christ-Centered Hermeneutics*, 12-13.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁷⁸ Adekunle Dada. Repositioning Contextual Biblical Hermeneutics in Africa Towards Holistic Empowerment,” *Black Theology: An International Journal* 8 no. 2 (2010): 161.

⁷⁹ Adamo, *What is African Biblical Hermeneutics?* 63.

interpreting scripture, their way of interpretation is inadequate because it does not meet the needs of African people.⁸⁰

Interestingly, African biblical hermeneutics closely aligns with the Western methodology of the hermeneutical process in that they both use critical tools and training that focus on the historicity and literary context of the biblical text. Methods used from the African standpoint include narration, orality, and theopoetics. By narration, the approach views the Bible as a divinely inspired, powerful story that seeks to deliver Black people from a poor, weak, and oppressed state.⁸¹ This approach is similarly aligned with the “Hermeneutical Triad” offered by Andres Köstenberger and Richard Patterson, where one of the corners of the triad is labeled “history.” As explained by Köstenberger and Patterson, history explores the historical-cultural context that is to be applied to the scriptural message.⁸²

In African biblical hermeneutics, orality is the interpretation of the text by reading orally. This method is used to continue the oral tradition of teaching⁸³ and aid in memorizing scripture. Here is where Köstenberger and Patterson offer the second criterion of the Hermeneutical Triad, “literature,” that focuses on the Old and New Testament canon, genre, and language. Although the literature does not explicitly focus on oral traditions, it does consider a deeper dive into the context, words, and way of speaking.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Adamo, *What is African Biblical Hermeneutics?*, 62.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁸² Andres J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2011), 93.

⁸³ Acts 2:42

⁸⁴ Köstenberger & Patterson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 209.

Next, African biblical hermeneutics considers theopoetics, which involves interpreting and reading scripture poetically.⁸⁵ This process may include chants, singing, and dancing which, from a Westernized perspective, is like praise and worship. However, the difference is that through theopoetics, the expectation is to receive revelation that would have otherwise been unknown to the reader, singer, or interpreter.⁸⁶ As suggested by Adekunle Dada, other characteristics of African biblical hermeneutics include the “African comparative approach,” which attempts to parallel convergent and divergent African experiences to the historical-cultural context of the biblical world.⁸⁷ Followed by the “reading with the ordinary reader approach.” This method seeks “to take seriously the interpretation of the ordinary reader of the Bible, under the guidance of a trained reader or exegete.”⁸⁸ Stated another way, expositional Bible study to increase biblical literacy.

African biblical hermeneutics takes interpretation a step further to arrive at a conclusion based on the African context. Nevertheless, the concept does not discard other methodologies that may be useful for the purposes of interpretation. However, as noted by Adamo, the challenge when applying African biblical hermeneutics is that Africans are using their “finite human knowledge” and “experience and communication to speak about a God who is all-embracing.” Therefore, given the variations of effectual hermeneutics, using hermeneutics for expositional Christ-centered Bible study will require more than biblical recollection yet will also incorporate interpretive methods of learning geared towards life application.⁸⁹ Alternatively stated, Bible

⁸⁵ Adamo, *What is African Biblical Hermeneutics?*, 65.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁸⁷ Dada, *Repositioning Contextual Biblical Hermeneutics*, 163.

⁸⁸ Köstenberger & Patterson, *Biblical Interpretation*, 209.

⁸⁹ Kevin Barnes, “A Bible Study about Studying the Bible: An Introduction to Inductive Bible Study” (DMin diss, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2018), 58, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

study. Notwithstanding that all interpretation is conditional based on the presuppositions Christians bring to the text, and as the Bible records in 1 Corinthians 13:12, believers only know in part because they see in part. As such, a comprehensive understanding of the Bible is impossible.⁹⁰

Pentecostal Hermeneutics

While the overarching Christian community acknowledges the role of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, an essential element of the Pentecostal faith tradition is the interaction with the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals are distinct in that they seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as part of their biblical interpretation and approach hermeneutics in a way which they reject historical criticism. This rejection is the belief that the Pentecostal community participates in the ongoing narrative of God's salvation history, and there is no historical distance between themselves and the church in the book of Acts.⁹¹ As R. Jerome Boone notes, "Pentecostals are people of the Spirit," and not only do they engage with the Bible, but they also interact with it as well.⁹² For Pentecostals, reading the Bible is a dialog resulting in interpretation.⁹³

Jacqueline Grey developed a Pentecostal hermeneutical model that aligns with the Protestant hermeneutical model offered by J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays. In this recognized Protestant model, "the interpretive journey," Duvall and Hays provide a linear hermeneutical process that covers five distinct components: (1) reading and observing the text (2) identifying

⁹⁰ Marius Nel, "Comparison Between the Respective Views of John Calvin and Classical Pentecostals on the Role of the Holy Spirit in Reading the Bible," *HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies*, 77, no. 4 (2021): 5.

⁹¹ R. Jerome Boone, "Pentecostal Worship and Hermeneutics: Engagement with the Spirit," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 26, no. 1 (2017): 113.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 116.

⁹³ French Arrington, *Hermeneutics, Historical Perspectives on Pentecostal and Charismatic*, Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 384-385.

and recognizing the differences between the biblical and Christian audience; (3) discovering the theological principle(s); (4) considering the theological principle(s) in light of the New Testament; and (5) applying the theological principle(s) into specific situations or individuals in today's church.⁹⁴ Though Duvall and Hays' interpretive journey is straightforward, Grey takes their model a step further and develops a Pentecostal hermeneutic framework that seeks to create a practical structure for biblical interpretation by staying true to the Pentecostal faith tradition. Grey's framework focuses on the experience of the interpreters as they engage with the Bible, resulting in an interactive transformation that considers three entities: me, them, and us.⁹⁵ Each entity must be engaged simultaneously as one voice and should not be employed in isolation. In doing so, the Pentecostal reader will miss part of the conversation.⁹⁶

The 'me' refers to the individual doing the biblical interpretation in which illumination of the text by the Holy Spirit is anticipated.⁹⁷ Grey states that for Pentecostals, "baptism in the Holy Spirit is definitive for understanding Scripture and engaging with God."⁹⁸ In Pentecostal hermeneutics, this is a critical first step because the emphasis on biblical interpretation is an activity of the reader. Boone posits that this interpretive process "is not to gain cognitive knowledge but to engage with God in a way that results in spiritual transformation."⁹⁹ Moreover, Grey asserts that

. . . Pentecostal readers bring this presupposition of charismatic experience to their reading of biblical texts, there is also an expectation that the Spirit will be encountered in the reading process. They anticipate being challenged by the text for personal transformation

⁹⁴ J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hayes, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 42-46.

⁹⁵ Boone, *Pentecostal Worship and Hermeneutics*, 120.

⁹⁶ Grey, *Three's A Crowd*, 161.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Boone, *Pentecostal Worship and Hermeneutics*, 117.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

and change, as well as to experience God. The Spirit speaks through the text beyond the original meaning or original context of the biblical passage to the contemporary situation of the Pentecostal reader.¹⁰⁰

The significance of ‘them’ is the recognition of the voice of the ancient community.¹⁰¹

Attempting to understand the ancient Near East's historical-cultural context reflects an appreciation of their worldview. As part of Pentecostal hermeneutics, readers recognize the differences between their worlds and see it as a reflection of their contemporary value systems.

The Pentecostal (and Christian) community is identified as ‘us’ who represent “the continuing work in the expansion of the kingdom of God through evangelism and spiritual warfare-not fighting against flesh and blood but against the spiritual enemies of God.”¹⁰² Grey proposes that when the voice of ‘them’ is heard, the Pentecostal community can also hear their faith testimonies in whose stories they participate.¹⁰³ Notwithstanding, as Pentecostals read from a Christological lens, the testimonies of the earlier faith communities can be applied to the life of the individual Pentecostal reader. Ultimately, Grey utilizes the three entities by underscoring that

The testimony of “them” and “us” provides the boundary by which the meaning of the text to the reader (me) can be evaluated. The voice of “them” alone is stagnant without the dynamism and immediacy of its significance to the individual (me) and Pentecostal community (us). The voice of “us” requires the foundation and unique voice of “them” to be heard and personal application to the life of the believer (me).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Grey, *Three's A Crowd*, 117.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 173.

The Road to Expository Christ-Centered Bible Study

From a Pentecostal perspective, Jackie Johns and Cheryl Johns posit that a Bible study program should incorporate four interactive movements: sharing testimonies, scriptural studies, submission to the Holy Spirit, and turning lives over to Christ.¹⁰⁵ However, from a holistic lens, to ensure a practical Bible study program, the church must first acknowledge that most Christians are biblically illiterate. To reiterate, biblical illiteracy does not mean that Christians cannot read the Bible yet suggests that most Christians cannot interpret the biblical text correctly. With this in mind, not only do pastors and teachers have to acknowledge this deficiency in biblical literacy, but they must also "investigate the theological, hermeneutic, and pedagogical differences among various Bible study programs."¹⁰⁶ Therefore, for an effectual expository Christ-centered Bible study program to occur, a triangular approach to biblical study should address a theological view of Scripture, a Bible study methodology, and an andragogical transformative approach to Christ-centered learning.

Theology of Scripture

All Bible study programs have a central focus that biblical education is critical for the body of Christ.¹⁰⁷ However, behind every program, there is a "distinctive theological understanding of the Bible" and how it should be approached.¹⁰⁸ Because of the various underpinnings of the authority of Scripture, churches will institute programs that align with their faith. For example, Father O'Brien of Georgetown University states that while Catholics rely on

¹⁰⁵ Jackie D. Johns & Cheryl B. Johns, "Yielding to the Spirit: A Pentecostal Approach to Group Study" in *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader*, ed. Lee Roy Martin (Boston, MA: Leiden), 2013, 47.

¹⁰⁶ Pamela M. Legg, "Understanding Bible Study Curricula: Theology, Hermeneutics, and Education in the Congregation." *Interpretation*, 56, no. 4 (2002), 398.

¹⁰⁷ Legg, *Understanding Bible Study Curricula*, 399.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

the Bible as the divinely inspired Word of God, they also practice sacraments to "enact the full meaning of scripture."¹⁰⁹ For Catholics, using sacraments reveals the Divine yet does so without renewing themselves in the presence of the Divine.

On the contrary, Pentecostals believe in the direct indwelling of the Holy Spirit and having personal experiences of being in the presence of God. Though Pentecostals do not believe in sacraments, their theological foundations are based on the belief of signs and wonders, baptism of the Holy Spirit, and speaking in tongues. Glossolalia (i.e., speaking in tongues) is a distinctive characteristic and common practice among Pentecostals. For Pentecostals, to experience glossolalia reflects “. . . a clear sign of direct, unmediated engagement with God.”¹¹⁰ Yet, in the grander scheme of the Christian community, Frank Macchia argues that glossolalia operates in the same authority as a sacrament.¹¹¹ Considering the purpose of sacraments, communicating the grace of God into the lives of Christians, glossolalia accomplishes the same objective. The difference, however, is that the power of glossolalia motivates Pentecostals to continuously seek a spiritual encounter with God that goes beyond baptism of the Holy Spirit.¹¹² Therefore, it seems plausible that while there are many belief streams among the religious denominations, a central theme emerges: the need for biblical theology.

In his book, *What is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns*, James Hamilton purports that "studying biblical theology is the best way to learn from

¹⁰⁹ Father Kevin O'Brien, "Why Catholics See the Bible Differently than Protestants: The Story Behind the Catholic Approach to Scripture" April 25, 2014, Accessed June 25, 2021. <https://blogs.commonsgorgetown.edu/campusministry/2014/04/25/why-catholics-see-the-bible-differently-than-protestants/>

¹¹⁰ R. Jerome Boone, Pentecostal Worship and Hermeneutics: Engagement with the Spirit," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 26, (2017): 112.

¹¹¹ Frank Macchia, "Tongues as a Sign: Towards a Sacramental Understanding of the Pentecostal Experience," *Pneuma* 15, no. 1 (1993): 61

¹¹² Boone, *Pentecostal Worship and Hermeneutics*, 113.

the Bible how to read the Bible as a Christian should. By the same token, studying the Bible is the best way to learn biblical theology."¹¹³ Hamilton asserts that studying biblical theology is done through interpretive analysis of how the original authors present their understanding of earlier scripture through "narratives, poems, proverbs, letters, and apocalypses."¹¹⁴ However, learning biblical theology can take many forms. Graeme Goldsworthy, a self-professed biblical theology addict, notes that biblical theology refers to various approaches to Bible study. The exegetical study of words or a single text or unit is known as synchronic biblical theology. Longitudinal or diachronic biblical theology studies themes evident within the canon or biblical theology that studies the Old Testament or New Testament without relating the testaments together.¹¹⁵

Notwithstanding, for Goldsworthy, the overarching theme of biblical theology is that it is "Christological, for its subject matter is the whole Bible as God's testimony to Christ. It is, therefore, from start to finish, a study of Christ. Nevertheless, since Christ is the mediator who makes the father known, biblical theology is also theological and not solely Christological."¹¹⁶

Bible Study Methodology

It seems reasonable to deduce that the average reader of the Bible is unacquainted with the plethora of biblical approaches to Bible study for meaningful interpretation. This is a contributing factor to biblical illiteracy as current Bible study methodologies are often introduced in the curriculum design of colleges and universities. Interestingly, while Bible study methods

¹¹³ James M. Hamilton, Jr. *What is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 2014, 20.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹¹⁵ Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 39.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

are not widely recognized, those who are somewhat familiar with interpretive approaches to Bible study are not using them appropriately, resulting in additional confusion of the biblical text. For example, Marek Zabriskie states that one of the biggest challenges among Episcopalians and Anglicans is that when attempting to study the Bible, their focus is more on the lectionary. Though there are strengths in using lectionaries, they tend to jump around and often omit large sections of the Bible that warrant further study.¹¹⁷ Therefore, if one is not consistently engaged in preaching and teaching the gospel, the average reader would be unaware of the resources to use. Consequently, Bible study methodologies are dependent on the critical evaluation, historical or literary aspects of the Bible, which the church chooses to explore.

Providing further insight along these lines, a review of the literature purports that Pentecostals emphasize the critical role of the Holy Spirit as part of their Bible study methodology. Because the Holy Spirit played a vital part in the inspiration and illumination of the original text, Pentecostals believe that the same inspiration and illumination are present for the contemporary reader.¹¹⁸ Moreover, since they respect the authority of Scripture, Pentecostals affirm that the primary means God is revealed in His word is by the Holy Spirit. Wolfgang Hollenweger supports this notion by maintaining that Pentecostals remain open to the possibility of receiving extra-biblical interpretation if it aligns “with the spirit and ethos of the Bible.”¹¹⁹

For Pentecostals, the crux of their identity is encountering God in and through the Bible. Other approaches to their Bible study habit center on three fundamental characteristics: it is

¹¹⁷ Marek P. Zabriskie, “The Bible Challenge and Why it Matters,” *Anglican Theological Review* 97, no. 4 (2015): 648.

¹¹⁸ Nel, *Comparison Between the Respective Views*, 4.

¹¹⁹ Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide*, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publishers: 2015), 319.

pneumatic, experiential, and focuses on historical narratives.¹²⁰ The experience and interpretive relationships are not reflective of a linear progression yet operate dialogically. When this occurs, Pentecostals continuously recover and re-enter the redemptive narrative as experienced in their own lives.¹²¹ Biblical narratives are not merely scripture. Pentecostals interpret biblical narratives as guideposts for daily living, and their understanding of and interaction with the narratives influence their lived experiences.¹²²

Andragogical and Transformative Learning Approach to Christ-Centered Bible Study

Transformative learning occurs when adults restructure their thinking by allowing their fundamental suppositions to re-engage with new ideas to interpret life and reality to guide present and future behaviors.¹²³ The way adults frame and organize knowledge directly results from ingrained social and cultural experiences. Ironically, others passively accept these experiences until something happens that causes adults to question their assumptions and how lives were lived up to the point of disruption.¹²⁴ For transformative learning to occur requires adults to consciously apply different meanings to perspectives that alter beliefs, behaviors, and ideas. According to Rhonda McEwen, transformative learning is a process, and though not all steps in the process are required, it is a process nonetheless which includes the following:

...(a) disorientation dilemma; (b) self-examination; (c) critical assessment of assumptions; (d) recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared; (e) exploration of options for new ways of living. . .(f) planning a course of action; (g) acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans; (h) provisional trying of new roles; (i) building confidence and self-confidence in new

¹²⁰ Nel, *Comparison Between the Respective Views*, 4.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Wolfgang Vondey, "Beyond Pentecostalism: The Crisis of Global Christianity and the Renewal of the Theological Agenda," (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2010): 58-59.

¹²³ Rhonda M. McEwen, "Learning that Transforms: For the Sake of His Kingdom," *Christian Education Journal*, 9. No. 2 (2012): 346.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

roles/relationships; and (j) reintegrating into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by the new perspective.¹²⁵

As Christians, transformational learning is a deliberate attempt to change hearts and minds to align with the moral principles established by the kingdom of God.¹²⁶ This transformational experience is part of the educational undertaking prevalent in scripture. As Romans 12:2 states, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. . ." is representative that change in the world will occur and the transformation that adults experience are the thoughts and actions that begin in the mind.¹²⁷

A central theme emerges in relation to transformational learning and the teaching episodes of Jesus Christ. The Gospels account for over 100 teaching situations of Jesus, most notably, the Sermon on the Mount.¹²⁸ Jesus' andragogical approach to teaching aims to solicit transformational learning such that He understood how people think, told stories with practical life applications, recognized the desire to learn, and endeavored to change the quality of life.¹²⁹

The difference between pedagogy and andragogy is the motivation in which students learn. Children are extrinsically motivated from a pedagogical lens and depend on authority figures to guide them through the learning process. By contrast, from an andragogical perspective, adults are self-motivated and are interested in examining new topics and ideas. In which case, adults have a "what is in it for me" mindset as they want to ensure the benefits of

¹²⁵ McEwen, *Learning that Transforms*, 347.

¹²⁶ Philippians 4:6-7

¹²⁷ Bruce B. Barton, David R. Veerman, & Neil Wilson, "Romans," in the Life Application Bible Commentary, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers), 1992, 221.

¹²⁸ John Sweetman & Stephen Ball, "How Andragogical was the Teaching of Jesus?" *Journal of Christian Education*, 45, no. 2 (2002): 34.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 37-40.

exploring new theoretical applications that contribute to their personal growth. Thus, encouraging adult learners requires drawing attention to how learning will impact them individually to benefit from the learning experience. Therefore, a foundational understanding of the Andragogy Framework will help pastors and teachers develop an andragogical approach to Christ-centered Bible study.

Initially coined by Alexander Kapp in 1833 and later evolved by Malcolm Knowles in the 1970s, Joseph Mews, in his article, *Leading Through Andragogy*, provides the Andragogy Framework consisting of six principles that influence adult learners through their self-development process. The six principles are: learners need to know, self-concept of the learner, prior experience of the learner, readiness to learn, the orientation of learning, and motivation to learn. These principles are examined below and scripturally supported following the andragogical learning episodes presented within the New Testament.

Learners Need to Know: “Creating a sense of why for adult learners is essential in education and leadership. Adults need to understand the value in what is being presented and how it can apply to their current life objectives.”¹³⁰ The Sermon on the Mount is a collection of teachings from Jesus that presents a holistic view of life under God’s rule.¹³¹ The Sermon is about Christian ethics, which can only be understood and applied to respond to God’s presence and His kingdom here on earth.¹³²

Self-Concept of the Learner: “As a person matures, his self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one that is self-directed.”¹³³ Some of the opportunities Jesus had as

¹³⁰ Joseph Mews, “Leading Through Andragogy,” *College and University*, 95, no. 1 (2020): 66.

¹³¹ Chad O. Brand, “*Sermon on the Mount*,” *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group), 2015, 1432.

¹³² *Ibid.*

¹³³ Mews, *Leading Through Andragogy*, 66.

a teacher were based on his understanding of people's thoughts. In Matthew 12:25-37, Jesus was exhorted to teach because he knew what the Pharisees were thinking. Though in this instance, it was Jesus' discernment that stopped the Pharisees from trying to trick him, unknowingly, it was their thinking that prompted this self-directed learning response.

Prior Experience of the Learner: "An adult accumulates a growing wealth of experience, which is a rich resource for learning."¹³⁴ Peter is an example of someone who has prior experience as a learner. In the beginning, Peter was the foremost disciple who spoke for the group. However, he was also the disciple who rejected Jesus three times. Though often quick-tempered, impulsive, and fearful,¹³⁵ Peter was a natural leader who was devoted to Jesus and his teachings. As stated by Richard Losch, Peter was "completely human, with all the flaws and warts that all humans have, yet despite this, he was a paragon of faith and strength."¹³⁶

Readiness to Learn: "Adults tend to know when they are ready to learn based on the content and how useful it is at the time."¹³⁷ In Acts 8:26-40, the Ethiopian eunuch is an example of someone ready to learn. On his way home from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the eunuch is reading about the prophet Isaiah. At the direction of the angel of the Lord, Philip is tasked with going south, walking alongside the eunuch's chariot, unknowing what he may expect. Philip asks the eunuch, "Do you understand what you are reading?" The eunuch replies with an eventual series of questions, "How can I, unless someone guides me? About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else? . . . What prevents me from being baptized?" During the question-and-answer session, Philip takes the opportunity to talk about

¹³⁴ Mews, *Leading Through Andragogy*, 66.

¹³⁵ John 13:8; Matthew 14:30

¹³⁶ Richard R. Losch, *Peter*. All the People of the Bible: An A-Z Guide to the Saints, Scoundrels, and Other Characters in Scripture, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 2008, 340.

¹³⁷ Mews, *Leading Through Andragogy*, 66.

Jesus, which ultimately leads to the eunuch's baptism. Here, it is essential to note that Philip met the eunuch at his level of understanding, "only then did he directly take him where he needed to go."¹³⁸ This passage shows that the eunuch listened, thought about what Philip said, adapted to the message, and acted on his faith. Why? Because he was ready to learn.

Orientation to Learning: "Adult learners are more likely to embrace and commit to problem-and life-centered methods than subject-centered learning."¹³⁹ Paul is a model of orientation to learning. Once a Pharisee, Paul recognized the threat Jesus and his followers had on the Jewish tradition.¹⁴⁰ However, after Jesus appeared to him and his immediate conversion and submission, Paul became the chosen instrument¹⁴¹ and an essential figure in the New Testament and the history of Christianity.¹⁴²

Motivation to Learn: "Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs, interests, and benefits that are satisfied through learning."¹⁴³ The growing church in Acts 2:42-47 is representative of the foundation of the local church. The believers had a devotion to the apostles' teaching and learned about God's perspective on spiritual and earthly matters so they could obey Him, experience spiritual growth, and make an impact in the world. Through this fellowship, the believers prioritized worship by breaking bread, praying, and engaging in evangelical outreach, and every day, "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ Bruce B. Barton, Linda K. Taylor, J. Richard Love, Len Woods, & David R. Veerman, *Acts. Life Application Bible Commentary*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers), 1999, 147.

¹³⁹ Mews, *Leading Through Andragogy*, 66.

¹⁴⁰ Acts 26:9-11

¹⁴¹ Acts 9:15

¹⁴² Chad O. Brand. *Paul*. Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group), 2015, 1277-1278.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Acts 2:47

Based on the framework and supporting theological illustrations, pastors and teachers can create an expositional Christ-centered Bible study program aligned with these principles. Because not only will it address their intrinsic needs, but it will also provide an opportunity to inspire them to read and interpret the biblical text. However, it is noteworthy that to facilitate learning, both andragogical and pedagogical methods may fit into the learning schema as teaching and learning should be consistent with the church's energy system.¹⁴⁵

In his study on andragogy in the adult Bible class, Peter Jurchen investigated andragogy in Bible study classes from a Lutheran perspective.¹⁴⁶ Jurchen discovered that using andragogical principles in adult Bible study classes increased learner interaction, understanding of the adult learner, and learners' desire for more intentional reflection. All resulted from instructor-directed questions geared toward individual life application.¹⁴⁷ Likewise, Jeffrey Martell evaluated the effectiveness of incorporating andragogical and pedagogical principles during Bible study. His study revealed that while andragogical teaching had a more profound impact than pedagogical, both did not negatively impact the learning experience.¹⁴⁸ Adult students that learned under an andragogical approach were more confident than those who learned under pedagogy.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ George E. Karl, "Using Andragogy to Help Adults Study Eschatology" (DMin diss., Anderson University, 2012), 128, ProQuest Dissertation & Theses Global.

¹⁴⁶ Peter L. Jurchen, "A Qualitative Investigation of Andragogy in Adult Bible Classes in Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Congregations of St. Louis" (EdD diss., Lindenwood University, 2020), iii, ProQuest Dissertation & Theses Global.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Jeffrey R. Martell, "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Andragogical Teaching in Adult Bible Fellowships at the Chapel, Akron Ohio" DEd.Min, diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011).

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Homiletics and Adult Learning

An overwhelming majority of Christians receive their theological education from pastors in their local churches. Of the many programs offered in churches, pastors' sermons are the primary means congregations receive their theological understanding.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, pastors that recognize the individual differences of their congregations are more apt to organize sermons that structure the understanding of their contextual experience.¹⁵¹ Therefore, attempting to converge homiletics and adult learning methodologies can allow congregants to approach church services as an educational learning experience contributing to their spiritual growth.

Suffice it to say that adult learning provides a different lens through which to approach homiletics and exegesis. Consideration must be given that sermon delivery is provided in various contexts, making it challenging for effectual homiletics.¹⁵² In some churches, pastors do not often realize whether their congregations understand what they think about what they hear, as sermons are a one-way oration.¹⁵³ Nevertheless, in charismatic denominational churches, congregations “are encouraged to talk back with affirmations or the African American tradition of call and response.”¹⁵⁴ The idea, however, is to ensure that within the homiletical structure, there is a call to action and practical application of faith.

Summary

Perhaps one of the main reasons for the interest in this exploratory investigation is to understand the importance of Bible study from the context of employing expositional principles

¹⁵⁰ Jonathan Stuart, “Applying Adult Education Principles within Church Sermons: Some Theoretical Implications,” *Journal of Adult Theological Education*, 8, no. 2 (2011): 116.

¹⁵¹ Stuart, *Applying Adult Education Principles within Church Sermons*, 116.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

that aid in a fruitful discovery of the revelatory nature of God. A second reason is to educate others on these principles to be aware of the resources available to support their studies. Most importantly, given the charismatic theology of the church, this researcher believes that considering alternative methods to approach Bible study will further nurture godly relationships and, at its best, influence church growth. In summary, a review of the literature sought to provide biblical, theological, and practical support to increase biblical literacy from an expositional Christ-centered approach to Bible study. By way of a triangular Bible study program structure, pastors and teachers can address biblical literacy by focusing their efforts on hermeneutics, theology of scripture, Bible study methodology, and andragogical and transformative learning.

Theological Foundations

Understanding the importance of biblical literacy is grounded in the belief that Christians should become intimately acquainted with Scripture. The Bible is filled with illustrations depicting the demand to be biblically literate and the consequences of a biblically illiterate nation. Knowing how to read and communicate in a biblically literate language means Christians can share their knowledge with others and bring non-Christians to Christ. As Christians share their understanding of the Bible, applying theology to application, they become bolder and more confident when sharing the Word of God.¹⁵⁵ As such, the theological foundations of this action research highlight a scriptural basis of the need to become biblically literate and engage in Bible study sessions as a community of believers. Doing so points people to their sin, leads them to worship, and gives them great joy.

¹⁵⁵ Ephesians 3:11

Old Testament

To remind the Israelites of God’s greatness, Moses prompted them to recollect the fear they experienced when they received God’s instructions.¹⁵⁶ In Deuteronomy 4:10, Moses exclaims, “Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when he said to me, ‘Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children.’” In the Old Testament, fearing God was more than reverence. To fear God meant becoming very aware of His purity and omnipotence that people would genuinely be afraid to disobey Him.¹⁵⁷ Acting on this fear would include how people respond, be it worship, service, trust, or obedience.¹⁵⁸ The day at Horeb, God displayed His omnipotence in the fire, black clouds, and darkness as His voice roared through the heavens. His purity is displayed in the Ten Commandments.¹⁵⁹

The words provided in the Ten Commandments reflect God’s nature and “demands of the creature only what the Creator's holiness requires for fellowship with himself.”¹⁶⁰ The Ten Commandments serve as a gift of grace given to the Israelites, not to keep them in bondage yet because they were brought out of bondage. In Horeb, the Law was issued to teach the Israelites that their God is a person who cannot be manipulated yet one who can impose His moral will on them. Still, God’s instruction to Moses to “assemble the people before me” illustrates Bible study

¹⁵⁶ Tony Evans, *Deuteronomy*, in *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary: Advancing God’s Kingdom Agenda*, (Nashville, TN: Hollman Bible Publishers, 2019), 215.

¹⁵⁷ John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck, *Deuteronomy*, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1985), 269.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ J.D. Douglas & Merrill C. Tenney, *Commandments, Ten*, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2011), 298.

on an ancient, near eastern level such that Moses' pedagogical approach to teach the Ten Commandments is divinely inspired by God.

In Deuteronomy 8:2-3, Moses again provides a divine call for the Israelites to remember God's past redemptive acts. Moses states, "Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. . .to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." As the supreme andragogical instructor, God used the wilderness as a classroom for the Israelites to learn how to humbly depend on Him and be obedient to Him.¹⁶¹ Whether the Israelites kept God's commands represents a transformative learning experience that the Israelites had a choice to accept. During the forty years, the Israelites had an opportunity to transition from a "postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application."¹⁶² As such, the wilderness episode was a time in their life when the Israelites had to find out if their faith was strong enough to depend on God in a place where alternatives were not available. Intentionally inconvenienced, the Israelites could not grow their own food and thus had to rely on God for their livelihood. Moses had to remind them that they cannot live on food alone and that everything they receive comes from the mouth of the Lord.¹⁶³ They had to be intimate with God and His Word, which they continuously failed to do. Since God's decree provided everything they received, the only logical response was to "observe (obey) the commands of the Lord, following and revering him."¹⁶⁴ Unfortunately for the

¹⁶¹ Evans, *Deuteronomy*, 218.

¹⁶² Nataliya Machynska. "Andragogy-The Science of Adult Education: Theoretical Aspects," *Journal of Innovation in Psychology, Education, and Didactics* 24, no.1 (2020), 26.

¹⁶³ Deuteronomy 8:3

¹⁶⁴ Walvoord & Zuck, *Deuteronomy*, 278.

Israelites, their proclivity to murmur and complain resulted in biblically illiterate behaviors, causing God's discipline of Israel, making Him the ultimate source of all their needs.¹⁶⁵

Obedience comes from knowledge, and for Joshua to flourish, God instructs Joshua to meditate on His law.¹⁶⁶ In Joshua 1:8, God commands Joshua to "Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful." Joshua cannot keep the Law on his lips and think about it all day without first becoming biblically literate. Joshua would have to read the Scripture, think about it, then articulate what it says. To be prosperous requires Christians to allow God's Word to penetrate the soul so that actions and behaviors are influenced by God's perspective rather than cultural opinions or personal inclinations.¹⁶⁷

In Nehemiah 8:3, Nehemiah recounts how the people of Judah stood as Ezra read the Word of God, ". . .aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law."¹⁶⁸ Though a priest, Ezra was a Bible study teacher specializing in Mosaic Law.¹⁶⁹ When Ezra visited Jerusalem for the first time, the moral and spiritual conditions of the people were appalling.¹⁷⁰ As Ezra prayed and taught God's Word, the people began to respond and obey. Ezra's teaching was so influential that the people asked him to stay, and their attentiveness to hear and receive God's Word granted them the patience to

¹⁶⁵ Deuteronomy 8:4-5

¹⁶⁶ Gregory T.K. Wong, *Joshua*, The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary, eds. Gary M. Burge & Andrew E. Hill (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2012), 182.

¹⁶⁷ Evans, *Joshua*, 245.

¹⁶⁸ Nehemiah 8:3

¹⁶⁹ Doug Nykolaishen, *Ezra*, The Baker Illustrated Bible Handbook, eds. J. Daniel Hays and J. Scott Duvall (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 226.

¹⁷⁰ Ezra 9:1-4, 10:2-10

remain and learn all morning long.¹⁷¹ As the people participated in this group Bible study session, they shouted “Amen,” demonstrating universal agreement in response to the lessons learned during their Bible study session.¹⁷²

Ezra’s ministry at the Water Gate serves as another illustration of a Bible study session. However, in this instance, Ezra had help. Ezra had the assistance of Bible school teachers, the Levites, who were also influential and well-versed in interpreting God’s Law. To effectively provide instruction, Ezra probably read specific sections of the Law, and on occasion, the Levites moved among the people providing an interpretation to what Ezra had revealed.¹⁷³ Because approximately 30,000-50,000 were in attendance,¹⁷⁴ Ezra had to have co-facilitators knowledgeable in the Word to help translate and give meaning. Thus, of primary importance, Nehemiah chapter eight (8) emphasized the need to continue their grand Bible study session, resulting in a renewed sense of purpose to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles and continuous interest in the sacred text.¹⁷⁵

Nehemiah chapter 9:1-38 depicts the continuation of their Bible study session. The people confessed their sins and petitioned God by offering praise and worship. Their newfound attitude towards God represented a rededication to their Creator, such that they became disinterested in celebrating and more engrossed with continuing Ezra’s Bible study session.¹⁷⁶

Through Bible study, the Israelites were not only convicted for their actions, but they were also

¹⁷¹ Walvoord & Zuck, *Nehemiah*, 689.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Nehemiah 8:7-8

¹⁷⁴ Nehemiah 7:66-67

¹⁷⁵ Mervin Breneman, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary, eds. Gary M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2012), 433.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

willing to change their behaviors¹⁷⁷ which represented an andragogical response to their Bible study sessions. Ezra implemented andragogical teaching principles by devoting time reading to them and encouraging the use of their shared experiences to confess, worship, and dedicate time for prayer.

In Psalm 19:7-9, David pronounces the sufficiency of Scripture that speaks to all aspects of life,

The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous.

Though statutes, commands, and decrees can lead one to presume they are written to keep people from experiencing pleasure and entertainment, verses 7-9 represent the opposite. Here, David expresses that God's Word brings joy to the heart, guides, and rewards. God's Word is trustworthy, which can forewarn the danger that lies ahead then pivot to lead on the path to success. In the end, Psalm 19 is a depiction of how God reveals Himself. Expressly, verses 7-9 confirm that God reveals Himself in His Word.

As the Lord was a pillar of fire that led the Israelites in the desert, the Word of God lights the way so that people do not stumble.¹⁷⁸ Likewise, biblical literacy allows readers to see their way clear enough to stay on the right path. As maintained by Judith Stack-Nelson, "openness to the text. . .combines the elements of courage and curiosity-the courage not to defensively cling to our current ideas, and the curiosity to wonder what else might be a possibility."¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Psalm 119:105

¹⁷⁹ Stack-Nelson, "*Beyond Biblical Literacy*," 296.

New Testament

John 14:26 states, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” The works of Jesus’ earthly ministry were partially understood. Three things had to occur for the disciples to understand His person and mission: death, resurrection, and the arrival of the Holy Spirit to interpret the meaning behind Jesus’ words and deeds.¹⁸⁰ Though Jesus said the Spirit “will teach you all things,” the context of “all things” was limited to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

In John 2:19, Jesus tells the Jews, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” However, the disciples did not understand what He meant, why He had to die, nor understand the scriptural reference that speaks to the suffering Messiah. It was not until Jesus’ resurrection that the disciples finally understood the context of what He said.¹⁸¹ Further in John 20:9, even after spending countless occasions under Jesus’ tutelage, one of the disciples saw and believed that Jesus rose from the dead.¹⁸² However, even after this monumental event, the disciples “. . .still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.” After Jesus’ resurrection, the Spirit worked in their minds as He reminded the disciples of His teaching and gave insight into its meaning.

In a similar vein, at Pentecost, with the support of eleven of the disciples, Peter begins his Bible study session by addressing the crowd stating, “. . .Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel. .

¹⁸⁰ John F. Walwood & Roy B. Zuck, *John*, The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament, eds. John F. Walwood & Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1983), 324.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 280.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 342.

.”¹⁸³ Peter addresses and assures the crowd that the disciples are not drunk and confirms the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Peter’s confirmation is a demonstration of his biblical literacy by reciting Joel 2:28-32. Peter would not have effectively explained the phenomenon that just occurred had he not been knowledgeable about the Old Testament Scripture.

According to Rickie Moore, “. . . Pentecostals bear distinctive witness to a reality and dimension of life in the Holy Spirit, out of which a uniquely Pentecostal approach to Scripture emerges.”¹⁸⁴ This approach to Scripture involves the active engagement with the Holy Spirit, who continues to keep the teachings of Jesus alive and remind the Christian community of what Jesus has said and done. By reading, studying, meditating, and obeying the Word of God, the Holy Spirit provides new revelation for further application as He keeps believers from misinterpreting what the Bible says and convinces them of the truth of the sacred text.¹⁸⁵

The formation of the Bible confirms that just as the Holy Spirit actively motivates the biblical authors of the Bible, the Holy Spirit also motivates people who read and interpret the text.¹⁸⁶ Some Bible scholars refer to this as double inspiration.¹⁸⁷ As readers engage with the Bible, the Holy Spirit is activated, inspiring readers to discern God’s will through the biblical text. As maintained by Maddix, this collaborative process between readers and the Spirit allows the readers to discover the possible meaning of God and His ongoing work of salvation. Hence, given the formative function of the Bible, Christians should consistently read and participate

¹⁸³ Acts 2:12-14

¹⁸⁴ Rickie D. Moore, “A Pentecost Approach to Scripture” in *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader* ed. Lee Roy Martin (Boston, MA: Leiden), 2013, 11.

¹⁸⁵ Walvoord & Zuck, *John*, 298.

¹⁸⁶ Maddix, *Rediscovering the Formative Power*, 35.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

with the sacred text. When this occurs, Christians shift from viewing the Bible primarily as an information manual to experiencing the text as a life transformational endeavor.¹⁸⁸

However, one of the challenges that Christians face when exploring the Bible is that they study the Bible in isolation from the Christian community.¹⁸⁹ As Hebrews 10:24-25 notes, “. . .let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” The writer of Hebrews is reminding the audience to continue to pursue Christ, grow in grace, stay connected, and inspire one another.

While with his disciples, Jesus used parables to clarify biblical truths and arouse and awaken spiritual perception.¹⁹⁰ Mark explains that Jesus “. . .did not say anything to them without using a parable. But, when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.”¹⁹¹ Consistent with this argument, scriptural interpretation should be done in the context of a community, ideally using an inductive approach to Bible study as this method allows for an honest interpretation of Scripture. In a group setting, as modeled in Mark 4:34, “people talk about Scripture together, which helps them apply what they are learning to their lives.”¹⁹²

In light of Paul’s plans to visit Rome, Paul wrote Romans to provide a complete statement of the principles of the gospel that he preached.¹⁹³ One, in particular, was a crucial

¹⁸⁸ Maddix, *Rediscovering the Formative Power*, 35.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Kenneth L. Barker, Craig L. Blomberg, Jeannine K. Brown, Mark L. Strauss, & Michael J. Williams. *Mark*. NIV Study Bible, eds. Kenneth L. Barker, Craig L. Blomberg, Jeannine K. Brown, Mark L. Strauss, & Michael J. Williams (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 1717.

¹⁹¹ Mark 4:34

¹⁹² Maddix, *Rediscovering the Formative Power*, 35.

¹⁹³ Romans 15:4

principle regarding the “purpose and ministry of the Scriptures.”¹⁹⁴ In Romans 15:3, when Paul states, “. . .as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me,” Paul quotes Psalm 69:9.¹⁹⁵ Paul recalling this verse reflects his level of biblical literacy of Old Testament Scripture. In this case, as Paul is referring to the Old Testament, all Scripture was written and preserved for future generations as Scriptural knowledge influences attitudes and behaviors towards the present and future.¹⁹⁶ The more one knows about what God has done in the past, the believers' confidence grows about what God will do in the future. Therefore, Paul impresses upon the Jewish and Gentile community to become biblically literate to increase their trust in what God can do for them.¹⁹⁷

Centered on Romans 15:4, John Stott, a renowned theologian, connotes five truths that can be gleaned from the Bible.¹⁹⁸ The first truth is the contemporary purpose of the Bible.¹⁹⁹ Because Scripture was originally written to and for an ancient near-eastern audience, the principles can serve to teach a postmodern society.²⁰⁰ Second, though Paul quoted an excerpt of Psalm 69, it does not suggest that the remainder of the Psalm is not applicable. In which case, the inclusive value noted by Stott implies that while everything may not be of equal value, Scripture written in the past has equal value for the future.²⁰¹ Third, in John 5:46, Jesus states, “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.” Here Jesus specifically points

¹⁹⁴ Walvoord & Zuck, *Romans*, 495.

¹⁹⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans*, *The Bible Speaks Today*, ed. John R.W. Stott (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020), 375.

¹⁹⁶ Romans 15:4

¹⁹⁷ Barton, Veerman, & Wilson, *Romans*, 263.

¹⁹⁸ Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 375.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

out that the Scriptures are about Him. Therefore, focusing on the purpose of Christ is how Jesus was able to clarify for the disciples that the Scriptures concern Him. The practical purpose of the Bible is the fourth truth in that encouragement and endurance may bring hope “looking beyond time to eternity, beyond present sufferings to future glory.”²⁰² Finally, the fifth truth, the divine message, is that “God himself who encourages us through the living voice of Scripture. For God continues to speak through what he has spoken.”²⁰³

John records in 5:39-40, “You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” During this time, even the Gentiles recognized the Pharisees' passion for Scripture.²⁰⁴ However, in this instance, Jesus reminds the Pharisees that though they diligently engage in Bible study, they fail to recognize that the Scriptures (the Old Testament) point to Him. The Pharisees believed that they would have eternal life if people read and understood the sacred text. From the Pharisees' perspective, anyone ignorant of the law was under a curse.²⁰⁵ Nonetheless, with veiled eyes,²⁰⁶ the Pharisees failed to see Jesus as the Promised One.²⁰⁷ Despite Jesus' efforts to provide revelation of who He is,²⁰⁸ the Pharisees refused to come to Him for their salvation and eternal life.²⁰⁹

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 375.

²⁰⁴ Craig S. Keener, *John*, in *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 265.

²⁰⁵ Walvoord & Zuck, *John*, 292.

²⁰⁶ 2 Corinthians 3:15

²⁰⁷ Deuteronomy 18:15,18

²⁰⁸ Luke 24:7

²⁰⁹ Walvoord & Zuck, *John*, 292.

The author of Hebrews describes the Word of God as His living power, "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."²¹⁰ God's Word is a living and changing dynamic that works to penetrate the core of our principled and spiritual lives by requiring reflective decision-making that judges the flesh and Spirit. Therefore, not only should we become biblically literate, but we should also allow the Bible to shape our lives.

The entirety of the Bible is God's inspired Word because God's Word is infallible and inerrant. Second Timothy 3:16-17 states, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." A regular habit of reading the Bible helps discover God's truth and how to live for Him. Because the truth is the goal, one should not lose sight of God's purpose to strengthen the faith leading to do the work of Christ.

Theoretical Foundations

A careful review of the literature demonstrates scholarly efforts to address the decline in biblical literacy, the correlation of biblical literacy, and variables that influence Bible knowledge. However, academic research has shown minimal attempt to address biblical literacy from an expositional Christ-centered approach to Bible study. To date, Bible scholars have a reactionary stance towards biblical literacy yet rarely provide strategies for tackling biblical illiteracy in the church.

²¹⁰ Hebrews 4:12

Biblical Literacy Examined

Interest in biblical literacy as a correlational characteristic was the focus of Cecilia Dennery's research. Dennery's study aimed to examine the association between biblical literacy and the education level, demographics, discipleship, and leadership positioning of congregants in the church.²¹¹ Based on the results, a discovery worth noting was that 67% of church attendees are biblically illiterate. Of the 67%, attendees between 18-39 years of age were identified as needing additional Bible instruction. Furthermore, the results showed that "there was no significant difference between the Bible class instructors (71%) and those who have no teaching role in the church," thus concluding that the Bible study ministry needs a comprehensive review of the Bible.²¹² Though Dennery acknowledges this finding and builds on understanding biblical literacy, there remains an absence of intervention strategies to address Bible training for the instructors and congregants in the church.

Consistent with the idea of examining biblical literacy, a study conducted by Todd Leach was to determine whether lead pastors can become more effective in decreasing biblical illiteracy in the church.²¹³ Using online surveys and semi-structured interviews with pastors and focus groups with laypeople, Leach designed his study to assess church pastoral influence that encourages biblical literacy.²¹⁴ Before concluding, Leach learned that while pastors agree Scripture is essential for believers, "many pastors are not intentionally acting on that behalf."²¹⁵ One pastor admitted that he is unsure how to get people to become biblically literate, while

²¹¹ Dennery, *A Correlational Study*, 59.

²¹² Dennery, *A Correlational Study*, 59.

²¹³ Leach, *Encouraging Word*, 1.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 163.

another pastor conveyed doubt on whether he was influential in his role.²¹⁶ Ultimately, Leach concluded that pastors desire to increase biblical literacy. However, some pastors are ill-equipped to do so because of competing priorities and the scale of the endeavor.²¹⁷ Despite this, while this study contributes to the existing knowledge about biblical literacy in the church, it does so without presenting an approach on how the church should address biblical literacy from a Bible study perspective.

Christopher Coleman's research attempt at examining biblical literacy sought to assess Bible reading outside Sunday and mid-week services. According to the author, a variable in the decline of biblical literacy is due to an underdeveloped habit in personal Bible study outside of the church.²¹⁸ In an attempt to investigate this phenomenon, the author discovered that of the eleven volunteers who participated in the study, 27% of them indicated that they read the Bible daily, 19% read the Bible weekly. In contrast, the remaining 54% indicated that their interaction with the Bible is either never, often, not enough, or not at all.²¹⁹

Interestingly, through his research, Coleman discovered that 19% of his participants ranked themselves as having good knowledge of the Bible, and 9% indicated their Bible knowledge as fair to good. Further, there were 72% who rated their Bible knowledge as either poor or fair. Though Coleman argues that congregants who engage in personal and weekly Bible

²¹⁶ Leach, *Encouraging Word*, 163.

²¹⁷ Leach, *Encouraging Word*, 166.

²¹⁸ Christopher Coleman, "Biblical Literacy: Developing a Habit of Personal Bible Reading Among the Members of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship" (DMin diss, Liberty University, 2020), iv, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

reading outside of church services are better equipped to contend for the faith and have greater discernment for “sound biblical teaching,” these results are concerning.²²⁰

Given the benefits of personal Bible reading, people can fervently study the Bible within and outside church services and still miss Jesus.²²¹ Knowing the Word of God is essential, but if knowledge of the Word does not lead to the Living Word (Jesus), Christians have entirely missed the mark. Coleman’s faithful attempt and contribution to the literature regarding the importance of addressing biblical literacy is warranted. Theoretically, the study still leaves a gap open for the opportunity to consider addressing biblical literacy within and outside church services that focus on reading the Bible from an expositional Christ-centered approach to Bible study.

Bible Study Withdraw

An effectual Bible study ministry incorporates a structure that supports a transformative learning experience. One that allows participants to engage with the content without becoming disinterested yet fosters an environment that encourages and influences spiritual growth.

According to Jen Wilkin, Bible study ministries that “push for catchy themes and culturally relevant approaches to teaching the Bible” risk cultivating a platform that is void of structure, accountability, and predictability.²²²

In her article, *How to Avoid Bible Study Dropouts*, Wilkin asserts that fostering commitment to Bible study requires the structure, accountability, and predictability to be the driving force of a sustainable Bible study program, even more than “exceptional teaching and

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Evans, *John*, 1029.

²²² Wilkin, “*How to Prevent Bible Study Dropouts*,” 28.

solid content.”²²³ The author defines the structure as discipleship when leaders establish clear objectives that include praise, worship, teaching, and discussion.²²⁴ A Bible study curriculum structure such as this gives congregants the confidence that their time spent during a Bible study session has long-term value. For this reason, transformative learning supports congregants as they work toward critically reflecting on their current theological presuppositions bringing new ways of defining their worlds.

In alignment with Romans 12:10, “Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves,” Wilkin posits that for accountability, discipleship happens when congregants meet defined expectations, stating, “when we raise the bar for our students, we must also put in place accountability mechanisms to help them meet that higher standard.”²²⁵ Holding each other accountable for lessons learned during Bible study sessions helps the group stay pure and faithful with their walk with God.

Intriguingly, Wilkin’s contribution regarding accountability offers indistinguishable insight as the 2010 study conducted by the Barna Group. The Barna Group national survey reported that 5% of people who identify as Christian reported that their churches “hold them accountable for integrating biblical beliefs and principles into their life.”²²⁶ Of the 5% who reported being held accountable by their church, small groups were the primary approach. Other accountability mechanisms used were revoking membership, mentorship, personal accountability

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Wilkin, “*How to Prevent Bible Study Dropouts*,” 28.

²²⁶ Barna Group, “National Study Describes Christian Accountability Provided by Churches” November 29, 2010, Accessed May 29, 2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/national-study-describes-christian-accountability-provided-by-churches/>

to the pastor or church staff, church performance evaluations, and inquisitions by the congregation for questionable activities.²²⁷

Finally, discipleship for predictability occurs when leaders meet expectations.²²⁸ During Bible study sessions, attendees build trust for their leaders when they adhere to set scheduling and teaching consistency grounded in solid preparation.²²⁹ Bible study ministries build credibility when they say what they plan to do and follow through.

Though Wilkin offers a perspective of avoiding Bible study dropout, the author's overarching message is that participants will commit to attending Bible study when more is expected of them than "simply showing up."²³⁰ Therefore, Wilkin's reflection supports this action research with a structural framework Bible study ministries should consider as part of a curriculum build of a Bible study program. Theoretically, Wilkin's Bible study structure coupled with an expositional Christ-centered curriculum that underpins a theological view of Scripture, a Bible study methodology, and an andragogical transformative approach to Christ-centered learning will encourage Bible study attendance and deter congregants from Bible study dropout.

Pentecostal Bible Study

Because SCC embraces a Pentecostal theology and this study considers a triangular approach to Bible study that includes a theology of Scripture, additional support of the theoretical foundation of this action research is to acknowledge the seminal work of Jackie Johns and Cheryl Johns, who suggest an approach to group Bible study from a Pentecostal perspective. As previously mentioned, Johns and Johns posit that Bible study programs should encompass

²²⁷ Barna Group, "*National Study*."

²²⁸ Wilkin, "*How to Prevent*, 28.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Wilkin, "*How to Prevent*, 28.

four collaborating activities: sharing testimonies, scriptural studies, submission to the Holy Spirit, and turning lives over to Christ.²³¹ The first step in the group Bible study requires members to share their testimonies. In doing so, members are faced with the challenge of personal and collective understanding of themselves as the subject of human history.²³² According to the authors, when group members share their “experiences, feelings, values, understandings, and expectations,” they do so in anticipation of receiving a response from God’s Word. As such, for group members, witnessing in this way is looking forward to a dialogue with Scripture.²³³

The second movement is scriptural studies, in which Pentecostal hermeneutics helps interpret passages to maintain the authenticity of the sacred text. Using an inductive approach to group Bible study requires interpreters to have an open mind and willingness to conduct a thorough analysis of the text before making conclusions. When the Bible is respected and allowed to speak to readers, they soon realize the power of Scripture.²³⁴

Further, the authors theorize that as group Bible study members submit to the Spirit, a transformative encounter between themselves and Scripture begins as the Holy Spirit is the agent of the encounter leading to conversion. As the illumination of God’s Word becomes clear, the individual and group are recognized and named for who they are. When exposed, group members may choose a submissive response, which leads to change or denial of the truth, leading to depravity.²³⁵ Finally, Johns and Johns hypothesize that obeying the words of the Holy

²³¹ Johns & Johns, *Yielding to the Spirit*, 47.

²³² *Ibid.*, 48.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 49.

²³⁴ Johns & Johns, *Yielding to the Spirit*, 52.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

Spirit will condemn and change people, thus eventually becoming people of faith. As new testimonies emerge, people begin to confess what they have seen, heard, and are obligated to do. When people genuinely want to know God, they respond in loving obedience to the light the Holy Spirit has shed upon their paths.

Research exists that continues to expose the decline in biblical literacy. However, it also reveals the deficiency in theological and Christian educational circles in addressing biblical literacy from a Bible study point of view. Though many are not called to teach, those who do have a responsibility because their words and example influence the spiritual lives of others.²³⁶ Therefore, through Bible study, pastors and teachers must first become learners of the truth, guideposts towards an inductive process of discovery, and accountability partners while simultaneously providing the opportunity to respond to the call of the Spirit. For this reason, this action research hopes to present new findings to address biblical literacy in the church from an expositional Christ-centered approach, ultimately leading to unique experiences, understanding, and appreciation of God and His Word.

²³⁶ James 3:1

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Regarding what is currently true about the problem, the researcher intends to address that Bible study in its current format does not engage an expositional Christ-centered approach yet employs a round-table discussion of the personal philosophies of Scripture. Although Bible study sessions are conducted by facilitators who presumably have not received formal exegetical and expositional training, the researcher suspects that those acting as Sunday school teachers may consider themselves “called” to teach. Therefore, formal theological training is not warranted. As such, the intervention design for this action research would address biblical literacy by providing the structure for the Bible study ministry to strengthen the ability of congregants to interpret Scripture and study the Bible with wisdom and understanding.

Moreover, the intervention will allow congregants to learn to appreciate the historical-cultural context of the Bible and its relevant application to postmodern society. Further congregants who actively engage in Bible study will increase biblical literacy and become better equipped to instruct in the ways of the Lord.²³⁷ Therefore, the intervention plan is for the researcher to address biblical literacy by facilitating expositional Christ-centered Bible study sessions using a triangular approach focusing on core scriptural theology (Pentecostal), Bible study methodology (curriculum design), and a transformative (andragogical) approach to Christ-centered learning. The researcher will design a Bible study curriculum taught in four to six Bible study sessions during the implementation phase. Participants will be assessed before and after implementation to determine whether an increase in biblical literacy exists.

²³⁷ Psalm 25:12

Intervention Design

The intended intervention design will be a Bible study curriculum taught in four to six sessions that will incorporate a multi-layered approach addressing a Pentecostal theme selected and facilitated by the researcher. The curriculum development will include using the Bible and commentaries to create a Bible study curriculum that includes a syllabus outlining the essential elements of the upcoming sessions, such as the session description, session expectations, learning outcomes, session materials, and session outlines (see Appendix A). Bible study lesson plans will also be created. The lesson plans are specifically designed to scaffold content so that participants can gradually make the connections among the theological, andragogical, and Christological themes. Each lesson plan is specific to sessions one through six and will include scriptural references, discussion topics, and discussion questions (see Appendix B).

Facilitator notes will also accompany the Bible study curriculum (see Appendix C). The purpose of the facilitator notes is for the researcher to use them to guide the Bible study session by having sample model answers to the discussion questions and insight about the lesson text. The facilitator notes will help the researcher encourage discussion and a transformative learning experience consistent with the scriptural theology of the Pentecostal faith tradition. Since the curriculum design considers an andragogical approach to Christ-centered learning, there are no right or wrong answers. Therefore, during the Bible study sessions, using the facilitator notes will support the researcher in guiding the learning process and encouraging participants to contribute to discussions that offer open debates on biblical applications and principles while promoting and challenging current and new theological views.

Next, the researcher will develop pre-and-post assessments to capture Bible knowledge at the beginning and end of the intervention phase, using the pre-assessment as the benchmark for

initial data collection (see Appendices D & E).²³⁸ The objective of the pre-and-post assessments is divided into two parts. First, responses from the pre-and post-assessments will be quantitative (questions 1-10) and qualitative (questions 11-15). Questions one through ten will align with the Bible study learning outcomes (LOs), and questions 11-15 will align with the pre-established identifiable themes (ITs) (see Appendix F). Aligning the pre-and post-assessments with the LOs allows the researcher to capture the quantitative data to determine whether the participants are meeting the outcomes of the Bible study lesson. Specifically, to determine whether the Bible study sessions have influenced the increase in biblical literacy.

Second, the pre-and-post assessments help to determine the effectiveness of the intervention design. By setting the expectations, identifying learning outcomes, and the criteria to assess the learning outcomes, the researcher can establish what the participants should be able to realize based on their respective experiences during the Bible study sessions. The Bible study learning outcomes, in particular, represent the knowledge and application based on the eventual expectation of the Bible study sessions. The learning outcomes also represent developmental areas in which the Bible study ministry has an opportunity to address through future expositional Christ-centered Bible study curriculum interventions.

Furthermore, the intervention design of four to six sessions is essential for two reasons. The first reason is that six sessions will provide the researcher with more than enough time to facilitate the Bible study and gather information to effectively identify categories based on the qualitative questioning from the post-assessment. Second, suppose the researcher suspects participants are becoming disinterested during the intervention. In that case, the researcher can end the Bible study sessions with at least three sessions of information to garner qualitative data

²³⁸ Austin, *The Role of Biblical Literacy*, 90.

for theme identification. Then during session four, the researcher can provide the post-assessment and close out the intervention phase of the study.

Target Demographic

The target demographic of this action research is the Women's Prayer Group (18 years of age and older) that meet bi-weekly in the church offices on Tuesdays from 7 pm to 8 pm. To gauge interest, during one of the Women's Prayer Group (WPG) sessions, the researcher will announce the plan to facilitate Bible study sessions designed to address biblical literacy from an expositional Christ-centered approach to Bible study. As part of the study introduction, the researcher will share that the researcher is pursuing a Doctor of Ministry (DMin) specializing in Expository Preaching & Teaching and that earning a DMin degree requires the completion of action research. The need for the study, the action plan to address biblical literacy, and the intervention strategy (i.e., Bible study) will be discussed. Next, during the meeting, the WPG will be advised that weather permitting, Bible study sessions will continue to be facilitated in the church offices yet will transition to virtual conferencing if weather conditions are unsafe for face-to-face meetings.

Most importantly, the researcher will advise the group that if they are willing to participate in the intervention, they will be required to provide their consent. The researcher will have to be specific in detailing the purpose of the consent form so that volunteers do not interpret it as something other than granting their approval to participate in the study. The consent form will be distributed by providing a link to Google Surveys via the women's WhatsApp group. Volunteers will be able to review and complete the consent form online. If some members of the WPG do not want to consent to participate in the intervention, they are still welcome to attend the Bible study sessions. Members who volunteer and later decide they no longer want to

participate are still welcome to attend the Bible study sessions. However, for those who no longer participate in the intervention, the researcher will remove their pre-assessments to ensure that their information is not part of the final reflection and analysis. In either case, once the intervention phase begins, participants that drop out of the intervention will not be replaced.

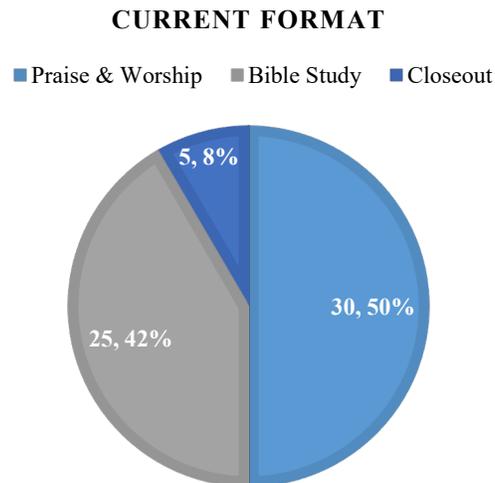
Permission to Conduct Action Research

Before the implementation phase of this action research, approvals will need to come from the Senior Pastor or First Lady of the church (see Appendix G). Though they are both aware that this researcher is pursuing a DMin in Expository Preaching and Teaching, they have preliminarily approved the use of the church congregation as a means of participation and data collection. Specifically, the First Lady has approved for this researcher the use of the WPG as the target demographic of the intervention strategy. Nevertheless, once the action research has been formally approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher can begin the implementation by announcing the plan to conduct the expositional Christ-centered Bible study sessions during the WPG meetings.

Bible Study Curriculum Design & Structure

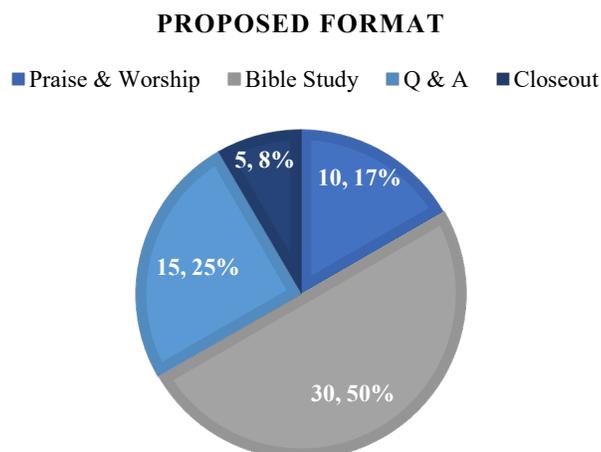
As with the current format, the WPG has 30 minutes of praise and worship followed by 25 minutes of Bible study and the last five minutes to close out the session. As seen in Figure 1, praise and worship represents 50% of the group activity, Bible study 42% of group activity, while the closeout represents the final 8% of group activity.

Figure 1: Current Format



However, because of the action research, the researcher will make slight modifications to accommodate the study. First, there will be 10 minutes of praise and worship, 30 minutes of Bible study, 15 minutes of question-and-answer, leaving the remaining five minutes to close out the session. Though researcher modifications reflect a 33% decrease in praise and worship, Figure 2 reflects there will be an 8% increase in Bible study, and 25% will be allotted for question-and-answer, allowing the researcher to guide participants as they engage in critical reflections of their experience leading them through an andragogical transformative learning process. The researcher will adjust for sessions that run over schedule.

Figure 2: Proposed Format



Second, volunteers electing to participate in this action research will receive the Bible study syllabus (see Appendix A). As the researcher will be the Bible study facilitator, the researcher will introduce the topic of discussion and guide the Bible study session by asking questions that solicit an andragogical approach to learning. Participants will be encouraged to share their experiences and be open to a perspective shift that aligns with Scripture based on the discussion topics and questions outlined within the lesson. The Bible study lesson, *The Work of the Spirit*, is designed to recognize the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers and be encouraged to live out the gospel.

As presented in Table 1²³⁹, session one, *Renewed by the Holy Spirit* (Acts 2:1-4), the group will discuss the promises of God, the beginning of the last days, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In session two, *Encouraged by the Holy Spirit* (Acts 2:22-24; 36-40), the topics of discussion are confidence in the Holy Spirit, the resurrection of Christ, and saved by grace. *Silver and Gold, I Have None* (Acts 3:1-10) will be the lesson for session three, and the group

²³⁹ Michael Lewis Godfrey, "Developing and Implementing a Training in Biblical Interpretation for the Bible Study Teachers at First Baptist Church, Waynesboro, Georgia" (DMin diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 61-67. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

will discuss being hopeless, helpless, and confident, accepting spiritual help, and God’s greater purpose. Session four, Remember to Say, “Thank You” (Acts 3:11-16), the discussion topics are demonstrating faith, exercising authority, and giving God glory. In session five, Eternal Treasure, the group will transition to 1 Peter 1:3-5 and discuss the promised inheritance, a new identity in Christ, and living hope. Finally, in session six, The Genuineness of Your Faith (1 Peter 1:6-9), the group will end the session by discussing suffering without sinning, professing and embracing faith, and the salvation of souls. Each session will have a set of discussion questions specific to the lesson. However, one question, “What is the connection to Christ?” will be assigned every week because the idea is that after the group reviews Scripture, they should be able to see how the biblical text ultimately leads them back to Christ. Table 1: Bible Study

Session Outline

Session Outline	Discussion Topics	Scripture Reference
Session 1: Renewed by the Holy Spirit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ God’s promise ○ The beginning of the last days ○ Baptism of the Holy Spirit 	Acts 2:1-4
Session 2: Encouraged by the Holy Spirit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Confidence in the Holy Spirit ○ The resurrection of Christ ○ Saved by grace 	Acts 2:22-24; 36-40
Session 3: Silver and Gold, I Have None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hopeless, helpless, and dependent ○ The acceptance of spiritual help ○ God’s greater purpose 	Acts 3: 1-10
Session 4: Remember to Say “Thank You”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Demonstration of faith ○ Exercising authority ○ Giving God glory 	Acts 3:11-16
Session 5: Eternal Treasure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promised inheritance ○ A new identity in Christ ○ Living hope 	1 Peter 1: 3-5
Session 6: The Genuineness of Your Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Suffer without sinning ○ Professing and embracing faith ○ Salvation of souls 	1 Peter 1:6-9

Validity and Reliability of Pre and Post Assessments

The concept of validity and reliability found common in quantitative research seeks to measure what it intends to measure (validity) and the consistency of responses across constructs (reliability).²⁴⁰ In qualitative research, validity is the “appropriateness of the tools, processes, and data” and whether the chosen methodology is appropriate for the research question concluding with valid results.²⁴¹ Because qualitative research allows for a margin of variability, the essence of reliability in qualitative research is consistency.²⁴² Consistency in qualitative research is the trustworthiness of the data collection. A few notable methodological strategies to ensure trustworthiness include accounting and acknowledging personal and sampling bias, ensuring data interpretation is consistent and transparent, and establishing a process that allows for theme analysis to ensure that all perspectives are well represented.²⁴³

Alternatively, some authors propose that while validity and reliability are the essential criteria for qualitative research, in qualitative circles, alternate terms such as “Credibility, Neutrality or Confirmability, Consistency or Dependency, and Applicability or Transferability are to be the essential criteria for quality.”²⁴⁴ Specifically, as it relates to reliability, the term “dependability” in qualitative studies corresponds to “reliability” in quantitative studies.²⁴⁵ Moreover, because many qualitative researchers have established their own validity theory, they

²⁴⁰ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 149.

²⁴¹ Lawrence Leung, “Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability in Qualitative Research,” *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care* 4 no. 3 (2015): 4.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Helen Noble and Joanna Smith, “Issues of Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research,” *Evid Based Nurs* 18 no. 2 (2015): 34-35.

²⁴⁴ Nahid Golafshani, “Understanding Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research,” *The Qualitative Report* 8 no. 4 (2003): 601.

²⁴⁵ Yvonne S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1985), 300.

choose terms they believe are more appropriate to validate qualitative studies, such as “Quality, Rigor, and Trustworthiness.”²⁴⁶

Evaluating the quality of this action research is essential if the results gleaned from the study are used to enlighten future research on biblical literacy.²⁴⁷ As such, the instruments designed for this action research will garner data on biblical literacy via participants’ responses on pre-and post-assessments of this construct. As previously indicated, responses from the assessment will be quantitative and qualitative and align with learning outcomes and identifiable themes. The “validity” and “reliability” of the pre- and post-assessments will be determined by their “trustworthiness” and “dependability” by soliciting a focus group of four to review the assessments and provide their feedback.

Data Collection & Analysis

To gather and measure the effects of the intervention design, the researcher will use Google Surveys, which will house the pre-and post-assessments.²⁴⁸ As participants complete the assessments, Google Surveys will capture the quantitative data for questions one through ten, allowing the researcher to analyze and create graphical representations of the data. Moreover, based on the responses to the open-ended questions (11-15), the researcher can identify themes through sentiment analysis.

Following the implementation, data analysis, and reflection, the evaluation criteria for questions one through ten is to observe a greater than 1% increase (>1%) in the quantitative data from the post-assessment. The evaluation criteria for questions 11-15 are to observe consistent Identifiable Themes (ITs) yet show a greater understanding of biblical literacy.

²⁴⁶ Golafshani, *Understanding Reliability*, 602.

²⁴⁷ Noble & Smith, *Issues of Validity and Reliability*, 34.

²⁴⁸ Dennery, *A Correlational Study*, 60-63.

Key to the evaluation criteria is the Bible study session learning outcomes. As previously indicated, the curriculum for the Bible study sessions will include learning outcomes (LOs) in which each question from the pre-and post-assessments aligns with the corresponding outcome (i.e., cross-tabulation). As part of the final reflection and data analysis, the direct measures of assessment (pre-and-post assessments) will be used to gain a more comprehensive perspective of participant learning against the defined outcomes. Most importantly, the results of the defined outcomes may garner potential ideas for intervention strategies or suggestions for future research.

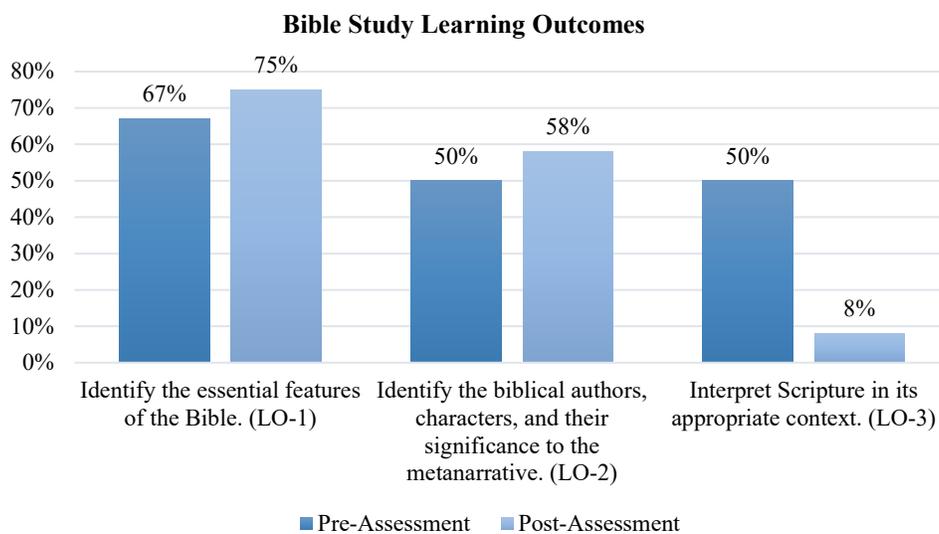
Implementation of the Intervention Design

Upon formal approval from the University's IRB, the initial stages of the action research began. To ensure the trustworthiness (validity) and dependability (reliability) of the pre- and post-assessments, the researcher solicited a focus group of four (4) members to review, take, and provide feedback on the pre- and post-assessments. The researcher advised the focus group that this action research will assess the biblical literacy of participants using the measurement tools, and their assistance in ensuring trustworthiness and dependability are essential to this study. The focus group was advised that within the measurement tools, questions one through ten are multiple-choice (quantitative), and questions 11-15 require fill-in responses (qualitative). To further determine whether the assessments measure what they are intended to measure, the quantitative and qualitative questions were aligned with the Bible study learning outcomes (LOs) and Identifiable Themes (ITs). Questions one through ten were aligned with the pre-established learning outcomes (LOs), and questions 11-15 were aligned with the pre-established identifiable themes (ITs).

Focus Group: Quantitative Results

Upon agreement to participate, the researcher provided the focus group with the link to the pre-and post-assessments. The assessments were housed on Google Surveys, which allowed the researcher to capture their quantitative and qualitative responses. Based on quantitative questions one through ten, Figure three represents the results of the focus group, which shows an 8% increase in LO-1 and LO-2 and a 42% decrease in LO-3.

Figure 3: Bible Study Learning Outcomes



It is worth noting that the 42% decrease in LO-3 is insignificant to this action research as the focus group did not participate in the Bible study sessions. The purpose of the focus group was to assist the researcher in determining the trustworthiness and dependability of the measurement tools. Though the results of LO-1 and LO-2 are promising, the results for LO-1, LO-2, and LO-3 of the pre-and-post assessments will not be included in the overall results of this study. However, the results will serve as evidence that the quantitative portion of the pre-and-post assessments can be trusted.

Focus Group: Qualitative Results

Further interpretation of the focus group pre-assessment required the researcher to examine the response alignment to the ITs. Reading was the theme of *IT-1: Describe current Bible study methods*. Collectively, the focus group shared that their preferred Bible study methods were reading at various times during the day that included prayer, meditation, a devotional, or a Bible study group. The theme for *IT-2: Discuss factors that influence biblical interpretation* was a bit murky as the focus group provided responses that veered in various directions. Ultimately, the deciding theme for IT-2 question 12, was exposition. Exposition was selected because praying, commentaries, and Bible studies contribute to biblical interpretation. Biblical literacy was the theme for *IT-3: Employ appropriate resources that aid in biblical interpretation*. Though one member indicated that resources are not used to aid in biblical interpretation does not suggest the member does not know the resources exist. It could be that the focus group member chooses not to use them. However, the remaining members appear to be aware that outside resources could be employed to help them understand Scripture.

Since questions 12 and 14 were aligned with IT-2, guidance was also a theme of *IT-2: Discuss factors that influence biblical interpretation* for question 14. According to the focus group, the role of the Holy Spirit serves as their guide during Bible study. Finally, for *IT-4: Explain preferred methods of group Bible study*, the theme was community. In response to question 15, the focus group indicated that studying the Bible with others is their preferred Bible study methodology. Therefore, based on the focus group results, the researcher is confident, without prejudice or bias, that the pre-and-post assessments are trustworthy and dependable to use as measurement tools designed to capture biblical literacy.

Focus Group: Sentiment Analysis Results

Qualitative questions 11-15 were aligned with the pre-established ITs. Working in Excel, the researcher used the Azure Machine Learning feature to conduct sentiment analysis for the focus group. Scores above 50% and closer to 100% result in positive sentiment scores, while outcomes under 50% represent negative scores. Neutral scores may range between 50-65% depending on the qualitative input. Based on the analysis of the focus group, most of the responses yielded a “positive” outcome. IT-4 received a “negative” sentiment because a word used to describe someone as lacking judgment was inserted into the response. Nevertheless, given the context of the response to question #15, the researcher would not consider it an unintelligible reaction but an honest attempt to express that Bible study sessions should be flexible enough to warrant a transformative learning experience.

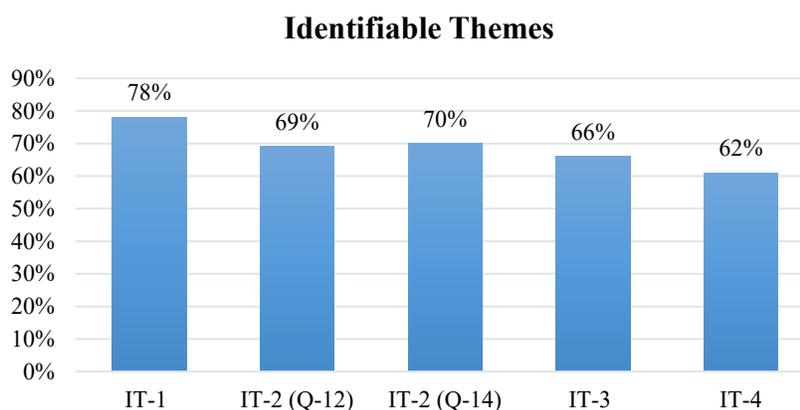
Table 2: Focus Group Sentiment Analysis Scores

IT-1		Question 11	
Describe current Bible study methods.		Explain how you currently study the bible.	
Response	Sentiment	Score	
Reading morning and night	positive	85%	
Daily reading	positive	69%	
Reading one or more chapters with prayer and meditation	positive	76%	
With a devotional or Bible study as a guide	positive	83%	
	Average	78%	
IT-2		Question 12	
Discuss factors that influence biblical interpretation.		How do you interpret Scripture?	
Response	Sentiment	Score	
N/A	positive	67%	
Through the word	positive	77%	
By praying	positive	66%	
Using a commentary and study Bible	positive	67%	
	Average	69%	
IT-3		Question 13	
Employ appropriate resources that aid in biblical interpretation.		What resources do you use to aid in biblical interpretation?	
Response	Sentiment	Score	
N/A	positive	67%	
None	positive	63%	
Concordance and Google	positive	69%	
Study Bible, Commentary	positive	64%	
	Average	66%	

IT-2		Question 14	
Discuss factors that influence biblical interpretation.		What role does the Holy Spirit play in your Bible study?	
Response	Sentiment	Score	
God's plans and teachings	positive	70%	
Direction	positive	66%	
First place	positive	76%	
Intercede for understanding	positive	69%	
		Average	70%
IT-4		Question 15	
Explain preferred methods of group Bible study.		Explain in detail your preferred method of group Bible study?	
Response	Sentiment	Score	
Weekly meetings and partnership	positive	72%	
None	positive	63%	
Where you can feel free to talk and not feel dumb for the answer you give	negative	35%	
With a Bible study	positive	76%	
		Average	62%

Based on the overall sentiment analysis results, the views of the focus group suggest that they place more emphasis on their current Bible study methods (78%) followed by the role of the Holy Spirit's influence on biblical interpretation (70%) and how the focus group personally interprets Scripture (69%). Then, employing interpretive resources and their preferred Bible study method ranked 66% and 62%, respectively. To that end, the qualitative portion of the pre-and-post assessments further solidifies the trustworthiness and dependability of the measurement tools.

Figure 4: Focus Group Identifiable Themes



Recruitment and Consent

According to IRB, since this action research seeks to improve biblical literacy via quality improvement activities, a formal recruitment announcement and consent form was not warranted (See IRB Approval). Because of the flexibility of this endorsement, the researcher made the determination not to use those tools to garner participant interest or require approval. As mentioned earlier, a significant limitation of this action research was requesting participant consent. The researcher was concerned that since the church membership is predominantly African, there may be attendees who have yet to receive permanent residency, and their apprehension of giving consent could be interpreted as indirectly providing accessible information to immigration services, resulting in permanent removal without recourse from the United States. Fortunately, based on IRB approval allowing the researcher options to use the consent form, the researcher made a protected judgment call not to use the form. Because of this, on January 11, 2022, the researcher introduced the intent of the action research to the WPG. The WPG was advised that the researcher is working towards earning a DMin, and as part of the educational journey, the researcher is required to conduct a study in relation to the degree. Additionally, the group was notified that they would receive a link to complete a pre-assessment that captures their current state of biblical literacy.

Current State of Biblical Literacy

On January 24, 2022, the participants received the link to the Bible study pre-assessment to capture their current state of biblical literacy. Though all the women of the church are invited to participate in the WPG Bible study sessions, four members completed the pre-assessment questionnaire. After the pre-assessment was completed, the results were downloaded from Google Surveys and analyzed to determine and set benchmarks. The benchmarks were set in

preparation to capture the participants' final state of biblical literacy by observing a greater than 1% (> 1%) increase of the Bible study learning outcomes (LOs) and using sentiment analysis to show an improved understanding of biblical literacy based on the qualitative evaluation criteria of the Identifiable Themes (ITs).

To interpret the pre-assessment quantitative data, the researcher downloaded the file from Google Surveys and converted the file from a .csv file to a .xlsx file. After the conversion, the researcher scrubbed and analyzed the quantitative data to create graphical representations of each quantitative question to show the number of correct and incorrect answers per question. Since the quantitative questions are aligned with the Bible study LOs, the researcher created additional graphical representations to reflect the quantitative questions and the percentage of members who answered correctly. Once the percentage of each question was determined, the researcher calculated the final average percentage of each learning outcome. As a result, the final average percentage of the pre-assessment Bible study LOs became the benchmark for that outcome.

According to Tim Sensing, there are several ways to organize data- themes or patterns, slippage, or silences.²⁴⁹ Themes or patterns represent commonality in the qualitative data. Apparent disagreements within the data are slippages, while silences correspond to the unforeseen surprising truths of the data.²⁵⁰ Based on the qualitative evaluation criteria, for the interest of this study, the researcher opted to use Azure Machine Learning for sentiment analysis to identify themes within participant responses.

To interpret the pre-assessment qualitative data, the researcher scrubbed the data from the previously downloaded file and created tables to sort the responses by their Identifiable

²⁴⁹ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Method Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 197.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Themes (ITs). Next, the researcher highlighted the responses of each IT, selected the “Text Sentiment Analysis” option, then “Predict” to process the results. Once Azure Machine Learning completed the prediction, the data reflected sentiments that were either positive, negative, or neutral. Along with the sentiments were their corresponding scores- 66-100% for positive and 50-65% for negative. However, scores between 50-65% may also yield a neutral outcome depending on the results. After carefully reviewing the pre-assessment sentiments and the qualitative responses, the researcher categorized themes as meditation, exposition, guidance, biblical literacy, and community.

Participant Awareness

Due to inclement weather conditions and to ensure safety for the WPG, the first Bible study session was held virtually on January 25, 2022. Subsequent Bible study sessions on February 8th, 22nd, and March 8th were conducted in the church offices. Since the first session was virtual, there were 15 members in attendance, while the second and third sessions had six and seven, respectively. As the intervention was designed for the researcher to host four to six Bible study sessions, attendance after the first session quickly declined. During the third session, a member in attendance looked disengaged throughout. Though there could be several reasons for this lack of engagement, even after researcher encouragement attempts to contribute, the researcher decided that instead of hosting at most six sessions, the researcher would conduct four. Doing so will allow the researcher to capture the information needed to fulfill the action research requirements while simultaneously being sensitive to the perceived needs of the group.

Post State of Biblical Literacy

On March 9th, following the Bible study session, participants received a link to the post-assessment for an updated status of their biblical literacy. Although seven members were present

during the March 8th session, five members completed the post-assessment questionnaire. When the post-assessment was completed, the quantitative data was downloaded from Google Surveys. Each quantitative question was depicted in a graph showing the number of correct and incorrect answers per question. These question-and-answer graphs were essential elements for the post-assessment. Although the questions aligned with the Bible study learning outcomes, the quantitative questions for the post-assessment were different. Nevertheless, the post-assessment quantitative data was plotted against the pre-assessment quantitative (i.e., benchmark) results, and graphical representations showcased the percentage differentiation of LO-1, LO-2, and LO-3. Through evaluation of the pre-and-post assessment quantitative data, the researcher was able to measure whether the results from the intervention design resulted in a greater than 1% (>1%) increase in Bible study learning outcomes.

To interpret the post-assessment qualitative data, the researcher utilized the same process as the pre-assessment qualitative data to translate the results. From the previously downloaded post-assessment file, the researcher reviewed the data and sorted the responses by their ITs. Still using Azure Machine Learning to predict and process the sentiment analysis scores, the data reflected positive, negative, or neutral sentiments. The corresponding scores for a positive sentiment were 61%-81%, a neutral sentiment was 46%-59%, and 2%- 44% represented a negative sentiment. The researcher noted the neutrality of the pre-and-post sentimental analysis scores as overlap in the neutral sentiment was present in the pre-assessment and void in the post-assessment. After carefully reviewing the post-assessment sentiments and qualitative responses, the researcher categorized the ITs as transformation, exposition, guidance, biblical literacy, and community. Once again, graphical representations depicted the percentage differentiation of IT-1, IT-2, IT-3, and IT-4 to capture the improved understanding of biblical literacy.

Summary

The intervention design developed by the researcher aims to address biblical literacy from an expositional Christ-centered approach to Bible study. Using a triangular method that considers Bible study methodology, scriptural theology, and an andragogical approach to learning, participants discover a renewed understanding of the sacred text that considers the historical-cultural background, thematic analysis, and modern application. Through a selected Bible study topic identified by the researcher, participants embark on a spiritual, educational journey that assesses their level of biblical literacy before and after the intervention. Chapter Four presents the implementation results that show whether expositional Christ-centered Bible study increases biblical literacy and should replace the current Bible study lesson plans.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this action research is to show that engaging in an expositional Christ-centered approach to Bible study will increase biblical literacy for the congregation of Schaumburg Community Church (SCC). The study results will show that implementing a triangular approach to Bible study that includes a theology of Scripture, Bible study methodology, and a transformative learning design will influence awareness of the proper interpretation of Scripture by helping believers understand and respond as they ought-with obedience. As described by Roy Zuck,

The Scriptures should. . .be approached with the willingness to obey them, a willingness to put into practice what has been learned in the Word. When one sees how the Lord has worked in the lives of people in the Bible who obeyed or disobeyed Him, and when he comprehends the precepts and instructions given in the Bible for one's life, he should willingly follow those examples and instructions.²⁵¹

Further, the development and adoption of a Christ-centered Bible study curriculum will prevent the inclusion of presuppositions that may inaccurately influence the interpretation of the Bible, thereby hindering the improvement of biblical literacy.

In addition, findings from this action research will reveal that while there is a current Bible study curriculum in place, the curriculum provided to the Sunday school teachers will have to be reviewed for accuracy as they are more topical than expositional. Although thematic Bible studies have their place, the Bible studies provided to the SCC congregation include biblical references that are often misaligned. However, transitioning to an expositional Bible study curriculum will guide congregants to finding the truth through Scripture by understanding the historical-cultural context in which the biblical text was written then articulating the meaning of

²⁵¹ Zuck, *Bible Interpretation*, 23.

the text to a postmodern audience. Therefore, this action research will have substantial promise because the intervention design will improve the delivery of an effectual Bible study.

Pre-Assessment Quantitative Results

To capture the focus of the Bible study learning outcomes (LOs), the researcher aligned the quantitative sections of the pre-assessment questionnaire. Quantitative questions one through ten were aligned to LO-1, LO-2, and LO-3. Table 3 reflects a representation of this alignment.

Table 3: Pre-Assessment Alignment LOs

Pre-Assessment Alignment LOs		
#	LO & IT Objectives	Pre-Assessment Questions
LO-1	Identify the essential features of the Bible.	2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10
LO-2	Identify the biblical authors, characters, and their significance to the metanarrative.	1, 3, 8
LO-3	Interpret Scripture in its appropriate context.	4

Pre-Assessment LO-1

On January 24th, the WPG was given the link to the pre-assessment to capture their current state of biblical literacy, in which four members completed the questionnaire. Based on the results for LO-1, for question two, three WPG members knew the gospels were the primary source of information about the life of Jesus Christ (Figure 5). For question five, none of the WPG members knew that the overarching theme of the Book of Romans was about the spread of the gospel (Figure 6), yet in question six (Figure 7), three WPG members knew that the first five books of the Bible are called the Pentateuch. Interestingly for question seven (Figure 8), the answers were 50-50 as two WPG members indicated that the Old Testament is divided into three sections. The other two answered it correctly, indicating that the Old Testament is divided into five. For the last two questions, nine and ten (Figures 9 & 10), three WPG members knew that

Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and 1 & 2 Samuel were historical books of the Bible, and all WPG members knew that Proverbs is considered wisdom literature.

Figure 5: Pre-Assessment Question 2

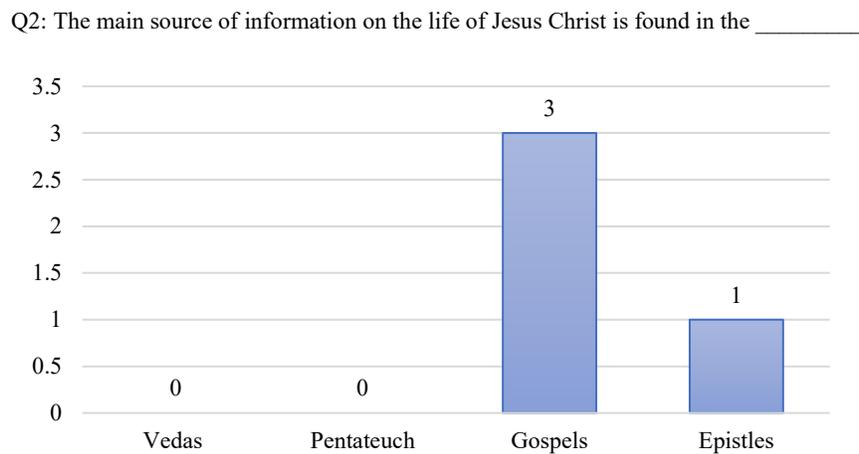


Figure 6: Pre-Assessment Question 5

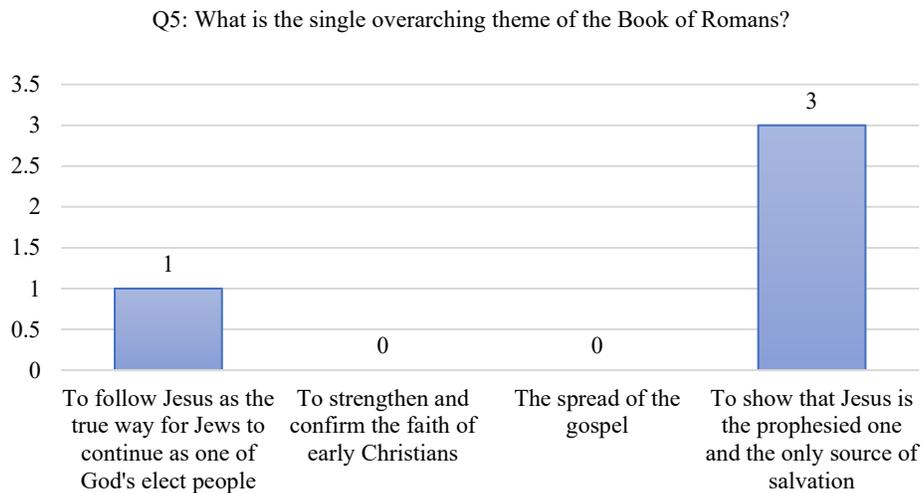


Figure 7: Pre-Assessment Question 6

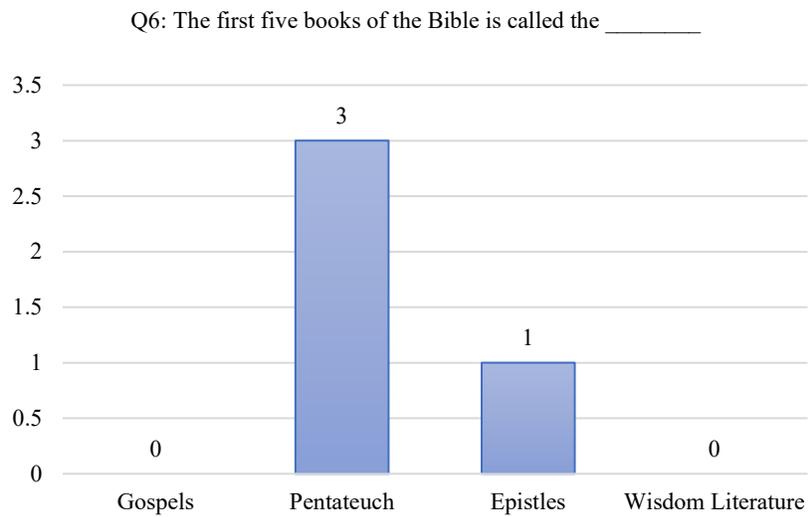


Figure 8: Pre-Assessment Question 7

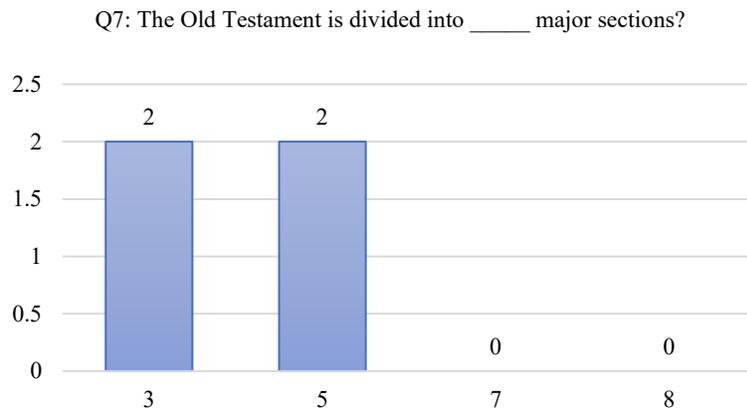


Figure 9: Pre-Assessment Question 9

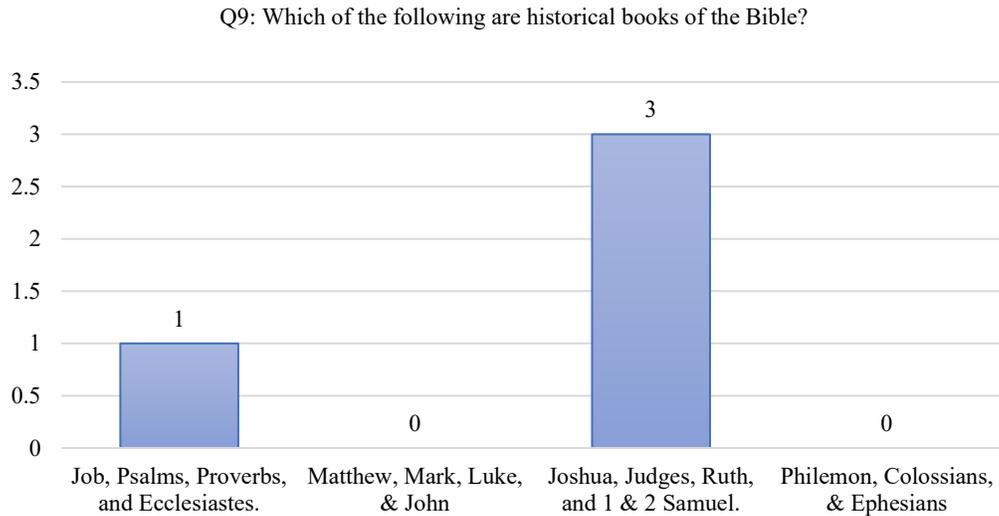
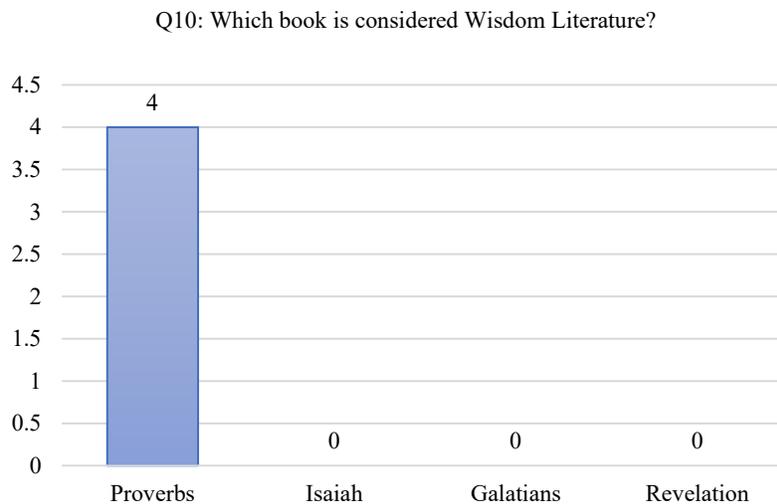


Figure 10: Pre-Assessment Question 10



Pre-Assessment LO-2

The outcome for LO-2 revealed that only one WPG member correctly answered question one (Figure 11), indicating that Luke was not an apostle of Jesus Christ. At the same time, all four WPG members acknowledged in question three (Figure 12) that the Pentecost and Peter was the context of the Book of Acts and the ministry of Peter. Moreover, question eight (Figure 13) regarding Jeremiah 29:1 was expected to be tricky. However, one WPG member answered

correctly, acknowledging that the context of this verse is about God's promise to bless His people amid a pagan culture.

Figure 11: Pre-Assessment Question 1

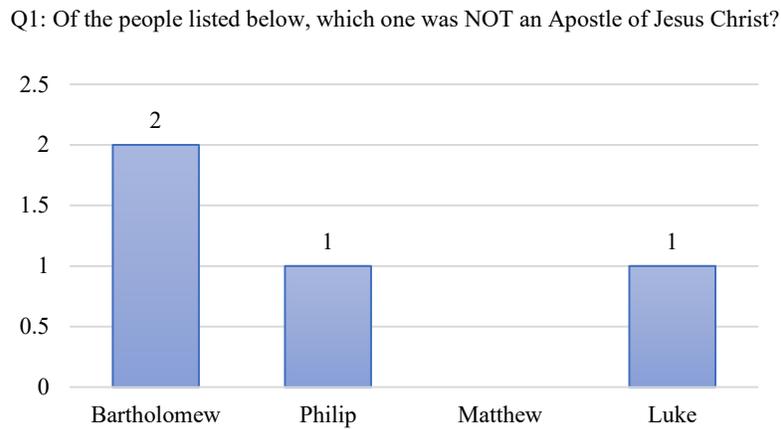


Figure 12: Pre-Assessment Question 3

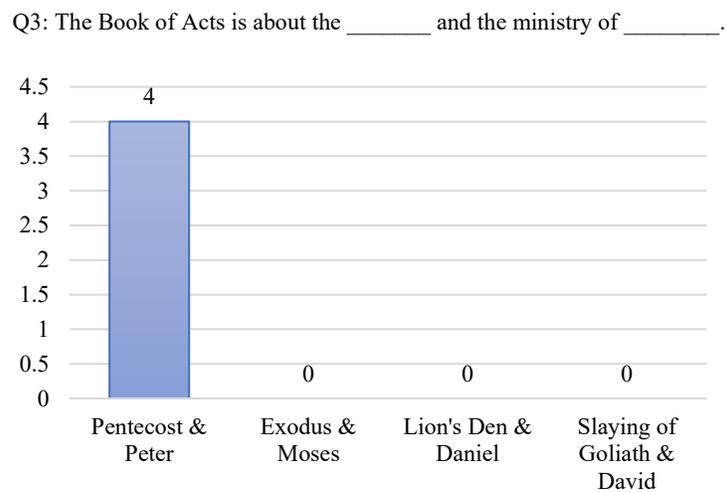
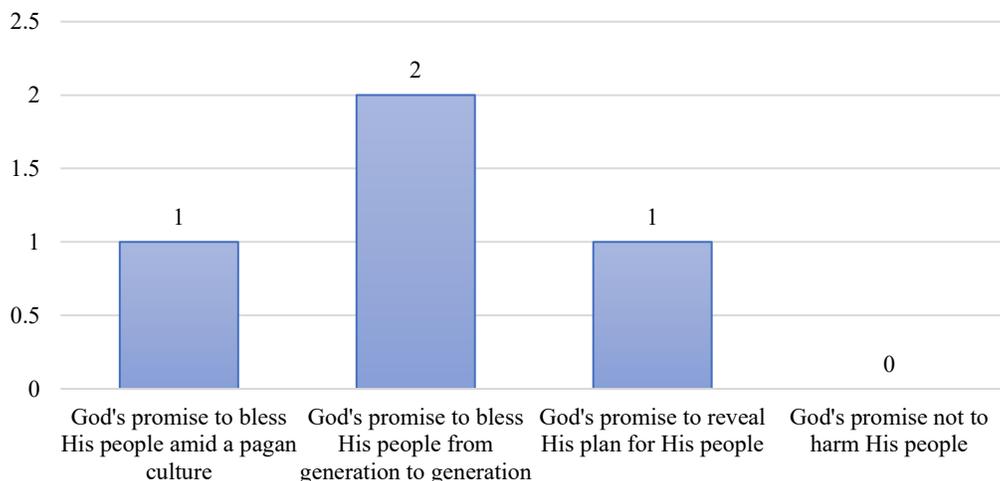


Figure 13: Pre-Assessment Question 8

Q8: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future,” (Jeremiah 29:11), is spoken in what context?

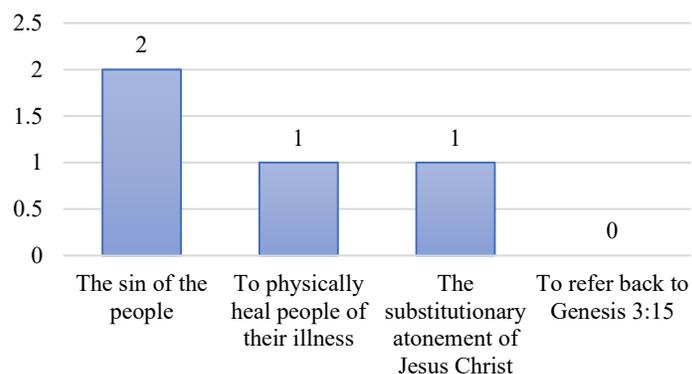


Pre-Assessment LO-3

Finally, for LO-3, in response to question four (Figure 14) regarding Isaiah 53:5, it was expected that not many would answer this correctly. However, one WPG member knew that Isaiah 53:5 referenced the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ.

Figure 14: Pre-Assessment Question 4

Q4: The prophet Isaiah said, “But he was pierced for our transgression, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed,” (Isaiah 53:5). What is the context of this passage of Scripture?



Bible Study Learning Outcome Benchmark Results

The results of the pre-assessment quantitative data for questions one through ten established the benchmark to observe a greater than 1% (>1%) increase of the Bible study

learning outcomes at the end of the Bible study sessions. Tables three, four, and five represent the benchmark results that were determined using the percentage of WPG members who correctly answered questions one through ten.

Table 4: LO-1 Benchmark

Q#	Identify the essential features of the Bible.	Correct Answer	% of People With Correct Answers
2	The main source of information on the life of Jesus Christ is found in the _____.	Gospels	75%
5	What is the single overarching theme of the Book of Romans?	To spread the gospel	0%
6	The first five books of the Bible are called the _____.	Pentateuch	75%
7	The Old Testament is divided into _____ major sections	5	50%
9	Which of the following are historical books of the Bible?	Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and 1 & 2 Samuel.	75%
10	Which book is considered Wisdom Literature?	Proverbs	100%
Benchmark			63%

Table 5: LO-2 Benchmark

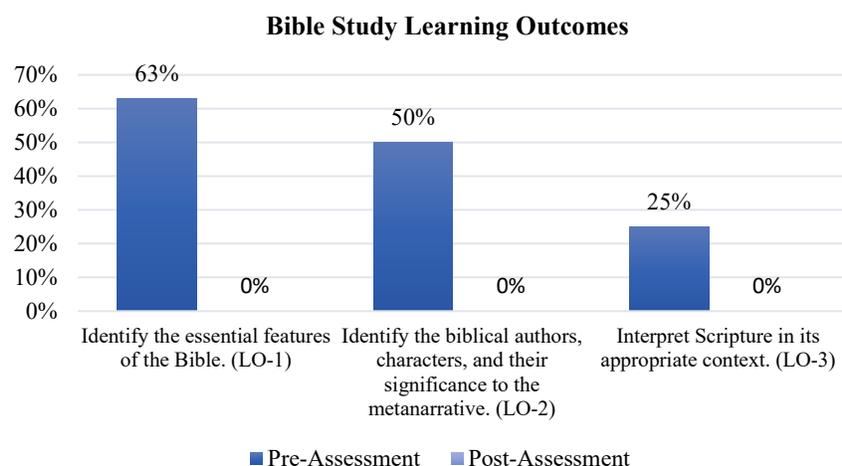
Q#	Identify the biblical authors, characters, and their significance to the metanarrative.	Correct Answer	% of People With Correct Answers
1	Of the people listed below, which one is NOT an Apostle of Jesus Christ?	Luke	25%
3	The Book of Acts is about the _____ and the ministry of _____.	Pentecost; Peter	100%
8	“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11), is spoken in what context?	God’s promise to bless His people amid a pagan culture.	25%
Benchmark			50%

Table 6: LO-3 Benchmark

Q#	Interpret Scripture in its appropriate context.	Correct Answer	% Of People With Correct Answers
4	The prophet Isaiah said, “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). What is the context of this passage of Scripture?	The substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ.	25%
Benchmark			25%

Based on the evaluation criteria of the quantitative results, the benchmark for LO-1 was set at 63%, LO-2 at 50%, and LO-3 at 25% (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Bible Study Learning Outcomes Benchmark Results



Pre-Assessment Qualitative Results

To understand the qualitative data, the researcher examined the responses aligned with the Identifiable Themes (ITs). Table 7 reflects a representation of this alignment.

Table 7: Pre-Assessment ITs

Pre-Assessment: ITs		
#	LO & IT Objectives	Pre-Assessment Questions
IT-1	Describe current Bible study methods.	11
IT-2	Discuss factors that influence biblical interpretation.	12, 14
IT-3	Employ appropriate resources that aid in biblical interpretation.	13
IT-4	Explain preferred methods of group Bible study.	15

Using the same interpretive approach when assessing the focus group responses, the researcher illuminated expressions carefully while maintaining all but one previously recognized theme. For the focus group results, IT-1 was identified as reading. Yet, IT-1 is now identified as “meditation” based on the WPG sentiment analysis results. Exposition (IT-2; Q #12), guidance (IT-2; Q#14), biblical literacy (IT-3), and community (IT-4) remain unchanged.

For *IT-1: Describe current Bible study methods*, the WPG shared that their preferred Bible study method centered on meditation and prayer, followed by devotional reading and establishing a quiet study environment. *IT-2: Discuss factors that influence biblical interpretation*, for question 12, WPG members expressed that their means of exposition was influenced by the Holy Spirit, reading various biblical resources, and life application. Though one WPG member expressly indicated “life application,” this could reference the Life Application Study Bible or the WPG member’s personal life experience. To deal with the ambiguity, the researcher categorized “life application” under the auspices of a transformative learning experience.

A somewhat unexpected result occurred for *IT-3: Employ appropriate resources that aid in biblical interpretation*. The WPG indicated that they use commentaries as resources to aid in biblical interpretation. Sunday school attendance and devotional reading were also used to help this effort. Ironically, one WPG member indicated that testimonies were a factor that aided in biblical interpretation as well. The uncertainty of how testimonies aid in interpretation may warrant further investigation. However, the researcher did not dismiss this note and considered it a potential new resource that aids to help understanding Scripture.

Question 14 was also aligned with *IT-2: Discuss factors that influence biblical interpretation* as the WPG collectively agreed that the Holy Spirit played a considerable role in their ability to understand Scripture. One WPG member noted that while the Holy Spirit serves as a guide, counselor, helper, and gives the Rhema, another member referenced the Holy Spirit as a teacher. It is worth noting at this point that while questions 12 and 14 are both aligned with *IT-2*, the questions are different but solicited similar responses. Question 12 is “How do you interpret Scripture?” emphasis on “you,” and question 14 is “What role does the Holy Spirit play

in your Bible study?” The idea of question 12 was to understand how the specific WPG member actively engages with biblical interpretation. By contrast, question 14 seeks to understand the priority of the Holy Spirit in this interpretive process. These questions may have been ambiguous to the group. Finally, for *IT-4: Explain preferred methods of group Bible study*, the respondents agreed that having an open Bible study forum in a community setting that allows for a transformative learning experience was their preferred Bible study method.

Identifiable Themes Benchmark Results

Building on the analysis of the previous section, qualitative questions, 11-15, were examined using sentiment analysis to establish benchmarks for the ITs. Sentiment scores 50% and below result in negative outlooks. Scores between 66-100% represent positive scores, while scores between 50-65% are neutral. However, as previously mentioned, scores in the 50-65% range may also be considered positive depending on the quality of the response. Based on the analysis of the qualitative questioning, most of the results yielded a “positive” sentiment score.

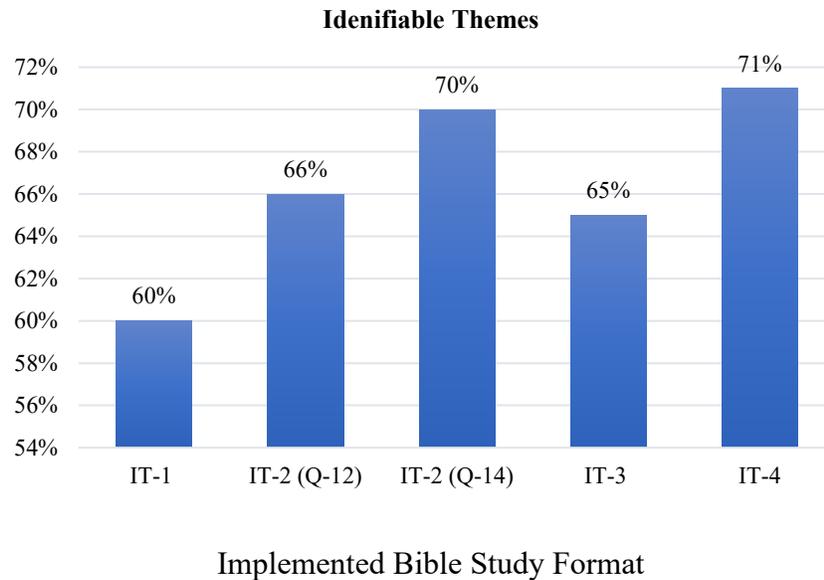
Table 8: Pre-Assessment ITs & Sentiment Analysis Scores

IT-1		Question 11	
Describe current Bible study methods.		Explain how you currently study the Bible.	
Response		Sentiment	Score
Meditate, use of Bible commentary		positive	71%
Devotional books			
Pray/Read/take notes		positive	66%
I study the Bible in a very quiet environment. Making sure I am away from all distractions.		neutral	49%
Through my daily devotional		neutral	52%
		Benchmark	60%
IT-2		Question 12	
Discuss factors that influence biblical interpretation.		How do you interpret Scripture?	
Response		Sentiment	Score
Life Application		positive	66%
Different versions/commentary		positive	66%
I allowed the spirit of God to interpret the scripture to me.		neutral	52%
By the leading of the Holy Spirit and with testimonies		positive	81%
		Benchmark	66%
IT-3		Question 13	
Employ appropriate resources that aid in biblical interpretation.		What resources do you use to aid in biblical interpretation?	
Response		Sentiment	Score

Commentaries, sermons, Sunday school	positive	63%
Commentaries	positive	66%
My daily devotional book.	neutral	60%
Christian books and testimonies	positive	71%
	Benchmark	65%
IT-2	Question 14	
Discuss factors that influence biblical interpretation.	What role does the Holy Spirit play in your Bible study?	
Response	Sentiment	Score
My guide. Interpreter, the Teacher	neutral	57%
Help In understanding	positive	62%
The spirit of God tells me the rhema of the word. Interpreting the word of God according to the heart of God	positive	85%
Teacher, helper, guide, counselor and friend	positive	76%
	Benchmark	70%
IT-4	Question 15	
Explain preferred methods of group Bible study.	Explain in detail your preferred method of group Bible study?	
Response	Sentiment	Score
For as many people as possible in the group to participate, share, and breakdown our understanding of the scripture with biblical backings, life applications, and testimonies	positive	89%
Open form/ verbal participation	neutral	57%
I prefer the Bible study where others are allowed to participate.	positive	72%
Taking turns	positive	65%
	Benchmark	71%

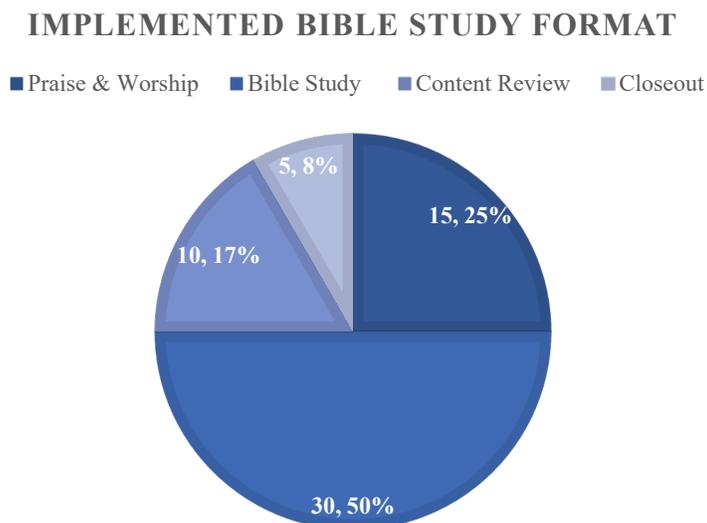
Overall, the evaluation criteria from the pre-assessment sentiment analysis results reveal that the WPG prefer community as their preferred Bible study method (71%), followed by the assurance that the Holy Spirit plays a viable role in Bible study (70%). A transformative learning experience and the Holy Spirit help the WPG understand the Bible (66%) while employing appropriate resources and current Bible study methods ranked 65% and 60%, respectively.

Figure 16: Identifiable Themes Benchmark Results



In consultation with the First Lady, due to inclement weather /conditions, the first WPG Bible study session transitioned from a face-to-face to a virtual meeting. As initially planned, the proposed Bible study format was to have 10 minutes of praise and worship, 30 minutes of Bible study, 15 minutes of question-and-answer, leaving the remaining five minutes to close out the session (Figure 1). However, during the first WPG session, there were 15 minutes of praise and worship, 30 minutes of engaged Bible study, and 10 minutes of content review. The remaining five minutes were allotted for prayer to close out the session (Figure 17). Though there were slight modifications to the proposed format, the adjustments were minute. Praise and worship in the proposed format (10 minutes at 17% time spent) and question-and-answer (15 minutes at 25% time spent) reversed positions. During implementation, praise and worship were now at 15 minutes, 25% time spent, and content review (formally question-and-answer) was now at 10 minutes, 17% time spent.

Figure 17: Implemented Bible Study Format



It is important to note that the proposed question-and-answer segment was renamed “content review” because, during the session, members of the WPG were turning off their cameras and appeared to either become disinterested or engaged in other activities while online. Therefore, the researcher would intermittently pause to solicit a discussion to inquire if anyone had questions and encourage contributions to join the discussion. The First Lady was supportive during this time and would often call on members who had not joined the conversation.

Session One: Renewed by the Holy Spirit

The first Bible study session had 15 WPG members in attendance, including one who called in from Nigeria. The researcher began the session by introducing the topic of study, *Renewed by the Holy Spirit*, and asked if any of the members would like to read the opening scriptural reference. After a volunteer read Acts 2:1-4, the researcher provided some context of the scriptural reference. Although the researcher had pre-established facilitator notes (Appendix B), through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the researcher was led to discuss the unique

similarities between Genesis 11:1-9 and Acts 2:1-4. Essentially, how God separated and brought people together by language, clarifying that at Pentecost, people “began to speak in other tongues,” not “speak in tongues.” Moreover, the arrival of the Holy Spirit was the “gift of the Holy Spirit” and not a “spiritual gift,” as presented in 1 Corinthians 12 through 14.

Next, the researcher asked the first question, “What is the significance of the filling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.” Though several WPG members discussed the Pentecost event, it was not discussed in the context of its purpose. The purpose of providing an account of the origin and growth of the Christian church. Members continued to discuss Pentecost as the time when people began speaking in tongues. The Festival of First Harvest was the celebration that people attended, expecting to receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The WPG was then asked, “How does the Pentecost impact you today?” To answer this question, members of the group answered it in terms of how it should holistically impact Christians. During the dialogue, it was clear to the researcher that some of the members either did not understand the context of the question or believed they understood yet unknowingly answered the question incorrectly. Realizing that the question was not answered, one of the members said, “I’d like to go back to answer the question,” and then proceeded to explain the personal impact of the Pentecost. The personal impact for this member was knowing the member has a comforter that dwells within.

As the session ended, there was not enough time to ask the final question, “What is the connection to Jesus Christ?” The WPG had to stay on schedule because the group still needed time for content review and session closeout. Therefore, the researcher asked the WPG to consider how the context of the discussion and Acts 2:1-4 connects them back to Christ, and the Bible study session will pick up during the next session.

Session Two: Encouraged by the Holy Spirit

As the weather allowed for a face-to-face meeting, the second WPG Bible study session resumed meeting at the church offices. After 15 minutes of praise and worship, the researcher began the second session by providing a content review of the first session, Renewed by the Holy Spirit. After the review, the researcher introduced the new topic, Encouraged by the Holy Spirit, and asked for a volunteer to read the opening text, Acts 2:22-24; 36-40.

Next, using the pre-established facilitator notes, the researcher shared the context of the scriptural reference then asked the first question, “Why does spreading the gospel require Christians to have confidence in the Holy Spirit?” One member of the group shared that “there is really nothing you can do without the Holy Spirit” and that “the Holy Spirit can give you the confidence to stand bold even during persecution.” Another member stated that the Holy Spirit serves as a “personal conviction” and helps move away from things that are not right. Interestingly, during the conversation, one of the members restated the question and answered it by sharing that once the Holy Spirit resides in the person, the Holy Spirit gives confidence and the ability to share God can be done without fear.

The association between repentance and baptism was the purpose of the next question, “Why are repentance and baptism essential in the life of a believer?” As one of the members shared, people must surrender themselves as they are going through a process from being a “sinner and an unbeliever to a new person,” and for one to call themselves a Christian, repentance is the first step. Another member shared that repentance is the main ingredient, “it’s what every believer has to do, it’s continuous.”

Despite interest in understanding why repentance and baptism are essential in the life of a believer, one of the members had an issue with the question, saying it was “questionable.”

According to the member, people must repent and be baptized to become believers. Other members agreed with this analogy and continued sharing that becoming a believer is a process. As the discussion continued, the dialogue became intriguingly engaging as the WPG spoke quite elaborately, insisting that people must repent and be baptized before becoming believers. To challenge the group's thinking, the researcher asked, "Was John the Baptist baptized?" Noticeable changes in facial expressions emerged, yet no one responded. Contrary to the group's personal philosophies, they were unable to provide biblical examples of people who believed prior to baptism²⁵² or were not baptized at all.²⁵³

Ending the Bible study session, the researcher asked the final question, "What is the connection to Christ?" Like Session One, the question was geared toward how the lesson text leads us back to Christ. Nevertheless, answers varied as each member provided their understanding of what it means to be connected to Christ via baptism, adding that Jesus said He would never leave or forsake us. As one member noted, the connection to Christ is love such that Christ knew how fragile people are and that when He ascended to heaven, He knew how empty people would be, "He saw the emptiness when He was about to go. . .the emptiness of man" so He left something of Him.

Session Three: Silver and Gold, I Have None

The third session, Silver and Gold, I Have None, began with the usual 15 minutes of praise and worship followed by a content review of lessons learned from the first and second sessions. It was important for the researcher to provide a recap so that the WPG can begin recognizing the unique work of the Holy Spirit by gradually making connections from the biblical text. Using the pre-established facilitator notes, the researcher provided the background

²⁵² Acts 10

²⁵³ Luke 23:40-43

context of Acts 3:1-10, the lame beggar, highlighting that the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in Acts chapter three, yet the works of the Holy Spirit are present. Next, the researcher requested a member of the WPG to read the scriptural passage, and to open the discussion, the researcher asked the first question, “What was the spiritual gift used by Peter, and how was it accomplished?”

Though the model answer from the facilitator notes indicated the gift of healing²⁵⁴ accomplished through faith “in the name of Jesus,” the WPG provided various answers. One member stated, “the gift of healing,” others stated, “it was a miracle,” “the gift of faith,” and Peter “exercised his faith.” Further, one member shared that Christians must exercise their faith; otherwise, it will remain dormant. At this time, a transformative learning experience began to emerge as the WPG shared examples of how they respond to faith in their lives. Until one member asserted that all Christians could activate their faith because “it was given to us once we became believers, but it’s up to us to have that faith.” Although this statement is partially accurate, faith was not given to Christians once they become believers. Faith is nurtured in the heart of the hearer through the Word of God,²⁵⁵ and it is through faith that people come to believe.

Continuing the discussion, the WPG recognized that Peter not only had the gift of faith but also had authority in Jesus Christ, which led the researcher to ask the next question, “How do you exercise your authority in Jesus Christ?” One member shared that Christians must exercise their authority because “we have it in us, but we have to make that conscious effort because it's so easy for us to get caught up in our stuff and then forget we have that authority.” The WPG shared similar examples of what Christians should do to exercise authority. However, during this

²⁵⁴ Corinthians 12:1, 9

²⁵⁵ Romans 10:7

segment of the Bible study, some members of the WPG failed to specifically connect the question to what the WPG does to exercise their authority in Jesus Christ. It was clear to the researcher that the group did not understand the question until one member shared an experience. For this member, a decision was made not to call people the member knew to pray about a personal matter. Instead of making phone calls, the member decided to exercise authority by praying “in the name of Jesus.” The member stated, “I probably would have never done this, but it was in me, and I had to have the confidence that I can do it.” As a result, God answered the member’s request, resulting in a breakthrough.

To that end, the last question of the evening, “What is the connection to Jesus Christ?” was to reflect on the lesson text and discuss how exercising one’s faith and authority leads them back to Christ. As one member noted, the connection to Christ is that Christians were given the privilege to use His name, while another shared that Christians are not “ordinary people on the street” because Christians “carry His presence.” Another member of the group shared that the more Christians get to know God, the more confidence they have. Collectively, the WPG agreed that ultimately, Christians must know who they are in Christ, and in doing so, they will grow in faith and come to understand the power they hold when they call out His name.

Session Four: Remember to Say, “Thank You”

Finally, in the fourth session, Remember to Say, “Thank You,” the researcher began the discussion by reiterating previous discussions about being renewed and encouraged by the Holy Spirit and our authority in Jesus Christ. For this last session, the focus was on thanking God and recognizing the source of our blessings. As in the previous sessions, using the pre-established facilitator notes, the researcher provided the framework for the lesson, Acts 3:11-16, followed by asking a volunteer to read the opening text. Then, the researcher asked the first question, “Based

on Acts 3:11, how does this align with Isaiah 35:3-6 and John 10:22-24?" The purpose of this question was to help the group see the full circle of events of Isaiah's prophecy of the lame²⁵⁶ and the conflict of Jesus' identity²⁵⁷ and the healing of the lame man which both took place at Solomon's Colonnade.²⁵⁸

As the group began to ponder this revelation, the researcher opened the discussion for comments. One member stated that this discovery was "enlightening" and "never made the connection." The member also shared that this connection makes one think about things that have happened in one's life that come full circle, "like having an epiphany." Using Isaiah 7:14 as an example, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel," another member shared that the book of Isaiah is full of prophecy and that, as Christians, there should be mindfulness not to overlook what Isaiah has spoken that was fulfilled in the New Testament. Additional insight into this discussion was provided by a member who revisited John 10:22-24 by sharing that "in the very place Christ was treated negatively, His name was magnified."

With the present discussion, the researcher asked the following question, "Why is it difficult for Christians to give glory to God for the things He has done in our lives?" One member shared that after thinking about the question, "it's normal," suggesting that people take things for granted. Another member shared that people "don't feel the need" because they have become content in their current circumstances presuming, they are not experiencing life challenges. As a consensus, the group believed that there was a level of pride that interferes with one's acknowledgment of thanking God, having the "me, me, me" mindset. However, people

²⁵⁶ Isaiah 35:6

²⁵⁷ John 10:22-24

²⁵⁸ John 10:22-24; Acts 3:11

who have worked hard, presumably harder than the next person and, as one person stated, “still come up with nothing but can still praise God,” know how to appreciate Him. Interestingly, one member indicated that “the older we are, the more appreciative we become” and that “we can look at our environment and see what God is doing and know that He is a faithful and good God.”

Finally, as one member noted, everything comes back and centers on Jesus, which led the group to the last question, “What is the connection to Christ?” One member stated that “we have to be continually renewed.” The researcher was encouraged to hear this statement as it served as a reminder from the second session, Encouraged by the Holy Spirit. Further, another member shared that the Holy Spirit could help us by first “calling to Him for help,” specifically when people begin to worry. At this point, the researcher shared that worrying is misplaced trust and the continuous renewal of the Holy Spirit is a reminder of where our trust belongs. During this discussion segment, one member noted that when Christians worry, their faith reduces, the issue is placed above God, and we are “telling God that He is not able to help us.” To that end, the WPG concluded that it is essential to nurture a relationship with God as He is the sustainer of our life, and we must make him a priority over all things that concern us.

Post-Assessment Quantitative Results

Employing the same approach in aligning questions one through ten of the pre-assessment questionnaire, the researcher aligned the quantitative questions, one through ten of the post-assessment questionnaire. The quantitative questions aligned to LO-1, LO-2, and LO-3. Table 9 reflects a representation of this alignment.

Table 9: Post-Assessment LOs

Post-Assessment Alignment LOs		
#	LO & IT Objectives	Post-Assessment Questions
LO-1	Identify the essential features of the Bible.	2, 8
LO-2	Identify the biblical authors, characters, and their significance to the metanarrative.	3, 4, 5, 6, 7
LO-3	Interpret Scripture in its appropriate context.	1, 9, 10

It is worth noting that although questions one through ten of the post-assessment differ from questions one through ten of the pre-assessment, all the questions were designed to align with the respective learning outcome.

Post-Assessment LO-1

On March 9th, the WPG was given the link to the post-assessment to capture their improved state of biblical literacy. Of the seven members who attended the last session, five members completed the questionnaire. Based on the post-assessment results of LO-1, the responses of all five members show that they know the Epistles are in the New Testament (Figure 18) and the difference between the major and minor prophets (Figure 19).

Figure 18: Post-Assessment Question 2

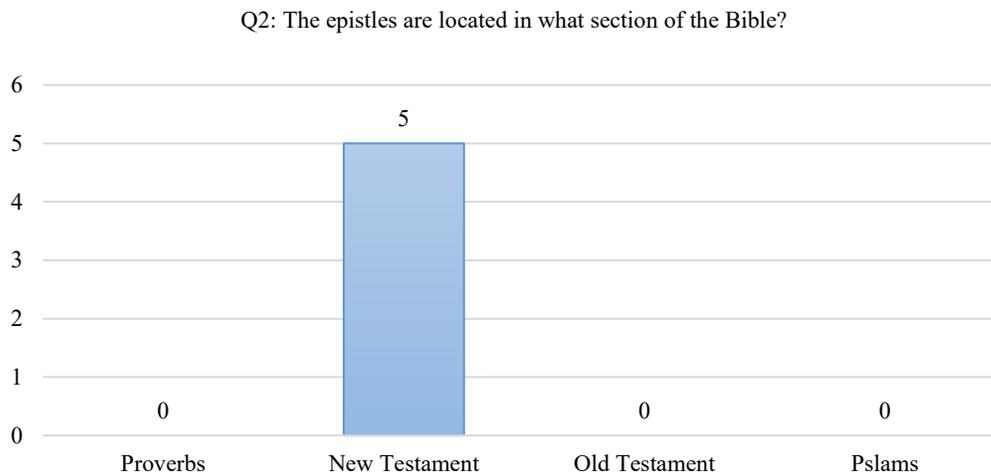
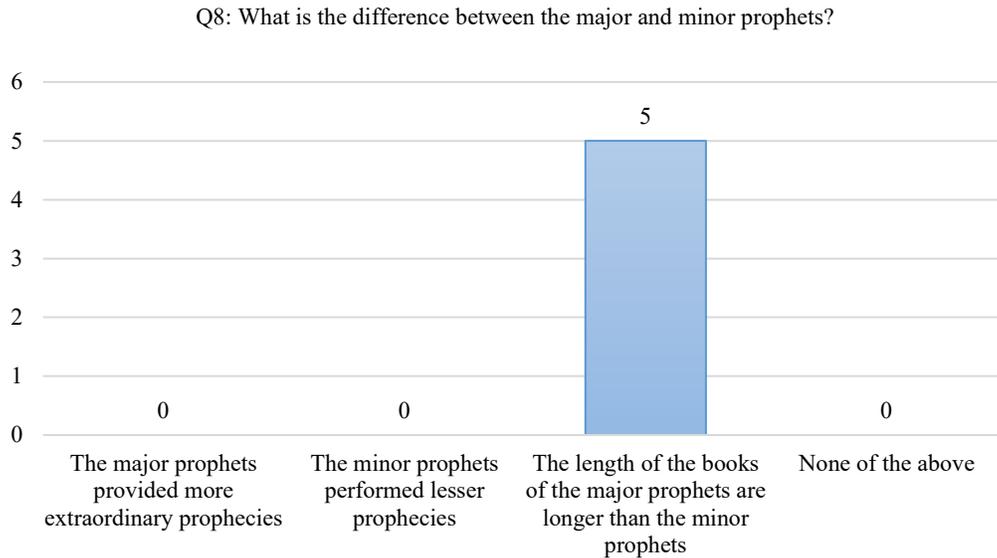


Figure 19: Post-Assessment Question 8



Post-Assessment LO-2

The post-assessment outcome for LO-2 indicates that all members know that Abraham gave his wife away twice because of fear (Figure 20). Four WPG members knew it was Mary who emulated Hannah in her song of praise (Figure 21), and one member recognized that the angel of the Lord was the pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ (Figure 22). Wind was the appropriate response as the representation of the Holy Spirit in which all five WPG members answered correctly (Figure 23), and four WPG members remembered that it was the tribe of Levi who was set apart in service of the Lord (Figure 24).

Figure 20: Post-Assessment Question 3

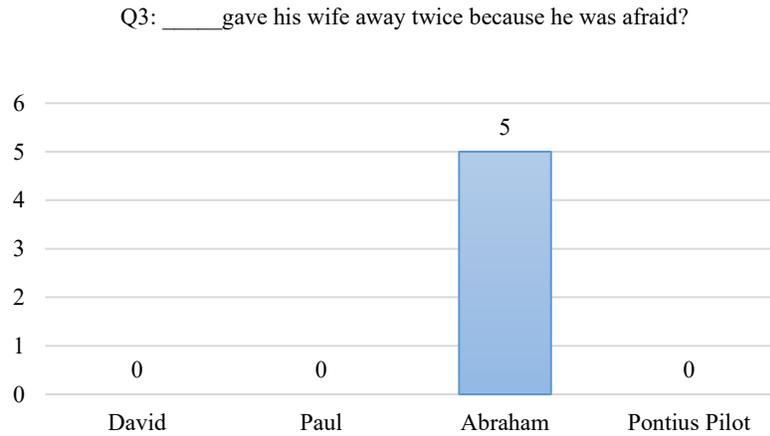


Figure 21: Post-Assessment Question 4

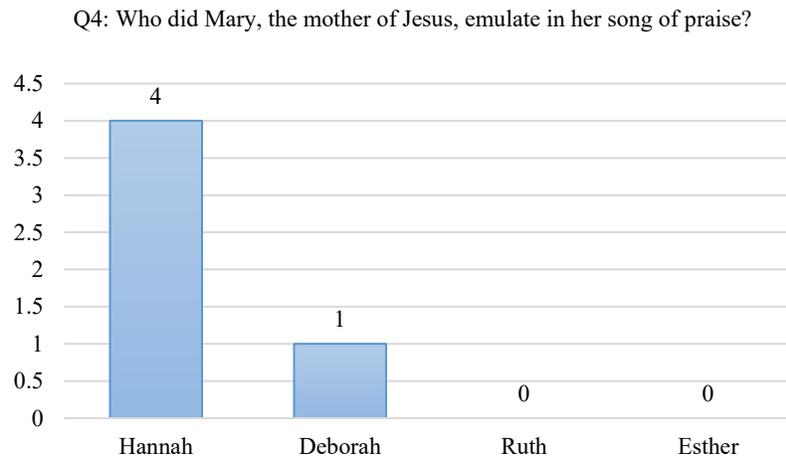


Figure 22: Post-Assessment Question 5

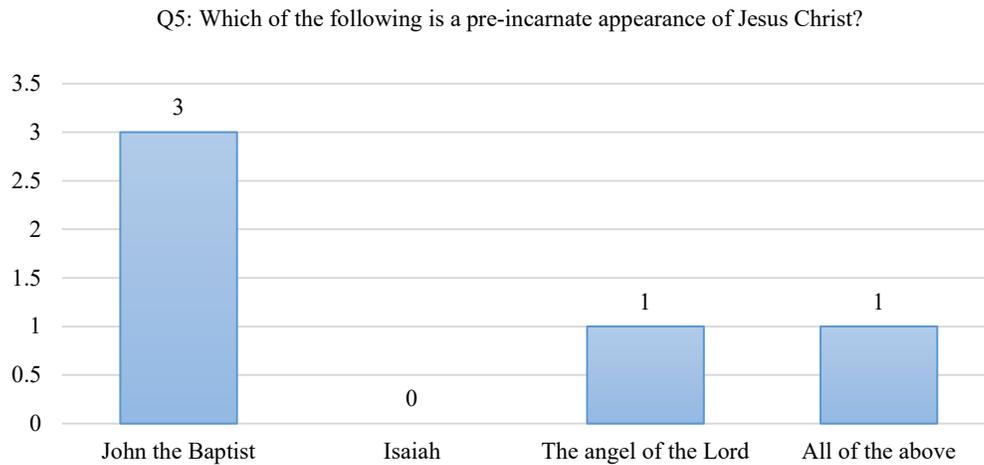


Figure 23: Post-Assessment Question 6

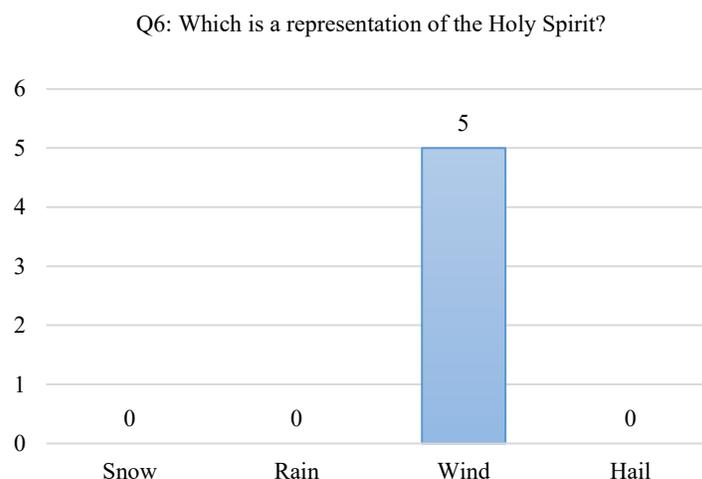
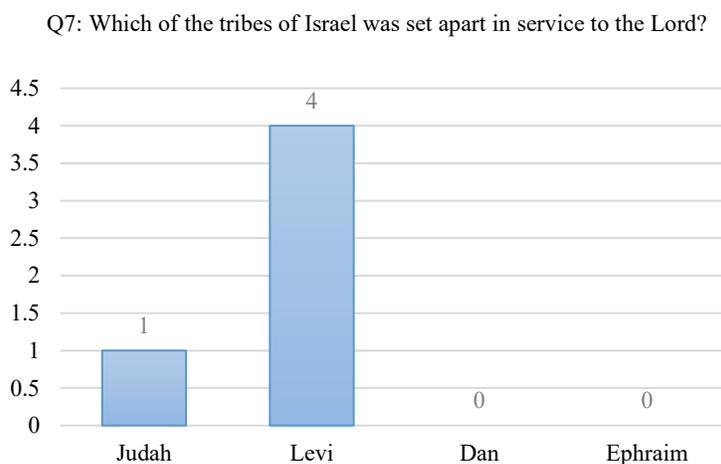


Figure 24: Post-Assessment Question 7



Post-Assessment LO-3

Finally, the post-assessment results for LO-3 revealed that two WPG members understood that Ephesians 5:18-19 was Paul's alternative to getting drunk (Figure 25). However, no one recognized that Psalm 105:1 was an invocation to praise God, not a command (Figure 26). Ultimately, one WPG member knew that 1 Corinthians 6:13 refers to the Corinthians' hedonistic lifestyle (Figure 27), and unfortunately, this response was not surprising. First Corinthians 6:13 was discussed during a Sunday Bible study session in which the facilitators inappropriately related the verse to gluttony and unhealthy eating habits.

Figure 25: Post-Assessment Question 1

Q1: According to Ephesians 5:18-19, Paul states the following "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord. . ."What is the context in which Paul makes this statement?

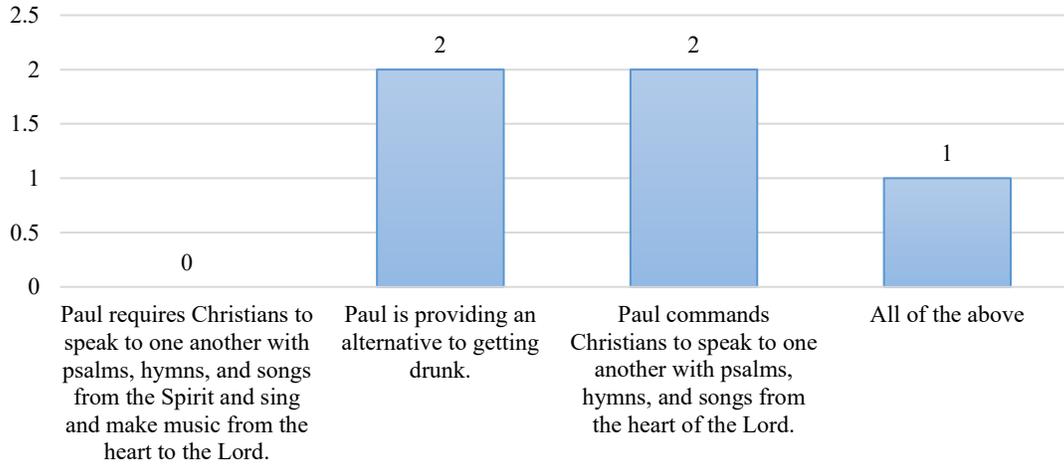


Figure 26: Post-Assessment Question 9

Q9: In Psalm 105:1, David states, "Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done." This statement is a/an _____.

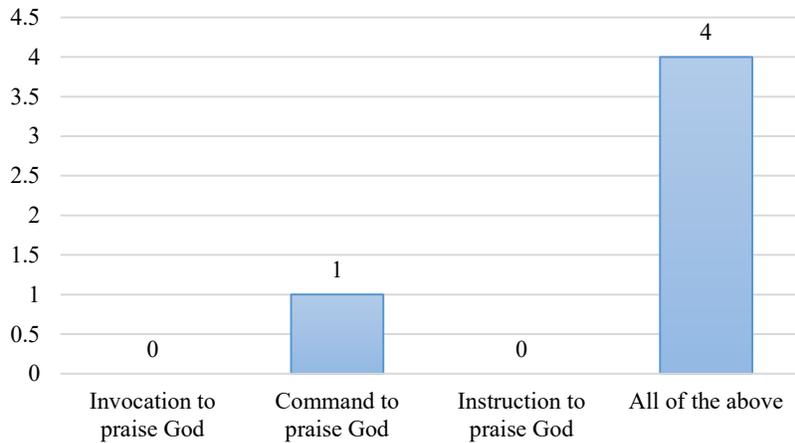
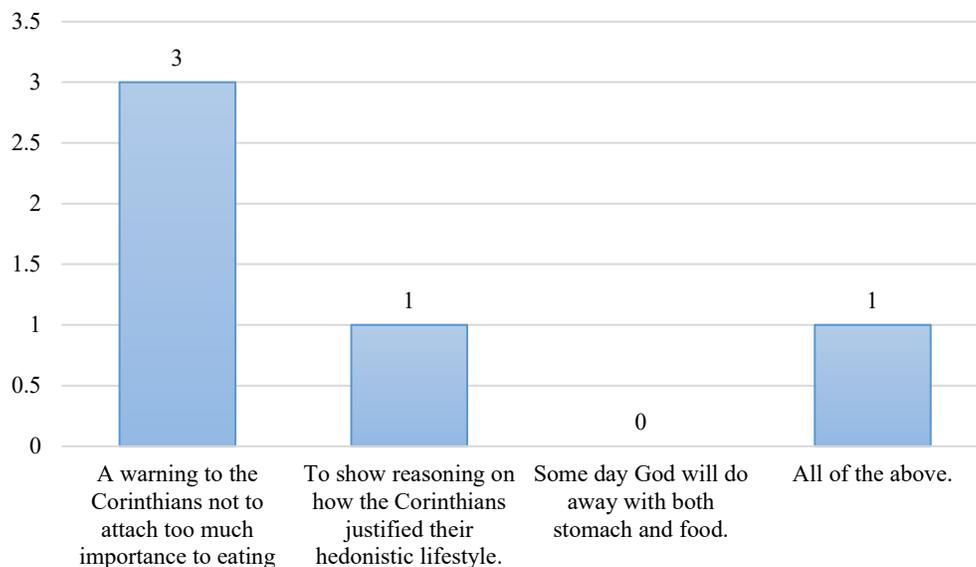


Figure 27: Post-Assessment Question 10

Q10: In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he says, "You say, 'Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both. . .'"(1 Corinthians 6:13). In what context was Paul referring to when he made this statement?



Final Results: Bible Study Learning Outcomes

As a precursor to the result of the Bible study learning outcomes, the post-assessment quantitative data results are reflected in Tables seven, eight, and nine. As previously indicated, the Bible study learning outcome results are the percentage of WPG members who correctly answered questions one through ten.

Table 10: Post-Assessment LO-1

Q#	Identify the essential features of the Bible.	Correct Answer	% of People With Correct Answers
2	The epistles are located in what section of the Bible?	New Testament	100%
8	What is the difference between the major and minor prophets?	The length of the books of the major prophets are longer than the minor prophets	100%
Post-Assessment			100%

Table 11: Post-Assessment LO-2

Q#	Identify the biblical authors, characters, and their significance to the metanarrative.	Correct Answer	% of People With Correct Answers
3	_____ gave his wife away twice because he was afraid	Abraham	100%
4	Who did Mary, the mother of Jesus, emulate in her song of praise?	Hannah	80%
5	Which of the following is a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ?	The angel of the Lord	20%
6	Which is a representation of the Holy Spirit	Wind	100%
7	Which of the tribes of Israel was set apart in service to the Lord?	Levi	80%
Post-Assessment			76%

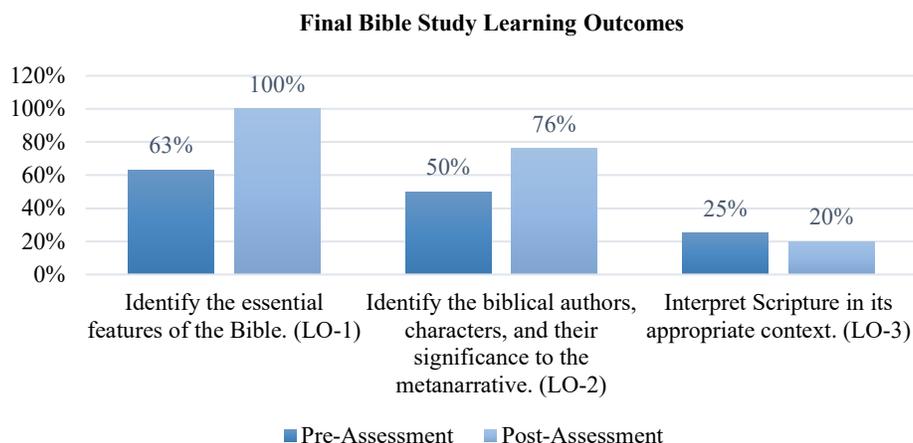
Table 12: Post-Assessment LO-3

Q#	Interpret Scripture in its appropriate context.	Correct Answer	% of People With Correct Answers
1	According to Ephesians 5:18-19, Paul states the following “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord. . .” What is the context in which Paul makes this statement?	Paul is providing an alternative to getting drunk.	40%
9	In Psalm 105:1, David states, “Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done.” This statement is a/an	Invocation to praise God	0%
10	In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, he says, “You say, 'Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both. . .' (1 Corinthians 6:13). In what context was Paul referring to when he made this statement?	To show reasoning on how the Corinthians justified their hedonistic lifestyle.	20%
Post-Assessment			20%

Based on the evaluation criteria of the quantitative results, the Bible study learning outcomes from the post-assessment results were LO-1 at 100%, LO-2 at 76%, and LO-3 at 20%. The

concluding results of the Bible study learning outcomes indicate a 37% increase for LO-1, 26% increase in LO-2, and a 5% decrease in LO-3 (Figure 28).

Figure 28: Final Bible Study Learning Outcome Results



Post-Assessment Qualitative Analysis

To determine the final results of the Identifiable Themes (ITs), the researcher examined the qualitative responses from the post-assessment questionnaire. Though the last five qualitative questions of the post-assessment were different, they were still aligned with the ITs. Table 13 is a representation of this alignment.

Table 13: Post-Assessment ITs

Post-Assessment ITs		
#	LO & IT Objectives	Pre-Assessment Questions
IT-1	Describe current Bible study methods.	11
IT-2	Discuss factors that influence biblical interpretation.	12, 14
IT-3	Employ appropriate resources that aid in biblical interpretation.	13
IT-4	Explain preferred methods of group Bible study.	15

Interestingly, the theme for IT-1 changed for the third time. As part of the focus group, IT-1 was classified as reading, and for the pre-assessment, IT-1 was classified as meditation. However, for the post-assessment, IT-1 is now classified as "transformation," while the

remaining themes exposition (IT-2; Q #12), guidance (IT-2; Q#14), biblical literacy (IT-3), and community (IT-4) stayed the same.

IT-1: Describe current Bible study methods, the WPG was asked to describe how their approach to Bible study has changed. The WPG shared that their approach to group Bible study has changed by recognizing they learned to pay more attention to authorial intent, got a deeper understanding of the text, or have enlarged their knowledge of the Word of God. Next, For *IT-2: Discuss factors that influence biblical interpretation*, the group was asked to describe how their ability to interpret Scripture has changed. Their responses indicated that the WPG relies more on the Holy Spirit to aid in biblical interpretation, allowing them to obtain a clearer understanding of the historical and spiritual message of the text.

Further, when the WPG was asked to describe the resources they will use to aid in biblical interpretation, the respondents acknowledged in *IT-3: Discuss factors that influence biblical interpretation* that there are plenty of biblical resources available. One member appears to continue to rely only on the Holy Spirit. Moreover, since IT-2 is also aligned with question 14, the WPG was asked to explain how the role of the Holy Spirit changed how they study the Bible. According to the group, the role of the Holy Spirit either did not change the way they studied the Bible, or the Holy Spirit provided a better understanding. Finally, for *IT-4: Explain preferred methods of group Bible study*, responses regarding their perceptions of group Bible study have changed by acknowledging that they learned a lot during the sessions, they believe in group Bible study, and they enjoyed learning from the shared experiences and perspectives of others.

Final Results: Identifiable Themes

Before drawing final conclusions, sentiment analysis was conducted to examine the post-assessment qualitative data. The evaluation criteria from the post-assessment sentiment analysis

revealed that the WPG preferred to be guided by the Holy Spirit for biblical interpretation (61%), followed by community as their Bible study method of choice (57%). While the WPG's change in scriptural interpretation ranked third (55%), resources used to aid in biblical interpretation (48%) is in the same fourth position as in the pre-assessment. Finally, the transformative learning experience (42%) of the WPG came in the last position.

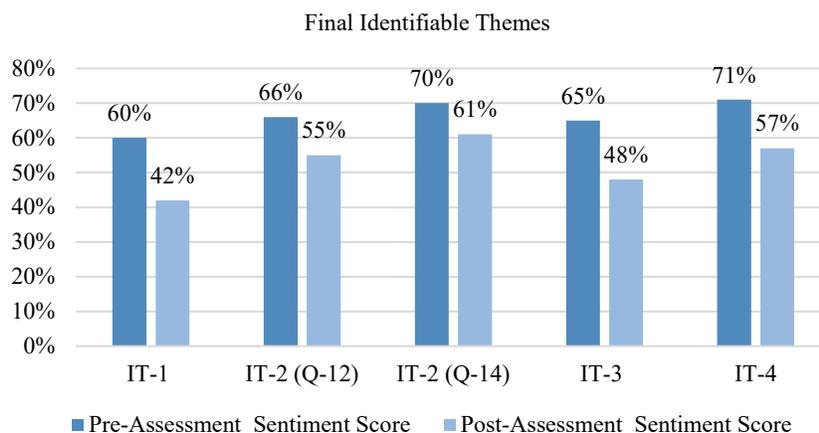
Table 14: Post-Assessment ITs & Sentiment Analysis Scores

IT-1		Question 11	
Describe current Bible study methods.		Describe how your approach to Bible study has changed.	
Response	Sentiment	Score	
It gives me deeper understanding sharing words with brethren.	positive	81%	
My approach has changed as I pay more attention to what the writer is saying and not my understanding based on my experience or someone else's interpretation of the scripture.	negative	2%	
See things differently and at peace.	positive	62%	
I see the importance of examining context when studying the Bible and not simply glossing over words.	negative	24%	
Group Bible study has enlarged my knowledge of the word of God.	neutral	47%	
		Post-Assessment	42%
IT-2		Question 12	
Discuss factors that influence biblical interpretation.		Describe how your ability to interpret Scripture has changed.	
Response	Sentiment	Score	
Through the knowledge of the Holy spirit.	positive	72%	
Interpreting the scripture had changed more because I now try to understand the historical context of what is going on when the writer wrote the particular passages of the Holy Bible.	negative	44%	
I rely on the Holy Spirit more	positive	66%	
I have a better understanding of language, historical and spiritual context, and the lenses used.	neutral	59%	
I have yielded myself more to the spirit of God, and this has helped me to interpret the word better.	negative	32%	
		Post-Assessment	55%
IT-3		Question 13	
Employ appropriate resources that aid in biblical interpretation.		Describe the resources you will use to aid in biblical interpretation.	
Response	Sentiment	Score	

There are lots of biblical resources that help in interpretation of the Bible. Am presently using life principles bible and other resources from moody bible institute.	positive	76%
I now use commentaries.	neutral	58%
Interactive method and meditation	positive	68%
I would use a Bible dictionary, a concordance to provide translation, context, and links to other passages and probably a map of the territories as they would have been.	neutral	46%
Holy Spirit. Personal I think, the spirit of God is still our greatest resources in interpreting His word	neutral	58%
Post-Assessment		61%
IT-2		
Question 14		
Discuss factors that influence biblical interpretation.	How has the role of the Holy Spirit changed how you study the Bible?	
Response	Sentiment	Score
It gives me deeper meaning to what I read.	positive	67%
I allow the Holy Spirit to speak to me regarding the scripture being read.	neutral	46%
He guides me	negative	26%
I have a greater understanding of authority with which those words and interpretations were written vs if they were interpreted by man.	neutral	53%
I believe that His role hasn't changed. Because He's God. He remained the same.	negative	38%
Post-Assessment		48%
IT-4		
Question 15		
Explain preferred methods of group Bible study.	How has your perception of group Bible study changed?	
Response	Sentiment	Score
It helps to build each other up	positive	74%
I learned a lot during this session. The information I received allowed me to study the Bible differently.	positive	61%
Tremendously and learn new views from other. God speaks to all differently to achieve same goal	positive	78%
I believe that we are better served by a Bible study that not only spiritual but also rational. It should be studied in the same way as another academic course.	negative	29%
I believe strongly in it. Because it expands my knowledge and help me to see things in other people's perspectives.	neutral	46%
Post-Assessment		57%

The final results reveal an 18% decrease for IT-1, 11% decrease for IT-2 (Q-12), 9% decrease for IT-2 (Q-14), 17% decrease for IT-3, and 14% decrease for IT-4.

Figure 29: Final Identifiable Themes Results



It is important to note here that a percentage increase was not the goal for the ITs. The objective of the ITs was to show an improved understanding of biblical literacy, which was accomplished. For example, in response to question 11 for IT-1, one WPG member stated, "My approach has changed as I pay more attention to what the writer is saying and not my understanding based on my experience or someone else's interpretation of the scripture." This response resulted in a negative (2%) sentiment score. Likewise, in response to question 12 for IT-2, a WPG member stated, "Interpreting the scripture had changed more because I now try to understand the historical context of what is going on when the writer wrote the particular passages of the Holy Bible." This response also received a negative (44%) sentiment score. The responses to question 11 for IT-1 and question 12 for IT-2 should have, at a minimum, yielded neutral results. The context of the answers favored an expositional Christ-centered approach to Bible study. However, in this instance, the responses' sureness was not captured by Azure Machine Learning.

What is more, IT-2 question 14 received two negative scores (26% and 38%). However, the respondents stated, "He guides me" and "I believe that His role hasn't changed. Because He's God. He remained the same." Like question 11 for IT-1 and question 12 for IT-2, these results

should have also yielded, at a minimum, a neutral result. Nevertheless, the researcher believes these responses were unfavorable because there were not enough words to provide an appropriate score. The wording used in response to the questions triggered a negative result. Lastly, IT-4 received a negative (29%) sentiment score. In response to question 15, a respondent stated, "I believe that we are better served by a Bible study that's not only spiritual but also rational. It should be studied in the same way as another academic course." Though employing a Bible study session as an academic effort may be too much, the fact that the respondent recognized that Bible study should be a spiritual and practical experience is a step in the right direction leading toward a transformative learning experience.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

It seems plausible that this action research will conclude by confirming that biblical literacy is an emerging concern that must be addressed. Instead of engaging in discussions that depend on Sunday school teachers subjectively informing congregants what the Bible teaches them, the congregation must collectively learn how to study the Bible through an exegetical, expositional, and hermeneutical understanding to avoid misreading and misapplying the sacred text. Because theological education not only occurs in colleges and universities, churches must also consider delivering Christ-centered Bible study sessions that inculcate a dependence on the text. Doing so will empower believers to know the Bible to facilitate understanding and critical reflections that support their transformative learning journeys while increasing biblical literacy.

Although this study is exploratory, with contributions providing a framework for future research, the findings of this study suggest opportunities to examine expositional Christ-centered Bible study within other ministries or personal study to include promoting programs that teach foundational exegetical, expositional, and hermeneutical principles. Most importantly, as noted by Zuck, “approach the Scriptures with sound judgment and reason, seeking to be as objective in his approach to the Bible as possible, without coming to the Scriptures with prejudice or preconceived notions.”²⁵⁹

Christ-Centered Overview

One of the fascinating aspects of this action research was that the researcher was learning by doing. During the implementation phase, though the researcher had pre-established facilitator notes, the researcher still had a responsibility to thoroughly prepare to facilitate Bible study sessions. This meant the researcher had to continually engage in various sources, up to and

²⁵⁹ Zuck, *Bible Interpretation*, 25.

including reading different versions of the Bible (i.e., NIV, ESV, CSB, NLT). Thus, while implementing a triangular approach to an expositional Christ-centered Bible study, the researcher has identified lessons learned, emerging themes, and key findings that influence the application of results and recommendations for future research.

Lessons Learned

The action research reported herein has taught the researcher several valuable lessons. First, the researcher learned that a responsible Bible study facilitator must fully prepare to host Bible study sessions. The preparation consists of meditation, prayer, studying the lesson text, and engaging other biblical interpretive resources. As the facilitator, the researcher had to ensure that in the event questions were asked, the researcher was prepared to answer or at minimum provide scriptural references in support of a response. Second, though the researcher toggles between the New International Version (NIV) and the English Standard Version (ESV) of the Bible, the researcher learned that the WPG has a preference in Bible translations, the New King James Version (NKJV). This preference may be because the Senior Pastor favors the NKJV as well.

Further, the researcher learned that some of the qualitative questions lacked clarity. As an example, item 12 on the post-assessment states, “Describe how your ability to interpret Scripture has changed.” Question 14 states, “How has the role of the Holy Spirit changed how you study the Bible?” Question 12 was designed to capture changes in the members’ personal ability to interpret Scripture. Question 14 was designed to capture changes in how the Holy Spirit helps them study the Bible. It appeared that respondents may have considered these questions to be the same, yet they were different. As such, the responses to questions 12 and 14 of the post-assessment appeared to have similar responses. This ambiguity may have influenced the unfavorable IT-2 responses of the post-assessment sentiment analysis scores.

Despite this, the researcher learned that while the results indicated an increase in biblical literacy, there should be a church-wide effort to increase biblical literacy from a Pentecostal theology lens. As Pentecostals are people of the Spirit, reading the Bible in its proper context will enhance spiritual understanding. As the researcher conducted the Bible study session, a penchant for topical rather than expositional studies were apparent. Also, since the researcher is a member of a predominantly African church, the researcher had to consciously navigate through and be sensitive to cultural subjectivity.

Emerging Themes

During the implementation phase, an emerging theme began to present itself. One of which warrants immediate attention. As the Bible study lessons focused on the work of the Holy Spirit, nurturing a relationship with God, specifically during times of struggle, was also discussed. It became apparent that future Bible study lessons are warranted that focus on depression, anxiety, worry, patience, and hope. These future lessons can be entitled, “Conformed to the Image of Christ.”

Christ-Centered Community

Expositional Christ-centered Bible studies focusing on depression, anxiety, worry, patience, and hope would be ideal for addressing these reoccurring themes. This approach will allow for the opportunity for a community of believers to share life’s challenges without being made to feel that the challenges they are experiencing are a result of their lack of faith in God. Sadly, in the church, Christians often offer “scriptural platitude and a dose of condemnation for failing to rejoice in the midst of their trials.”²⁶⁰ Understanding that all believers struggle, the

²⁶⁰ Jennifer LeClaire, *The Prophet’s Devotional: 365 Daily Invitations to Hear, Discern, and Activate the Prophetic*, (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 2021), 89.

trials Christians face are not always attributed to spiritual warfare. Christians should not emphasize one realm at the expense of the other.²⁶¹ However, according to Matthew Stanford, it is during these times that relationships are most important. According to Stanford,

We were created to be in a relationship with God. God himself said that it is not good for us to be alone (Genesis 2:18). While our first and greatest relational need is to know God, we should never underestimate the importance of being in fellowship with other believers.²⁶²

Christ-Centered Guidance

An expositional Christ-centered curriculum studying biblical characters who have experienced similar issues could include topics such as Naomi, who became bitter after losing a husband and two sons,²⁶³ Elijah, who was discouraged and afraid,²⁶⁴ and Job, who suffered a loss.²⁶⁵ Participants can see, exegetically and hermeneutically, God working in the background through these stories and learn to be rooted in and built up in Christ.²⁶⁶ Also, a session on the scriptural alignment between James 1:12 and Matthew 5:3-12. The theme of these Scriptures is what it means to be blessed. Additionally, a future session on James 1:2-4 and what it means to consider pure joy. During these sessions, participants also need reminding that they can do all things through Christ who strengthens them.²⁶⁷

²⁶¹ Neil T. Anderson, Terry E. Zuehlke, and Julianne S. Zuehlke, *Christ-Centered Therapy: The Practical Integration of Theology and Psychology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 89.

²⁶² Matthew S. Stanford, *Grace for the Afflicted: A Clinical and Biblical Perspective on Mental Illness*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2017), 7.

²⁶³ Ruth 1:3-4; 20.

²⁶⁴ 1 Kings 19:4.

²⁶⁵ Job 2:9; 3-36.

²⁶⁶ Colossians 2:6-7.

²⁶⁷ Philippians 4:13.

Christ-Centered Mindset

As some seasons of life can feel overwhelming and exhausting, during these times, Christians think they help by saying, “God has a plan for you,” “things happen for a reason,” or “God will not put more on you than you can bear.” Though these statements appear to be an encouragement, they are not helpful for the Christian sufferer. Their pain is real and present, and casting doubt on their faith makes matters worse. As a result, the inability to handle challenges with the appropriate mindset becomes heightened. These expositional Bible study sessions will encourage and support transformative learning, and where appropriate, recommendations can be made for outside professional help.

It is worth noting that the researcher is not a practicing therapist or psychologist. However, the researcher recognizes that the church often fails to acknowledge that congregants suffer in silence without seeking pastoral help for fear of praying it away without helping to address the distress. Therefore, as a community of believers, studying Scripture and biblical characters who had similar experiences may help members refocus and redirect their energy on the power of God.

Key Findings

The findings of this action research make it evident that there are some alignments between the results of the study and the literature review. Particularly with respect to the Pentecostal tradition and reliance on the Holy Spirit. Notwithstanding that the lesson of the implemented Bible study centered on the works of the Holy Spirit, the WPG emphasized their dependence on the Holy Spirit in their personal lives and biblical interpretation.

Holy Spirit at Work

As mentioned in the literature review, though the Christian community acknowledges the work of the Holy Spirit, Pentecostals especially seek to engage the Holy Spirit regularly as part of their faith tradition. Without the baptism of the Holy Spirit, one cannot engage with God to effectively interpret His Word. As respondents noted in the pre-and post-assessments, their reliance on the Holy Spirit has increased, and they engage with Him to serve as a guide, a teacher, and to reveal the heart of God through the Word of God. All of which align with the ‘me’ portion of Grey’s three-pronged Pentecostal hermeneutical framework.

However, it is important to consider that while the reader must depend on the Spirit of God as a function of biblical interpretation, His role does not mean that the interpreter’s reading is without error. According to Zuck,

Inerrancy and infallibility are characteristics of the Bible’s original manuscripts but not for the Bible’s interpreters. Individuals have the right to interpret the Bible but this does not mean that all the results of the private interpretation will be accurate.²⁶⁸

Life Application of the Pentecostal Tradition

Part of Grey’s Pentecostal hermeneutical framework, the ‘them’ refers to the recognition of the ancient community and how Pentecostals attempt to understand the historical-cultural context of that time. While this may be true for some Pentecostals, this was not the case for the WPG. They were, however, more aligned with Duvall and Hays’ Protestant linear hermeneutical process, specifically step five, which is the life application of the theological principle(s). During the Bible study, the second question of each session outline was geared towards life application and a transformative learning experience. It would make sense that this portion of the research would align with Duvall and Hays instead of Grey.

²⁶⁸ Zuck, *Biblical Interpretation*, 24.

Andragogy of the WPG

While pursuing the relevant literature, the concept of adult learning methodologies was critical to this inquiry. Beyond the relevant work done, the important role of an andragogical and transformative learning approach seeks to engage adult learners at various stages of their spiritual growth. This approach offers a framework in which pastors and Bible study teachers appeal to an audience varied in life experiences. Constructing sermons and a Bible study curriculum that challenges the congregation while meeting their spiritual needs will foster, encourage, and contribute to their Christian development. At present, the results indicate that the six principles of andragogy: learners need to know, self-concept of the learner, prior experience of the learner, readiness to learn, the orientation of learning, and motivation to learn, were present in this action research.

For instance, at the beginning of the Bible study sessions, the researcher presented some insight regarding the scriptural references. This insight allowed the WPG to learn and understand the context in which the text was written in preparation to receive the lesson for the evening. Some of the action items the researcher talked about during the first session were the purpose of the book of Acts, the author of the book, Peter's speech to an international audience, and the similarities of the Pentecost and the Tower of Babel. Discussing the similarities between the Pentecost and the Tower of Babel was an intriguing dialog as the WPG learned that God separated and brought people together through language. After providing the background of Acts 2:1-4, the WPG was asked, "How does the Pentecost impact you today?" Here is where the WPG shared experiences of instituting their self-concept by explaining the impact of the Holy Spirit as one who convicts and redirects them. As Stanford maintains,

The Scripture teach us that we are to submit ourselves to Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, allowing him to transform our minds (Romans 12:1-2). As our minds are

transformed and our thoughts are taken captive to Christ, he begins to take control of the “members” of our body, changing our behavior and transforming our relationships (Colossians 3: 5-10).²⁶⁹

Because the second set of questions presented within the session outlines was specially designed to warrant subjective responses to capture and incorporate shared experiences, prior experience of the learner contributed to the active engagement of the group. As an example, in the third session, the WPG was asked, “How do you exercise your authority in Jesus Christ?” Responses varied, most of which the WPG collectively discussed what Christians should do, not what the WPG specifically does to exercise their authority in Christ. Nevertheless, as the discussion continued, one member caught on and understood what the question meant. Based on this revelation, the member was able to share an experience in which the member exercised authority in the name of Jesus, ultimately resulting in a breakthrough.

Next, another key finding was that bi-weekly WPG meetings indicate that the members were ready to learn. After the 15 minutes of praise and worship, there were 30 minutes of Bible study. During the session, there was discussion and question-and-answer. Each member contributed to the conversation and attempted to assist others by providing answers to their questions. For example, in the fourth session, a member discussed personal matters in which the member was dealing, which prompted another member to ask, “Do you have the Holy Spirit?” The first member replied, “I don’t know.” The conversation ensued by informing the member that the Holy Spirit is needed to help deal with the member’s issues. At this time, the researcher interceded and shared with the group that this member does have the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit resides within and never left. However, the overwhelming circumstances of life have triggered a shift in focus, causing the Holy Spirit to lay dormant. As the researcher positively redirected the

²⁶⁹ Stanford, *Grace for the Afflicted*, 12.

conversation, the member was appreciative and encouraged. This illustration also serves as a catalyst why expositional Christ-centered Bible study sessions are warranted to help discuss matters such as this.

Further comparison to the literature review confirms a level of psychological comfort to read the Bible to find Scriptures that will give spiritual rest. This formational reading requires Christians to open their Bibles and be vulnerable enough to accept the teaching regardless of its alignment with their philosophies. This orientation to learning was evident during the Bible study sessions when members would often provide scriptural references in support of circumstances in which they were seeking biblical justification for decisions made.

While this was encouraging, it was also crucial for the researcher to consider that the WPG members were all not motivated to learn by the same thing. Each member brings their respective experiences to the session, presenting a transformative learning experience for all those involved. As such, the researcher had to try to facilitate the Bible study session as outlined and when the opportunity presents itself, and if asked, the researcher can share insight, inviting others to contribute to this discussion. An example of this occurred during the third session when a member in attendance appeared to be unmotivated throughout. After several attempts to encourage contribution, the member remained uninterested.

Bible Study Engagement

Also noted in the theoretical foundations was the concept of Bible study withdrawal. The withdrawal was evident as participation declined from the first to the fourth session. There were 15 WPG members in the first session, six in the second session, and seven in the third and fourth sessions. According to Wilkin, avoiding Bible study withdrawal would include incorporating a curriculum that integrates structure, accountability, and predictability.

During the implementation phase, the Christ-centered curriculum was structured and predictable. It was structured because the researcher was careful to ensure the session outlines allowed for personal reflection while exposing and introducing theologies of the lesson text. It was predictable because the researcher continued to host the bi-weekly Bible study sessions on Tuesdays from 7 pm-8 pm. Additionally, teaching was consistent and supported by a comprehensive preparation process.

Intentionally, the researcher did not include Wilkin's accountability portion of the curriculum, which meant setting defined expectations for the group. For the researcher, the expectation was that members of the WPG would attend the Bible study sessions during the regularly scheduled time and participate in the same manner as in previous WPG meetings. The only difference was that the researcher would host the opening sessions of the year. Also, the curriculum did not include homework to discuss during an upcoming session. The researcher decided not to include homework as part of the curriculum design to avoid disinterest in participation in this action research.

Application of Results

The study results confirmed that implementing an expositional Christ-centered approach to Bible study increases biblical literacy. As such, the researcher believes this study method can apply in various settings within the church. To start, the men's group can adopt this method if one or some of them are willing to be vulnerable enough to have their proclivities challenged to reveal the Word of God that may be contrary to their belief systems. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, this approach will require Bible study facilitators to conduct additional research in preparation for an expositional Bible study session. Additionally, because this approach adopts a triangular design, the men will have to gradually learn to be willing to share testimonies as part

of the transformational learning process as prior experience, and motivation to learn are andragogical variables contributing to a fruitful Bible study experience.

Most importantly, because SCC is a predominantly African church with various ethnicities, most men will have to learn to humble themselves and accept the sacred text in its literal meaning, void of interpretation from a cultural perspective. The interpretation of Scripture from a one-sided lens, regardless of culture, results in the misalignment and misapplication of Scripture. Briefly stated, the men would have to consider hermeneutics and exegesis without the interference of an African point of view. This concept is contrary to the African biblical hermeneutics presented in the literature review.

Further, the results of the study can also be applied by changing the Bible study curriculum. At present, RCCG-NA provides the Bible study material, which includes topical Bible study outlines for the year. Though topical outlines have their place for study, they do not adopt expositional Christ-centered learning. Because accepting this methodology will cause a complete shift to studying Scripture, Bible study facilitators will have to learn the foundations of hermeneutics and exegesis to apply proper exposition.

Finally, the study results can be applied by changing the format of the Wednesday mid-week services to mid-week Bible study. Praise, worship, tithes, and offering are still a part of the program, yet the sermon segment would be dedicated to Bible study instead of preaching. The thrust of this approach is that the Senior Pastor, or whoever is assigned for the evening, can teach the entire congregation, which can be done in two ways. One, the teacher for the evening can develop lessons that are aligned with the Sunday sermon. This alignment will allow the congregation to learn about the historical-cultural context, ancient-near eastern issues or events of the day, and authorial intent that supports the sermon for the upcoming Sunday. Alternatively,

the mid-week Bible study can be thematic, like the researcher's implementation design, "The Work of the Spirit," focusing on Acts chapters two and three and 1 Peter 1:3-9.

Recommendation for Future Research

This action research aimed to examine Bible study sessions taught from an expositional Christ-centered approach to increase biblical literacy. The objective was to implement a triangular approach focusing on scriptural theology, Bible study methodology, and a transformative approach to Christ-centered learning. Because there is much work to do to address biblical literacy, the researcher provides recommendations for future research. First, this action research was limited to the researcher's home church. Future research suggests implementing Christ-centered Bible studies in neighboring RCCG-NA churches with similar small group events. Since these churches may be employing the same Bible study curriculum as offered by RCCG-NA, this will require them to transition their Bible study curriculum from topical learning to an expositional learning approach.

Second, future research suggests developing hermeneutical and exegetical skills to learn how to read and understand the Bible based on its literary style. For example, though the book of Luke is a gospel, it is also biographical. Luke is also a physician and historian. Therefore, Luke's account of Jesus' ministry is from the perspective of a scientist²⁷⁰ and researcher²⁷¹. Readers should familiarize themselves with these types of nuances while simultaneously paying particular attention to the authorial intent of the overarching theme. To do this successfully requires the establishment of a program that teaches the fundamentals of inductive Bible study.

²⁷⁰ Luke 9:10-11

²⁷¹ Ibid., 1:1-4.

Inductive Bible study is a method of Bible study that allows readers to study the Bible, independent of the church or group settings. In his research on inductive Bible study in his church, Burl Mackey says, “Inductive Bible study is a method or strategy which helps the students effectively comprehend the Bible and guide them to study the Bible on their own.”²⁷² For inductive Bible study, there are four steps to employ this method: observation, interpretation, contemplation, and application. Each step is independent of each other yet is connected to contribute to the success of the holistic inductive process. If done correctly, inductive Bible study answers the Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How? of the text.

Third, for the future, a recommendation is for the Senior Pastor, or whoever is assigned to preach for that Sunday, to learn and adopt andragogical learning principles in sermon preparation. When this occurs, the Pastor of the day can capture the congregation, drawing upon biblical principles that help the audience create a sense of why a particular lesson applies to their current need. Furthermore, on Sunday morning, as most members prepare for a readiness to learn, the sermon, if constructed based on andragogical principles and presented with a charismatic Pentecostal flare, will support the congregations’ spiritual growth.

Finally, a recommendation for future research is a study on pneumatology, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This study would align with the Pentecostal faith tradition and its dependence on the Holy Spirit. This dependence does not invalidate God’s sovereignty. However, understanding the active role of the Holy Spirit as part of the Trinity will help understand the person and ministry of the Spirit of God.

²⁷² Burl E. Mackey, “Teaching Met at Baptist Church Stroud, Oklahoma, Inductive Bible Study as a Spiritual Discipline” (DMin thesis, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002), 33.

Christ-Centered Final Thought

In conclusion, the purpose of this action research was to examine Bible study sessions taught from an expositional Christ-centered approach to increase biblical literacy. This approach increased the level of biblical literacy such that members of the Schaumburg Community Church Women's Prayer Group experienced the Bible from the perspective of revelation instead of interpolation. This study represents the first attempt to examine expositional Christ-centered Bible study to increase biblical literacy. As part of this effort, the researcher garnered data to understand Bible study from the participants' perspective. Though not all readers of the Bible are interested in having a deeper understanding of the sacred text, those who do, benefit from the treasures that God reveals in his Word.

In Chapter One, the researcher explained the problem that addressed the need for an expositional Christ-centered approach to increase biblical literacy. Chapter Two underpinned the problem posited by relevant literature and theological and theoretical foundations. The researcher presented the intervention design in Chapter Three, which included a Bible study curriculum that captured the pre-and-post state of biblical literacy. Also included in Chapter Three was an explanation of the implementation of the intervention design that outlined the steps in the process and how the data was collected, analyzed, interpreted. Results were presented in Chapter Four, which confirmed that an expositional Christ-centered Bible study would increase biblical literacy.

Throughout this action research, the researcher, as the facilitator, confirmed the desire to teach Bible study. However, not a topical session or a Bible study session that enlists someone's popular devotion about a particular text. The researcher is interested in teaching Bible study that includes designing a curriculum void of focusing "on the controversial at the expense of the

important.”²⁷³ As said by Jin Su Choi, “Bible study should not be limited to acquiring superficial information about the Book but induce believers to change in Christ.”²⁷⁴ Therefore, the researcher is attracted to the idea of promoting a Bible study program that encourages an inductive approach that requires the use of hermeneutical, exegetical, and expositional principles that help learners interact with the text, grasp the truth, and allow God to imprint His message on the hearts and minds of His children.

²⁷³ Jin Su Choi, “Training Older Adults for Personal Bible Study at First Virginia Baptist Church” (DMin thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 51.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

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Appendix A

BIBLE STUDY SYLLABUS: THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

Session Description: As the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is the core of the Christian faith, and if Christians are going to live victoriously, understanding the work of the Spirit is key. Therefore, these Bible study sessions will review Scripture in which participants familiarize themselves with the role of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Session Expectations: To engage in an expositional Christ-centered approach to Bible study that allows participants to experience the sacred text from the perspective of the theology of Scripture, Bible study methodology, and transformative learning.

Learning Outcomes

- 1) Identify the essential features of the Bible.
- 2) Identify the biblical authors, characters, and their significance to the metanarrative.
- 3) Interpret Scripture in its appropriate context

Session Materials

Title	Text Information
Holy Bible	Participants are free to use the version of the Holy Bible in which they are most familiar. (i.e., CSB, ESV, KJV, NKJV, NIV, etc.)
Optional Materials	Participants are free to use and bring resources that aid in biblical interpretation.

Session Outline

Session 1: Renewed by the Holy Spirit

- God's promise
- The beginning of the last days
- Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Session 2: Encouraged by the Holy Spirit

- Confidence in the Holy Spirit
- The resurrection of Christ
- Saved by grace

Session 3: Silver and Gold, I Have None

- Hopeless, helpless, and dependent
- The acceptance of spiritual help
- God's greater purpose

Session 4: Remember to Say "Thank You"

- Demonstration of faith
- Exercising authority
- Giving God glory

Session 5: Eternal Treasure

- Promised inheritance
- A new identity in Christ
- Living hope

Session 6: The Genuineness of Your Faith

- Suffer without sinning
- Professing and embracing faith
- Salvation of souls

Appendix B

BIBLE STUDY LESSON PLAN

Week 1: Renewed by the Holy Spirit

Scripture Reference: Acts 2:1-4

¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Discussion Topics:

- God's promise
- The beginning of the last days
- Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Discussion Questions

- 1) What is the significance of the filling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost?
- 2) How does Pentecost impact you today?
- 3) What is the connection to Christ?

Week 2: Encouraged by the Holy Spirit

Scripture Reference: Acts 2:22-24; 36-40

²²“Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

³⁶“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.” ³⁷When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” ⁴⁰With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”

Discussion Topics:

- Confidence in the Holy Spirit
- The resurrection of Christ
- Saved by grace

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Why does spreading the gospel require Christians to have confidence in the Holy Spirit?
- 2) Why are repentance and baptism essential in the life of a believer?
- 3) What is the connection to Christ?

Week 3: Silver and Gold, I Have None

Scripture Reference: Acts 3:1-10

¹One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon.

²Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” ⁵So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” ⁷Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. ⁸He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Discussion Topics:

- Hopeless, helpless, and dependent
- The acceptance of spiritual help
- God’s greater purpose

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What was the spiritual gift used by Peter, and how was it accomplished?
- 2) How do you exercise your authority in Jesus Christ?
- 3) What is the connection to Christ?

Week 4: Remember to Say “Thank You”

Scripture Reference: Acts 3: 11-16

¹¹While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade. ¹²When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

Discussion Topics:

- Demonstration of faith
- Exercising authority
- Giving God glory

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Based on Acts 3:11, how does this align with Isaiah 35:6?
- 2) Why is it difficult for Christians to give glory to God for the things He has done in our lives?
- 3) What is the connection to Christ?

Week 5: Eternal Treasure

Scripture Reference: 1 Peter 1:3-5

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Discussion Topics:

- Promised inheritance
- A new identity in Christ
- Living hope

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Our promised inheritance is not earned; it is a gift—share scriptural references from the Bible that refer to our promised inheritance as a gift.
- 2) What does it mean to you to be reborn into a living hope?
- 3) What is the connection to Christ?

Week 6: Remember to Say “Thank You”

Scripture Reference: 1 Peter 1:6-9

⁶In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Discussion Topics:

- Suffer without sinning
- Professing and embracing faith
- Salvation of souls

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Share scriptural references that give us reasons to rejoice during trials.
- 2) Provide an example of how a trial proved the genuineness of your faith?
- 3) What is the connection to Christ?

Appendix C

FACILITATOR NOTES

Session 1: Renewed by the Holy Spirit

Scripture Reference: Acts 2: 1-4

¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.²⁷⁵

Insight:

- Purpose: To give a true account of the origin and growth of the Christian church.
- Historic: Luke continues his story that he began in the gospel (Luke) covering the 30 years after Jesus' ascension.²⁷⁶
- Kerygmatic: The purpose of the book of Acts is to highlight the kerygma, the Greek word for "that which is preached," which is the gospel message proclaimed by the Apostles.²⁷⁷
- Apologetic: Refers to the "rational defense of the faith, a presentation of solid evidence that the gospel is true."²⁷⁸
- Fifty days (50) after Passover was the Festival of First Harvest, also known as Pentecost. The Festival of First Harvest is one of the three major annual festivals that Jews attended to give thanksgiving for their harvested crops (Deut 16:16).²⁷⁹
- Jesus was crucified at Passover and ascended 40 days after his resurrection. Fifty (50) days after the resurrection (Pentecost/Festival of First Harvest) was the arrival of the Holy Spirit.²⁸⁰
- When Peter gave his speech (Acts 2:14ff), he spoke to an international audience, resulting in the worldwide harvest of new believers- the first converts of Christianity.²⁸¹
- Discuss the similarities between Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Acts 2:1-4

²⁷⁵ Acts 2: 1-4

²⁷⁶ Bruce B. Barton, Linda K. Taylor, J. Richard Love, Len Woods, & David R. Veerman, *Acts*, Life Application Bible Commentary, eds. Grant Osborne & Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), xvi.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., xvii.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 21.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

Discussion Questions:

- What is the significance of the filling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost?
 - **Model Answer(s):**
 - The beginning of the fulfillment of God’s promise to pour out His Spirit on all His people in the end times (Joel 2:28-29).
 - Now that the beginning of the last days has begun, it is now time for people to repent and believe in Christ (Matt 3:2; Luke 13:3).
 - Enable people to witness for Christ (Romans 15:19).
 - Through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the followers of Christ can continue His earthly ministry (John 14:12)
- How does Pentecost impact you today?
 - Answers are subjective to invite participants to incorporate their shared experiences into the discussion. Participants may talk about speaking in tongues.
- What is the connection to Jesus Christ?
 - **Model Answer(s):**
 - Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to empower believers (Ex 3:2-5; Matt 3:11, 12; Acts 1:5, 8).
 - Participants should demonstrate how the scriptural reference(s) leads Christians back to Christ, ideally providing other scriptural references to support their position.

Session 2: Encouraged by the Holy Spirit

Scripture Reference: Acts 2:22-24; 36-40

²²“Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.

²³This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

³⁶“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.” ³⁷When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” ⁴⁰With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”

Insight:

- Here is an example of God’s prearranged plan for His people, “His sovereignty will bring salvation to His people through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”²⁸²
- God works through people and events through history (Acts 4:28)
- Peter indicates that the Jews were responsible in the death of Jesus Christ because they allowed the leaders to kill Him, guilty by association. (Deut 32:5)
- To “repent” and “be baptized” are terms that imply faith; repentance and baptism accompany faith.²⁸³
- Water baptism does not save, we are saved by grace (Eph 2:8-9; Rom 4:4-5)
- Baptism identifies Christians to a community of believers

Discussion Questions:

- Why does spreading the gospel require Christians to have confidence in the Holy Spirit?
 - **Model Answer(s):**
 - The gospel is the message of a man who died and was raised from the dead. His death and resurrection upset the religious expectations of people who will seek to oppose and find alternative reasoning to discredit the life and death of Jesus Christ.
- Why are repentance and baptism essential in the life of a believer?
 - Answers are subjective to invite participants to incorporate their shared experiences into the discussion.
- What is the connection to Jesus Christ?
 - **Model Answer(s):**
 - People unwilling to bear witness to Jesus Christ will not experience the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:1-8; Gal 5:16-25).
 - Participants should demonstrate how the scriptural reference(s) leads Christians back to Christ, ideally providing other scriptural references to support their position.

Session 3: Silver and Gold, I Have None**Scripture Reference:** Acts 3:1-10

¹One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ²Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴Peter looked straight at him, as

²⁸² Baron, et. al, Acts, 31.

²⁸³ D.A. Carson, *Acts*, NIV Theological Study Bible: Follow God’s Redemptive Plan as it Unfolds Throughout Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 156.

did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!”⁵ So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”⁷ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong.⁸ He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.⁹ When all the people saw him walking and praising God,¹⁰ they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Insight:

- The lame man asked for what he “wanted” and got what he “needed.”
- Luke, the author of Acts, was a physician; he was careful to mention that the lame man’s feet and ankles became strong²⁸⁴
- This is an example of speaking hope into a broken life and giving practical help.²⁸⁵
- Responding to God’s work in the lives of Christians must be visible and vocal.
- Discuss the similarities of John 5:1-14 and Acts 3:1-10

Discussion Questions:

- What was the spiritual gift used by Peter, and how was it accomplished?
 - **Model Answer(s):**
 - The gift of healing (1 Corinthians 12:1, 9) and accomplished through faith “in the name of Jesus.”
- How do you exercise your authority in Jesus Christ?
 - Answers are subjective to invite participants to incorporate their shared experiences into the discussion. Participants may talk about how they pray “in Jesus’ name.”
- What is the connection to Jesus Christ?
 - **Model Answer(s):**
 - In our confession of faith, Christians should exercise their authority in Jesus Christ as he has given Christians the privilege of using His name (Matt 28:18; Mark 16:12; John 14:13-14).
 - Participants should demonstrate how the scriptural reference(s) leads Christians back to Christ, ideally providing other scriptural references to support their position.

²⁸⁴ Barton et. al, *Acts*, 46.

²⁸⁵ Tony Evans, *Acts*, *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary: Advancing God’s Kingdom Agenda* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019), 1074.

Session 4: Remember to Say “Thank You”

Scripture Reference: Acts 3: 11-16

¹¹While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade. ¹²When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

Insight:

- Some of the Jews listening to Peter may have been in the audience shouting, “Crucify Him!” (Acts 5:30-31)
- When someone gives you a gift, the proper response is to say, “thank you.”
- Recognize the true source of your blessings.
- Peter acknowledges Jesus’ true identity.
- Peter is connecting the healing of the lame man to Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.²⁸⁶

Discussion Questions:

- Based on Acts 3:11, how does this align with Isaiah 35:3-6 and John 10:22-24?
 - **Model Answer(s):**
 - Review Isaiah 35:3-6 and John 10:22-24 and discuss the alignment between scriptures. The inauguration of the Kingdom of God is seen in Christ’s healing of these kinds of people.
- Why is it difficult for Christians to give glory to God for the things He has done in our lives?
 - Answers are subjective to invite participants to incorporate their shared experiences into the discussion.
- What is the connection to Jesus Christ?
 - **Model Answer(s):**
 - Peter did not take credit for healing the lame man yet took the opportunity to explain that it was by the power of Jesus Christ in which the healing occurred.

²⁸⁶ Carson, *Acts*, 1957.

- The location where Peter and John healed the lame man (Solomon’s Colonnade) was the lame location where the Jews continued to harass Jesus over His claims of who He is (Luke 22:8; John 10:23; Acts 5:12).
- Participants should demonstrate how the scriptural reference(s) leads Christians back to Christ, ideally providing other scriptural references to support their position

Session 5: Eternal Treasure

Scripture Reference: 1 Peter 1:3-5

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Insight:

- The word “living” is used six (6) times (1:3; 23; 2:4-5; 4:5-6). In this context, “living” means that “believer’s hope is sure, certain, and real, as opposed to the deceptive, empty, false hope the world offers.”²⁸⁷
- A new identify in Christ redefining the relationship with God and society (Col 1:5;).²⁸⁸
- Our inheritance is guarded in heaven and cannot be touched (John 10:28).²⁸⁹
- Christians are eternally secure, and salvation is the new birth.²⁹⁰

Discussion Questions:

- Our promised inheritance is not earned; it is a gift—share scriptural references from the Bible that refer to our promised inheritance as a gift.
 - **Model Answer(s):**
 - Psalm 105:11
 - Joshua 11:23
 - Daniel 12:13
 - Ephesians 1:13-14
 - Colossians 3:24

²⁸⁷ John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck, *1 Peter*, The Bible Knowledge Bible Commentary: New Testament (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1984), 841.

²⁸⁸ D.A. Carson, *1 Peter*, NIV Theological Study Bible: Follow God’s Redemptive Plan as it Unfolds Throughout Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 2239.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Tony Evans, *1 Peter*, The Tony Evans Bible Commentary: Advancing God’s Kingdom Agenda (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019), 1350.

- What does it mean to you to be reborn into a living hope?
 - Answers are subjective to invite participants to incorporate their shared experiences into the discussion.
- What is the connection to Jesus Christ?
 - **Model Answer(s):**
 - Unlike the Israelites inheritance of Canaan, for Christians, their inheritance is eternal life in the kingdom of God (Mark 10:17, 29, 30).
 - Participants should demonstrate how the scriptural reference(s) leads Christians back to Christ, ideally providing other scriptural references to support their position.

Session 6: The Genuineness of Your Faith

Scripture Reference: 1 Peter 1:6-9

⁶In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Insight:

- Early Christians were the target of prosecution for refusing to worship the emperor, worship in pagan temples, support pagan ideals, and rejecting the pagan culture
- “The ability to cope in the present is tied to your understanding of your inheritance in the future.”²⁹¹
- Responding to trials in life requires the love of God, believing in Him, and rejoicing (Jas 1:2; 1 Pet 1:8)
- “Trusting Christ isn’t a feeling; it’s a decision to obey. Rejoicing in Christ means thanking him because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls”²⁹²

Discussion Questions:

- Share scriptural references that give us reasons to rejoice during trials.
 - **Model Answer(s):**
 - 1 Peter 4:19
 - 1 Peter 5:10
 - Galatians 5:22
 - 1 Peter 4:1

²⁹¹ Evans, *1 Peter*, 1351.

²⁹² Ibid.

- Provide an example of how a trial proved the genuineness of your faith.
 - Answers are subjective to invite participants to incorporate their shared experiences into the discussion.
- What is the connection to Jesus Christ?
 - **Model Answer(s):**
 - Christians can expect to suffer yet understand that they have security in Christ. The ability to deal with present challenges is tied to faith. God allows trials to prove faith, develop faith, and glorify God (Job 23:10; Ps 66:10; Pr 17:3; Jas 1:2:4; Rom 6:22)
 - Participants should demonstrate how the scriptural reference(s) leads Christians back to Christ, ideally providing other scriptural references to support their position.

Appendix D
PRE-SESSION ASSESSMENT

Instructions: The goal of this pre-session assessment is to capture one's biblical literacy with the Bible. Think about your approach to Bible study and respond to these questions through that reflective lens.

- 1) Of the people listed below, which one is NOT an Apostle of Jesus Christ? (LO-2)
 - Bartholomew
 - Philip
 - Matthew
 - Luke

- 2) The main source of information on the life of Jesus Christ is found in the _____. (LO-1)
 - Vedas
 - Pentateuch
 - Gospels
 - Epistles

- 3) The Book of Acts is about the _____ and the ministry of _____. (LO-2)
 - Pentecost; Peter
 - Exodus; Moses
 - Lion's Den; Daniel
 - Slaying of Goliath; David

- 4) The prophet Isaiah said, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). What is the context of this passage of Scripture? (LO-3)
 - The sin of the people.
 - To physically heal people of their illness.
 - The substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ.
 - To refer back to Genesis 3:15.

- 5) What is the single overarching theme of the Book of Romans? (LO-1)
 - To follow Jesus as the true way for Jews to continue as one of God's elect people
 - To strengthen and confirm the faith of early Christians.
 - To spread the Gospel.
 - To show that Jesus is the prophesied one and the only source of salvation.

- 6) The first five books of the Bible are called the _____. (LO-1)
- Gospels
 - Pentateuch
 - Epistles
 - Wisdom Literature
- 7) The Old Testament is divided into _____ major sections. (LO-1)
- 3
 - 5
 - 8
 - 7
- 8) “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11), is spoken in what context? (LO-2)
- God’s promise to bless His people amid a pagan culture.
 - God’s promise to bless His people from generation to generation.
 - God’s promise to reveal his plan for His people.
 - God’s promise not to harm His people.
- 9) Which of the following are historical books of the Bible? (LO-1)
- Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes.
 - Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John.
 - Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and 1 & 2 Samuel.
 - Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians.
- 10) Which book is considered Wisdom Literature? (LO-1)
- Proverbs
 - Isaiah
 - Revelation
 - Galatians
- 11) Explain how you currently study the Bible. (IT-1)
- 12) How do you interpret Scripture? (IT-2)
- 13) What resources do you use to aid in biblical interpretation? (IT-3)
- 14) What role does the Holy Spirit play in your Bible study? (IT-2)
- 15) Explain in detail your preferred method of group Bible study. (IT-4)

Appendix E
POST-SESSION ASSESSMENT

Instructions: The goal of this post-session assessment is to capture one’s biblical literacy with the Bible. Think about your approach to Bible study during this intervention phase. Respond to these questions through that reflective lens.

- 1) According to Ephesians 5:18-19, Paul states the following “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord. . .” What is the context in which Paul makes this statement? (LO-3)
 - Paul requires Christians to speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit and sing and make music from the heart to the Lord.
 - Paul is providing an alternative to getting drunk.
 - Paul commands Christians to speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit and sing and make music from the heart to the Lord.
 - All of the above.

- 2) The epistles are located in what section of the Bible? (LO-1)
 - Proverbs
 - New Testament
 - Old Testament
 - Psalms

- 3) _____ gave his wife away twice because he was afraid. (LO-2)
 - David
 - Paul
 - Abraham
 - Pontius Pilot

- 4) Who did Mary, the mother of Jesus, emulate in her song of praise? (LO-2)
 - Hannah
 - Deborah
 - Ruth
 - Esther

- 5) Which is of the following is a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ? (LO-2)
 - John the Baptist
 - Isaiah
 - The angel of the Lord
 - All of the above

- 6) Which is a representation of the Holy Spirit? (LO-2)

- Snow
 - Rain
 - Wind
 - Hail
- 7) Which of the tribes of Israel was set apart in service to the Lord? (LO-2)
- Judah
 - Levi
 - Dan
 - Ephraim
- 8) What is the difference between the major and minor prophets? (LO-1)
- The major prophets provided more extraordinary prophecies.
 - The minor prophets performed lesser prophecies.
 - The length of the books of the major prophets are longer than the minor prophets
 - None of the above.
- 9) In Psalm 105:1, David states, “Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done.” This statement is a/an _____. (LO-3)
- Invocation to praise God
 - Command to praise God
 - Instruction to praise God
 - All of the above
- 10) In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, he says, “You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both. . .” (1 Corinthians 6:13). In what context was Paul referring to when he made this statement? (LO-3)
- As a warning to the Corinthians not to attach too much importance to eating.
 - To show reasoning on how the Corinthians justified their hedonistic lifestyle.
 - Someday God will do away with both stomach and food.
 - All of the above.
- 11) Describe how your approach to Bible study has changed. (IT-1)
- 12) Describe how your ability to interpret Scripture has changed. (IT-2)
- 13) Describe the resources you will use to aid in biblical interpretation. (IT-3)
- 14) How has the role of the Holy Spirit changed how you study the Bible? (IT-2)
- 15) How has your perception of group Bible study changed? (IT-4)

Appendix F

GENERAL INFORMATION & ALIGNMENT

GENERAL INFORMATION
Session Title: Work of the Spirit
Session Description: As the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is the core of the Christian faith, and if Christians are going to live victoriously, understanding the work of the Spirit is key. Therefore, these Bible study sessions will review Scripture in which participants familiarize themselves with the role of the Holy Spirit in their lives.
Session Expectations: To engage in an expositional Christ-centered approach to Bible study that allows participants to experience the sacred text from the perspective of the theology of Scripture, Bible study methodology, and transformative learning.
Required Text: Holy Bible; Participants are free to use the version of the Holy Bible in which they are most familiar (i.e., CSB, ESV, KJV, NKJV, NIV, etc.)
Optional Materials: Participants are free to use and bring resources that aid in biblical interpretation.

ALIGNMENT: LEARNING OUTCOMES (LOs) & IDENTIFIABLE THEMES (ITs)		
LOs & ITs:	Pre-Assessment Questions	Post-Assessment Questions
Identify the essential features of the Bible. (LO-1)	2, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10	2, 8
Identify the biblical authors, characters, and their significance to the metanarrative. (LO-2)	1, 3, 8	3, 4, 5, 6, 7
Interpret Scripture in its appropriate context. (LO-3)	4	1, 9, 10
Describe current Bible study methods. (IT-1)	11	11
Discuss factors that influence biblical interpretation. (IT-2)	12, 14	12, 14
Employ appropriate resources that aid in biblical interpretation. (IT-3)	13	13
Explain preferred methods of group Bible study. (IT-4)	15	15

Appendix G
PERMISSION REQUEST

December 21, 2021

Pastor Wale Akinosun
Senior Pastor
Schaumburg Community Church

Dear Pastor Wale,

As a graduate student in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree in Expository Preaching and Teaching. The title of my research project is “Biblical Literacy: An Expositional Christ-Centered Approach to Bible Study.” The purpose of my research is to address biblical literacy by conducting inductive Bible study sessions developed using a triangular approach focusing on scriptural theology, Bible study methodology, and a transformative approach to Christ-centered learning.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at Schaumburg Community Church and contact members and attendees to invite them to participate in my research study.

Participants will be asked to complete pre-and post-assessments to capture Biblical literacy before and after the intervention. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, respond by email to [email address]. For your convenience, attached is a sample permission letter document for your review.

Sincerely,

Paula K. Offutt
Doctoral Student

Appendix H

PERMISSION RESPONSE

Paula K. Offutt
Doctoral Student
Liberty University
John W. Rawlings School of Divinity
1971 University Boulevard
Lynchburg, VA 24515

December 21, 2021

Dear Ms. Offutt

PERMISSION RESPONSE

After careful review of your research proposal entitled "Biblical Literacy: An Expository Christ-Centered Approach to Bible Study," I have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study at Schaumburg Community Church.

Sincerely,

Pastor Wale Akinosun
Senior Pastor
Schaumburg Community Church

IRB Approval**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 10, 2021

Paula Offutt
Jacob Dunlow

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY21-22-426 Biblical Literacy: An Expository Christ-Centered Approach to Bible Study

Dear Paula Offutt and Jacob Dunlow,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your project with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

(1) Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word research with the word project throughout both documents.

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

Sincerely,

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