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JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

The Resurrection and the Witness

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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The thesis project aims to educate and equip New Life Christian Church (NLCC) and Eagle View Christian School (EVCS) leaders to use biblically fundamental arguments and theories about Christ's Resurrection to defend its merits against contemporary cultural objections. The study employed the quantitative design method to gather information through a survey utilizing open and closed-ended questions with a convenient sample of thirty-eight participants from the NLCC and EVCS population. As leaders teach, others become effective witnesses of Christ's Resurrection, equipping them to implement the teachings of Mathew 28:19-20 and 1 Peter 3:15 in their witness and defense of the gospel's message. Leaders must understand the message to influence a modern, progressive culture long removed from acceptable civil etiquette and conversations. So many church leaders have compromised the simple message of the cross and Christ's Resurrection, which is no longer the good news in the contemporary age. Evangelical leaders struggle to articulate the gospel's message effectively. As the project's goal unfolds, the future ministry aims to create influential leaders and congregants who can effectively witness and defend Christ's Resurrection without resorting to personal testimonies as a proverbial means to an end. The researcher conducted the study in four survey groups: "Leaders Only Questions," "Leaders and Believers' Questions," "Individuals answering two questions, and the "Focus Group," ensuring triangulation. The study revealed that NLCC and EVCS leaders and believers understand biblical principles but lack the knowledge to articulate the message.

Key Words: Resurrection, Witness, Great Commission, Leaders, Evangelism.

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Abbreviations

DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
EVCS	<i>Eagle View Christian School</i>
HH	<i>The Hallucination Hypothesis</i>
NLCC	<i>New Life Christian Center</i>
RCC	<i>Roman Catholic Church</i>
RH	<i>The Resurrection Hypothesis</i>
MSI	<i>Mass Sociogenic Illness</i>
MPI	<i>Mass Psychogenic Illness</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

As the runner bends the corner and approaches the straight-away, entering the final stretch of the run, exhaustion sets in. The mile marker to the finishing line becomes apparent. Although there are still some ways to go, the runner is optimistic, knowing that the training received will be effective towards the end. However, the muscles constrict, and the runner moves slower. The heart beats in anticipation, reaching and digging for every ounce of strength imaginable. Every fiber of the being is alert. The runner is showing signs of exhaustion. The runner pants as legs and arms scream in frustration.

However, the runner realizes this once elusive goal is in potential reach. Mentally, the runner reflects and summons back to his consciousness the previous years of training, preparation, and a desire to finish the race. The runner needs to remain focused, hearing the trainer's voice at every step. The runner takes control of each stride, slowly and methodically implementing the training. The heart settles into a ceremonious rhythm as the body recoils from its earlier demand. The runner focuses on the prize, avoiding all possible and unnecessary distractions. Mentally disciplined like a stoned-faced soldier ready to face the deciding battle as success is within reach.

Every theological student aspiring to complete a doctoral degree faces the race and its challenges. However, the process is not unlike this present age and culture, as Christ's believers face many obstacles and distractions. They, too, must run the race for the prize at the end. Therefore, this study embarks and commences the journey over the proverbial rough seas of the Ministry Context, Literature Review, Theological, and Theoretical aspects of the research. The aim is to solve a specific problem at the New Life Christian Center (NLCC) and Eagle View

Christian School (EVCS). The study considers Christ's Resurrection and the believers' witness, calling on leaders to remain focused and faithful in completing God's calling.

Ministry Context

Nestled in the rural community of Yelm, Washington is New Life Christian Center (NLCC) also home to the private school, Eagle View Christian School (EVCS), established in 1995. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, as of 2022, the city of Yelm has a population that is 75.8% Caucasian, 13.6% Black or African American, 1.3% American Indian and Alaskan Native, 6.1% Asian, 0.3% Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, 2.9% Two or more Races, and 18.9% Hispanic or Latino.¹ The level of cultural diversity serves the city of Yelm well, as individuals from all walks of life learn about different cultural motifs through everyday interactions. Ministry leaders at NLCC and EVCS get the opportunity to serve this cultural diversity as they oversee the two-hundred-student-strong private school from kindergarten to twelfth grade, which also offers daycare services for working parents. In addition, many of the teachers at EVCS attend the church, bringing with them not only their expertise in teaching but also the church's fundamental beliefs in Jesus Christ to the EVCS student body.

However, NLCC is not unlike other churches in the area which have experienced their reasonable share of internal and external crises. NLCC was once a bustling edifice of spiritual attraction to the local community, spurring activities that were the envy of other local churches and businesses alike. Congregants were engaged and vibrant in their worship and praise to God; many recollected memories of the building shaking under the weight and expression of love for

¹ U. S. Census Bureau, "Yelm Race and Ethnicity," *Statistical Atlas*, July 1, 2022, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/yelmcitywashington,US/PST120222>.

God. The people were spiritually free, and the surrounding community felt this freedom in many ways. The congregation experienced miracles and the operation of the gifts of the Spirit, moving and manifesting the attributes of God. Everyone experienced a spiritual touch and awakening at some point in their lives as the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, and reading God's word were evident. Yet, as the years passed on, many of its members were lost to disagreements, migration, and newcomers to the fold only saw a more subdued audience. Unfortunately, for newcomers the church is now a shadow of its former glory. Somewhere in the process, the wheels fell off, an uncanny reminder of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve received one command from God. Although they walked naturally, they communicated with God by their Spirit (John 4:24; Rom 1:9).² History has shown that the movement that suffers through the crucibles of pain drives the remnant towards greater introspection and closeness with God (2 Cor 13:5). NLCC is experiencing a wind of change from the bitterness of the past as congregants attempt to return to their first love, Jesus Christ, and Him, crucified.

Like many churches in this rural community, which is also home to a military base, there is a rotating circle of migrating families, making long-term stability often questionable. NLCC, as with other churches, finds it hard to keep and attract younger members due to this constant migration. However, the church needs to tap into another facet of reality to spiritually benefit from this rich cultural diversity: facilitating an active ministry outreach to the local community with the gospel's message of salvation through Jesus Christ. According to the U.S Census

² Nicholas J. Frederick and Joseph M. Spencer, "John 11 in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of the Bible and its Reception* 5, no. 1 (2018): 90.

Bureau of Statistics, as of July 1, 2022, the population estimate for Yelm is 10,707.³ For this reason, the NLCC body must maintain a gospel message focus on engaging the ever-increasing and diverse population.

Most churches in this rural community have foundational members, and NLCC is also akin to this reality. NLCC is non-denominational and predominantly Caucasian, with long-standing members of the church made up of family members and acquaintances. The board's leadership is predominantly elderly, with a slight mix of middle-aged personnel. Many in the congregation reflect this foundational mix, while other congregants emerge from the wider community, often as mere visitors. More recently, NLCC has been developing an urgent message to reach those in the broader community with the gospel. Congregants are starting to warm up to the message as they begin to recognize the importance of fellowshiping with Christ in the Spirit. They realize this fellowship is born in the Spirit and led by the Spirit through purposeful obedience and submission to Scripture. Therefore, this project's thesis becomes essential to bolster leaders with the message of the cross of Christ in defense of the Resurrection if needed.

The Matter at Hand: The Command, Defense and Training

This thesis aims to persuade church leaders to see and appreciate the extraordinary aspect of the Resurrection. Unlike other religions, Christianity takes on a life as the only religion where the leader declares seven “I am” statements of Scripture (Exo 3:14; Jn 6:35-48, 8:12, 58, 9:5, 10:9-14, 11:25, 14:6, 15:1-5). The Scriptural references of Exodus 3:14 and John 8:58⁴ are not a

³ U. S. Census Bureau, “Yelm Race and Ethnicity.”

⁴ Bogdan G. Bucur, “God Never Appeared to Moses:” Eusebius of Caesarea’s Peculiar Exegesis of the Burning Bush Theophany,” *Journal of the Bible and Its Reception* 5, no. 2 (2018): 246.

part of the seven “I Am” declarations of Scripture but act as reference points in their declaration.⁵ With these seven “I Am” declarations, Jesus is positing in the affirmative that no other religious leader had either the power or authority to accomplish what He did, even if they attempted to do so. However, the “I Am” statement that the introduction will allude to is the Resurrection (John 11:25).⁶ The story in John 11 of Lazarus’ resurrection gives the believer a glimpse into the nature and incredible work of Christ declaring Himself to be the Resurrection. With this declaration, Christ shows that resurrection power and authority belong only to the deity who rules over the heavens and the earth.

Christ believers serve the same God who clarifies in the Scriptures that He never changes (Isa 40:8; Mal 3:6; Heb 13:8; Jas 1:17). If so, the God involved in Creation cannot be different from the God of the Resurrection. It is not an independent thought when considering the magnitude of this statement, as the Scripture is clear on all its indicatives⁷ and imperatives.⁸ However, mainly after Charles Darwin and his “Evolution of Species,” the theological world was sent into a tailspin.⁹ No longer was theology thought of as the “Queen of the Sciences.”¹⁰ Theology was now relegated to the backseat of natural science in endless competition with

⁵ Ibid., 235-36.

⁶ Frederick and Spencer, “John 11 in the Book of Mormon,” 81-2.

⁷ Howard Jones and Morgan Macleod, “Semantics and Syntax in Old English Mood Selection,” *Transactions of the Philological Society* 118, no. 2 (2020), 2.

⁸ Teresa Kuo-Yu, “Reconsidering Pauline Juxtaposition of Indicative and Imperative (Romans 6:1 -14) In Light of Pauline Apocalypticism,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2013): 300.

⁹ Wolfgang Streeck, “From Speciation to Specialization: On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, Charles Darwin,” *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (2018): 661-680, doi:10.1353/sor.2018.0038.

¹⁰ Tomoko Masuzawa, “Theology, the Fairy Queen,” *Modern Intellectual History* 19, no. 4 (2022): 1262, 1282-3, doi:10.1017/S1479244321000287.

Darwinism through the lenses of Herbert Spencer.¹¹ The religious defenders of the Victorian era were impotent to stop this onslaught against origins because many intellectuals and scientists of the day sought out this alternative instead of traditional religious beliefs of the time.¹²

When anyone thinks about the Resurrection, there is rarely a linkage to the Creation narrative in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 regarding this recognized fact: that the same power in the beginning, as read in these two chapters, was the same power operating in Christ's Resurrection. The Resurrection is a remarkable miracle and the lynchpin of the Christian faith and doctrine. Without the Resurrection, Christianity would cease to exist. However, peradventure that Christianity existed without the framework of the Resurrection, then it would only fall into the class and category of other false religions. The connection between Creation and resurrection is unique in that it gives the believer hope and reassurance even at death.¹³ Both the Creation narrative and the Resurrection of Christ are not scientific theories and endeavors washed in merely observable, measurable, and repeatable acts of verification.¹⁴ The Creation and resurrection narrative both belong to the theatre of theology where the operation of miracles is not a strange phenomenon to God, but a powerful expression of His magnificent power and majesty, a reality that the theories of science can neither prove nor disprove, the God of miracles.

¹¹ Andrew R. Holmes and David N. Livingstone. "Creation, Evolution, and "The New Cosmic Philosophy": William Todd Martin's Critique of Herbert Spencer," *Modern Intellectual History* 19, no. 2 (2022): 376, doi:10.1017/S1479244321000056.

¹² Ibid., 376-77.

¹³ Andreas May, "The Significance of Freedom in God's Plan," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 79, no. 2 (2023): 2-3.

¹⁴ Sachi Edwards, "Religious "Nones" and Onto-Epistemic Socialization: Problematizing Participant Self-Identification in Research on Religious Identity," *Journal of College and Character* 23, no. 4 (2021): 295, 301, doi.org/10.1080/2194587X.2021.1977150

The angel in Luke 1:37 exclaimed to Mary, “For with God nothing will be impossible” New King James Version (NKJV).¹⁵

Hence, as the thesis progresses, it is not without merit to emphasize the gravity to which the gospel’s message stands in contrast to other religious mediums. The vehicle to carry the message of the Resurrection occurs through the believers’ voice, as the Scripture rightly declares, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher” (Rom 10:14). The unique message of the gospel follows the mandates of Scripture, as Timothy Wiarda notes in connecting the Great Commission and defense of the gospel’s message.¹⁶ Consequently, this research proposes the implementation of an intervention plan to address the problem in four major arguments: “Identification of the Problem,” “Assessing the Level of the Problem,” “Agents of Change,” and “What Would Success Look Like After Implementation?” Addressing these four areas will equip leaders of NLCC and EVCS to defend the veracity of the Resurrection against objections using focus training groups that connect the power in Genesis as the same as Christ’s power of resurrection and relate that power to their obedience to the Great Commission of Scripture.

The rubber meets the road in the saga of life’s experiences, sometimes unceremoniously forcing the believer to choose whether to adhere to the indicatives and imperative commands of Scripture or boycott them altogether. It is no coincidence that the heading for this section is “The

¹⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references in this thesis project will be from the New King James Version of the Bible.

¹⁶ Timothy Wiarda, “Scripture Between the Incarnate Christ and the Illuminating Spirit,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 21, no. 1 (2019): 121, <http://doi.org/10.1111/ijst.12345>.

Matter at Hand: Command, Defense, and Training,” as NLCC and EVCS leaders grapple with ways to implement the gospel’s message as a seed for the believer to cultivate. NLCC and EVCS believers and many other church congregants have become dull to the importance of the gospel’s message, let alone the message of the Resurrection, especially in the current culture. Morals that once hailed as standard societal norms have become evil in the deliveries (Isa 5:20). Therefore, it is vital to stand and declare the truth of Scripture today without shame or favor. Training and teaching believers to focus on the mission set before them is paramount to staying strong in contemporary culture. The local church plans to embark on the mission to use the Great Commission, as found in Matthew 28:19-20,¹⁷ as well as the considered apologetic verse found in 1 Peter 3:15, to lay the foundations for this teaching. Considering these Scriptures, the believer acknowledges that the most significant symbol of the Christian faith is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ; without it, the Christian faith would lose all its authority and power.¹⁸ Therefore, embarking on the Great Commission and arming the believer to defend the gospel’s message is crucial.

The Resurrection of Christ is more than just the proverbial glue that holds the religion together; it is the very source of life in the religion. All religions, for the most part, are superficially the same. However, Christianity stands on a unique ground because it is the only religion fundamentally different from all others in its doctrine of the Resurrection. How, then,

¹⁷ David C. Sim, “Is Matthew 28:16-20 The Summary of The Gospel?” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies; Pretoria* 70, no 1 (2014): 1.

¹⁸ J.W. Bergeron and G. R. Habermas, “The Resurrection of Jesus: A Clinical Review of Psychiatric Hypotheses for the Biblical Story of Easter,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 80, no.2 (2015): 158-9, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021140014564555>.

does the Christian believer focus on the Resurrection? Although the believer is endeavoring to become more like Christ, laying the groundwork for leaders in this teaching will help believers of NLCC see how crucial it is to remain focused on the task at hand. Furthermore, leaders will learn that becoming a disciple of the Word and putting on the characteristics of one following the core teachings of the Master without flinching will go a long way in influencing those they meet and teach. Leaders must understand that they cannot say that the time of Christ was any less distracting, because first-century individuals had their share of befuddling with the Resurrection message. NLCC and EVCS congregants need education in sharing the good news of the gospel. Isaiah 52:7 declares, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns!” in agreement with Nahum 1:15, “Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace...!”

Sharing the good news of the gospel is all about training in the spiritual disciplines and becoming a disciple of Christ, just as Paul confidently declared that he followed Christ (1 Cor 11:1). NLCC and EVCS leaders and believers must love Christ and desire to know Him by the Holy Spirit, being mindful that they are not walking in deception, doing a daily self-examination (2 Cor 13:5). However, leaders and believers must ensure that they settle these matters in line with Scripture and focus on doing God’s will (Matt 7:21). Furthermore, leaders and believers cannot say they love God and live in open rebellion to His commands, as this action would run contrary to God’s word (1 Sam 15:22-23). They must recognize that spiritual regeneration was not a construct of the emotions but a work of the Spirit (John 3:7).

Jesus declared that He came to do the will of Him who sent Him and to finish His work (John 4:34, 6:38). Therefore, one of the first principles believers should engage in is asking

themselves: what is the purpose of ushering God's kingdom to others? Jesus had a purpose that He received from God. As leaders and believers ask this core question of their purpose in the Christian walk, they will discover that the answer lies in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20 and 1 Peter 3:15. The Scripture commands believers to go and declare the gospel and baptize individuals, thereby making disciples, not of themselves, but of Christ (Matt 28:19-20). The mission is narrow in sharing the gospel with others (1 Pet 3:15). However, the contemporary culture has made the effects of the gospel seem broad in scope with appendages that only weakens the message of the cross.

Leaders First: Lead by Example

As the leadership of NLCC and EVCS look towards the future, keeping focus on realizing God's purpose in preaching the gospel for the church and its people must be paramount. Although the leaders are spiritually and actively building the hearts and minds of individuals to seek after Christ, they lack the necessary tools to aid them in the proclamation and defense of the gospel.¹⁹ A church or organization either rises or falls depending on their leadership. Therefore, to spiritually influence and transform individuals to have the mind of Christ and become agents of change in the community, leaders must focus on learning Scripture and becoming disciples themselves for the benefit of the church (Phil 2:1-11). NLCC recognizes the mandate of Scripture to follow the Great Commission while surrendering to the Great Commandment (Matt 28:19; Mark 16:15; John 13:34-35). However, the leaders face the challenge of how to go about

¹⁹ Eckhard J. Schnabel, "The Persecution of Christians in the First Century," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61, no. 3 (2018): 544.

administering these spiritual concepts and prioritizing the importance of implementing biblically based defense teaching into the church (Eph 2:8-9).

Leaders realize it is necessary to align the hearts and minds of the congregation to seek after God. However, the influencer must be the Holy Spirit, as He first captures the hearts of those leaders willing to surrender, molding them to seek after God. Again, whether a ministry rises or falls, depends on ministry leaders' relationship with the Holy Spirit. The power and manifest presence of the Holy Spirit was evident in the first-century church, changing lives in miraculous ways, but it primarily occurred through the church's leaders. Unfortunately, over the years, the congregants of NLCC have become accustomed to the status quo of relaxing in Zion and trying to seek after God as if there is a tug-and-war. Leaders and believers of NLCC and EVCS take their responsibility for the gospel's message for granted, just as the Scripture rightly declares in Hosea 4:6, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...." The book of Acts should be an inspiration to leaders which flows over into the congregation as they examine the lives of the apostles and the early church going about the defense and proclamation of the gospel, declaring Matthew 28:19-20 and 1 Peter 3:15. As leaders embrace and bring these lessons forward, individuals will desire to grow in God rather than easily surrendering to habits of the flesh. However, as with everything in life, surrendering to the Holy Spirit is a choice. It is incumbent on leaders to live and teach NLCC congregants the powerful message that the early church was not silent, but that people moved in the power of the Holy Spirit because they recognized the undeniable Lordship of Christ as one risen from the grave.

Examining the need for *apologetic* gospel defense and proclamation reasoning, leaders of NLCC will first focus on the command given by Jesus and the myriad of ways to defend the Resurrection. Leaders will realize that individuals will not need to defend the gospel's message in

all cases, but preparation for such a situation is necessary for effective evangelism (2 Tim 2:15). Leaders must first catch the vision of the vital message preached in the Gospels and the Book of Acts, not neglecting other areas of the Bible where the gospel's message was also a watershed reality in the lives of individuals. Any compromising and lackluster desire defeats and diminishes the work of the Holy Spirit. Any nonchalant attitude and approach only rob the richness and freedom found in the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Moving forward must be a joint effort, as leaders incorporate the other ministries in the church to embark on this endeavor to reflect the book of Acts in the lives of contemporary believers and the present culture. The message of the thesis to address the issue of NLCC is unmistakable as leaders learn to give themselves to the ministry and leading of the Holy Spirit. Leading a congregation towards apologetic evangelism in a secular age requires leaders to first submit to God. Leaders harboring any besetting sin or activity will only transfer to the congregation, muting and diminishing the work of the Spirit. Therefore, leaders must first ensure that their Christian walk aligns with God's Word and the Spirit. As leaders examine themselves, they will learn to identify the personal issues that keep them from experiencing God in His fullness. Often, pride is the root that produces evil fruits; therefore, the congregation will only suffer if leaders fail to submit to God. Love is more than just a phrase in the vocabulary of Christianity. Love is the essence of life, a surrender to the God of love (1 John 4:7).

Navigating through tricky waters can become daunting, especially if these waters have a long-standing tradition of maintaining the status quo. NLCC is no stranger to rough and difficult circumstances. The church still undergoes enormous challenges in attracting new members into the ministry while facing internal bickering. Due to the many distractions over the years, leaders have not had time to focus on the mission and the issue this research seeks to address. NLCC

leaders have done little in the past to address the growing need for preaching the gospel and the Resurrection by way of the Great Commission and its defense.²⁰ As leaders engage in this challenge, it would be a unique approach to consider Matthew 28:19-20 and 1 Peter 3:15 as the basis for the discussion. In the past, NLCC leaders oversaw Sunday-school-type teaching events with generalized messages that only fizzle over the years. Additionally, the church holds regular Bible studies every other Wednesday night, men's fellowship during the first Saturday of the month, and women's Bible studies on Thursday nights. However, the theme for these activities should be the same: finding ways to please God and bringing forth the gospel's message to a lost and dying world. One proposal for the future is that NLCC leaders must have an intentional, loving relationship with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. It is a relationship that will need cultivation through surrender. The work of the first-century church was not only in delivering God's Word but also demonstrating power and authority by the Holy Spirit. NLCC needs such a move again, and it can only start with the leaders.

Problem Presented

When it comes to a general articulation for the Resurrection of Christ, leaders at NLCC seem to have problems galvanizing biblical truth surrounding the claim. However, current biblical knowledge about the claim of the Resurrection stops at the doorstep of ignorance. There are many sources and research projects written on the Resurrection. The sources are of varying degrees and length, capturing the episode of the Resurrection in remarkable ways. There are also video presentations on the Resurrection and its defense in abundance. There should be no

²⁰ Wiarda, "Scripture Between the Incarnate Christ," 121.

existing gap regarding excellent resources teaching on the importance of the Resurrection for contemporary culture and NLCC leaders' understanding of this remarkable miracle. However, the prevailing thought pattern only trivially focuses on the Resurrection of Christ in sermons (which is not without merit, but also insufficient). Without the Resurrection of Christ, the Christian religion would not have a leg to stand. So, a true believer in Christ cannot divorce Christianity from the Resurrection. However, it is also incumbent on those believers to recognize the importance of the witness and the witnesses of the risen Lord. Indeed, this research will present the modern and ancient views against the Resurrection of Christ, which will equip leaders of NLCC to have all the information necessary to articulate the defense of the Resurrection in a winsome way. In the context of this thesis, apologetics is nothing more than expressing and articulating the defense of the Resurrection and the gospel coherently while simultaneously making others know that as powerful as the Resurrection is, the eyewitness accounts are equally weighty.²¹ The problem is that NLCC and EVCC leaders are ill-equipped to defend the Resurrection against objections expressed by our culture.²²

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research project aims to equip leaders of NLCC and EVCC to defend the Resurrection against objections using focus training groups. However, the presenting problem leans into the purpose in such a way as to equip leaders of NLCC to teach the position and defense of the Resurrection in conjunction with the witness of the risen Lord. The

²¹ Sherene N. Khouri, "The Crucifixion in the Qur'an: Answering Muslim's Claims Regarding the Death of Jesus Christ," *Transformation* 38, no. 2 (2021): 159, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378821994216>

²² Wiarda, "Scripture Between the Incarnate Christ," 121.

Resurrection is essential, but without a witness, the Resurrection narrative would only be a myth in the minds and hearts of the first-century populace. Therefore, considering the problem through the intended purpose, members of the NLCC and EVCS will not only be able to stand and defend the Resurrection but also articulate the importance of the witness of the Lord when considering the Resurrection.

The comparison that readily comes to mind with the witness of the resurrected Lord is the Day of Pentecost in the book of Acts. Before the day of Pentecost, the disciples fled, Simon Peter denied Christ, and the disciples were in hiding. However, something changed after the resurrected Lord showed Himself to the disciples and commanded them to remain in Jerusalem until they experienced power from the Highest. The disciples became bold and no longer afraid, now filled with the Holy Spirit, and endowed with power (*dynamis* in the Greek: "the power to perform, might, strength, ability") they never had before (Acts 1:8). The disciples saw, spoke, and ate with the risen Lord. Likewise, leaders and believers at NLCC and EVCS must be bold to preach and defend the gospel's message in the present culture. As the same Holy Spirit in the first-century believers exist in today's leaders and believers who call on the name of Christ. The purpose statement suggests, equipping and bolstering of leaders' understanding of the defense of the Resurrection will occur in a focus group discussion, learning about the possible oppositions and exploring the benefits of advancing the gospel message.

Basic Assumptions

Every believer in Christ should endeavor to present the gospel's message via the Resurrection narrative. The Resurrection of Christ was the single most influential event in the biblical and historical narrative that changed the course of the disciples' lives and history. However, the researcher can only assume that participants' information will reflect their

understanding of the biblical text concerning the Resurrection and the gospel command. The study narrowed the focus so that after the study, individuals will understand and be able to articulate Matthew 28:19-20 and 1 Peter 3:15 as the vehicles from which this message of the Resurrection can apologetically go forth to the world. Furthermore, the researcher considered that many might disagree with the assumption that the two powerful elements of the Christian faith are the directives found in Matthew 28:19-20 and 1 Peter 3:15, with backing from 1 Corinthians 15:1-20 as supporting passages to complement the Resurrection, the command, and defense of Scriptures.

The researcher assumed that these two Scriptures, which formed the basis of the study, and all other supporting materials aided the research methods. The basic outline for the study came from those two passages. Why focus on these two passages? The research assumed a two-fold approach: living out the Great Commission through a purposeful and intentional lifestyle that seeks to carry the gospel's message of the Resurrection through the defense of Scripture. The study avoided assuming that individuals who are not actively professing the Christian faith are not born again. Although the defense of Scripture may fall under the umbrella of apologetics, nonetheless, a novice believer in faith can gather essential information to start a conversation simply by understanding the rudiments of their faith. However, the researcher assumed that the coverage and engagement of the chosen topic and highlighted verses for NLCC and EVCS will give individuals a starting point in the defense of their faith.²³ The basic assumption formed and

²³ Schnabel, "The Persecution of Christians," 544.

the result in pursuit of this topic came as a result from teaching the Resurrection in a previous four-week session held at NLCC, and the feedback in needing such knowledge was palpable.

Therefore, moving forward, the desired outcome is to get individuals equipped to argue and apologetically defend the Resurrection of Christ without feeling intimidated. Any novice can take on the challenge of effectively arguing the Christian faith by applying the fundamentals of the Resurrection narrative, as the researcher assumed that NLCC and EVCS believers hold the same understanding of the significance of the Resurrection of Christ. In addition, the concluding thoughts on future research lays out basic assumptions and challenges the researcher may face. These challenges include but do not limit individuals' willingness to go beyond mental limitations and learn something new. Individuals keen to becoming disciples of Christ and desire to practice spiritual disciplines grow and mature spiritually.

Definitions

All believers have their part to play in spreading the gospel. The leaders and congregation are not exempt from this directive at NLCC and EVCS. Understanding concepts such as command, disciple, resurrection, evidence, defense, and secular add to the purpose of the thesis and strengthen the research project. Considering the Great Commission, the definitions of theories and philosophies that are antithetical to the preaching of the cross become the center focus. The project uses these definitions to bring to light varying terms used in theology that will help individuals at NLCC and EVCS better understand and be able to articulate a coherent

position when bringing forth the gospel's message. The following is a list of common terms that the theses used.²⁴

Congregants: Leaders and believers at NLCC and EVCS.

Indicatives: The part of speech that indicates a statement about something or someone.²⁵ Understanding indicatives are essential for those who desire to articulate the gospel through the message of the Resurrection and the implications of what the individual is saying.²⁶

Imperatives: The imperative is a command or directive to do.²⁷ Understanding imperatives are vital because they help the believer break down the message so that everyone can understand the command of Scripture to follow and or submit.²⁸

Apologetics: According to Chamberlain and Price, the word "apologetics" comes from the Greek phrase *apologia*, which means "a defense."²⁹ Practicing apologetics is speaking to defend the faith or providing reasons for belief. Apologetics involves untangling people's misconceptions. Apologetics serves to clear away the intellectual rubble strewn about by culture and any entrenched assumptions of the day, providing the message of Jesus with a fairer hearing in the marketplace of ideas.

²⁴ Paul Delany, "Purgatory, Almsgiving, and the Needs of the Dead," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 16 (2020): 2.

²⁵ Jones and Macleod, "Semantics and Syntax," 2.

²⁶ Timothy J. Wengert, "Philip Melancthon on Bible Translation and Commentaries," *Lutheran Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2019): 26-45, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lut.2019.0012>.

²⁷ Kuo-Yu, "Reconsidering Pauline Juxtaposition," 300.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 304.

²⁹ Paul Chamberlain and Chris Price, *Everyday Apologetics: Answering Common Objections to the Christian Faith* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020): 73.

Emotional doubts: Emotional doubts arise when something throws off one's emotional balance.³⁰ A bad breakup, a sickness, a death in the family, or an answered prayer can lead to emotional doubt.³¹ When people doubt themselves emotionally, they do not like God.³² People are more frustrated with Him than anything. People's questions end up with exclamation marks.³³

Volitional doubts: Unlike emotional doubts, volitional doubts engage the will first.³⁴ The individual begins by not wanting a statement to be accurate and so intentionally begins to doubt, hoping that what the individual finds in the research will confirm the initial desire to reject the belief.³⁵

Logical doubts: Logical doubts causes crisis of information.³⁶ Ignorance about specific topic leads to significant uncertainty, unsettling our convictions. We deal with logical doubts by doing research. People read books. People consider ideas. People attend lectures. People invest diligently in acquiring more knowledge. People must sift through it all and see what makes the most sense.³⁷ Individuals must ask, what is consistent? What view lines up with how the world

³⁰ Ross Moret, "Religious Ethics and Empirical Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 49, no. 1 (2021): 34, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jore.12341>.

³¹ Megan A. Neff, "Barriers to Recognition: The Third and Inter-Neuro Communication Breakdown," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 41, no. 3 (2022): 216.

³² *Ibid.*, 217.

³³ Moret, "Religious Ethics," 53.

³⁴ Robert Audi, "Faith, Belief, and Will: Toward a Volitional Stance Theory of Faith," *Sophia* 58, no. 3 (2019): 417-8.

³⁵ Moret, "Religious Ethics," 51-52.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 56-57.

seems to work? Research can cure many logical doubts and produce clear thinking and good old-fashioned reason.

Cultural Empathy: The apologist recognizes the sensitivities and difficulties the Christian faith encounters in any specific cultural context.³⁸ Therefore, it is necessary for the apologist to respond graciously and winsomely to specific objections to Christianity, potential misunderstandings or historic misrepresentations that may stand in the way of an appreciative reception of the gospel.³⁹

Orthodoxy (correct beliefs): The teaching of the Great Commission stands at the threshold of Jesus' and the church's mission. The Great Commission details the task of making disciples who receive teaching and baptism as followers of Christ (Matt 28:18–20). Jesus's authority sends the disciples with confidence under God's sovereignty. The method for carrying out the missionary task appears initially in the pattern of Christ's proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of God, those disciples becoming witnesses of Jesus, and leading to the promised Spirit (Luke 24:47-49), echoed in the mirrored structure of Acts 1:8 with the reception of the promised Spirit, becoming witnesses of Jesus, and the disciples proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of God to the nations.⁴⁰

Orthopathy (right desires or experience): From the perspective of *orthopathy*, the Great Commission operates through the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the missionary task. The

³⁸ Robert Braun, “Religious Dominance and Empathy,” *Theory and Society* 49, no. 3 (2020): 403-4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 404-5.

⁴⁰ Vladimir Kharlamov, “Athanasius and Arius in Deificational Tandem,” *Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies* 3, no. 1(2020): 32, DOI:10.1353/joc.2020.0002.

dedication toward those who have not heard the gospel also reveals the character and pathos of God. The day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) reveals the impartation of the same Spirit to the church that Jesus Christ received at his baptism. The prominence of this spiritual immersion received attention from brother Luke as a part of the instructions and experience promised to the disciples and future believers (Lk 24:49). The Pentecostal reading of Scripture demands a clear definition of spiritual power and relational obedience while refusing political and controlling iterations of power derived from and destined for the church. Instead, according to Jesus's instructions, fulfilling the Great Commission by preaching the gospel in self-reliance is insufficient. The Spirit helps the believer to exercise the missionary task; and abiding with the Holy Spirit provides perspective and direction to the believer.⁴¹

Orthopraxy (right practice or behavior): The correct practice of mission, a product of biblical *orthodoxy* and Spirit-led *orthopathy*, are framing points of the origin and destination of the gospel, as the trajectory of the biblical mission includes all points on the vector. The disciples initially gathered in obedience to follow the risen Jesus's instructions to receive the promise of the Spirit in Jerusalem. They received the power to complete the task of preaching the kingdom of God from that point. Further, the empowerment of the Spirit guided the geographic direction of their now Spirit-led efforts in mission. Empowerment of the Spirit provided direction for where the disciples would preach the kingdom of God. While it could have become enticing for the followers of Christ to evangelize the immediate area of Jerusalem through efforts

⁴¹ Nancy Pineda-Madrid, "The Aesthetics of Solidarity: Our Lady of Guadalupe and American Democracy," *Horizons* 49, no. 2 (2022): 417, doi:10.1017/hor.2022.52.

immediately following the Resurrection, Jesus directed them to wait until the Spirit arrived. This divine guidance remains as essential then as it is now for the impending missionary task.⁴²

Limitations

No study is without potential limitations, as limitations attempt to address the possible weaknesses involved in the study. First, one limitation required using sources no more than five years old as the researcher considers and moves toward the intervention process. However, it is not easy to gather contemporary materials five years old that are pertinent to the study of the Resurrection. The research required strict adherence to materials within a specific period, which proved difficult. In addition, because the nature of the project is very narrow in scope, materials that spoke heavily on the Resurrection fell outside the research age-range focus. Therefore, the researcher attempted to bring out the rich nature of the Resurrection and believed that older information would add weight to the process but limited the sources' scope within ten years.

The second limitation dealt with time. The researcher considered that individuals may not have enough time to sit and address or even answer the presented open and close-ended questions for the research. As a result, this limitation may affect or skew the data due to practical or theoretical constraints because of participants involvement or lack thereof during the process. The researcher used a convenient versus a generalized sample as the implementation and intervention of the design came to fruition.

The third limitation resided in the fact that, although there may be abundant sources to confirm the gospel writings, the sources themselves came up against enormous skepticism for the

⁴² Jacob J. Prahlow, "Redemptive Kingdom Diversity: A Biblical Theology of the People of God," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 65, no. 1 (2022): 131.

contemporary mind. The fourth limitation involved addressing the problem that is paramount to adding validity to the research. Because of the nature of the problem, purpose, and thesis statement, the research limited the focus group to only those individuals who are consenting adults. Consenting adults for this study included individuals eighteen years and older. However, as the research progressed and if the number of participants became inadequate, the researcher may incorporate other consenting age groups to meet the required sample size and achieve measurable results. If expansion of the pool of participants occurred, the research noted this information.

The fifth limitation involved time constraints and survey questions. The research looked at fifteen questions for issuance, as participants in this rural community faced time constraints. Also, because of these time constraints, conducting any form of a focus group may be limited to non-existent. Nevertheless, the researcher's only achievable goal may be gathering the information, tabulating the results, and sharing the data with the pastor, pastor's council, and church body.

For this process, the research used a convenient sample, as mentioned above, soliciting attending members of NLCC and EVCS instead of a random or generalized sample.⁴³ The reason for using this convenient sample gave the researcher the information to ascertain how many individuals are willing to commit to change and move towards the discipline of learning about the Resurrection, as the researcher considered the limitations in the collection process. In addition, the researcher considered the limitation of accessibility with the chosen individuals for

⁴³ Carol M. Roberts and Laura Hyatt, *The Dissertation Journey: A Practical and Comprehensive Guide to Planning, Writing, and Defending Your Dissertation* (Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press, 2018), 143.

the process. For example, how long can the researcher engage the chosen participants, and what is a convenient time to do so? The researcher understood that the limitation placed on the research methodology is not in a vacuum but is a well-thought-out approach to give the stakeholders a necessary voice in the process by explicitly using the action research method.

Delimitations

Delimitations are not dissimilar to limitations because both focus on limitations. However, delimitations address the scope of the research relating to the presented research questions. Delimitations address where the research is going with a specific topic and the extent of the confines the researcher will place on the topic.

The first delimitation of this research focused on two Scriptures, Matthew 28:19-20 and 1 Peter 3:15, with other Scriptures to support the claim the researcher attempted to make when addressing the specific issue outlined in the thesis statement. The study focused on these two Scriptures, setting aside the other intriguing and essential doctrines of the Christian faith to only the Resurrection narrative and its importance in the Great Commission Command and its subsequent defense. Another delimitation required that primary and secondary sources be at most five years old and, if not, within ten years. However, the researcher included sources older than five years relevant to the study, effectively conveying the intended message. The purpose of using older sources mixed with more contemporary ones gave the study a panoramic view of the topic. Still, the study delimited the use of resource materials over ten years old from the current year of the thesis submission. Another delimitation is the chosen topic, "*The Resurrection and the Witness*," which focuses on the Resurrection of Christ and the believer's duty to understand the message and convincingly articulate this position to others. The researcher understands that there are alternate views of the Resurrection of Christ which is the cornerstone of Christian

doctrine. However, any material or sources used highlighted and connected information pertinent to the Resurrection and the witnessing of the gospel's message.

The choosing of individuals is another delimitation. Regarding the paper, the research delimitations itself focused on the NLCC and EVCS congregational body, seeking to ensure that the information gathered benefited the church and school's ability to defend the Resurrection effectively. The research selected a population of individuals who are not only clergy but individuals who showed a desire and interest in the study to learn about the Resurrection of Christ and how to communicate its defense effectively.⁴⁴ The researcher understood that not everyone who claimed to have a desire followed through with the engagement in learning about the topic. However, carefully screening potential candidates eliminated those with a passing interest. Also, the research excluded individuals under the age of eighteen. The project avoided teaching the Resurrection to children or young adults under eighteen because they have not developed sound abstract reasoning. Exposing children to this kind of teaching will only confuse them. Instead, children who fell within this age group had the opportunity to gain experience from their parents or guardians modeling Christlike behaviors before them as they became familiar with Scripture. The aim is that the reason identified in 1 Peter 3:15 and the command in Matthew 28:19-20 must work hand in hand, with one not dominating the role of the other. By waiting and learning from their parents and other respectable adults in the faith, the child will be ready to move to the next stage as they learn from those walking in defense and command of the Resurrection.

⁴⁴ Schnabel, "The Persecution of Christians," 544.

Thesis Statement

Bridging the gap between the Resurrection and the witness is too essential to leave unabated. For too long, the ministry and pronouncement of the Resurrection of Christ stood at the forefront of the Christian's apologia. Again, those who are Christians in this modern age cannot underestimate the crucial role the Resurrection plays in the lives of those who believe in Christ. However, as mentioned earlier, the importance of Christian witness is equally important but less spoken about when it comes to the defense of the Resurrection.⁴⁵ If leaders are equipped to defend the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, then they will model for our congregation a more confident witness to the gospel.

⁴⁵ Michael L. Brown, *Resurrection: Investigating a Rabbi from Brooklyn, a Preacher from Galilee, and an Event That Changed the World* (Chicago: Charisma House, 2020), 47.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In introducing this section, it was vital to remember that knowledge is information packaged in different forms. Individuals weigh and build upon existing literature to bring different perspectives to the discussion forum. The problem addressed and the purpose of the research both tie into the thesis statement, which becomes the heart of the review.⁴⁶ Consequently, this section highlights and exposes the existing problem at NLCC and EVCS, which is a lack of resources and materials to aid leaders in witnessing to and defending the Resurrection. Therefore, this section is critical to the issue just as builders lay materials to erect a frame or structure. The framework brought existing resources that either supported or opposed the topic and thesis in question. The framework sets the stage for the literature review, paving the way as John the Baptist did for Christ (Isa 40:3, 57:14; Mal 3:1; Mk 1:2-3). The upcoming literature review sought to lend additional knowledge as it explored the works of various academic authors to arm leaders at NLCC and EVCS with relevant information to tackle the problem. However, knowledge is only a portion of the battle. The researcher applied the suggested texts yielding this knowledge, hoping individuals gained understanding and applied wisdom as they examined the various sources to increase learning.

Subsequently, the literature review fundamentally dealt with topics related to the Resurrection and the equipping of the leader and believer to share the gospel effectively. Most specifically, the review addressed the topic of witnessing, focusing on the passage of the Great

⁴⁶ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach for Doctor of Ministry Projects* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 19.

Commission as found in Matthew 28:19-20 as well as the believer's *apologia*, which is to give a reason for that hope within them as found in 1 Peter 3:15. These two passages framed the literature review as it seeks to support these Scriptures with other biblical references and sources to back up the Resurrection claim and the power that undergirds its potential.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the literature review identified any possible and impending gaps in the scholarly conversation and either seek to explain or eliminate them.

Examining the relevant themes associated with Christ's Resurrection through the lens of the Christian witness and its defense, the following literature played a crucial role in the research process for the topic to address the prevailing problem. The review acknowledges those who both support and reject the Resurrection claim. In laying the rational and biblical foundation for the Resurrection, the review impinged on the notion that the power that raised Jesus from the dead was also evident in the Creation.⁴⁸ Finally, as mentioned in the purpose statement, this review is intended to encourage and focus NLCC and EVCS leaders and believers on evangelism, using apologetic persuasion of the reality of the Resurrection to share the gospel (Matt 28:19; 1 Pet 3:15).

However, the researcher understands that there are other materials from which to gather sources. Hence, to remain specific and concise in the study and appreciation of the topic, the researcher only employed pertinent resources that complement or contrast the theme of how Christ's Resurrection affects the Christian's gospel witness to enrich the discussion.⁴⁹ It is

⁴⁷ Delany, "Purgatory, Alms-Giving, and the Needs of the Dead," 3.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁹ May, "The Significance of Freedom in God's Plan," 2.

without question that producing a Doctor of Ministry Degree project has its share of difficulties. The researcher must learn to navigate and move around many potential pitfalls through the process while maintaining a level of coherency that falls in line with academic standards and mores.⁵⁰

Literature Review

Before taking a step into the literature review, it is incumbent to lay out why the topic of the Resurrection is critical to addressing a problem with evangelism. After extensive research, the present resources and materials reference the same eternal power that existed in the Genesis account of Creation was present in Christ's Resurrection. Because Christ experienced resurrection, Christ's believers also have hope of rebirth after death, made into a new spiritual creation.⁵¹ In other words, the same power God used to originally create the world God uses to re-create or regenerate sinful human beings, and that is the power of Christ's Resurrection. The Scripture reveals that God's people perish due to a lack of knowledge and oftentimes allow the spirit of fear to take control (Prov 29:18; Isa 5:13; Hos 4:6; 2 Tim 1:7). The believer's life should never fall under such adversities because Christ is their hope after death (John 11:25-26). However, the fact does not escape the reality that Christ believers can do the unthinkable in committing suicide or live a depressed and unfulfilled life. Dying is not the final solution because Jesus is alive, and especially for the believer in Christ, Jesus promised that all those who

⁵⁰ Wiarda, "Scripture Between the Incarnate Christ," 121.

⁵¹ Marcin Krycki, "The role of Genesis Account of Creation in the development of monogamy in the Old Testament and its reception in the early Church," *Colloquia Theologica Ottoniana*, no. 2 (2017): 100, <https://doi.org/10.18276/cto.2017.2-05>.

believed in Him shall live.⁵² Therefore, no matter what life throws at believers they must rest in this hope that Christ is alive. According to Scripture, the Resurrection of Christ should be the Christian's hope when facing the aspects of logical and emotional doubts regarding death, depression, or even the thought of suicide as echoed in the book of John 11:25-26.⁵³ Where Scripture gives hope for believers in Christ after death, unfortunately for unbelievers, no scientific observations can provide them with hope or lend credence to what awaits the skeptical and unbelieving soul. Thus, it is critical to defend the truth of the Resurrection as our source of hope in this life and the next to come. The following section details nine theories that oppose the truth of the Resurrection.

Theories Opposing the Resurrection

RCC Theory of Purgatory

Generally, Christians hold to the certainty of life with Christ after death (2 Cor 5:8), although some denominations espouse views contrary to this immediate reality, offering a more intermediate solution to and for the process of death. These views avoid the biblical teachings about Jesus being the source of all resurrection and life.⁵⁴ The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) perpetuated one such view by accepting *purgatorium*, a Latin word for the English translation *purgatory*.⁵⁵ The concept of purgatory arrived in the Middle Ages of the Roman Catholic Church's existence between AD 500-1500 with the phrase, "*Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti*

⁵² Jeffrey Tripp, "Jesus's Special Knowledge in the Gospel of John," *Novum Testamentum* 61, no. 3 (2019): 272.

⁵³ Caroline Yih, "The Impact of Cultural Diversity on End-of-Life Care," *Religions* 13, no. 7 (2022): 8-9.

⁵⁴ May, "The Significance of Freedom in God's Plan," 3.

⁵⁵ Delany, "Purgatory, Alms-Giving, and the Needs of the Dead," 2.

Patriciia,” a temporary place for saved and lost souls to undergo final purification before gaining access to heaven.⁵⁶ However, under the Reformation led by Martin Luther, this position and other RCC undertakings came under scrutiny in the sixteenth century.⁵⁷ The RCC often uses the following Scriptures and a passage in the Apocrypha, primarily from 2 Maccabees 7:1-41,⁵⁸ to justify their view on the authenticity of the claim for a purgatory, taking Scripture out of context to validate a manufactured concept (Matt 12:32, Luke 16:19, 26 23:43; 1 Cor 3:11-15; 2 Tim 1:18; Heb 12:29).⁵⁹

Swoon Theory

The section started by examining the first two theories heavily funded by Deedat, Ally, and Din, Muslim scholars who articulate the Swoon Theory and the Substitute Hypothesis (also known as the Twin Theory) in support of Islam's objection that Jesus was never crucified or placed on a tree.⁶⁰ The Swoon Theory defended by Deedat, Ally, and Din does not deny the crucifixion of Christ. However, it suggests that Jesus merely fainted or underwent self-hypnosis on the cross and resuscitated later.⁶¹ The Muslims' position is that the disciples and those around Christ conspired in some way to fake His crucifixion and death in the hope of deceiving the

⁵⁶ Delany, "Purgatory, Alms-Giving, and the Needs of the Dead," 4.

⁵⁷ J.M. Raley, "Martin Luther on the Legitimacy of Resisting the Emperor," *The Journal of Law and Religion* 37, no. 1 (Jan. 2022): 104-5.

⁵⁸ Bruce Chilton, "The Chimeric 'Empty Tomb,'" *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 17, no. 1/2 (2019): 146, doi:10.1163/17455197-01701001.

⁵⁹ Nicholas T. Wright, "Resurrection and the Renewal of Creation: Public Lecture," *The Biblical Annals* 9, no. 4 (2019): 656. doi:10.31743/biban.4784.

⁶⁰ Khouri, "The Crucifixion in the Qur'an," 167.

⁶¹ Bargagli-Stoffi, Falco J. Gustavo Cevolani, and Giorgio Gnecco, "Simple Models in Complex Worlds: Occam's Razor and Statistical Learning Theory," *Minds & Machines* 32, no. 1 (2022): 2, doi:10.1007/s11023-022-09592-z.

masses. They go so far as to argue that if a crucifixion involved nailing a person to the cross, the individual would quickly succumb to respiratory and cardiovascular failure in most cases.⁶²

Therefore, Therefore, Christ's loving disciples were motivated to ensure that this horrible death would never be experienced by their beloved leader. If the death were faked, then no resurrection is needed. These theories, although Muslim in origin, create a long-standing debate and divide between the religion of Islam and Christianity.⁶³ Khouri states, "...While even skeptics and atheists join Christians in submitting to the crucifixion historicity, most Muslims deny it."

Indeed, Mohammad suggests in Surah 4:157 that Jesus never experienced crucifixion, but someone bearing Jesus's resemblance went to the cross. For the Muslims, the *Qur'an* is the highest authority. Any authority outside of that text became secondary and used only to confirm the authenticity of the *Qur'anic* verses.⁶⁴ However, to quash debates about any Qur'anic verses, Muslims go to another source familiar to their defense which is their *tafsīr* books, such as *Al-Tabari*, *Al-Qurtubi* (Sunni), *al-Tabarsi* (Shi'ite), and *Ibn Arabi* (Sufi) to lighten any confusion. Although Islam seems united under one umbrella, there is a split in views between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims when considering the story involving Jesus's crucifixion. There are two tafsir writings or Islamic exegesis: *al-Tabari* associated with the Sunnis and *Al-Tabarsi* associated with the Shi'as. However, under both the Sunnis and Shi'as versions, their writings on Surah 4:157 consistently teach that Jesus never went to the cross. They offer different stories about how

⁶² Khouri, Sherene Nicholas. "The Crucifixion in the Qur'an: Answering Muslim's Claims Regarding the Death of Jesus Christ." *Transformation* 38, no. 2 (2021): 166, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378821994216>.

⁶³ Ibid., 158.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 164.

and who took His place or explain that Allah influenced *Issa* (Jesus) to escape spiritually into heaven.

To stake a claim against the Swoon Theory, the researcher must examine the plausibility of the defense for the crucifixion. Ultimately, the *Qur'anic* verses and their sources do not consider how the biblical account of the crucifixion aligns with outside historical evidence. The scripture details that Jesus's body came off the cross only after the soldiers confirmed His death without breaking His legs as medically Romans soldiers broke the legs of victims to ensure they did not push up to take air, thereby speeding the asphyxiation process (John 19:33). The Bible also confirms that before the Crucifixion Jesus underwent inquisition, scourging, and humiliation from those who had Him in bondage (Matt 27:26; Mark 15:15, 44; John 19:1). The writings of Josephus and other notable historians similarly record that Roman crucifixion invented by the Persians was so gruesome that not many survived the beatings beforehand or the carrying of their cross, and that crucifixion did not have to follow a particular pattern as it was at the discretion of those who oversaw and carried out its proceedings.⁶⁵ The Roman's brutality on individuals before, during, and after crucifixion were sure to lead to death. Therefore, Islam fails to see that the gospels and history support the claim for the horrendous acts involved in the measuring out for those who were to undergo crucifixion. Khouri states, "Imagine: how could Jesus—who was beaten, bruised, dehydrated, and exhausted from a sleepless night, taken across Jerusalem to Pontius Pilate and sent back to be scourged and crucified—have survived? Taking into

⁶⁵ Khouri, "The Crucifixion in the Qur'an," 165.

consideration the historical background about the cruelty of scourging and the process of crucifixion shows that it is impossible for Christ to survive the cross.”⁶⁶

Science also belies the Muslim claims about Christ’s death, which no Islamic scholar to date seems to desire to address using their *tafsīr* to speak on the issue. Deedat, Din, and Eisenberg support the view that there was medical controversy over the presumed death of Christ. However, according to anatomical scientists and many medical doctors such as Fedrick Zugibe, there is no reason to believe that Jesus was not dead before the Roman soldier pierced His side and others refused to break His legs, as John 19:32-33 claimed.

Twin Theory (Substitution Hypothesis)

In hot pursuit of the Muslim's Swoon Theory is the "Twin Theory or substitution hypothesis," which purports that Jesus had a twin who took His place, most notably Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Christ. Shabir Ally, a Muslim cleric, states, "I have followed the thinking of many who feel that it is not necessary to have the belief that someone else was substituted for Jesus."⁶⁷ The Quran opposes the biblical resurrection of Christ. It claims that Jesus, being a prophet, could not have experienced crucifixion. The Quran also states that Christ cannot be the Son of God, as the Bible contends, because God cannot have a Son. However, Muslims propose that if crucifixion occurred, the individual who experienced this crucifixion was Judas (Surah 4:157-159).⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Khouri, “The Crucifixion in the Qur’an,” 165-66.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 160.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Notable contemporary Muslim scholar Louay Fatoohi seems to go against the grain of Islam's longstanding position concerning Christ's Crucifixion and proposes a new idea, the twin or substitutionary-hypothesis theory.⁶⁹ Fatoohi latches onto two positions concerning the Crucifixion of Christ in the Qur'an, that Jesus never experienced crucifixion, and if it occurred, then someone else took His place on the cross, in this case, Judas.⁷⁰ However, Fatoohi leans more towards the second point of the two that a misidentification of Jesus was a possibility because of ancient inadequate verification of identity methodology. Fatoohi laid out many objections to confirming that it was indeed Christ on the cross, starting with the soldiers, who would never be able to identify Jesus apart from someone else doing so. Fatoohi also addresses the various heresies the second century fathers of the Christian church tried to quell regarding Jesus's deity. For Fatoohi, these heresies proved that the authenticity of the Crucifixion overall was suspect.

Stolen Body Theory

The "Stolen Body Theory" is another theory directly contrasting the Bible's position. The "Stolen Body Theory" asserts that Jesus's followers stole the body.⁷¹ After officials examined the empty tomb,⁷² they speculated that the disciples and possibly others stole or hid Christ's body.⁷³ Presumably, the Stolen Body Theory existed from the very inception of the assumed resurrection

⁶⁹ Khouri, "The Crucifixion in the Qur'an," 167-168.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 167.

⁷¹ Dale C. Allison, *The Resurrection of Jesus: Apologetics, Polemics, History* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 24.

⁷² Chilton, "The Chimeric," 145-6.

⁷³ Smith, "Seeing Things," 691.

and is mentioned in the book of Matthew. Matthew's account simply records what people believed after the Crucifixion, and the author did not intend to lend conjecture to the Resurrection claim. Matthew's account differs from the other gospels, details the events between Jesus's Crucifixion and the empty tomb. However, the other gospels support the Resurrection claim with slight variations to individuals.

Believers of the stolen body theory argue that Christ's dead body was stolen from the tomb, rather than resurrected. However, history refutes the argument of the Stolen Body Theory.⁷⁴ However, it is essential to address the position and thought pattern held by the first-century believers of Christ regarding this theory.⁷⁵ Even though Matthew's account is a standard from which the Stolen Body Theory may have had its beginnings, the theory struggled over the years to convince those who are ardently seeking after truth to believe its claims. Matthew shows the deceptive roots of this theory's origin (Matt 28:11–15). The Stolen Body Theory relies on abnormalities to give possible credulity to its claims. Moreover, it deposits on the notion that a few of the disciples stole the body, which indicates that some fifty years after the Crucifixion and the writing of Matthew, there may have been those who were already sowing these seeds of deceit in conjuring up this theory.

Despite the deceptive aspect of the theory, the Stolen Body Theory never considered that the disciples were in hiding after the Crucifixion. Additionally, the apostles and many disciples

⁷⁴ Zachary Breitenbach, "A New Argument that Collective Hallucinations Do Not Adequately Account for the Group Appearances of Jesus in the Gospels," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 62, no. 2 (2019): 342.

⁷⁵ Stephen H. Smith, "Seeing Things": 'Best Explanations' and the Resurrection of Jesus," *The Heythrop Journal* 61, no. 4 (2020): 698, <https://doi.org/10.1111/heyj.13316>.

gave their lives in the service of Christ. It is not plausible to claim simultaneously that individuals who stole a body, aware of the apparent deception, later surrender their lives for something they knew not to be true (Rom 5:6-11).⁷⁶ The scriptures show that the disciples cowered in fear after the Crucifixion, not yet fully understanding or believed in an actual bodily resurrection of the Messiah.⁷⁷ The disciples ought to have understood or believed a little, since Christ raised Lazarus from the dead. However, Lazarus' resurrection differs from what Jesus underwent because Lazarus's body would eventually die and decay. Jesus showed His disciples that He had the power to raise individuals in a glorified form.

The Gospels are the key sources to the Resurrection and chart a smooth course on the rough seas of human contradictions and heresies that bombard its claims over the years in this elaborate proclamation for the bodily resurrection of Christ, an essential doctrine for the Christian faith.⁷⁸ The gospels are so unique that manipulating their contents would constitute an enormous task. Each writer of the Gospel was independent and recorded the event in different periods.

Therefore, it is imperative to note the dates that the apostles wrote the Gospels when considering the Resurrection. Since the Crucifixion and Resurrection occurred between AD 30-

⁷⁶ Breitenbach, "A New Argument," 342.

⁷⁷ Christian Stettler, "The Resurrection of the Body. Its Place in Biblical Theology and Its Meaning for Christian Life and Witness," *European Journal of Theology* 32, no. 1 (2023): 26, 29, doi: 10.5117/EJT2023.1.003.stet.

⁷⁸ Simone J. Joseph, "The Resurrection as Category Error: A Response to The Resurrection of Jesus," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 32, no. 3 (2022): 290, doi:10.5325/bullbiblrese.32.3.0287.

33, the book of Mark, considered the earliest of the gospels, was written around AD 50.⁷⁹ The book of Matthew was recorded around AD 80, the book of Luke written in AD 85, the book of Acts around AD 85-90, and the book of John in or about AD 95. The authors of these books had more than enough time to change their stories over the years, but none did. However, even earlier than all these was the book of Corinthians which was written about twenty-five years after the Resurrection. It is vital to recognize the importance of how close the date of writing was to the event's occurrence. The nearer the message and the writing about an event, the more credible the event becomes to those who wish to apply objective and rational reasoning.

Additionally, the book of Acts uses the Resurrection as the driving force behind the message it unfolds. As readers watch the acts of the apostles and early Christian church, the bodily resurrection of Christ is confirmed by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit's work (Acts 2:24, 4:10-12, 13:34; 1 Thess 1:10). Leaping off the pages of the Old Testament into the New Testament, the Resurrection of Christ proves that God the Father attested to Christ's accomplishment by raising Him from the dead (Rom 8:11). Jesus declared to the disciples His resurrection, but even though they heard Him they did not fully understand its ramifications.

The Hallucination Theory

In simple terms, the "Hallucination Theory" reports that because of the shock of Jesus's sudden crucifixion, the disciples and followers hallucinated the Resurrection narrative.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Jeffrey Tripp, "The Eyewitness in Their Own Words: Testing Richard Bauckham's Model Using Verifiable Quotations," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 44, no. 3 (2022): 411-12, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X211051299>.

⁸⁰ Philip R. Corlett et al., "Powers III. Hallucinations and Strong Priors," *Trends in Cognitive Science* 23, no. 2 (2018):114, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2018.12.001>.

However, it is no secret that a vast majority of scholars accept that the disciples saw Jesus after the Resurrection and they denote this occurrence as a historical fact (Matt 28:16-20; Luke 24:36-49; John 20: 19-23, 26-29, 21:1-23).⁸¹ The Hallucination Theory is nothing more than a naturalistic hypothesis.⁸² It is a historically accepted fact that these individuals were not the same after seeing the risen Lord, and more so were they changed after their infilling by the Holy Spirit.⁸³ The accounts of the sightings of the resurrected Lord in the Gospels, and the account of Pentecost in the book of Acts, although dramatic for many, present an undeniable case of the apparent miraculous and supernatural intervention of God in the lives of these individuals. Were the disciples hallucinating in both instances? That scriptural reality denies all logic for the secular mind. How could these men, who were once cowardly in fear, speak on the day of Pentecost with boldness in tongues not native to them, announcing the miraculous working of God of the resurrected Christ (Gal 1-2).⁸⁴

During mass hallucinations, individuals usually have different rather than the same experiences.⁸⁵ These experiences progressively become worse over time if not treated by medical science.⁸⁶ However, for the disciples of Christ, the Bible supports all having the same witness of the risen Lord occurring at different times with various individuals (Luke 24:13-32, 33-36; John

⁸¹ Breitenbach, "A New Argument," 342.

⁸² Smith, "Seeing Things," 691.

⁸³ Joseph, "The Resurrection as Category Error," 288-9.

⁸⁴ Even skeptical scholars like Gerd Lüdemann and Michael Goulder date Paul's experience to within three years from the crucifixion. See Gerd Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 38; Michael Goulder, "The Baseless Fabric of a Vision," in *Resurrection Reconsidered*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 48.

⁸⁵ Smith, "Seeing Things," 694.

⁸⁶ Breitenbach, "A New Argument," 342-5.

20:11-18, 21:4-12).⁸⁷ Mary, in the garden who was one of the first to have an encounter with Jesus never thought of the experience as an hallucination?⁸⁸ The issue with hallucinations is that they have momentary realism and then the reality that the occurrence was not actual, thereby tormenting many souls.⁸⁹ However, this was not the case for the disciples and anyone who interacted with Jesus before He showed Himself openly to those who would bring forth the message of salvation.⁹⁰ Everyone who had some near involvement to Jesus knew that the tomb was empty. Therefore, if Jesus's followers were lying, all the ruling authority needed to do was provide evidence to the contrary, and both the ancient and present history would have this documented rejection of the bodily resurrection of Christ. It is implausible that the disciples would steal the body of Jesus, articulate His Resurrection, witness Christ's ascension and Saul of Tarsus's transformation, and then die to defend and propagate a lie.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 347.

⁸⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 241.

⁸⁹ The Emmaus disciples were so convinced of seeing Jesus that they made a late evening return to Jerusalem to tell the disciples (Luke 24:32–36). The seven disciples who saw Jesus while fishing “knew it was the Lord” (John 21:12) and had intimate conversations with Him (John 21:15–23). Mary Magdalene, once she recognized Jesus, declared Him “Rabboni” and ran to tell the disciples she had seen Jesus (John 20:16–8). Both Gospels also emphasize the physicality and certainty of Jesus's appearances (Luke 24:30, 39–43; John 20:24–29; 21:9, 13).

⁹⁰ Breitenbach, “A New Argument,” 348.

Wrong Tomb Theory

The “Wrong Tomb Theory” also opposes the Resurrection of Christ, first proposed by Kirsopp Lake⁹¹ in 1907.⁹² Kirsopp Lake and Alan Segal⁹³ doubt the initial story of the Resurrection and the empty tomb.⁹⁴ For Segal, the story of the empty tomb came much later and was not an official occurrence after the Resurrection of Christ.⁹⁵ The theory indicates that the women and the disciples of Jesus went to an already empty tomb, presumably the wrong tomb.⁹⁶ Thus, Christ did not rise from the dead; His dead body was never truly found. The “resurrection” story proceeds from a problem of mistaken gravesites. However, the theory begs the question that even if the disciples went to the wrong tomb, the ruling authorities would have also gone to the wrong tomb. However, this would not be the case because the ruling class knew precisely where the tomb was due to Roman soldiers and Jewish palace guards' constant watch. Unless the skeptics plan to outrightly state that the Bible is entirely false and worth no effort to analyze its contents, they should be objective as to why the disciples thought Jesus rose from the grave and pursued their faith in Him so passionately. Although the disciples spent three years

⁹¹ Kirsopp Lake (1872–1946), a critical New Testament professor, suggested that the women went to the wrong tomb, assumed that He rose from the dead, and then ran away. They eventually told the disciples about their encounter with an empty tomb, which led to them experiencing visions of the risen Lord.

⁹² Chilton, “The Chimeric,” 170.

⁹³ Alan Franklin Segal (August 2, 1945 – February 13, 2011) was a scholar of ancient religions specializing in Judaism's relationship to Christianity and understood Paul the Apostle as part of Jewish history. Segal interprets Paul's conversion as an apostasy - a break from Judaism because of his insistence on transformation in Christ. Segal, who wrote on Christian and Jewish beliefs in an afterlife, explained that the view about death existed in the first century and is active amongst Western religions.

⁹⁴ Chilton, “The Chimeric,” 145-6.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Smith, “Seeing Things,” 691.

with Jesus and heard His position on the Resurrection numerous times, they did not initially believe it to be true when told. Did the skeptics consider these accounts valid or disregard them as fluff? Even Mary initially thought that someone had moved the body of Jesus (John 11:34-40, 20:13-15). The Wrong Tomb Theory insufficiently addresses why these disciples would follow a dead man when considering the events surrounding the empty tomb.

Alien Theory

The alien theory suggests that Jesus was an alien from another world who copied a first-century Jewish male. The proponents of this view cite John 10:16 as a possible reference to Jesus's knowledge and acceptance of the existence of other people. Many will quote C.S. Lewis's take on the matter,

"It is, of course, the essence of Christianity that God loves man and for his sake became man and died. But that does not prove that man is the sole end of Nature. In the parable, it was the one lost sheep that the shepherd went in search of: it was not the only sheep in the flock, and we are not told that it was the most valuable - save in so far as the most desperately in need has, while the need lasts, a peculiar value in the eyes of Love."⁹⁷

Those who believe this theory believe this is how Jesus was able to perform many miracles. However, one of the biggest problems with the alien theory is that it is not open to any truth test claim. There is no place in Scripture where the Bible uses words or terms to indicate the possibility of alien life forms or has science confirmed this possibility.

Legend Theory

The legend theory was created in the 19th century by theologian D. F. Strauss (not, surprisingly, by a historian or secular scientist). This theory is the most popular and asserts that

⁹⁷ C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. W. Hooper (London: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970): 38-47.

Jesus was an actual historical figure but that the legend of Jesus's importance grew over time. Strauss developed the theory in the post-Enlightenment era due to perceiving dissonance between biblical miracles associated with Jesus and what Strauss determined to be the authentic Jesus. Strauss reported that these so-called miracles of the Scriptures were mere deception or myths to persuade individuals to believe in Christ. As the culture embraced naturalism and materialism, it was easy for Strauss's theory to take root and proliferate.

Moreover, as time passed, supporting the hallucination or conspiracy theories was easy for those who believed in the Legend Theory. The aim and objective of the culture was to deny anything supernatural and replace it with rational and natural explanations. Both atheists and deists have no problem accepting these theories with those who fill the religious camp, including Strauss, Rudolf Bultmann, and the Jesus Seminar, to name a few of the modern era's most popular and recognized figures.

However, Strauss's Legend Theory argument has several objections, beginning with the acceptable time development of actual legends. Julius Müller, a critique and contemporary of Strauss, states:

"Most decidedly must a considerable interval of time be required for such a complete transformation of a whole history by popular tradition when the series of legends are formed in the same territory where the heroes lived and wrought. Here one cannot imagine how such a series of legends could arise in an historical age, obtain universal respect, and supplant the historical recollection of the true character and connexion of their heroes' lives in the minds of the community, if eyewitnesses were still at hand, who could be questioned respecting the truth of the recorded marvels. Hence, legendary fiction, as it likes not the clear present time, but prefers the mysterious gloom of grey antiquity, is wont to seek a remoteness of age, along with that of space, and to remove its boldest and more rare and wonderful creations into a very remote and unknown land."

Strauss bases the Legend Theory on the notion that the development of the "legend" of Christ occurred in the same era as the living witnesses and disciples. However, the length of time

for a legend to take effect would be around two centuries, or at least far removed from the time of the New Testament documents. Such is the case with the apocryphal gospels, which showed up at that precise length of time.⁹⁸

Additionally, both the eyewitness accounts of 1 Corinthians 15 and Christ's appearance to many of the disciples for forty days after the Resurrection outrightly refute Strauss's theory. They corroborate the events surrounding the Crucifixion, death, burial, and Resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, the writing of the Gospels was still in the timeframe of the eyewitnesses, a claim Strauss's position could not categorically deny. Examining the disciples' position as authoritative figures would crush any myth, especially those who established the movement as leaders and spread the gospel's message without compromise. Their purpose as authority figures was to write letters to congregants all over the regions where established followings of Christ were to help those serving continue in the faith of the risen Lord.

Another critical point is that the stories surrounding the Resurrection lack the usual route any legendary tale would typically take. The early followers of Christ developed creeds that authenticated the Resurrection as a fact of history, unlike legendary myths steeped in conjectures and hyperbolism (Mark 15:42-47; 1 Cor 15: 3-7).⁹⁹ The apocryphal gospels written some two

⁹⁸ The title "apocryphal gospels" conventionally applies to specific early Christian or Gnostic texts that are written either in imitation of the genre "gospel" as applied to the New Testament canon or in telling of events and sayings in the life of Jesus and his immediate circle of family and disciples. The original canon of Scriptures rejects these gospels. Hence, the apocryphal gospels came about during the second and fifth centuries.

⁹⁹ Ramona Simut, "Creation and Salvation in Edward Schillebeeckx. Well-being as more about Jesus' death and less about Resurrection." *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 16, no. 46 (2017): 36-37, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/creation-salvation-edward-schillebeeckx-well/docview/1877770109/se-2>.

hundred years after the Resurrection of Christ and the death of the disciples show what legendary myths look like in their writings.

Another point against Strauss's position is that, while legendary accounts have no basis for authenticating their viability, the Scriptures have several accounts of the Resurrection and the witness, starting with the Gospels, the books of John, Acts, and 1 and 2 Peter, and Paul's letters to the New Testament congregants. In addition, the mere fact that the gospels and other books of the Bible show variations in the Resurrection narrative, not copied from one book to the other, and not once contradicting the outcome of the Resurrection narrative, is also a testimony to the authenticity of the Resurrection claim. Paul L. Maier argues in his book *In the Fullness of Time*, "variations in the Resurrection narratives tend to support, rather than undermine, their authenticity."¹⁰⁰

Conjectures such as Strauss's claim do not consider how foolish it would be for the disciples to claim the prerogative in preaching and defending a message widely known by those of that era to be false. The disciples' willingness to preach and suffer persecution would be preposterous if they were defending a well-known myth. The authorities would have proven the mythical nature of the death and resurrection of Christ just by showing His body. Instead, the message of the Resurrection started in Jerusalem, the place of the Resurrection, and this message of hope in the gospel became the good news for other people and nations.

The last note to consider is that the lives and reputations of the men defending Christ's Resurrection hung in the balance. Many are unlikely to come out and willingly die for a myth.

¹⁰⁰ Paul L. Maier, *In the Fullness of Time: A Historian Looks at Christmas, Easter, and the Early Church* (Kregel Publications, 1991), 24.

Nevertheless, history shows that countless thousands died from believing in Jesus's resurrection. Christianity is alive today not because of a myth but because of its powerful and awesome message of bringing the good news of redemption to the world.

Minimal Facts Theory

The Minimal Facts Theory proposed by Gary Habermas is the watershed theory for any newcomer to apologetics.¹⁰¹ The theory lays out coherent arguments at the heart of Jesus's claim to the Resurrection. Habermas lists twelve "minimal fact statements" in defense of the truth of the Resurrection, but this research focused on three to whet the appetite of leaders at NLCC and EVCS believers whom they equipped to begin their own apologetic journey.¹⁰² The contemporary world faces many troubles as leaders and individuals look for answers in solving or least addressing societal crises. Many religions seem to play an integral role in people's lives but lack the push to take them to a level of satisfaction and security. Many people stay away from any form of religion, opting instead to live lives that are totally in opposition to what they may deem as control. However, it must be said that although Christianity falls in the category of religion, its teaching and principles from Scripture supports a relationship with God more than any other religious persuasions. How does humanity answer the age-old questions of origin, meaning, morality, destiny, and identity? How do we account for the deep desire to worship within the heart of every human being? The Bible seems to answer these questions with a clear and confident message.

¹⁰¹ Khouri, "The Crucifixion in the Qur'an," 159.

¹⁰² Ibid., 160.

The Minimal Facts Theory includes much scholarly evidence and autonomous lines of arguments that many mainstream contemporary scholars acknowledge as supporting the historicity of the Resurrection claims.¹⁰³ Habermas' argument utilizes the historical facts argument in extrapolating a coherent view of the Resurrection of Christ.¹⁰⁴ There are twelve proposed minimal facts statements by Habermas which this paper does not include but listed three the researcher of this paper believes is pertinent to the study. Those three accounts are:

1. Jesus's disciples believed that Christ rose from the dead (Mark 16: 6-7-9, 11-12, 14, 15-20; John 2:17, 22, 22, 12:16).
2. James, the brother of Jesus believed in Christ as the Messiah (James 1:1)
3. Paul's conversion to the Christian way (Acts 9:1-22).¹⁰⁵

The minimal facts approach is evidential and calls for searchable and widely acceptable historical claims.¹⁰⁶ Habermas has undoubtedly kept the minimal facts arguments tight, as Ockham's razor principle demands.¹⁰⁷ Beck and Licona make it clear that the minimal facts argument does not mean minimal information, because the information gives an understandable response to the voices of dissent against the Resurrection of Christ. The eight theories against Christ's Resurrection mentioned above become very superficial, as Gary Habermas uses three minimal facts arguments disproving all eight theories. This is not the time for believers at NLCC

¹⁰³ Merrill C. Tenney, *The Reality of the Resurrection* (Chicago, IL: Barakaldo Books, 2020), 5-6.

¹⁰⁴ Gary R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 23–24.

¹⁰⁵ Raphael Lataster, "Defending Jesus Agnosticism," *Think* 18, no. 51 (2019): 78-9. doi:10.1017/S1477175618000362.

¹⁰⁶ Khouri, "The Crucifixion in the Qur'an," 159.

¹⁰⁷ Bargagli-Stoffi, Cevolani, and Gnecco, *Simple Models*, 14, 19.

and EVCS to become complacent but to continue to hit against these theories through the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Historical Data and Creed

Evidence in the Creation

Just like in Creation, miracles give humanity a chance to acknowledge and believe in God (John 11:40-44).¹⁰⁸ Augustine of Hippo saw religious conversions as a miracle.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, for many believers, it is a recognized fact that the same power that existed for Creation was part and parcel involved in the Resurrection of Christ.¹¹⁰ Although this paper is primarily about the Resurrection and its eyewitness,¹¹¹ there is no doubt that the same power which raised Christ from the dead was an eyewitness to these events.¹¹² The same God who designed, ordered, created, and sustains the universe can interrupt that order with miraculous intervention such as the Resurrection.¹¹³

Briefly advancing the idea touched on in chapter one, Charles Darwin (b.1809 -1882) dropped a bomb on theology with the introduction of *The Evolution of Species*. The unbelieving world accepted this new idea, as Darwin's work moved the Bible, and especially the Creation narrative, into the realm of human knowledge and skepticism and away from theology. Then

¹⁰⁸ Graham H. Twelftree, "The Historian and the Miraculous," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 28, no. 2 (2018): 202, DOI:10.5325/bullbiblrese.28.2.0199.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹¹⁰ Richard A. Rodriguez, "The Word of God for Safeguarding Creation: Bible-based Reflections to Re-establish the God–Humanity–Creation Covenant," *Anglican Theological Review* 103, no. 2 (2021): 127.

¹¹¹ Breitenbach, "A New Argument," 345-6.

¹¹² Rodriguez, "Safeguarding Creation," 114.

¹¹³ Ibid., 127.

came Herbert Spencer, a non-Christian scientist (b.1820 -1903) and contemporary of Darwin (b.1809 -1882), who furthered the idea that earth's origin was a result of evolution. What Darwin and Spencer proposed by subverting the Genesis account of Creation undoubtedly put skepticism in the minds of individuals about God being the author of Creation.¹¹⁴ If this idea were accurate, then the entire Bible became suspect. At the heart of the matter was the challenge to the first ten words of Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The statement spews certainty, not allowing any wiggly room for ambiguity. However, the nature of humanity sought something else that would tickle their intellectual fancy away from the specific Word of the living God, and this they found in both Darwin's and Spencer's work.

Spencer, reading Darwin's work, challenged the nature of origin pronounced in Genesis chapters 1 and 2. In the volume *First Principles of a New System of Philosophy*, Spencer wrote on the categories of the knowable. Spencer proposed that the Creation episodes exist in five categories: Time, Force, Action, Space, and Matter. However, it was clear that the Genesis account pronounced these knowable categories as derivatives of God's Creation. Spencer and the scientific world, who hailed Spencer's work as a masterpiece, failed to acknowledge that closer examination of the first ten words in Genesis 1:1 revealed Spencer's "time," as denoted in Scripture, was already "In the Beginning." Spencer's "force" in the Genesis account was already the self-existing God. Spencer's "action" was already denoted as the Creation. Spencer's "space" was the Heavens, and "matter" was already the Earth. God's genius was already over Creation, giving humanity clear evidence of these categories. Consequently, like Adam and Eve who

¹¹⁴ Katherine Sonderegger, "The God-Intoxicated Theology of a Modern Theologian," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 21, no.1 (2019): 36, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijst.12342>.

neglected the first admonition (Gen 2:16-17), Darwin and Spencer ignored the clear evidence of God's spoken word (2 Pet 1:19).

For Darwin and Spencer, the confirmation of God's sovereignty would only become more annoying to their philosophy if not consciously ignored. Denying God's power behind Creation would essentially be repudiating the Genesis account and the Resurrection as the same God is the author and finisher of both miracles.¹¹⁵ In doing so, Darwin's and Spencer's proclamation would set in the mind of others the denial of Jesus' future Resurrection promised to occur three days after death. However, harping on Genesis 1:11-13 could also be helpful to comprehending the surety of the Resurrection, although hypothetical. Elohim's first signs of life during the advent of Creation occurred on day three, possibly symbolic of Jesus coming out of the grave three days after the Crucifixion. Was this a mere coincidence? Or was God telling humanity something that may be in the future; on a similar third day,¹¹⁶ a Messiah would come forth?¹¹⁷ (John 2:19; Matt 12:40). Merrill Tenney states, "Matthew 16:21 implies that the prescribed interval of time was not accidental."¹¹⁸ The universe has shown that God is a master tactician and mathematician, a God of numbers and precision. The first signs of life emerging from the ground in the Creation could very well have been a precursor to what God had in mind in the form of the Resurrection (John 1:17; Matt 12:40).

¹¹⁵ Sonderegger, "The God-Intoxicated Theology," 36.

¹¹⁶ Andrzej Gieniusz, "Jesus' Resurrection Appearances in 1 Cor 15,5-8 in the Light of the Syntagma Ὡφθῆ + Dative," *The Biblical Annals* 9, no. 3 (2019): 487-88, doi:10.31743/biban.4526.

¹¹⁷ Andrew Simmonds, "Women Witnesses to the Risen Lord," *Verbum Vitae* 40, no. 4 (2022): 911, <https://czasopisma.kul.pl/index.php/vv/article/view/13728>.

¹¹⁸ Tenney, *The Reality*, 31-32.

What is a Miracle?

Not only does evidence from Creation point to the truth of the Resurrection, but miracles also provide substantive evidence. The Resurrection was a miracle just like the virgin birth was a miracle, an act of God carried out by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35-36).¹¹⁹ The Resurrection is doubted by many who heard of this miraculous phenomenon.¹²⁰ Not surprisingly, then, addressing Resurrection requires asking the following question: What is a miracle? A miracle is an event that defies logic and must be highly unusual, resisting the confines of natural laws and affirmed by individuals and eyewitnesses as an exceptional and infrequent occurrence.¹²¹ A miracle can also be understood as God's supernatural intervention in the affairs of humanity. The Bible confirms in various Scriptures that God was involved in the miracle of the Resurrection (Acts 13:30; Ep 1:19-20; 1 Cor 6:14; Rom 8:11). Many recognize that Christianity is a religion of miracles, from the Resurrection itself (Matt 28:6; 1 Cor 15:20; 1 John 5:4; 2 Pet 3:9; Acts 2:38) to the various miracles performed by Christ during His earthly ministry (John 9:32-33).¹²² The Scripture declares that "The Lord opens the eyes of the blind..." (Ps 146:8), and we know that the character of God is unchanging (Ps 55:19; Heb 13:8).

However, many historians rage against the historicity of miracles, let alone the Resurrection.¹²³ Whether individuals believe, affirm, or deny the Resurrection, it is impossible to

¹¹⁹ Twelftree, "The Historian," 201.

¹²⁰ Tenney, *The Reality*, 46.

¹²¹ Ibid., 1.

¹²² Rodriguez, "Safeguarding Creation," 112-131.

¹²³ Per Bjarne Ravnå, "Miracles and Methods," *Biblical Theology Bulletin Journal* 51, no. 3 (2021): 150, DOI: 10.1177/01461079211019195.

argue against the longevity and sustainability of this miracle and biblical account that God intervened in the very aspect of Creation and orchestrated before time began the incredible miracle of Christ's Resurrection (Gen 3:15; Rom 8:21; 1 Cor 10:4; 1 Pet 1:19-20; Eph 1:4; Rev 5:6).¹²⁴

The miracle of the Resurrection falls in line with the miracles Jesus performed in His earthly ministry as extraordinary acts defying logic.¹²⁵ However, the arguments against the Resurrection and for those who once defended its position are becoming scarce, as Bjarne Ravna notes.¹²⁶ Still, the Bible is clear and replete with many examples of God's omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. Why not see these aspects of God's nature and link His Triumph with the Resurrection of Christ? Was it not the same God who spoke Creation into existence?¹²⁷ Was it not the same God who brought Adam and Eve into existence? Was it not the same God who miraculously parted the Red Sea and safely brought Moses and His people over to the other side? God is not confined to time, space, and matter, as are those who exist in creation. The Creator must stand outside the created to rectify whatever He demands according to His will and sovereignty through providence.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ May, "The Significance of Freedom in God's Plan," 5-6.

¹²⁵ Ravnå, "Miracles and Methods," 149.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 150.

¹²⁷ May, "The Significance of Freedom in God's Plan," 5.

¹²⁸ De Vera Nixon, "The God of the Covenant: Karl Barth on Creation Care," *Religions* 12, no. 5 (2021): 1-14.

Evidence in the Manuscripts

A third source of evidence for the Resurrection can be found in the manuscripts of Scripture. The bodily resurrection of Christ has caused contention since the first century.¹²⁹ Many have argued that its authenticity is problematic, as lingering challenges question even the deity of Christ. The challenges transform into oppositions that involve questions concerning Christ's Lordship and objections from science and natural law. There is no denying the documented burial place of Jesus and the empty tomb.¹³⁰

Why examine the Synoptic Gospels and the book of John for historical evidence? The Gospels, for the most part, form the foundation for the life and miracle workings of Jesus and they offer the reader valuable knowledge of His purpose. The three Synoptic Gospels and the book of John give a picture of Jesus' deity, death, and resurrection. If disproving these ancient books became a legitimate standard, then the denial of the veracity of the Resurrection message and the miracles presented could affect all of Scripture. It is Jesus who declared in both Matthew 5:18-19 and the parallel verse in Mark 13:31, "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Therefore, it is without question that if the gospels become unreliable, then the entire Bible is unreliable (Ps 138:2). Many contemporary believers in Christ are not

¹²⁹ Joseph, "The Resurrection as Category Error," 290-1.

¹³⁰ Chilton, "The Chimeric," 145-6.

familiar with the dated biblical historical records of the gospel. However, for many scholars, historical reliability is scarce due to existing limitations because of lack of data.¹³¹

One of the premises for valid historical writing is that it should be completed near the event. The earlier and closer the eyewitnesses are to an event, the richer the authenticity of the claims, whether in support or opposition to the event.¹³²

To demonstrate the validity and reliability of Scripture when pitted against other acceptable ancient works, assume that the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ occurred in AD 30. These men wrote the biblical manuscripts in less than one hundred years after the Resurrection of Christ. Remember, the earlier and closer the eyewitness to the event, the greater the validity of the source.¹³³

Importantly, there are undeniable evidence that answer the question for the bodily resurrection of Jesus.¹³⁴ various . Even skeptical historians cannot deny the writing of the New Testament manuscripts within a hundred years after the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ. The gathered manuscripts alone provide historians and Christian believers with an enormous glut riches far better than many of the accepted secular historical resources. Modern scholars have many New Testament manuscripts, with around 5824 copies of the Greek manuscripts. The Latin

¹³¹ Michael R. Licona, “Are the Gospels “Historically Reliable”? A Focused Comparison of Suetonius’s Life of Augustus and the Gospel of Mark,” *Religions* 10, no 3 (2019): 1, DOI:10.3390/rel10030148.

¹³² Khouri, “The Crucifixion in the Qur’an,” 159.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Theodore Cabal. “What are the Proofs for the Resurrection of Jesus? Southern Seminary, *YouTube*, 2017, video, 5:15, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Je9II5jPTnQ>.

manuscripts number 10,000 plus, other ancient versions number between 5,000-10,000, and manuscripts with quotations from the New Testament by church fathers total over 1 million.¹³⁵

If scholars only used the Greek and Latin manuscripts as examples to authenticate the Resurrection, it would be enough to prove that Christ rose from the dead. Critics often operate with double standards when examining the manuscripts of the New Testament, especially when it comes to the three Synoptic Gospels, all written 100 years of the historical event, and the book of John, written much later after the death and Resurrection of Christ in or about AD 95.

However, secular historians accept the accounts of Alexander the Great, who died about 330 BC, from Arian and Plutarch who wrote respectively nearly 300 and 450 years after Alexander's death.¹³⁶ No secular historian questions the historical veracity of Alexander the Great, although sources for Alexander were recorded hundreds of years after his life (some accepted works were written hundreds or even thousands of years after the incident). Secular historians also accept the authenticity of Tiberius Caesar from ten sources. The manuscript dates of the best sources for Tiberius' life range from 80-85 years after his death (Tacitus and Plotinus) to nearly 180 years after his death (Dio Cassius).¹³⁷

Creeds are a final way leaders and believers in Christ could refer to evidence for the Resurrection in their conversations. Creeds could have been written but more often were

¹³⁵ Daniel Wallace, "Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts," Wheaton College, *YouTube*, September 28, 2012, video, 1:40-10:12, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNwJFsZhBZA>.

¹³⁶ Michael Levering, "Historical Memory and The Resurrection of Jesus: Encountering the Risen Christ," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 20 no.2 (2018): 167, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijst.12273>.

¹³⁷ Benjamin I. Simpson, "Can We Trust the Gospels?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 62, no. 4 (12, 2019): 824.

recitations of words commonly known as accurate.¹³⁸ Creeds existed long before the believers received official writings or letters on parchments. According to Costa, “the creed outlines four parts, namely: the death of Jesus, the burial of Jesus, the Resurrection of Jesus, and the post-mortem appearance of Jesus to the disciples.”¹³⁹

Theological Foundations

Laying the theological foundation for a study of how the Resurrection affects our witness requires examining both Old and New Testament Scriptures to not only firm up our understanding of the magnitude of Christ’s Resurrection, but also to validate the authority of the witness.¹⁴⁰ Without the Resurrection of Jesus, there would never be a gospel.¹⁴¹ Without the Resurrection, there would never be a witness. Without the Resurrection, the believer would have no hope at the end of life.¹⁴² Those three statements, and there could be more, represent the surety that expresses one of the greatest miracles performed by God based on His providence working through His sovereignty. Everything, both in the ancient and modern churches, and any organization that claims to contribute to the cause of Christ, owes its existence to this remarkable miracle. As mentioned above, the Resurrection is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Why is it so significant to begin this section with the summary and referencing of these Scripture passages? If for nothing else, these Scriptures lay the foundation on which the defense and

¹³⁸ Licona, “Historically Reliable,” 1-2.

¹³⁹ Breitenbach, “A New Argument,” 341.

¹⁴⁰ Wiarda, “Scripture between the Incarnate Christ,” 124.

¹⁴¹ Joshua W. Jipp, “Why Do Christians Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus?” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 32, no. 3 (2022): 295-6, doi:10.5325/bullbiblrese.32.3.0294.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 136.

witness of the Resurrection of Christ can rest.¹⁴³ Leaders at NLCC and EVCS can see and appreciate the magnitude of what is at stake and be able to teach on the Resurrection with confidence (2 Tim 2:1-2). If the Resurrection of Christ occurred, then it is imperative as soldiers bearing the Word of God to stand boldly in love and declare the sweet message of the resurrected Lord and only Savior of humanity due to His hypostatic union (Acts 4:12; 2 Tim 2:3-4).¹⁴⁴ The challenge facing the leader is two-pronged: discerning how to commit to Christ while living in this world or focusing whole-heartedly on the affairs of this life while balancing living for Christ. Leaders must be aware that this position is not unique; every believer faces the same challenge. However, they must rise above the level of the fray and follow Christ through the examples of the Apostles by becoming ardent students and disciples of the Word of God. Additionally, the Scripture dictates that believers in Christ should be a part of this world but not in support of its ways (John 15:19; 1 John 4:5).

Thus, articulating and navigating the theological foundations for this project requires the implementation of specific Scriptures, purposefully marrying the Old and New Testament to give life and validity to the meaning of prophecy and the Resurrection.¹⁴⁵ However, there is no way this section can exhaust the enormity of the Scriptures which speak on the prophecies of the coming Messiah and the Resurrection of Christ, not to mention the witness that believers are to hold. Consequently, to keep this research from becoming another extensive barrage of

¹⁴³ Ibid., 121.

¹⁴⁴ Jerome Van Kuiken, "Sinless Savior in Fallen Flesh? Toward Clarifying and Closing the Debate," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 64, no. 2 (2021): 330.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 128.

encyclopedic work, the study focused on specific Scriptures, which becomes a delimitation. It used the verse in John 21:25 as a justification for this approach, which reads, "And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen." This verse in John 21:25 gives a clear view of this section's intent and direction in highlighting specific Scriptures, which undergirded the topic, problem, purpose, and thesis statements, and further equip NLCC leaders to put forth a logical defense for Christ's Resurrection.¹⁴⁶

It may be hard for many to read certain Scriptures without prejudice based entirely on one's presuppositions. However, with an open mind, it becomes evident that prophecy is vital to God's plan and purpose, as recorded in the Bible. From the very beginning, after the Fall of Adam and Eve, it was prophesied that a seed would come through the woman to crush the head of the serpent while striking the heel of the promised Messiah.¹⁴⁷ Various prophets, priests, and kings in ancient times also foresaw the promised seed, who came at God's perfect time (Gal 4:4). The Bible is not so much about the world as it is about the message of the coming Hebrew Messiah who redeemed humanity from original sin¹⁴⁸ (Rom 3).¹⁴⁹ Hence, this section evidence

¹⁴⁶ Wiarda, "Scripture between the Incarnate Christ," 121.

¹⁴⁷ Shao K. Tseng, "'Non Potest Non Peccare': Karl Barth on Original Sin and the Bondage of the Will," *Neue Zeitschrift Für Systematische Theologie Und Religions philosophie* 60, no. 2 (2018): 187, doi:10.1515/nzsth-2018-0010.

¹⁴⁸ Protestant Reformer John Calvin (1509–1564) developed a systematic theology of Augustinian Protestantism by interpreting Augustine of Hippo's notion of original sin. Calvin believed that humans inherit Adamic guilt. In Christian doctrine, original sin is the condition or state of sin into which each human being is born, also the origin (i.e., the cause or source) of this state. Traditionally, the origin ascribes to the sin of the first man, Adam, who disobeyed God in eating the forbidden fruit (of knowledge of good and evil) and, consequently, transmitted his sin and guilt by heredity to his descendants.

¹⁴⁹ Tseng, "Non Potest Non Peccare," 185-6.

from Scripture the following claims. It summarized Scripture's theme of the resurrected Christ as a remedy to humanity's Fall and death.¹⁵⁰ Additionally, it justified how Scripture emphasizes the importance of witnessing and proclaiming the gospel's beautiful message (Isa 52:7; Rom 10:14-15).¹⁵¹

Promised Seed and Crucifixion

It would be amiss not to start this section by mentioning Genesis 3:15, where the promise and prophecy all began. Ever since the Fall, humanity prefers the servitude of the flesh; the road leading towards destruction is vast and inescapable for many. Yet even from the first introduction of sin into the world, the Messiah made Himself available to humanity within the eternal counsel of the Trinity set forth before the world began. Additionally, Isaiah 53 is a powerful chapter in that it expresses the actions of the suffering Messiah, the Holy Lamb of God. Throughout the pages of Scripture, there is hope for sinners provided in the face and name of Christ. Peter announced in Acts 4:12, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." The statement here echoes absolute certainty. The Scripture tells believers that they looked like Christ. Christ came out of the grave after experiencing a bodily resurrection by God and the power of the eternal Spirit.

The Witness: The Command to Preach *Apologetically*

Paul addresses a position from logic in 1 Cor 15:12-20 (which correlates to 1 Peter 3:15) and declares that Christ's believers should "...sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always

¹⁵⁰ Sonderegger, "The God-Intoxicated Theology," 39.

¹⁵¹ SimonMary Asese Ahiokhai, "Where/How/For what Purpose is Christ being Proclaimed Today: Rethinking Proclamation in the World of Peripheries," *Religions* 14, no. 3 (2023): 12.

be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." The believer in Christ addresses the gospel and defense not mindlessly, but with an understanding that the Resurrection is the key to the Christian hope in the good news of the gospel. The word "sanctify" in Greek is *hagiasate* from *hagios*, meaning to make holy, purify or consecrate; to venerate. The defense of hope in the believer's life is more than just a proclamation of the gospel but a noticeable lifestyle that entreated others to listen.¹⁵²

Before diving into exegeting the text of 1 Peter 3:15 and Matthew 28:19-20, it is incumbent to understand the indicatives and imperatives within the text. The indicative of 1 Peter 3:15 aligns with the command of Matthew 28:19 to preach the gospel and make disciples. What are the indicatives and imperatives of both Scriptures? In 1 Peter 3:15, the indicative gives the standard that sanctifying the Lord in our hearts describes who we are. The indicative is the objective, like the fuel that is in the car. Whereas the imperative is the action the believer takes in the carrying out of being "who they are." Here, the believer carries the gospel's message with meekness and boldness. Matthew 28:19-20 states, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...." The imperative is in the command to 'Go,' and the indicative is the believer's call to service. However, the hope of the gospel's proclamation and its defense links to the Resurrection of Christ and the command given to proclaim the gospel to every ethnic group? Therefore, 1 Peter 3:15 is the Scriptural anthem, creed, and standard for the Christian apologist.¹⁵³ The Greek

¹⁵² Schnabel, "The Persecution of Christians," 544.

¹⁵³ Breitenbach, "A New Argument," 341.

phrase *apologia* means defense, which Peter alludes to when proclaiming the gospel's message, and which Paul announced in the treatise in 1 Cor 15:1- 20.¹⁵⁴

The importance of the gospel's message is founded on the bridge between the Old Covenant and New Covenant in God's plan, a legal framework in the Spirit to redeem humanity from sin. The Resurrection results from the payment in full for the price of redemption from sin. Christ now sits as the perfect Lamb and Mediator between God and humanity. After the Fall, the enemy had a legal right to the earth, as mentioned in Matthew 4:9 and Luke 4:6. The Greek phrase used in these scriptures is *paradedotai*, meaning “it relinquishes.” Therefore, with all legal implications, Jesus became a Man so that through crucifixion He could take back what the enemy stole through deception (2 Cor 4:4, 11:3).¹⁵⁵ Understanding the thesis statement of the Bible brings clarity to the argument. As this research demonstrates, a law of first mention comes from the first promise after the Fall in Genesis 3:15, revolving around Christ, who is the promised Redeemer (Gen 41; Luke 24:13-19; John 5:46).

¹⁵⁴ Schnabel, "The Persecution of Christians," 544.

¹⁵⁵ Leszek Misiarczyk, "Influence of the Septuagint on the Typological Interpretation of Joshua and His Deeds in Justin Martyr's 'Dialogue with Trypho, the Jew,'" *Verbum Vitae* 39, no. 3 (2021): 941–42.

Theoretical Foundations

Creating a theoretical foundation for this project while living in a world of uncertainties reminds those who believe in Christ of an important Scripture in 1 Corinthians 15:19, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable." No matter the debate, the doubt, or even the many speculations, for the believer Christ's Resurrection is their only hope after this life.

Indeed, the gospel is a message of offense, especially in this contemporary age where respect for authority becomes a commodity to the faint at heart. The voice of one crying in rural and urban communities is rare. God only sees two kinds of people, those who believe in Jesus and those who do not. Therefore, this section covered several topics that together form a theoretical foundation for the project as a whole: Models against the Resurrection; exploring the justification of the called-out ones about their faith and faithfulness; examining righteousness and the wrath of God as leaders learn and then equip believers with the understanding of the seriousness of their call to minister to lost souls; seeing how leaders preach and defend the gospel and its merits; and answering the question of a disciple.

In surveying each of these topics, this section seeks to engage and operationalize the practical aspects of theology for NLCC and EVCS leaders as they embark on the journey of rediscovering the passion and drive to run the race of witnessing. It is hoped that those in authority lead by example in their efforts to teach and preach the gospel's message; equipping, as they are themselves equipped, fellow believers of NLCC and EVCS to effectively articulate the defense of the gospel through witnessing.

Beginning Qualifications

The study seeks to establish specific and relevant models featuring past and present experiences and attitudes toward addressing the topic of articulating the gospel's message and defense. Christianity, and especially the bodily resurrection of Christ, is not immune to choruses and crescendos of voices¹⁵⁶ echoing theories of various kinds to directly or indirectly address ideas for or against this bodily resurrection of Christ and its impact for those who will one day die.¹⁵⁷ The impact of various opposing theories to Christ's Resurrection steers individuals away from the intended message of God's purpose in the redemptive plan and hope for humanity. The Bible is not God's kill-joy message to individuals. However, it does contain an admonishing of love for lost souls to repent and come to God for salvation. Thereby, the proposal of this model in its questioning as to what occurred during Jesus' Resurrection is paramount to this study?¹⁵⁸ Let alone as this model strongly argues against the possibility of an existence after death?¹⁵⁹

While various authors from different walks of life have separately lent their voices to exploring either Christ's Resurrection or the Christian witness, bringing together both topics is a new prospect aimed at bolstering and informing the leaders of NLCC and EVCS on how the truth of the Resurrection challenges contemporary science of psychiatry and psychoanalysis and

¹⁵⁶ Pieter F. Craffert, "Jesus' Resurrection in a Social-Scientific Perspective: Is There Anything New to Be Said?" *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 7, no. 2 (2009): 126, doi:10.1163/174551909X447365.

¹⁵⁷ Justin Mooney, "The Possibility of Resurrection by Reassembly," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 84, no. 3 (2018): 274-6.

¹⁵⁸ Joseph, "The Resurrection as Category Error," 287.

¹⁵⁹ Thomas C. Atkinson, "The Problems of Life After Death," *Philosophy Compass* 14, no.10, (2019): 1-2, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12595>.

supports the believer in being a living witness.¹⁶⁰ As elaborated earlier, nine popular theories oppose the Resurrection, attempting to explain away Christ's Resurrection.¹⁶¹ However, of the theories discussed, the most important and prevalent of these is the Hallucination Theory; the study therefore uses the Hallucination Theory as a model for the type of apologetic debate it hopes leaders of NLCC and EVCS will engage.¹⁶²

The Hallucination Model: Explanatory

Models have come and gone, some making a big splash in the currents of time, making very noticeable and long-lasting waves, while others provide just a ripple to historical currents. The hallucinatory model is one such big splash into a wave-like effect on history, since scholars from all walks of life have lent their voices to its tremendous tsunami-like roar. One such scholar is Dale Allison who provided the explanatory model, suggesting that the Resurrection was merely visionary experiences of a broader human phenomenon borne out of grief.¹⁶³ For Allison, when Jesus spoke about dying, a future kingdom and enthronement was only a reference to eschatological occurrences in the reverse that never happened at the time intended. Allison's goal is to show that the bedrock of Christianity is not so much the actual Resurrection of Christ so much as some visionary aspect and experiences of it by those who claim to witness the risen Jesus. Sightings of Christ are either all-in-the-mind, wholly self-induced, or unusual mind-independent inputs.¹⁶⁴ Therefore, for Allison it is not farfetched to believe as the explanatory

¹⁶⁰ Smith, "Seeing Things," 693.

¹⁶¹ Joseph, "The Resurrection as Category Error," 288-9.

¹⁶² Bergeron and Habermas, "The Resurrection of Jesus," 158-60.

¹⁶³ Joseph, "The Resurrection as Category Error," 288.

¹⁶⁴ Bergeron and Habermas, "The Resurrection of Jesus," 158.

model moves further into espousing the idea that the same visionary delusionary occurrences for the disciples were not unlike those for other individuals.¹⁶⁵ Allison stresses that individuals realize and recognize the presented study of apparitions as undeniable of the mind-induced cross-cultural phenomenon experienced by the disciples and all those who claimed to witness the risen Christ.¹⁶⁶ Jesus's disciples and those claiming to see the risen Lord operated in subjectivity as they claimed to see Jesus in a bodily form instead of an ethereal state. The result of this claim only further perpetuated and bolstered the confusion from the commonly accepted norm of these experiences being ghost-like.

The explanatory model goes even further to suggest that the propagation for the forgiveness of sins was not an act Jesus had the authority to perform, but instead was a measure orchestrated out of guilt the disciples carried for their abandonment of their Messiah in the early hours leading up to the Crucifixion and beyond (Mk 14: 66-72).¹⁶⁷ The next aspect of the model explains the empty tomb scenario by equating the disappearance of Jesus' body with an account in Buddhism where the bodies of deceased monks allegedly moved to a parallel universe.¹⁶⁸

For Simone J. Joseph, these proposals made by Allison are very persuasive because they build on the inconclusive evidence for the dogmatic and orthodox position for the Resurrection of Christ.¹⁶⁹ Joseph defends the claim that Jesus's so-called Resurrection is simply a category

¹⁶⁵ Smith, "Seeing Things," 696.

¹⁶⁶ Bergeron and Habermas, "The Resurrection of Jesus," 158.

¹⁶⁷ Smith, "Seeing Things," 696.

¹⁶⁸ In this case, a parallel to the "rainbow body" is the example of Buddhist monk Achok (Khenpo A Chö), in which the alleged shrinking of a Tibetan master's physical body after death continues until it disappears.

¹⁶⁹ Joseph, "The Resurrection as Category Error," 288.

error very similar to those of other religions in history. Allison continues, and Joseph shares in this belief that the spread of the gospel's message went against the traditional and acceptable norm of the day, that dead individuals do not return to life. Both Allison and Joseph concur that Matthew's account of the dead walking in the streets of Jerusalem after Christ's Resurrection is further proof that the episodes surrounding the Resurrection were mere visions and not factual occurrences (Matt 27:51-53).¹⁷⁰ They are uncomfortable with the Resurrection as a mark of significant¹⁷¹ importance as suggested by many scholars¹⁷² and see it merely as a theological claim rooted in reinscribe tradition rather than a historical fact.¹⁷³ Allison concludes that both Jesus¹⁷⁴ and Paul were in error regarding the end time and that Paul promulgated both the temporal error of imminence and the categorical error of Resurrection.

The Resurrection Hypothesis (RH) and the Hallucination Hypothesis (HH)

The Resurrection Hypothesis (RH) and the Hallucination Hypothesis (HH) sound like two strings in the gene-mapping pool of humanity. However, both terms are significant to the ongoing debate regarding the Resurrection. Stephen H. Smith proposes a potential model of how both models relate to each other. For Smith, the HH in this regard would follow the bereavement

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 292.

¹⁷¹ Smith, "Seeing Things," 689.

¹⁷² Bergeron and Habermas, "The Resurrection of Jesus," 157.

¹⁷³ Joseph, "The Resurrection as Category Error," 292.

¹⁷⁴ Mark 9:1; 13:30; Matt 10:23. It is, of course, possible to indefinitely postpone the "fulfillment" of general resurrection expectations by recalculating the end time or by appealing to divine time ("With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day" [2 Pet 3:8 NRSV]).

experience shrouded in delusion.¹⁷⁵ Smith argues that the HH hypothesis could be proven viable when tested against the well-acclaimed RH hypothesis.

According to Smith, little attention is placed on the contributions of psychologists and psychiatrists in the field when considering hallucinations. However, Smith chooses the definition by Aleman and Larøi.¹⁷⁶ Smith also shows from recognized accounts by W.D. Rees¹⁷⁷ that individuals experience loved ones near, consoling, encouraging, seeing, hearing, and touching the deceased.¹⁷⁸ Armed with this information, Smith believes that biblical scholars have ground on which to support the claim that the Resurrection was real and not a hallucinatory-vision-like experience by those who claimed to see the Jesus. Smith recognizes the evangelical and even scientific position that hallucinations belong to individuals and not a group of people. Nonetheless, Smith cites Michael Goulder's response that groups of people can have collective delusions because psychologists in the scientific field recognize mass sociogenic illness (MSI) or even mass psychogenic illness (MPI) as a possibility.

Smith dismisses evangelical scholars who hold firm to the notion that the Resurrection hypothesis¹⁷⁹ is solid and disregard skeptics like Dale C. Allison as mere subjective objectors to

¹⁷⁵ Smith, "Seeing Things," 693.

¹⁷⁶ A. Aleman and F. Larøi provide the definition: "A sensory experience which occurs in the absence of corresponding external stimulation of the relevant sensory organ, has a sufficient sense of reality to resemble a veridical perception, over which the subject does not feel s/he has direct and voluntary control, and which occurs in the awake state." *Hallucinations: The Science of Idiosyncratic Perception* (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2008), 15. Their definition is an adaption of the one provided by A.S. David, "The Cognitive Neuropsychiatry of Auditory Verbal Hallucinations: An Overview," *Cognitive Neuropsychiatry* 6 (2004): 108.

¹⁷⁷ W.D. Rees, "The Hallucinations of Widowhood," *British Medical Journal* 4 (1971): 37-41.

¹⁷⁸ Smith, "Seeing Things," 693.

¹⁷⁹ The Resurrection Hypothesis, otherwise known as the God-hypothesis, promotes that the God of the Old Testament was present in the raising of Jesus from the dead according to Scriptures.

the Resurrection claim without accepting HH as a possibility.¹⁸⁰ Smith sees William Lane Craig, N.T. Wright and Gary Habermas as unabashed evangelical apologists who cannot give a reasonable response to the growing questions surrounding the HH hypothesis. In response, Smith addresses the merits and weaknesses of William Lane Craig's and N.T. Wright's defense of the Resurrection.

William Lane Craig

After careful study of Craig's work, Smith highlights that this evangelical apologist gives much credence to C. Behan McCullagh's writings about Christ's Resurrection. Smith objects to this reliance because McCullagh bases much of the produced work on the preferred position of "being guided by the hand of God."¹⁸¹ For Smith, this premise is objectionable and not based on rationalism at all when examining the so-called historical evidence for the Resurrection of Christ.¹⁸²

Still, Smith makes a valid claim that the conversation around Christ's Resurrection and the empty tomb comes from faith-based documents which history seems to have in abundance. Smith admits that these faith-based documents are the only available sources evangelicals and skeptics must promote the Christian's viewpoint. Smith quoting Glen Siniscalchi, "No doubt,

¹⁸⁰ Allison Jr., *Resurrecting Jesus*, 344-50; "The Resurrection of Jesus and Rational Apologetics," *Philosophia Christi* 10 (2008): 315-35. Unlike Siniscalchi, I would hesitate to apply the epithet 'sceptic' to Allison. In my estimation, he is one of the most honest scholars around, always taking an even-handed approach in considering the available evidence and reserving judgement on what cannot be fully known rather than presupposing the answers. For most evangelicals, a 'sceptic' is one who leans decisively towards rejecting their position, and I do not see Allison belonging in this company (compare him with Lüdemann and Goulder, for instance).

¹⁸¹ Smith, "Seeing Things," 690.

¹⁸² Fully presented by William Lane Craig in *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment? A Debate Between William Lane Craig and Gerd Lüdemann*, eds. P. Copan and R. K. Tacelli, 163-86 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), but repeated ad nauseam elsewhere. R.H. Gundry suggests that Craig's term 'established facts' be amended to 'reported facts', to which Craig raises no objection (104).

correct to urge that we must make do with the sources we have. We cannot speculate on what ‘take’ non-Christian sources, such as official Roman documents of the time, might have had on events. Nor can we be sure that the discovery of fresh sources in, say, the Judean desert, Christian or not, might not radically change our perspective on events.”¹⁸³

Smith elaborates that although the sources on the Resurrection are historical and Bible-based, the proponents of the Christian faith still debate over the happenstance of the empty tomb. Smith highlights that Paul, whom Smith believes is one of the earliest sources, claims that Jesus appeared to Peter and others, and then himself (1 Cor 15:5-8). Smith claims that Jesus was in the grave, but that Paul never referred to an empty tomb.¹⁸⁴ Smith suggests that for Craig to claim that Paul referenced or inferred an empty tomb is absurd and based on Craig’s presuppositions.¹⁸⁵ The HH does not require an empty tomb to argue for its validity because the graves of any modern burial site contain the bones of the departed. Accordingly, Smith rules out the empty tomb scenario but gives the benefit of the doubt to Craig’s position.¹⁸⁶

Ultimately, Smith argues that the acceptance or denial of any other position on the Resurrection relies on the viability of the HH account, and that the HH account can be proven viable if it can stand up to the four established positions in Craig’s RH. Smith says that according to Craig, these four facts concerning the empty tomb and post-resurrection appearances laid the

¹⁸³ Smith, “Seeing Things,” 690-91.

¹⁸⁴ Andrzej Gieniusz, “Jesus’ Resurrection Appearances in 1 Cor 15,5-8 in the Light of the Syntagma Ὡφθην + Dative,” *The Biblical Annals* 9, no. 3 (2019): 487-88, doi:10.31743/biban.4526.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 689-91.

¹⁸⁶ The collection of essays in R.P. Price and J.J. Lowder, eds., *The Empty Tomb: Jesus Beyond the Grave* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005) provides a good critical overview of the issue.

foundation for the Christian faith as recorded in 1 Corinthians 15: 3-8,¹⁸⁷ Jesus died and was buried, tomb was discovered to be empty, Jesus subsequently appeared to his disciples, and Christ's appearance affected the disciples. Smith addresses each of Craig's "four facts."

First, Craig claims as fact that Jesus died and was buried. According to Craig, the view that Jesus's body was left on the cross, placed on the ground, and devoured by wild animals, or buried in a common grave rather than a rock tomb is mere speculation. For Smith, the only tangible evidence about this occurrence is the biblical accounts (Matt 27: 57-66; Mark 15: 42-47; Luke 23: 50-56; John 19: 38-42).

Second, Smith addresses Craig's claim that the tomb was discovered to be empty. According to Smith, there are no viable options for evidencing this claim except for the Scriptures, even though the Scripture suggests that the disciples stole the body of Jesus (Matt 27: 62-66). The earliest source (1 Cor. 15: 3-5) does not directly mention the tomb was empty, and the first direct claim comes from the Gospel of Mark (16: 1-8), dating the account by many New Testament scholars to around forty years after the recorded events.

Third, Smith argues against Craig's claims that Jesus appeared to His disciples after the Resurrection. Smith contends that collective delusions are never as spontaneous as they appear. For example, the papacy only approved a handful of the many Marian apparitions recorded through the centuries. The series of apparitions to three young (and vulnerable) girls at Fátima in 1917.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Smith, "Seeing Things," 690.

¹⁸⁸ The Fatima story seems to have been carefully managed by Lúcia Santos, the eldest and most influential. The younger two saw and heard little of the three, deferring to whatever Lúcia decided. At the end of this series of apparitions, an estimated 70,000 people descended on Fátima to witness what Mary promised (through

Finally, Smith addresses Craig's claim about the effect of Christ's appearances on the disciples. He acknowledges that the evidence which seems to impress evangelical scholars more than anything else is the astonishing effect of the disciples' experiences. The disciples hid after the Crucifixion, but after seeing the risen Christ they proclaimed the gospel openly in Jerusalem, making converts by the thousands (Acts 2: 41; 4: 4; 21: 20). Surely, nothing less than their meeting, eating, and talking with the risen Lord in bodily form could have accounted for such a transformation.

N.T. Wright

Just as Craig's four facts counter the HH, Wright's position solidly affirms the RH, according to Smith. In following Siniscalchi's arguments, Smith argues that both Wright and Craig affirm other rational explanations for the Resurrection of Christ, but they are not strong enough to alter their position in the Resurrection Hypothesis. Wright argues that only RH can answer the question of the empty tomb and Jesus's appearances. The "wrong tomb" or the "stolen body" hypotheses would sufficiently explain the empty tomb but not the appearances, while HH would sufficiently explain the appearances but not the empty tomb. Smith claims that Wright introduces the phrase "sufficient and necessary" to distinguish RH from other

Lúcia) would be a great miracle. When the great day came, nothing unusual happened until Lúcia exclaimed, 'The sun!' which drew the crowd's attention. Collective delusion then took over. People claimed to see the sun dancing, whirling about, or rapidly changing color. At the same time, the young seers should have seen the Holy Family standing. Significantly, however, individual reports of these events betray contradictions, with some admitting that they saw nothing unusual. Many copycat sun miracles should have occurred at various times during the past century. Suppose collective delusions like this occurred in comparatively recent times. There is good reason to think they could have done so in the polyphasic first-century Mediterranean society in which Jesus and his disciples lived. Suppose we can agree that large sections of a 70,000-strong crowd at Fátima 'saw' dramatic changes in the sun's behavior, which did not occur (none of the phenomena were reported beyond the vicinity of Fátima or by competent astronomers). In that case, it is just as plausible to think that the disciples 'saw' a man who was not there. So, indeed, Jesus did appear to the disciples. However, this fact does not specify the form the appearances took.

hypotheses. However, there could still be the possibility of deception since the women could have gone to the wrong tomb and reported this event, which then spread as authentic. Peter, who was guilty of denying Christ, could have undergone a bereavement experience, creating a false chain reaction of speculation about a risen Jesus. Smith acknowledges that Wright does not consider any of these arguments plausible; they fail because they create a lack of necessity on the part of those who had everything to lose to falsify claims they knew were false. Still, Smith is not convinced by Wright's claim of RH being a sufficient explanation for the Resurrection of Christ and the empty tomb.

For Smith, denying the naturalistic explanations leads to more conjecture and skepticism, even if Wright and others entertain these objections when considering these debates. Smith seems frustrated that the long-standing position of those who support the RH theory gives no ground to other speculation planting its roots firmly in the soil's retrievable historical data. Arguments such as Wright's are a one-sided attempt for evangelicals to justify their position as authentic since questioning the supernatural is not historically prudent. Smith notes Alan Segal's counter position: "History may be able to confirm that Jesus appeared to many but not that God raised Christ from the dead."¹⁸⁹ Smith also quotes Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes maxim, "when you have eliminated the impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."¹⁹⁰ Smith lays out a reasonable argument that if individuals who are dead today do not

¹⁸⁹ Alan F. Segal, "The Resurrection: Faith or History?" In *The Resurrection of Jesus: The Crossan-Wright Dialogue*, ed. Robert B. Stewart (London: SPCK, 2006): 137-8.

¹⁹⁰ Smith, "Seeing Things," 693

return alive, why should it be proper for Jesus of Nazareth, especially on the basis that during the time of Jesus the supernatural world was an ever-present experience?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

It is essential to note that every step in the process is about to climax as the study enters the methodology phase.¹⁹¹ The goal of this section outlined the workable implementation of the action research, including but not limited to statistical analysis in various forms to address and report the results of the problem and assess whether the action research fulfills its purpose. Remember that the problem is that NLCC and EVCS leaders are ill-equipped to defend the Resurrection against objections expressed by our culture. The purpose of this DMIN action research project aims to equip leaders of NLCC and EVCS to defend the Resurrection against objections by using focus training groups.

In the present culture and climate of preaching, there is a growing and accepted reversal from the biblical understanding of the gospel's message. Many go out of their way to advertise a gospel without Christ, which only streamlines the message to conform to prevailing societal norms. The methods and message of presenting the gospel will not change. The message's intent, content, and purpose remain the same: to repent and believe the gospel. The message of repentance and belief has nothing to do with social justice or any present foray the culture deems acceptable. The gospel is never about acquiescing to various cultural demands and norms but focuses on reaching the lost with the redemptive work of Christ. Therefore, this section

¹⁹¹ In a quantitative study, the methodology chapter usually contains the following sections: introduction, purpose and research questions and/or hypotheses and null hypotheses, research design and reasons for selecting it, protection of human subjects, population and sample, sampling procedures, instrumentation, validity and reliability, data collection procedures, data analysis, data display (e.g., charts, tables, graphs, etc.), and limitations. Roberts and Hyatt, *The Dissertation Journey*.

highlighted some essential truths that the focus group questions assume that participants understood the connection between the Old and New Testaments that are foundational to teaching leaders at NLCC and EVCS about the connection between the Resurrection and their witness of the gospel.

Bridging the Gap: Resurrection and Ultimate Purpose

Although many may disagree with referencing the Old Covenant to address the Resurrection narrative. It is not far-fetched to believe that the metanarrative of Scripture deals with Christ. Now, not every word or phrase in Scripture alluded to Christ, but only those that have great significance to the plan and purpose of God. Was Genesis 3:15 a promise only to Adam and Eve and, eventually, the Hebrew People? Or was it a promise made to Adam and Eve regarding the ultimate purpose and plan of God through the Resurrection of Christ? The focus group benefited from the earlier research that engaged Scriptures from the Old Covenant, without broadening the scope of the research showing the importance of the promise in Genesis 3:15 to the goal of the Resurrection. The New Covenant spoken about in Scriptures (Matt 26:28; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25) and the command to preach the gospel and make disciples (Matt 28:19; Luke 24:47) complemented by Peter's announcement in 1 Peter 3:15 are also important to understanding the Resurrection.

Importantly, the mandate in the Old Testament has multiple parallels to the mandate in the New Testament. Genesis chapter one ends with God giving Adam and Eve a cultural mandate to replenish the earth. (Gen 1:28-30). The cultural mandate is a mission God gave to Adam and Eve to recreate on the earth in and through the Creation. The cultural mandate is like the mandate in the New Testament to preach the gospel and make disciples. Under the Great Commission, God is using believers in the New Covenant to replenish the earth with His

presence through them (Matt 28:19; 1 Pet 3:15). The mission is to make disciples, and in that making, teach them also to be ready to give a reason for the hope which lies in them. Part of the cultural mandate also included the gift of dominion over the earth at the initial Creation, but unfortunately, disobedience to God's command caused humanity to lose their dominion. The command was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Because of their disobedience, Adam and Eve found themselves spiritually cut off from God. Similarly, in the New Covenant, if believers in Christ failed to become disciples and make the Great Commission important to the service of God, then the act of disobedience would still be evident.

Christ Promised

As already asserted, Christ is the bridge between the Old and New Testaments, but the guard rails are the fullness in time, as revealed in Galatians 4:4. The message of the Bible is not so much about heroes, heroines, and villains, although each plays their part throughout Scripture. The Bible tells us about the promised seed to come at the time appointed. Therefore, as the believer reads the Bible, it reveals Christ in every book. However, the reader must consider that allegorizing certain aspects of the Bible must occur within context so that it does not take away from the meaning and purpose of Scripture. God raised a people in the Old Testament to bring His message to other nations. Jesus was not just a common man, but the seed promised in Genesis (Gen 3:15, 4:25; Isa 9:6; Luke 1:31-35). The Hebrew term used for seed is *zar· 'ă-kā* meaning "your seed" and *zar· 'āh* meaning "and her seed." The Scripture used the same root word in Genesis 4:25 when Seth was born to Adam and Eve. God (*ē-lō-hîm*) gave Eve another *a·hêr* seed *ze-ra*. The seed traveled through Enoch then Cainan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Gen 5:1-32). After the Flood, God gave the promise again to Noah, making a Covenant with him to be fruitful and multiply on the earth

just as He did with Adam and Eve (Gen 9:1, 8). The seed of the Messiah continues in Noah's son Shem, the great-grandfather of Abraham (Gen 11:10-31). God blessed Abraham and promised that the descendants to come would be great on the earth (Gen 12: 7). Abraham's wife could not undergo defilement because the promised seed would come through her loins and Abraham's seed (Gen 12:17-20). Why is this explanation necessary? It is necessary to make the believer see that the Resurrection of Christ was not a matter of coincidence but tied in with biblical history.

Throughout the Bible, Jesus exists in many areas, with the most pronounced place in Exodus as the Hebrews prepared to leave Egypt. Scripture is replete with Christ's mission, purpose, and ministry and prophecy of His first and second coming. The following research already establishes the first Messianic prophecy, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Gen 3:15). The significance of the Second Coming is to put all things under Christ and once and for all put an end to the serpent as identified in the Garden. In Revelation 12:9, the Bible identifies the dragon, that old serpent, as Satan, the devil. The believer understood that with the announcement of Christ in Genesis 3:15 humanity had a chance to experience God again, overcoming the old serpent who since the Fall had legal rights over the earth.

The announcement of the Savior became God's foundational promise to Adam and Eve for humanity, paving the way for salvation through Jesus Christ. The promised redemptive work of the Messiah is one of the most important promises God made. The working of the promised seed happened through Abram. Scripture lists the genealogy of Christ through Joseph and Mary, who were both descendants from Judah (Matt 1:1- 25; Luke 3:1-38). God said to Abram, "No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations" (Gen 17:5; Rom 4:17- 18). God changed Abram's name to Abraham,

meaning “father of a multitude,” indicating the importance of the promise. The work and love of God in His mission and purpose is unfathomable through His relationship with Abraham and promised descendants to comprise many nations. “. . . I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:2-3, 18:18).

Believers in Christ understand that the gospel’s message came from a promise to Abraham, whom God called His friend (Jas 2:23). God started with what was familiar to Abraham. However, the promise would extend far beyond the boundaries of Abraham’s present position to preaching the gospel around the world. “And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered” (Gen 13:16, 15:5, 22:17, 26:4-5). It is important to establish the foundation and to make the believer in Christ see that God called Abraham from his dwelling place to make him a father of many nations and people. “Then He said to him, ‘I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it’” (Gen 15:7, 13:15). Through Abraham’s twelve sons, one would carry the seed of the Messiah as recorded in Scripture, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people” (Gen 49:10). Every person and nation benefited from the promise of Genesis even though the blessings of the promise to Abraham regarded the land and its people at the time. However, the future of the blessing was also spiritual as Abraham’s great-great-grandson, Judah, received a unique promise that the scepter—the pledge of royalty would include the Messiah—would not depart from his line of descendants “until Shiloh comes.” What a remarkable promise that "Shiloh" is a “reference to the Messiah. Future biblical prophecies

confirmed that the Messiah was to come from the tribe of Judah in Isaiah 11:1-5. The Messiah came from the descendants of Jesse (the father of David), who was in the lineage of Judah.

In Romans 15:12, Christ's human roots are in Judah. Although Abraham received a natural blessing from the Lord, the spiritual blessing was more critical for humanity as Abraham believed in God by faith. The Scriptures declare, "He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore 'it was accounted to him for righteousness'" (Gen 15:6, 22:18; Rom 4:20-22). Faith became an integral part of Abraham's character as it should be for the believer in Christ. Abraham showed great confidence that God would fulfill His promises. In response, God viewed Abraham's faith as righteousness even though Abraham was imperfect. God regarded him as righteous because he deeply believed in and obeyed God.

Many may ask why God used Abraham to carry out this important mission. God knew Abraham as He searches the reins of individual's heart. The Scripture states, "For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him" (Gen 18:19). God gave Abraham the promises because he had faith that was evident by his obedient actions. Abraham put his heart into trying to accomplish all God commanded him just as believers in Christ should in obeying the Great Commission through the preaching and defense of the Resurrection.

Although many of Abraham's immediate descendants never saw the promise, the faith of these men was relentless. Hebrews states, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed

that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb 11: 8- 13). The New Covenant tells believers that those who died believing that the promised seed would bring redemption under the Old Covenant, “And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us” (Heb 11:39-40). It would be a tragedy not to mention faith in Christ as seen in Galatians, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ . . . And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:26- 29). Believers in Christ share this promise of Abraham through baptism, as Romans 6 declares we have an eternal inheritance because of faith in Christ Jesus (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

The Connection of Faith: Evidence and Substance, Indicatives and Imperatives in Hebrews 11

It is essential to acknowledge that leaders of NLCC and EVCS cannot effectively appropriate the mandate of the Great Commission expressed in Matthew 28:19-20, and the defense told in 1 Peter 3:15 without understanding evidence and substance. In addressing the subject matter of evidence, the research must consider faith and its walk. According to the understanding gathered from Scripture, faith is both an active sign and a constituent mixed with the justified believer’s position. The definition of evidence that Scripture articulates is: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). However, is it that simple? The author of Hebrews was addressing faith and its work in the believers’ life in the previous chapter. The author emphatically begins Hebrews 11:1 with” he word, "Now," denoting that the indicatives of Hebrews 10 come to life in the imperatives of Hebrews 11. Why is this connection so important in addressing the practical walk of leaders of NLCC? In chapter ten of Hebrews, especially verses thirty-two to thirty-nine, the author references the justified men

and women in work and suffering with Christ. Although the book of Hebrews draws reference to Christology and the Levitical priesthood during Temple worship,¹⁹² the author is forewarning those in the ministry to remain faithful to God in their service as Christ is now the High Priest of their faith.¹⁹³

The Scripture declares,

“And not being weak in faith, he [Abraham] did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief. However, he was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and convinced He could perform what He had promised. Moreover, therefore ‘it was accounted to him for righteousness’. . . Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (Rom 4:19-22, 5:1-2).

Leaders must show faith in the finished work of the cross and follow Christ’s teachings and example in every area and walk of life. Being right with God comes through faith in Jesus. Even so, the book of James connects faith explicitly to our actions:

“But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? [...] Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? Moreover, the Scripture fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and accounted to him for righteousness. Furthermore, he was called the friend of God [...] You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only [...] For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (Jam 2:20-26).

¹⁹² Paolo Garuti, "The Christology of Hebrews," *Nova et vetera* 18, no. 4 (2020): 1369. doi:10.1353/nov.2020.0060.

¹⁹³ Eval Regev, "Hebrews’ High Priestly Christology: Models, Method and Aim," *Religions* 12, no. 11 (2021): 4-5.

Therefore, leaders must acknowledge that in preaching and teaching the word to defend the gospel, individuals will face opposition. However, preaching the gospel's message must go forth in faith as leaders whole-heartedly place their faith, hope, and trust in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit and teach others to do the same (1 Cor 11:1).

In Need of a Savior: God, the Righteous Judge

Another aspect and responsibility leaders face in being faithful to the mission of preaching the gospel is to warn individuals of the wrath of God, which awaits every unbeliever. Thus, leaders at NLCC and EVCS needed to understand the biblical theology of sin. Sinful individuals are not aware that the wrath of God is an ever-present reality in their lives (John 3:36; Rom 1:15-32). Leaders must engage and believe wholeheartedly what the Scripture declares about the condition of sin (Rom 3:23). Therefore, it is not suitable for leaders who are called into the service of the Lord to continue with the status quo of indifference. Leaders must take up the cross daily while teaching and warning others about sin and its remedy, Jesus Christ (Rom 3:23, 6:23; 1 Tim 4:6-7). The Scripture declares in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." People need to know that they are sinners in need of a Savior.

Therefore, the second aspect of implementing the practical focus group is by building a bridge where the theological reason for the problem, purpose, and thesis statement meets the theoretical, the active working of faith, as leaders engage with eagerness and boldness, presenting the message of the gospel to a lost and hurting world. The command is to preach the unadulterated word of God, whether it is tasteful or not, as time is of the essence.

No one knows what tomorrow holds and Christ commands those hearing the gospel to repent (Ps 95: 7-8; Heb 3:15). There is no opportunity to waste, as time runs out for the many

who struggle daily with uncertainty. Unfortunately, many Western churches and leaders compromise the gospel's message, acquiescing to a contemporary lifestyle and method that only deceives and further leads to destruction. Leaders must keep in mind that those who have already died without Christ are now experiencing the judgment of the living God (2 Tim 4:1; Heb 9:27, 10:31). Scripture even goes on to say, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will" (Heb 2:3-4). The proverbial rubber meets the road for NLCC leaders as they articulate the Great Commission and its defense with Holy Spirit passion and vigor (Heb 9:28).

What are Leaders Up Against

Leaders must see and understand that the Great Commission and defense of the gospel is not a trite occurrence in the believer's life. The gospel is the Bible's message for those willing to accept Jesus as Lord. In the book of Romans, the apostle is a bondservant of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 11:22-31). Paul, who was to suffer much for the kingdom of God, affirms that this service is by obedience to Jesus Christ (Acts 9:10-19).¹⁹⁴ Paul goes on to say in Romans 1:16-17, the thesis statement of the book of Romans, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and for the Greek. For in it, the righteousness of God reveals from faith to faith; as it says, "The just shall live by faith." In

¹⁹⁴ Dirk G. van der Merwe, "The Concept and Activity of 'Obedience' in the Gospel of John," *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 43, no. 1 (2022).

making this statement, Paul reminds believers that the gospel's message is God's righteousness for all who believe (John 3:16-17).

What is the leader up against in this contemporary culture if not the reality of Romans 1:18-32 and 1 Timothy 4:1-2? Paul begins verse eighteen of Romans chapter one in the negative, citing the abject moral decay and condition of individuals, a condition which is very much alive today. It is not unlike the message of John the Baptist when he came on the scene preaching the baptism of repentance (Matt 3:1-2; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). The negative comes before the positive to alert and draw individuals to their sinful and depraved conditions. Some readily accepted the message of repentance. In contrast, many others flagrantly and remorselessly brought Romans 1 into reality (Matt 7:13-14). Knowing the stakes are high, leaders must not be afraid to lovingly warn individuals of their sinful condition when presenting the gospel. They must let people know about the impending wrath of God that abides on the unbeliever (John 3:36). The Christian God of Creation is unlike any other gods who become angry because of sheer emotions. God is Holy and cannot look upon sin. Therefore, God provides and offers a mediator, Jesus Christ, to take on and pay the penalties of sin. However, contemporary culture does not see God in this biblical reality. Instead, the culture views God as only loving, even going as far as to believe that God supports their immoral behaviors. The leader must insist on God's word and teach those who believe to stand and articulate the same.

God's Perfect Love and Hatred

The leader must not confuse the perfect love of God with the perfect hatred of God in delivering the gospel's message. Neither should the leader confuse God's anger and wrath as synonymous with evil intent and emotions, as those are usually the attributes of humanity outlined in the flesh (Jam 1:20-22). The Scripture is not shy in its articulation of this position as

declared in Hebrews 1:9, “You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness....” What else is there to say than to present the unapologetic message of the cross of Christ as the only hope of salvation? However, leaders at NLCC must do so firmly and in love (Acts 4:12; 1 Cor 15:3; Col 4:2-6). Many modern-day churches and ministers do not teach or preach about the hatred of God for sin and unrighteousness but focus only on the love of God to not offend. Still, the gospel is a message of offense (Matt 10:34-36). People are broken and cannot save themselves. Because of this, the gospel, which is a message of exclusivity, offers to humanity this hope in Christ from the impending wrath of the living God (Ps 2:12, 76:6-12, 78:49-51, 90:7, 11; Isa 9:19; Jer 7:20; Eze 7:19; John 3:36; Rom 9:22; Eph 5:6; Col 3; 2 Thess 1). There are many other places where the Scripture demonstrates the wrath of God. Still, for the leader, knowing what God hates does not give them the license to present the message of the cross in anger. On the contrary, it is in this unpleasant and seemingly harmful pronouncement of wrath through the gospel's message that God's revealed and eternal love manifests.

Making the Mark (Sanctify and Defend)

It is no secret that the gospel's message has faced numerous oppositions over the centuries. Especially in this contemporary era, it seems that Isaiah 5:20-21 becomes a reality with every passing second. Who would have imagined about ten to fifteen years ago that Western society would so eagerly embrace moral decay on an unprecedented scale with the legalization and acceptance of many immoral positions quickly sweeping across their lands? It is an understatement to say that implementing various immoral laws upsets God. Are these laws and behaviors not an affront to the Word of God? This research paper has already examined the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20, linking these verses with various Scriptures from the book of Hebrews. Now the examination takes on another critical aspect of the journey to satisfy

and fulfill the problem and the purpose of NLCC and EVCS as 1 Peter 3:15 comes into play with its Scriptural linkage coming from 2 Timothy 4:1-5. Paul admonishes his young protégé to preach the Word. Eternity is not a kids' game to play. As leaders consider the seriousness and urgency of the Word, they become bold in articulating the gospel, applying careful study and reason (2 Tim 2:15). As leaders defend the gospel, presenting the message through four areas of consideration:

1. First, leaders must tell people that the gospel is universal and applies to everyone.
2. Second, leaders must ensure listeners know they are genuine and sincere in their concern for them through their words and actions.
3. Third, leaders should never present the gospel as a sales pitch but as a message reflecting hope for this life and eternal salvation after death.
4. Fourth, leaders must show their unwavering commitment to Jesus by shedding all forms of hypocrisy by becoming disciples of Christ.

A Disciple

Who is a disciple, if not an individual who looks like their master?¹⁹⁵ Every believer should seek to become a disciple. A disciple is a listener, an individual who follows the instructions of the Bible.¹⁹⁶ A disciple of Christ is always active, taking nothing for granted when obeying the Scriptures, and always mindful of the world. The gospel of Christ is the believer's message to give hope to a lost and dying world. Following the command, the disciple has daily communion with God, reading and listening to the Word as the fruit of the Spirit

¹⁹⁵ John Stott, *The Disciple* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 42.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

actively manifests and operates in the disciple's life. The disciple is humble and not quick to cast aspersions about others, always willing to minister the gospel.

However, these characteristics start locally and individually as those willing to follow Christ become committed to the message of the Cross. Disciples who are followers of Christ surrender to the non-negotiable commands of Scripture. The Bible commands the disciple to spread the gospel and to operate in authority and power. The disciple understands that the defense and proclamation of the Christian faith is the marvelous message of Jesus's resurrection and is God's saving work for humanity. Unfortunately, many contemporary believers cannot answer the fundamentals of their faith regarding the deity, death, and resurrection of Christ. Secular culture seems to be shaping Christianity, giving rise to indifference and relativism, as individuals equate truth only with their experiences. The prevailing thought is that the Resurrection of Christ is meaningless to the contemporary vernacular as society moves further away from the basic tenets of Christianity's absolutes. This attitude emerges in part from believers not taking seriously their role to be a disciple.

The Contemporary Believer

To implement a successful methodology, Christ's believers focus on their position as contemporary believers. The believer in Christ is only as firm as having a dependent relationship with the Holy Spirit. It is worth mentioning that when Phillip caught up with the chariot containing the searching Eunuch, he was able the question concerning the Messiah from Scripture (Acts 8: 30-35). To be an effective witness, believers must know the Word of God. If the church has failed to teach, then believers have lost the ability to defend the Resurrection, a foundational pillar of the gospel's message. Messages from pulpits placate the living and prospering in this world. No longer is the focus on the Cross and the power of the Resurrection

of Christ.¹⁹⁷ No longer is it essential to live and witness the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 3:2-3). Instead, many contemporary churches accommodate believers untrained in the Word. Numerous congregants are locked in a dance of selfish ambitions. No more is there a call to holiness and separation as the Scriptures demand of the believer (1 Pet 1:16). Yet entertaining a mixed lifestyle only stifles the Cross's message, rendering it null and void in the hearing of many.

Many believers have lost the image of the Lord, and only by purposeful contribution will His followers begin to know Him intimately. Christian churches worldwide suffer from the onslaught of contemporary culture, which demands a right to be heard, accepted, and tolerated. Nowhere is this more profound than in the Western culture, where self-actualization is far more critical than collective biblical morality. Once a striving edifice of biblically sound principles, many Western churches have normalized unbiblical positions. Over the years, the gospel's message has lost its power and importance. Indeed, pockets of churches and individuals still command authority in the Spirit, but they are few and far apart. Many Western churches, by and large, are now a part of the globalized economy, technology, and institutional norms. Many Christ believers have unwittingly become a part of this political and immoral global expansion as culture seduces them into mixing theology and secular influences.

Hence the contemporary church faces a dilemma. Moving around is daunting, as every aspect of an individual's life becomes touched by the changing unbiblical cultural influences. Once considered a staple in the American educational system, the Bible is no more a part of its

¹⁹⁷ James A. Roh, "The Cross-and-Resurrection: The Supreme Sign in John's Gospel," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 64, no. 4 (2021): 828, <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/cross-resurrection-supreme-sign-johns-gospel/docview/2661589221/se-2>.

diet. The Bible's influence and need waned in its effectiveness and lure to capture the hearts and minds of many postmodern individuals. Even in seminary institutions, there is a decline in attendance. Is it possible to go back to a time when institutions of higher learning linked nicely to educational institutions? For the postmodern era, the answer may never be yes.

However, the church can use its position to infiltrate the mechanisms of society by first engaging in repentance and the fundamentals of the Scriptures. Throughout the gospel, Jesus commits to announcing the "*basileia tou theou*," literally "the kingdom of God." The church must do the same, but it begins with a personal commitment which is not easy considering the culture and time. Sadly, most contemporary believers are not experiencing the power and presence of God as did the first-century church.

Additionally, although Scripture reminds the believer that the name of Christ is the only way under heaven for the salvation of humanity (Acts 4:12), the primary methods of evangelism have been lost due to a three-pronged attack. First, the basic methods of evangelism disappeared due to years of erosion of fundamental biblical principles of faith and compromise. Second, individuals are more engaged in fighting personal battles than focusing on the Great Commission by preaching the Resurrection message. Third, the eagerness of the first-century church to preach the message of repentance and belief in the Savior is missing as personalities rise over and above the need for God (1 Cor 11:1; Eph 5:1-2; 1 John 2:6, 21).

Is it possible to return to where Christ is the head and not the tail? Such a task requires self-inspection, a change in focus, and a desire to spread the gospel with a heart, soul, and mind that loves Christ (Deut 6:5; Prov 3:5-6; Matt 22:37; Mark 12:30-31; Luke 10:27). Many believers have malnourished spirits because the milk and meat of the Bible is not a part of the daily intake. Practicing spiritual disciplines in contemporary culture is not regular for many

believers. The gospel's message becomes muted if the believer focuses on personality gains rather than the gospel of Christ (John 3:30).

Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit continues His work in the believer's life despite their desire to self-medicate on life's issues. First, believers need to educate themselves in the Bible and the basic principles of the Christian faith. After which, by the leading of the Spirit, they need to start the apologetic process with love for Christ. It would be a mockery to think that a believer who does not love or have a deep relationship with the Lord will love others they minister to. The individual then must have a love for themselves. If the believer cannot love himself or herself, then the message of the cross will have no power or effect change in the lives of those who hear it. Even if an individual does not surrender to Christ at that moment or accept the presented arguments for the Resurrection, they should see the light of Christ on the believer's countenance.

Methodology Application

The methodology application section asks ten questions as it considers the problem statement of NLCC and EVCS in relation to the Resurrection and the winsome and coherent defense of the good news:

1. How will the study address the stated problem for clearer understanding?
2. What are the methods used to study the problem?
3. What ministry intervention will the research utilize to address the problem?
4. Description of interpreting the findings
5. The process for collecting and analyzing data.
6. Description of how the study will report the findings.
7. Does the student have some idea regarding how they might make the improvement?

8. How does the student plan to address or resolve this problem? Students should consider the need for the following resources:
 - a. Time: Schedules and calendars
 - b. Finances and Materials: Preliminary budget (only if costs exceed routine operating expenses)
 - c. Facilities: Availability, costs, suitability, and clean-up
 - d. Human: Availability of staff, independent experts, participants, control groups, and outside consultants.
9. Has the student identified a group of people relating to the ministry site with whom the student can work to implement the designed improvement? Has the student considered an alternate control group to help validate the results?
10. How will the student qualify or measure success?

These ten questions will be answered by detailing the intervention design in Phase 1 (Design) and Phase 2 (Implementation).

Intervention Design: Phase 1

Introduction

It is worth noting that securing IRB approval was necessary for the intervention design to have validity (See APPENDIX F for IRB approval). The Intervention and Implementation of the Design occurred in two phases over several weeks, with phase 1 focused on gathering information on potential participants in the action research process. Phase 2 detailed the practical implementation of the project. In this study, the intervention changed lives by addressing the problem statement with a planned approach. However, it is foolish to assume that all interventions will change the status quo of any situation or circumstance. Therefore, it behooves

those engaged in this venture to think objectively, as any judge should when hearing a case. However, in this case, the judge is the researcher, and the clients and jury members are the congregants of NLCC and EVCS leaders, respectively. Conversely, the results of the intervention gave a potentially new way of looking at a problem or bringing the issue to the attention of those who do not yet see the benefits of the intervention's subsequent acceptance and implementation. Where would anyone be or go without an intervention? As trivial as it may sound, often in life, and at some point, individuals have faced difficult situations where an intervention is necessary. For many, this was a life-changing act in time, whereas for others, the tragedy of that moment continued as the message and purpose of the intervention never took root. In sum, any intervention is a matter of not only gaining knowledge but also applying understanding through wisdom lenses.

Phase 1 involved gathering research materials, crafting teaching and equipping timelines, and thoroughly examining the results and preparation to ensure professionalism. The tabulation, data review, opening and closing of interviews, implementation of the intervention to NLCC, and synthesizing the data may take several weeks. Also, synthesizing the data through triangulation ensured authenticity. The triangulation methods for this study involved open and closed-ended survey, interview, and check on learning questions. Phase 1 included public announcements through EVCS and NLCC offices of the upcoming classes and topics, the issuing of fliers, recruitment of potential participants, and the issuance of consent forms. The study lasted two weeks, setting parameters for the action research study to completion.

Identification of the Problem

From casual observation of NLCC and EVCS leaders, the message of the Resurrection and being a witness of such a message seemed to be an idea that only echoes from the pulpit of

NLCC. Many leaders at NLCC and EVCS spend their time focusing on the cultural activities of this world and disregard the urgency of bringing forth the Word of God to their area of influence. Every believer has the same command to witness. However, those appointed as leaders must share the burden of carrying the message of salvation through the Resurrection by addressing members within their local body about the importance and urgency of the Resurrection.

To tackle this problem head-on, the study focuses on two crucial conversion points to make the intervention workable. These two conversion points find their foundation in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20 and 1 Peter 3:15, as discussed in chapter two. It is undeniable that the Resurrection of Christ was a significant event in the lives of many individuals living in the first century. Ordinary people exposed to the ministering of the gospel were never the same, with many experiencing life-changing miracles. However, the presence of these life-changing miracles will not necessarily make individuals commit their lives to Jesus Christ apart from the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, to address this problem and sufficiently implement the tools needed for a successful outcome, the importance of the witness, as seen in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20, and the ability to defend the gospel's message about the Resurrection in giving hope to individuals in 1 Peter 3:15 is crucial and foundational to this study. Therefore, the workshop started by asking two fundamental questions: What does the Resurrection mean? How does an individual go about the active witness of Jesus Christ in expressing the Resurrection message?

By beginning with these questions, the hope is to pique the interest of individuals concerning their knowledge of the subject and lay the foundation from which to start. As the intervention took shape, other Scriptures augmented the process to allow participants to appreciate the gospel's message in its fullness. One of the purposes of teaching the Resurrection, especially to

this contemporary Christian culture, is that it is an actual occurrence in Scripture, in line with the perceived problem at NLCC and EVCS. In 1 Peter 3:15, the participants learned that they must always be ready to give a reason for their indwelling hope, using 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 as a basis. In addition, the participants learned about the importance of the witness described in Matthew 28:19-20 supported with Scriptures such as 2 Timothy 2:15. The first-century church was passionate about the gospel's message of the Resurrection of Christ. This study saw NLCC and EVCS leaders, participants, and congregants become passionate about proclaiming the good news of the Resurrection with boldness.

Assessing the Level of the Problem

The intervention used a convenient sample and recruited members of NLCC and EVCC. Individuals participated in the study designed to tackle the problem that NLCC and EVCS leaders are ill-equipped to defend the Resurrection against objections expressed by our culture. In this section, the method laid out showed the specific instruments used for the intervention design and narrative statements to support the development of the design.

First, the research used the quantitative design method to gather information relevant to the research. The quantitative research method expresses numbers by gathering and informing individuals about the topic and issue.¹⁹⁸ The principal vehicle for employing the quantitative method employed open and close-ended survey questions to illuminate the topic for participants' understanding. The study's open and close-ended survey questions ensured robust information gathering to circumvent and eliminate possible biases as the researcher prepared the

¹⁹⁸ Roberts and Hyatt, *The Dissertation Journey*, 143.

questionnaires for issuance. The research is only interested in gathering numbers, statistics, averages, medians, and the means, and not so much the explanation of ideas. Therefore, quantitative research aimed to ensure reliability and convergence on the point of interest with these estimable questions.

Second, the methodology employed primary questions related to collecting original data, experimental in nature and not descriptive in scope. The difference between these two terms is that experimental data gathers information performed by the research as opposed to descriptive data that uses as-is measurements.

Thirdly, the quantitative study used statistical analysis methods to test relationships between variables using the Bar and Scatter Charts Excel programs to gather this information. The intervention is crucial when considering the research thesis statement and addressing the identifiable problem at NLCC and EVCS concerning the defense and proclamation of the Resurrection in the final tabulation, interpretation, and expression of the information.

Finally, the intervention included facilitator-led classes or workshops to get to the heart of the issue. Although conducting these workshops or focus groups desired more participants, it was understandable based on the unavailable many participants due to time constraints-a potential limitation.

Timeline for Data Collection and Analysis

Weeks 1-3 consisted of collecting and analyzing the data. During this time frame, participants received survey and questionnaire questions and gathered personal understanding and knowledge of the Great Commission, the defense of the Resurrection, and how they tie both concepts to the Resurrection narrative. APPENDIX A shows the questions related to the survey for leaders and congregants. Week 4 is dedicated solely to tabulating the initial results of the

questionnaire questions and surveys conducted. In Weeks 5-6, the random sample secured thirty participants who agreed to answer questions. APPENDIX D shows the flyer, permission/request, and consent forms to initiate the action research plan for the selected individuals participating in the intervention process. APPENDIX C shows check on learning questions to be used at the end of the teaching lessons. APPENDIX B shows the response form secured by the researcher from NLCC permitting the participation of the study. The Intervention announced in Weeks 7-13 with an implementation of the intervention design plan to follow as noted below, broken down in the following weeks after completing results. Finally, weeks 14-16 consisted of synthesizing the data. Note that the above timeline is a rough time estimate. Now that a picture of the intervention design is obvious, the paper went into the next step of the Implementing the Intervention Design (Phase 2).

Implementation of the Intervention Design: Phase 2

Introduction

Phase 2 is the practical implementation of the project. The main concern of the intervention and subsequent implementation addressed the problem that NLCC and EVCS leaders are ill-equipped to defend the Resurrection against objections expressed by our culture. The agents of change are the pastor and church ministers, who implemented the study results once the information became available to them.

The weeks involved run concurrently, as the researcher completed both phases within sixteen weeks. Data triangulation is essential to the study and occurred as the researcher gauged individuals' responses from the focus group sessions held over two Sundays.

The second half of the intervention focused on the actual teaching and implementation of the intervention. Flyers, questionnaires, and interview questions were already prepared. Teaching

the Resurrection narrative involved far more than teaching about an art form or science. The purpose and objective of the intervention got NLCC and EVCS leaders focused more on the Resurrection narrative of the gospel and to meditate on its merits (1 Cor 15:1-20; 1 Pet 3:15) while at the same time tending to the requirements of the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20; 1 Tim 2:15). Therefore, exposing leaders to the various topics dealing with the Resurrection assisted the journey. The Scripture declares in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Therefore, although this study educated leaders in defense and proclamation of the gospel, those whom leaders oversaw also benefited from its coherent articulation (Matt 28:19-20; 1 Pet. 3:15). It is common for church members to share and become excited about their experiences rather than the gospel. Teaching the Resurrection is not about making leaders feel good about themselves or for them to claim that they have the correct knowledge. Rather, the teaching is intended to inspire an awakening in the hearts and minds of leaders to elicit increased faith to accomplish the task of witnessing (Rom 10:17).

Teaching the Resurrection and the witness from this two-fold approach assisted leaders to answer potential nagging questions that directly involve the validity of this extraordinary phenomenon. Whether understood or not, it is an expected command from Scripture that believers in Christ should proclaim the gospel. The gospel's message is not complicated as individuals may think and witnessing to the Resurrection requires simply regurgitating the pertinent Scriptures that back up the claim with the help of the Holy Spirit. However, the problem with this simple message is that leaders cannot articulate its truth in a winsome way and have become indifferent to its importance. Complicating the matter is that leaders live in an age where distraction is at every point, and self-actualization is the hallmark of life's priorities. Aided

with the knowledge from the Literary Review, leaders bolstered their witness and overcome these challenges. With the systematic plan outlined in the upcoming sections, the teaching and instructions exposed leaders to the Resurrection's foundational principles. Next, leaders learned to make valid arguments firmly rooted in Scripture. Finally, leaders understood that Christianity has an absolute truth and that there are no variations to this truth.

Plan of Teaching

Participants learned first of the many biblical examples of how Christians systematically organize their defense of the gospel. For example, the writer of Luke used the eyewitness and historical backdrop when addressing the most excellent Theophilus in Luke 1:1-4.¹⁹⁹ The writer demonstrated a systematic approach to Theophilus as required by 1 Peter 3:15 while presenting Matthew 28:19-20 to the audience. Stephen also makes an impassioned plea before undergoing stoning in Acts 7. The study introduced the Minimal Facts Theory by Gary Habermas using the evidential method.²⁰⁰ Finally, the study discussed seven popular theories opposing the Resurrection.

Leaders understood that not all cases in teaching and responding to questions on the Resurrection will be equal. Leaders learned and adapted to questions and concerns of those asking the reason for Christ's Resurrection and respond accordingly as the Holy Spirit leads. In addition, learning the message about the Resurrection and studying the materials included an introduction from the position of authority (1 Cor 15:1-2), history (1 Cor 15:3-11), and reasoning (1 Cor 15:12-20), which helped set up the basis for any defense. The goal was to connect with

¹⁹⁹ Breitenbach, "A New Argument," 345-6.

²⁰⁰ Khouri, "The Crucifixion in the Qur'an," 159.

the purpose statement in helping leaders build a firm footing in these Corinthian verses. The plan incorporated other pertinent Scriptures in the lesson but, most importantly, instruction on 1 Peter 3:15 and Matt 28:19-20 as the foundation to lay the message of the Resurrection.

Applying the Implementation (Weeks Scenario)

The implementation of the intervention section incorporated the following path and the respective weeks each step took.

In weeks 1-3, the researcher posted the announcement of the study and handed out flyers designed to elicit participants to answer questions concerning the topic. The flyer and announcement dictated the classes' time, place, and duration. During this block of weeks, the researcher secured consent letters and survey questionnaires and made them available to potential study participants inside and outside NLCC. The survey questionnaires asked random individuals at NLCC and EVCS questions about the Resurrection of Christ based on Matthew 28:19-20 and 2 Timothy 2:15 on preaching the Great Commission to the world, and 1 Peter 3:15 based on defense, supported by 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, dealing with the certainty of the Resurrection. The exhibit of these items is in Appendix A (Survey Questions for Leaders and Congregants/Others) and Appendix D (Permission Letters, Request, and Consent Forms). The researcher asks for a suspense time frame of five days for both the signed consent form with potential participants' approval and the return of questionnaires in the study.

After participants returned questionnaires, the researcher made a second announcement to invite potential participants to a two-Sunday focus group where the researcher presented teaching on the topic. The first Sunday focused primarily on teaching the study material in a one-hour block of time. The second Sunday split into wrapping up any potential teaching from the previous Sunday and asking final interview questions to gauge learning. Weeks 4-5 included the

first classes. The first class began with teachings on several positions in quick succession. Remember, this study is like an introduction to apologetics, and the purpose is to whet the appetites of leaders and believers who attend to dig deeper into exploring the Resurrection message, its defense, and potential witness. The areas explored the Classical, Evidential, and Presuppositional positions; the researcher used these positions to help gauge the focus group and learning. Under the Classical position, NLCC and EVCS participants learned about logical thought as a standard regarding philosophical debates. Next, the researcher explored the Evidential position, where NLCC and EVCS leaders and congregants saw how using evidence to make coherent arguments led to various interpretations by others. The goal for the researcher is that when teaching the Evidential position of the Resurrection, NLCC and EVCS leaders learned about the evidence and arguments for and against Christ's Resurrection. One aspect of the Evidential stage is that it argues against neutrality, a construct of human thought and worldview. Finally, when teaching on the Presuppositional position of the Resurrection, NLCC and EVCS believers learned that God and His word are the absolute standards of morality, logic, uniformity in nature, and dignity. However, humanity acquires knowledge from nature, science, and biology. For the believer in Christ, scientific knowledge only compliments what is already known and accepted as God is the source and wisdom of all knowledge. This principle is as articulated in many Scriptural verses, especially those in Job 38 and Proverbs 8. The Scripture declares in Psalm 19:1-4, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."

The People Involved

The individuals involved in the study are from EVCC and NLCC, chosen based on a random sample of individuals. As the research implementation moves through each stage, individuals recognized that the researcher sought to propose meaningful resolutions to the problem. The researcher presents unbiased questions so that participants feel welcome to participate in the study.

The Place of Activity and Duration

New Life Christ Center hosted the apologetic classes and discussions in the school building adjacent to the church. Because of time constraints and the rural setting, individuals hardly had time to spare. Therefore, barring anything unforeseen, classes commenced on two Sundays at 9:00 am and lasted for at least an hour. APPENDIX E exhibits the prescribed timeline for the study lessons and teachings. The lectures covered the Resurrection's classical, evidential, and presuppositional aspects. These three areas of study covered the facets of the questions and arguments presented.

Ethical Issues, Informed Consent, and Confidentiality

Participating in action research requires the researcher to address ethical considerations. The researcher informed and answered stakeholders about any privacy concerns they may have. The researcher considered that when doing action research, participants have more control than in other studies. Nevertheless, the research required informed written consent for situations where people are at risk because of the sensitive nature of issues that may come up in the study. However, none of the survey questions or materials infringed on individuals' confidentiality.

Required Resources and Data

The required resources included questionnaires, interviews, and survey questions. In addition, the research presented a consent form for the project and the use of bar and scatter charts to tabulate the results with personal extrapolation of these results by the researcher.

What Would Success Look Like After Implementation?

Apart from receiving a follow-up survey to gauge learning for those who attended the class, individuals received knowledge and understanding of the biblical mandate to pronounce the gospel of Jesus Christ and defend the foundation of its merits, the Resurrection. The research resulted in a greater appreciation for the message and purpose of God that was offered to the leaders and congregants at NLCC and EVCS.

Conclusion of Methodology

Scholars and many academics can argue about whether the Resurrection of Christ, and the corresponding hope of life after death, is true. However, what theoretical alternative exists, especially for those exposed to Western culture and its religious influence? Each culture faces its own sets of dogmas when it comes to their religious beliefs and their examination of the purpose and the eventual death of individuals. The methodology of this action research seeks to apply a systematic approach to assist the leadership at NLCC and EVCS to be more effective and efficient when logically articulating the message of the Cross. The application of all lessons in the training focused on the two basic principles found in Matthew 28:19-20 (answering the call of the Great Commission and doing what Christ commands) and I Peter 3:15 (articulating a reason for believing in Christ). Leaders at NLCC and EVCS must recognize their purpose in spreading the gospel of Christ. Building on the theological reason for using both Scriptures, the

leader cannot avoid the indicative and the imperative posture. The imperative is to do the command of the indicatives. Therefore, as NLCC and EVCS leaders learned to articulate the defense of the Resurrection, they grew to appreciate the significance of obeying Christ's call and command to fulfill the Great Commission.

The Bible is replete with the historical defense of the resurrected Messiah.²⁰¹ For example, the Apostle Paul argued the defense of Jesus to the Jewish high court, Hellenists, and Gnostics. Stephen, in the book of Acts, gave a remarkable historical account of Christ, tracing the work of Christ through the Old Testament before undergoing stoning. In the Third Century, Origen defended the Resurrection, Augustine apologetically defended the faith against Paganism, and Thomas Aquinas used the systematic method against the intellectual spread of Islam. Contemporary Christian leaders can experience the same success by looking at and taking examples from these men.

As the Western culture moves away from the fundamentals of the Christian faith, it becomes increasingly crucial that contemporary Christian leaders do not ignore the naysayers' objections.²⁰² Christian leaders must strive to give excellent and accurate historical and theological responses to inquiries of the faith. Many Christians go into the world not knowing why they hold their beliefs. For those who believe in Christ, they too, not so long ago, may have questioned a faith for which they never heard well-reasoned answers in its proclamation and or defense. In addition, universities, colleges, and secular institutions of learning continue to negatively impact the lives of families, especially the young in the culture, espousing views

²⁰¹ Bergeron and Habermas, "The Resurrection of Jesus," 158-9.

²⁰² Lataster, "Defending Jesus," 81.

contrary to the Christian faith. Moreover, these negative influences remain as they invade the church with ruthless and reckless disregard for etiquette and reason, often negatively impacting the Christian's desire to be a witness of the gospel.

A man once said that preaching on the Resurrection in the church is an elementary message, as if to say, "move on and give meat and substance." Is it safe to say that the apostles were incorrect when preaching on the Resurrection in the first century, an idea not well-supported at the time?²⁰³ However, on the contrary, this type of preaching is what the church needs today. The good news of the Resurrection of Christ was the cornerstone of the Apostles' message. The Resurrection of Christ is a message of hope, and although the mode of preaching its truth over the centuries may differ, its message remains the same. There is power in the Cross's message. Any minister would be amiss, especially in today's culture, to not go forth and preach the good news of Jesus Christ, opening the door to repentance and believing in Him. This methodology section began by elaborating on nine truths that leaders at NLCC must believe as a support for their defense and proclamation of the Resurrection. These truths should motivate the leaders to value the importance of studying how to defend the Resurrection and thereby fulfill the Great Commission. The methodology section finally detailed the Intervention Design (Phase 1) and Implementation (Phase 2).

²⁰³ Breitenbach, "A New Argument," 342.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

The researcher completed this portion of the study after working in the field, gathering, teaching, interviewing, and tabulating the results. The investigation did not utilize the Likert Scale, SPSS model, or T-Test to tabulate and interpret any data, but instead applied Excel Tables to tabulate and interpret the results. Additionally, the researcher examines each question on its merits when analyzing the data, hoping to make the data as simple as possible to follow without any confusion.

On June 9, 2023, the researcher handed out fifty survey questionnaires to potential participants with a return date of one week. On June 17, 2023, the researcher received thirty-eight completed surveys. As the researcher issued the survey questionnaires before returning them to potential participants, the researcher secured two Sundays to conduct classes described in the implementation of the intervention design section, with a commencement date of June 18, 2023, with the final class ending on June 25, 2023. However, for the focus group session the researcher issued an open-ended questionnaire to solicit qualitative results instead of quantitative closed-ended questions. The purpose is to learn what participants understood from the focus group study. The focus group revealed fascinating insight as individuals gained valuable knowledge into Christ's Resurrection through its teaching on the supporting and opposing positions to its claims. Individuals learned that God is not so much concerned with the many distractions believers may face as much as fulfilling His divine will and purpose. Christ is the foundation of the believer's faith, Christ's Resurrection, and ascension into heaven (1 Cor 3:11-15). The study and the focus group met the objective of affirming NLCC and EVCC leaders' knowledge of Christ's Resurrection and the tools to explore the merits of its defense.

Collective Results

It is worth mentioning the problem and the purpose statement again to stress the importance of the study and its overall goal in addressing the issue. The presented problem is that New Life Christian Center leaders are ill-equipped to defend the Resurrection against objections expressed by our culture. Likewise, the purpose acts as a defining goalpost where the researcher hopes to put to rest the proverbial ball into the back of the net. The DMIN action research project aims to equip New Life Christian Center leaders to defend the Resurrection against objections using focus training groups.

The study covered four areas: Leaders Questions, Leaders and Believers Questions, Doubled-Up Questions, and the Focus Group Results. The resulting tables represent the results for each study area the researcher explored in detail. The collective results prove the hypothesis of the researcher that the general knowledge surrounding the underlying belief about the foundational truths concerning Christ's Resurrection is solid amongst NLCC and EVCS leaders, as each table shows. Even though individuals are aware of the fundamentals of the Christian faith, the results also show troubling areas when considering the connection between defense of the Resurrection and proclaiming the gospel's message, as many use personal witness, testimony, quality of life, and biblical evidence incorrectly. The basic assumption by the researcher is that what is lacking is the effort of NLCC and EVCS leaders to make Christ-centered witness a publicly announced reality of the school, church, and a standard part of the individual's lifestyle. Four tables reflect the results of the action research.

The study featured thirty-eight participants. Twenty-seven answered questions about leaders and believers, and eleven responded to questions related only to leaders at NLCC and EVCS. The focus group sessions featured fifteen individuals and occurred over two Sundays.

However, six questions received double responses from eleven participants, which the researcher records in Table 3.

The study resulted in four sections regarding the survey questions and questionnaires, primarily based on the initial issuance of two questionnaires, one specifically for Leaders of NLCC and EVCS and the other for congregants not in leadership roles. The researcher wanted to ascertain the knowledge leaders and congregants had concerning the topic and problem presented. Consequently, the results of doubled-up responses occurred based on specific questions from these two separate questionnaires. Then, the study added the final piece in the focus group open-ended questions to authenticate the result and subsequent triangulation of the results.

Nonetheless, this divergence did not affect or skew the intended result sought by the researcher in the study. The following discussion of the data occurs in four sections: Section 1 focuses on leaders only, Section 2 on leaders and believers, Section 3 on participants who answered two questions, and Section 4 displays the focus group results. The data analysis in each section provided the table of questions and answers given by participants, then explained the answers to each question.

Section 1: Leaders Only Analysis

TABLE 1: LEADERS ONLY RESULTS		
Question	Possible Answers to the Question	Number of Responses/Answer
1. What do you believe about Genesis' account of Creation?	a. That the Genesis account occurred as stated in the Bible.	10
	b. That the Genesis account cannot be verified by science.	0

	c. I studied information about Creation which assisted me to resolve concerns about science and the Bible.	1
	d. I do not understand the question.	0
2. What do you think or believe is a miracle?	a. A miracle is a supernatural event which is specific in its purpose as ordained by God.	11
	b. A miracle is not a supernatural event, but only natural processes affected by science.	0
	c. A miracle is produced by believers in the church actively witnessing individuals for them to have positive changes to their lives and is reserved for leaders of the church.	0
	d. I do not understand the question.	0
3. What do you understand about natural law and Creation?	a. That natural law confirms Creation.	5
	b. That natural law denies Creation.	0
	c. That natural law only exists because of Creation.	2
	d. I do not understand the question.	3
4. Do you believe that the same power in Creation was involved in Christ's Resurrection?	a. Yes, because the God of Creation was also present in the Resurrection.	11
	b. No, the power in the Resurrection was different from the power in the Creation.	0
	c. I believe that this question is illogical to my belief in Christ.	0
	d. I do not understand the question.	0
5. Do you believe that the Apostle's primary message was about the deity, death, and resurrection of Christ?	a. Yes, because the Scriptures evidence this to be true.	11
	b. No, because they mentioned other things that exalted Christ.	0
	c. The method was more important than the message to win lost souls at any cost.	0
	d. I do not understand the question.	0

Question 1: What do you believe about Genesis' account of Creation?

Table 1 shows the respondents' breakdown of the questions. Of the eleven individuals answering this question, ten agreed that the "Genesis account occurred as stated in the Bible," with one participant dissenting. However, this one individual answered that the "studied information assisted in coming to a logical conclusion about the creation story, science, and the Bible" is not frowned upon. One of the mainstays of the study is to equip leaders to effectively

share the gospel, especially in a contemporary culture that is quickly moving further away from the norms of Scripture.²⁰⁴ The mere fact that this one individual did not follow suit as the other ten individuals is not a mark of disapproval but reflects an ideal approach, especially in this contemporary culture where sometimes it is necessary to mix faith and knowledge to articulate Scripture coherently depending on the circumstances. The study shows that leaders and believers share common knowledge about the Bible's rendition of events. However, the one dissenting individual proves that only one participant understood that sometimes it may take an extra step in knowledge to convince naysayers of this fact.

Question 2: What do you think or believe is a miracle?

Table 1 shows all the participants answered in the affirmative for question two. The significance of this result is important because if leaders believe that miracles are anything other than specifically tied into the event and occurrence according to Scripture, then the Creation, Resurrection, and the miracles performed by God throughout Scripture would only compete with other everyday so-called and ordinary occurring miracles. Therefore, all participants understand that a miracle is not an everyday occurrence but something rare and usually defies human logic.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ The Bible is not a science textbook, but it gives the truth wherever its topics intersect with science. The Bible contains true and accurate information when it speaks scientifically as much as when it speaks spiritually. Actual science cannot argue against Scripture. The Holy Scriptures impart knowledge that man has only recently discovered through his own scientific research. The Bible offers many specific examples of amazingly accurate science, and science has uncovered much extraordinary evidence that the universe and earth are young, as the Bible describes.

²⁰⁵ A miracle is an extraordinary, astonishing, or event inexplicable by natural or scientific laws, often attributed to the intervention or action of a divine or supernatural power, such as God, a deity, a saint, or a miracle worker. Some people use the word miracle to describe any beneficial or wonderful event, regardless of likelihood or explanation. Others question the existence of miracles, God, or the possibility of God's involvement in human affairs.

Question 3: What do you understand about natural law and Creation?

The following question proved more diverse in the responses than all the other questions combined.²⁰⁶ The question is not an everyday expression floating around in religious circles. Table 1 shows the differences of opinion regarding this question and the respondents' knowledge. The results demonstrate that three individuals did not understand the question, two saw natural law as a direct result of Creation, five responded that natural law confirms Creation, and one did not answer this question. The responses to the question about the relationship between natural law and Creation demonstrate that NLCC and EVCS leaders initially did not know how to answer the question, so they researched it to gain understanding before returning the questionnaire.

Question 4: Do you believe that the same power in Creation was involved in Christ's Resurrection?

The essence of this question was to ascertain leaders' thinking when considering God's power and ultimate authority. The results indicate that all eleven respondents answered in the affirmative, which suggests that NLCC and EVCS leaders undoubtedly affirm God's involvement in the Creation and Christ's Resurrection.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ The Creator instituted natural law to maintain His complex creation. While the Creator has reserved the right to occasionally intervene supernaturally in this creation (especially the miracles mentioned in Scripture), these are exceptions to the rule of natural law. A theory in ethics and philosophy says humans possess intrinsic values that govern their reasoning and behavior. The natural law ethical theory claims that humans are born with a particular moral compass that guides behaviors. These inherited rules essentially distinguish the "rights" and "wrongs" in life. Under natural law, everyone has the same rights, such as the right to live and happiness.

²⁰⁷ Several Scriptures show God's involvement in Creation and the Resurrection. In Genesis 1:1-2, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." Clearly, this text shows God's involvement in Creation. In terms of Resurrection, several scriptures show God's involvement. For example, in Psalm 16:10, "For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption." It is a clear prophecy about Jesus' resurrection fulfilled in Acts 2:31-32. In Romans 8:11, "But if the Spirit of Him who

Question 5: Do you believe that the Apostle's primary message was about the deity, death, and Resurrection of Christ?

The answers to Question 5 show that the eleven respondents agreed that the Apostle's primary message was articulating the deity, death, and Resurrection of Christ. Again, it is essential to gather such information from NLCC and EVCS leaders because whatever they believe and teach will affect the body of Christ either positively, building up the saints towards spiritual worship (John 4:24), or negatively, leading the saints towards spiritual malnutrition and death.²⁰⁸

Section 2: Leaders and Believers

TABLE 2: LEADERS AND BELIEVERS RESULTS		
Question	Possible Answers to the Question	Number of Responses/Answer
1. To your understanding, were the birth and resurrection of Christ considered to be miracles?	a. Yes, they were miracles as both were supernatural acts.	37
	b. No, they were not miracles because they cannot be verified by science.	0
	c. I do not believe they were miracles.	1
	d. I do not understand the question.	0
2. What do you believe about Jesus' resurrection?	a. Jesus' resurrection proved that God the Father sent him.	37
	b. Jesus' resurrection cannot be verified by science; therefore, it is a myth.	0

raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." Again, clearly showing God raised Jesus from the dead and will also give life to those who believe in Him.

²⁰⁸ The message Jesus commissioned His early apostles to teach is the good news, or gospel, of the Kingdom of God (Luke 9:1-2). The Kingdom of God was His primary message. The Apostles' message was about the Kingdom of God and the good news of Christ's resurrection, and the Apostles' message was also about the deity of Christ.

	c. I did not believe until someone showed evidence for Jesus' resurrection.	0
	d. I become a Christian because of the Resurrection's historical and archaeological evidence.	0
3. Do you believe that Jesus is the promised Lamb of God who came as the final sacrifice to redeem humanity from sin?	a. Yes, because my life improved after I started following Christ.	38
	b. No, because one man cannot die for the sins of the world.	0
	c. I believe that Christ died but only for those who are predestined.	0
	d. I do not understand the question.	0
4. Do you believe you are an active witness for Christ?	a. Yes, because I share the gospel with every opportunity.	20
	b. No, because I share the gospel message partially.	2
	c. I share the gospel through the life I live.	8
	d. Active witnessing is ONLY reserved for leaders/members of the church. If you choose this answer, circle one (Leaders/Members).	0
5. Do you believe that the gospel message is the ONLY good news about Christ?	a. Yes, because it is the message of God for salvation from the beginning.	33
	b. No, the gospel message is only one area of salvation.	5
	c. The gospel message has no real impact on my life.	0
	d. I do not understand the question.	0
6. What do you understand is the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20)?	a. It is a command to witness about Christ's resurrection.	38
	b. It is just another message by Christ in the New Testament.	0
	c. I am too shy to be a witness or to do witnessing.	0
	d. I am not sure what to make of it.	0
7. If you were challenged about the validity of Christ's resurrection, could you defend it (1 Peter 3:15)?	a. Yes, with sufficient evidence for the claim.	23
	b. No, I would not know where to begin.	0
	c. I only have some knowledge.	3
	d. I would use my personal testimony.	8
8. Do you believe that your personal testimony is a source for defending Christ's resurrection?	a. Yes, because it changed my life.	30
	b. No, because personal testimonies are not sufficient evidence.	1
	c. I share the gospel through the life I live.	1

	d. I do not understand the question.	0
9. What do you think or believe is a miracle?	a. A miracle is a supernatural event which is specific in its purpose as ordained by God.	36
	b. A miracle is not a supernatural event, but only natural processes affected by science.	0
	c. A miracle is general in its purpose and can occur anywhere at any time.	1
	d. I do not understand the question.	0
10. What do you believe are the key arguments for God's existence?	a. Only biblical evidence.	12
	b. Biblical, historical, and archeological evidence.	25
	c. I never gave it a thought before. I just blindly accepted God's existence.	0
	d. I do not understand the question.	0

Question 1: To your understanding, were the birth and Resurrection of Christ considered miracles?

The overwhelming majority of participants considered that the birth and Resurrection of Christ are miracles, with one individual opposing this idea. Again, the mere fact that this individual opposes the idea that Christ's Resurrection and birth are not miracles does not eliminate their faith in Christ but reflects on the individual's lack of knowledge. A miracle is an event that defies logic and must be highly unusual, resisting the confines of natural laws and affirmed by individuals and eyewitnesses as an exceptional and infrequent occurrence.²⁰⁹ The Scripture declares in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." What someone incorrectly

²⁰⁹ Twelftree, "The Historian," 199-201.

believes becomes their view and doctrine if not addressed by sound teaching and explanation by leaders.

Question 2: What do you believe about Jesus' Resurrection?

The question pertained to a topic that is not frequently addressed at NLCC or EVCS. The question engaged respondents in apologetic thinking and not just mere guessing. Although assumed knowledge is there, it is still worth asking. From the result, thirty-seven respondents affirmed that God sent or approved Christ coming into the world, with one individual indicating personal skepticism in addition to affirmation of God sending Christ and verified evidence. Table 2 did not represent this individual because the participant answered two questions, selecting both (a) and (d as responses. The individual answered in the affirmative that God the Father sent Christ and that believing in Christ only came through someone else showing evidence for the claim of Christ's Resurrection. For this question, the individual was not incorrect; rather, their answer demonstrates the importance of being apologetically ready and sound in Scripture to give a defense. In many instances, unbelievers need to hear both perspectives to come to that full knowledge and understanding of Christ.

Question 3: Do you believe that Jesus is the promised Lamb of God who came as the final sacrifice to redeem humanity from sin?

It is evident from the presented responses that individuals know the Bible, as all thirty-eight respondents believed that Jesus is the promised seed foretold in Scripture. However, the goal is to move from knowledge into the practical application of Scripture with every chance an individual gets to share the gospel of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

Question 4: Do you believe you are an active witness for Christ?

The following question could be up for debate amongst Christians as seven individuals doubled up on their responses, which the study addressed in section 3, with one individual not answering. The results show mixed reactions to the question. Twenty respondents claim they are active witnesses who share the gospel at every opportunity. Two individuals say they share the gospel partially, and eight respondents highlighted that they do so through the life they live. It is not incorrect for believers to actively share the gospel through their lives, as noted by the eight respondents and the two who claimed that they do so partially. However, the study's purpose is that NLCC and EVCS leaders teach the importance of sharing the gospel at every opportunity through both godly actions and words.

Question 5: Do you believe that the gospel message is the ONLY good news about Christ?

The following question poses a vital fundamental truth of the gospel's message. The New Testament records this fact that the only message preached as the good news or the *euangelion* (εὐαγγέλιον)²¹⁰ was the deity, death, and Resurrection of Christ. Thirty-three individuals answered this question correctly, with five respondents revealing a disturbing reality for NLCC and EVCS by answering in the negative. The five individuals who answered this way would not only go against the grain of tradition and church orthodoxy, but against the Scriptures as well (Gal 1:8-10). Leaders must clarify that the gospel's message is not one way to salvation; it is the only way that opens the door to life in Christ and fellowship with the Father (John 14:23-24).

Question 6: What do you understand is the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20)?

²¹⁰ The Greek word *euangelion* (εὐαγγέλιον) translates exactly to the words "good news" or "good message." It was a term used initially in wartime.

There was no contradiction to the gospel's message in the results of Question 6, as all respondents answered in the affirmative that the command to witness Christ's Resurrection is the gospel's message. However, there seems to be a dissonance between the answers to Question 6 and the answers to Question 5 representing the gospel's message as the only good news, as the five individuals who dissented in Question 5 agree with the command of the Great Commission. Leaders must face and tackle these discrepancies head-on to avoid any mixed messages of the gospel. The believer must understand the rudiments of the faith to become men and women who rightly divide the Word of Truth.

Question 7: If you were challenged about the validity of Christ's Resurrection, could you defend it (1 Peter 3:15)?

The answers to Question 7 revealed that four individuals doubled up on their responses, with twenty-three affirming that they could defend Christ's Resurrection with sufficient evidence. The reason for using evidence is not to negate or water down the preaching or teaching of the powerful message of the gospel, but to equip the leader and believer with knowledge that could assist them in answering those who are naysayers of this miraculous event of Christ. Three respondents stated only having partial knowledge to defend the Resurrection, and eight would use personal testimony for the Resurrection's defense.

In response to these results, leaders of NLCC and EVCS have an enormous task upon them. In previous questions, the results reveal that participants think that personal testimony acts not only as a witness to the Resurrection but also as a defense to its claim, which ought not to be. Using one's testimony may be a noble effort based on the present culture. Nevertheless, it does not replace the power of the gospel's message. An individual's testimony and the use of outside sources are just appendages to the Scripture. No subplots exist for the gospel's message.

Individuals should consider the disciple's move in the book of Acts. Their submission to the will and power of the Holy Spirit through preaching changed and revolutionized the first century and beyond.

Question 8: Do you believe that your personal testimony is a source for defending Christ's Resurrection?

The researcher included the following question to see how individuals would articulate and defend Christ's Resurrection. However, the responses once again proved that NLCC and EVCS leaders need to keep abreast of what it takes to defend Christ's Resurrection, as thirty individuals believed that their testimony is sufficient because it changed their lives, not recognizing that testimonies are only appendages to the powerful message of the gospel. Although the gospel impacted their lives, making them a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17), their personal testimony is no substitute for the gospel's message.

The Apostle Paul could have walked through the entire pages of the New Testament and used the Damascus Road experience to share the gospel. However, the message of his own salvation would not affect those needing salvation through Christ. There is no power in an individual's testimony to have a long-lasting change in a person's life. It takes the move of the Holy Spirit to refresh that individual through the born-again experience (John 3:7-8), which only comes through the preaching of the Word. Only one individual answered correctly that personal testimonies are insufficient evidence to share the message of salvation in Christ. Six participants doubled up on their responses, while one claimed that sharing and defending the gospel's message through a life lived for Christ is a noble cause if mixed with the message of salvation for the lost.

Question 9: What do you think or believe is a miracle?

In this case, thirty-six participants answered the question according to the dictates of Scripture that a miracle is a rare but influential occurrence that depends on God's purpose and plan. However, if others were to ask if a miracle is rare, as the survey dictates, why were there so many occurrences during Jesus's time? There are several reasons why Jesus performed miracles. Jesus had deep compassion for those who were suffering. Thus, one reason was to meet human need. Jesus also performed miracles to remind us that He is the Creator of the world and the master of creation. They reveal His power over death, nature, and evil. Jesus performed miracles to give authority to His words, win people's hearts to follow Him, and model to the future church what was possible. According to the Scriptures, the primary purpose of Jesus' miracles was to demonstrate the fact that He was the Messiah promised by God to Israel through the prophets. Miracles proved Christ's fulfillment of the prophecies as a prophet like Moses. The miracles of Jesus Christ were performed as signs to testify to His unique identity as the Messiah sent from God. Miracles also demonstrated the close relationship Jesus had with God, his Father, and proved that his teachings were true. Additionally, miracles were performed to model to the future church what was possible. All the miracles Jesus performed were to glorify God, help others, and prove that he was the Son of God. We could also argue that Jesus performed miracles to provoke the opposition that would lead to His crucifixion. The following verses provide more information on why Jesus performed miracles: Matthew 14:14, Mark 6:34, John 6:62-63, John 4:41-42, John 3:1-2, Matthew 4:23, John 5:36, and John 10:24-27.

Additionally, we need to account for the cultural background at the time. Miracles were widely believed in around the time of Jesus. Gods and demigods such as Heracles (better known by his Roman name, Hercules), Asclepius (a Greek physician who was worshipped as a god) and

Isis of Egypt all were thought to have healed the sick and overcome death (i.e., to have raised people from the dead). Some thought that mortal men, if sufficiently famous and virtuous, could do likewise; there were myths about philosophers like Pythagoras and Empedocles calming storms at sea, chasing away pestilences, and being greeted as gods, and similarly some Jews believed that Elisha the Prophet had cured lepers and restored the dead. The achievements of the 1st century Apollonius of Tyana, though occurring after Jesus's life, were used by a 3rd-century opponent of the Christians to argue that Christ was neither original nor divine (Eusebius of Caesarea argued against the charge).

Additionally, one participant chose that a miracle could occur anywhere. This may be true if the Christian holds fast that a miracle is used so that the gospel of Jesus becomes known as fitting the purpose and plan of God, then this individual would be correct. Anything outside of the glory of God the Father through Jesus the Son is bordering on deception. (John 11:15, 41-44). The study addressed the other individuals who doubled up on the responses below.

Question 10: What do you believe are the key arguments for God's existence?

If leaders are to argue apologetically to reach and influence the culture, then using the Bible as the only source would not be sufficient, even though the Bible is clear on God's existence in the book of Genesis. NLCC and EVCS Leaders know that the Word is God's authority and is accurate because every Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim 3:15-17). However, the need for apologists is growing in an age and culture where skepticism and secularism abound and where the swift turning away from things once considered sacred is becoming obsolete (Isa 5:20; Rom 1:18-32; 1Tim 4:1-4; 2 Tim 3:1-7). Therefore, it is imperative to argue from the standpoint of God's existence through the lenses of what is already known and accepted as fact by those who do not believe in the secular world. Thirty-seven respondents answered by

choosing that biblical as well as historical and archeological evidence comes in handy.

Therefore, armed with the Scripture and often other evidence could lead others to follow Christ regarding this age-old question about God's existence or put them in place to at least consider its merits.

Section 3: Doubling Up

TABLE 3: DOUBLED UP RESULTS		
Question	Answers to the Question	Number of Responses That Circled All Indicated Answers
2. What do you believe about Jesus' resurrection?	a. Jesus' resurrection proved that He was sent by God the Father.	1
	d. I became a Christian because of the Resurrection's historical and archaeological evidence.	
4. Do you believe you are an active witness for Christ?	b. No because I share the gospel message partially.	1
	c. I share the gospel through the life I live.	
4. Do you believe you are an active witness for Christ?	a. Yes because I share the gospel with every opportunity.	6
	c. I share the gospel through the life I live.	
7. If you were challenged about the validity of Christ's resurrection, could you defend it (1 Peter 3:15)?	b. No, I would not know where to begin.	1
	c. I only have some knowledge.	
7. If you were challenged about the validity of Christ's resurrection, could you defend it (1 Peter 3:15)?	a. Yes, with sufficient evidence for the claim.	1
	c. I only have some knowledge.	
	d. I would use my personal testimony.	
7. If you were challenged about the validity of Christ's resurrection, could you defend it (1 Peter 3:15)?	a. Yes, with sufficient evidence for the claim.	2
	d. I would use my personal testimony.	
7. If you were challenged about the validity of Christ's resurrection, could you defend it (1 Peter 3:15)?	c. I only have some knowledge.	1
	d. I would use my personal testimony.	
8. Do you believe that your personal testimony is a source for defending Christ's resurrection?	a. Yes because it changed my life.	6
	c. I share the gospel through the life I live.	
9. What do you think or believe is a miracle?	a. A miracle is a supernatural event which is specific in its purpose as ordained by God.	1
	c. A miracle is general in its purpose and can occur anywhere at any time.	
	a. Only biblical evidence.	1

10. What do you believe are the key arguments for God's existence?	b. Biblical, historical, and archeological evidence.	
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Question 2: What do you believe about Jesus's Resurrection?

Only one individual provided a double response to this question. Table 3 records the two answers the individual provided. The respondent's two choices perfectly align with apologetic thinking. Not only was the individual correct in choosing that Jesus's Resurrection proved that God approved of Jesus's sacrifice for humanity's redemption, but that the evidence that lingers through the accounts of history is undeniable,²¹¹ as represented in Table 3.²¹² It is good that this individual chose to answer this way because it denotes the participant's level of reasoning, as many detractors deny the actual historical and archeological evidence for Jesus's existence.²¹³

Question 4: Do you believe you are an active witness for Christ?

Seven individuals provided double answers to this question, with six choosing the same answers and one choosing a different combination. The first individual's answers revealed an issue that percolates in the contemporary church. Although the individual partially shares the gospel, the individual does so mainly through personal witness—presenting the gospel in this

²¹¹ Tenney, *The Reality*, 5-6.

²¹² The following Bible verses suggest that God accepted Jesus' sacrifice:

Romans 3:25: God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood--to be received by faith. Romans 1:4: Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power by His resurrection from the dead. If Jesus had remained in the tomb, it would have meant that He did not die for our sins but for His sins. However, the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead proved that Jesus' gift was acceptable in the presence of God.

Hebrews 10:12: But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God. Christ's sinless sacrifice resulted in reconciliation with God. His sacrifice enabled God to justify us, that is, to consider us legally sinless. We were still sinful, but His blood covered us because we accepted Christ's sacrifice. Thus, under His righteousness, we are now allowed access to God.

²¹³ Stott, *The Disciple*, 32.

way is not active witnessing, thereby not living up to the command from Christ to preach the gospel of the Kingdom and baptize those who believe in the name of the Trinity. Personal and partial witness of the gospel's message may have its place, but only to the extent where the individual's life follows the dictates of Scripture as those of the first-century apostles and many others throughout the annals of history who proclaim the name of Christ without fear. The other six individuals agreed on the seriousness of sharing the gospel through every opportunity while complementing the gospel's message with Christ-like living (Acts 25:7; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:5-7; Pet 3:16). Although one individual chose the same response "I share the gospel through the life I live" as did the other six individuals, they indicate that they also actively witness.

Question 7: If you were challenged about the validity of Christ's Resurrection, could you defend it?

There were five different doubled choices among five individuals regarding defending Christ's Resurrection. The common theme running through the responses is "I only have some knowledge," followed closely with "I would use my testimony," "with sufficient evidence for the claim" rounding out the responses. Defending the gospel does not require having any expansive knowledge or scholarly requirements to do the task, but instead simply knowing the gospel's message, and able to articulate its defense. Although two individuals responded to the question stating that they could defend the Resurrection with sufficient evidence, using their testimony is not a mark for Christ's Resurrection defense. Yet many individuals regard personal testimonies as a changing agent that brings true transformation to individuals. Although this may be a well-meaning perspective, someone's testimony will not keep individuals serving Christ if they accept Jesus as Savior on that basis. Therefore, leaders must ensure that congregants understand the nature of their witness and prepare them to defend their position if called upon to do so.

Question 8: Do you believe that your personal testimony is a source for defending Christ's Resurrection?

Six individuals provided two answers to the question regarding personal testimony to defend Christ's Resurrection. It is assumed that personal testimonies are only appendages to the gospel's message and that sharing or defending Christ's Resurrection through life's experiences are only measures in futility if not tied to the working of the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts gives Christ's believers clear insights and messages that the Holy Spirit's work in the first century enhanced the gospel's message of the resurrected Lord, changing the lives of many and eventually turning the ancient world upside down with the message of the cross of Christ. Therefore, leaders at NLCC and EVCS must remind the body of Christ that the message of the cross of Christ is the only method that the Holy Spirit sanctioned (John 15:26-16:11).

Question 9: What do you think or believe is a miracle?

The researcher intends to have participants think apologetically when answering this question. However, with guidance from leaders of NLCC and EVCS, participants learned that miracles serve the purpose of God in bringing others to know Christ as the only way to the Father. Indeed, a miracle is a specific and supernatural event that defies natural science in every way. Still, a miracle cannot be general and specific at the same time, as it must be specific to serve the purpose and plan of God. Now, a miracle can occur anywhere and at any time, but only to advance the name of Christ to extend and fulfill the providence of God through His Sovereignty.

Question 10: What do you believe are the key arguments for God's existence?

As believers in Christ, biblical evidence is sufficient to answer this question, as the Scripture credits to God knowledge that is pertinent for individuals to know and accept God's

existence (Ps 14: 1, 19).²¹⁴ Although the Bible purports God's existence, the focus of its purpose gives the reader a panoramic view of God's hand from Creation to Revelation based on ultimate redemption in Christ. While some individuals chose only biblical evidence for this question, one participant stated that acknowledging God's existence through other evidence does not negate the individual's faith in Christ but helps the claim for God's existence for those who do not believe.

Section 4: Focus Group Results: Triangulation

There were seven Check on Learning Questions (shown on Table 4) which were used to validate triangulation:

1. In what ways was the teaching helpful to you?
2. What key arguments exist for or against the Resurrection based on this teaching?
3. What is the difference between absolute and relative truth?
4. Based on the teachings, how would you defend the Resurrection if asked?
5. What evidence do you believe exists for Christ's Resurrection?
6. Has science disproved God?
7. In your own words, were you able to connect the Creation story of the teaching with the Resurrection?

TABLE 4: FOCUS GROUP RESULTS		
Question	Possible Answers to the Question	Responses
1. In what ways was the teaching helpful to you?	a. The materials from the instructions gave me a better understanding of God and His connection to Creation.	8

²¹⁴ R.T. Mullins, "The Creator/Creature Distinction in Debates Over Models of God," *Religions* 13, no. 12 (2022): 3.

	b. I appreciate the Resurrection and its purpose.	1
	c. I can better defend the Resurrection using the gospel.	5
	d. I look at the Bible differently than I did before.	1
2. What key arguments exist for or against the Resurrection based on this teaching?	a. I liked the discussions about the theories against the Resurrection.	2
	b. The view of Dr. Habermas.	10
	c. Learning about the various models.	2
	d. The instructions gave me hope that God is real.	1
3. What is the difference between absolute and relative truth?	a. I had never considered it before but learned that absolute truth has no variations. In contrast, relative truth operates based on circumstances and is never fixed.	4
	b. I seem to be a bit confused about this question. I know the Bible is the Word of God, but absolute and relative truth I do not know anything about it.	3
	c. I do not see how it fits with the lesson just taught.	8
4. Based on the teachings, how would you defend the Resurrection if asked?	a. I would use the examples given in the study referencing the Bible.	4
	b. I would begin with that the Trinity was much involved in Creation and Christ's resurrection.	2
	c. Based on the teachings and the question, I would use the arguments for and against the Resurrection.	8
	d. I would need to study some more to get a complete understanding of the matter.	1
5. What evidence do you believe exists for Christ's Resurrection?	a. The material was encouraging, but the Word of God is the primary source.	6
	b. The theories in the teachings that try to oppose Christ's Resurrection only convince me more that He exists.	7
	c. I was more intrigued with the prophecies of the Messiah as far back as Genesis chapter 3.	3
6. Has science disproved God?	a. I learned that science requires three things for verification, none of which existed initially for any human to observe.	10
	b. From the focus group lessons, only God was present at Creation.	2
	c. What stuck out to me is that science and theology are different.	2

	d. No, as from the focus group lessons, scientists try to deny the existence of an intelligent designer.	1
7. In your own words, were you able to connect the Creation story of the teaching with the Resurrection?	a. Yes, because I saw where God was involved in both occurrences from the study.	8
	b. Yes, as both occurrences are not scientific.	1
	c. I learned that Darwin and Spencer suggested that creation was a part of evolution, which is not the case.	2
	d. I learned that the miracle of Creation is the same as the miracle of the Resurrection.	4

Data Analysis

Fifteen individuals participated in the focus group teachings that occurred for two Sundays. Unfortunately, due to participants' prior commitments, the focus group could not secure the total sample size of individuals who completed the survey questionnaires. However, the information gathered was valuable, as the results show the overall consistency the researcher expected. Table 4 represents the results displaying the questions and answers from individuals who participated in the focus groups. Based on these responses from the open-ended survey questions, the survey revealed that individuals gained valuable knowledge to defend Christ's Resurrection. In the following discussion, the researcher highlighted critical responses that prove the success and vitality of the study.

Question 1: In what ways was the teaching helpful to you?

Regarding the connection between Creation and the Resurrection, eight individuals responded to question one, and twelve participants responded to question seven, and two responded to question four. The results proved that the study obtained a primary goal in connecting the Creation, Christ's Resurrection, and miracles so that individuals can draw from the truth of this phenomenon as a reference when arguing for God's providence through His sovereign rule.

Question 2: What key arguments exist for or against Christ's Resurrection based on these teachings?

Ten participants responded that they would use Dr. Gary Habermas's view, which correlates with question four, "a"- (I would use the examples given in the study referencing the Bible) and "b"- (I would begin with that the Trinity was much involved in Creation and Christ's Resurrection) responses from the original questionnaire. Although question four focuses on defense and question two on arguments, they both come into play when considering apologetics.

Question 3: What is the difference between absolute and relative truth?

Only four respondents offered substantive answers to Question 3. Other responses received from eleven participants indicate they had no knowledge or thought it irrelevant to the study. The absolute truth about the Scriptures is a bedrock of Christianity, without which the seven "I Am" statements made by Christ would be irrelevant if an individual thinks or understands the Bible as the metanarrative word about Christ.²¹⁵

Question 4: Based on the teachings, how would you defend the Resurrection if asked?

Twelve individuals use examples from the Bible and the arguments for and against Christ's Resurrection to articulate the gospel's defense. It is a testimony to the usefulness of the focus group that individuals were able to understand and distinguish between what materials they could use to bolster their gospel defense to those who may be on the fence when it comes to

²¹⁵ The "I am" statements found in the Gospel of John are the bread of life (6:35), the light of the world (8:12), the door (10:7), the good shepherd (10:11, 14), the Resurrection and the life (11:25), the way the truth and the life (14:6) and the true vine (15:1).

whole-heartedly accepting the resurrected Christ as Messiah or simply to those who disregard such evidence as being authentic.

Question 5: What evidence do you believe exists for Christ's Resurrection?

Based on the study materials, the participants' answers rightly reflected the teaching in the focus groups, even though responses were different. Most participants found it necessary to pay attention to the theories presented in the focus group, which bolstered their confidence in the resurrected Lord.

Question 6: Has science disproved God?

For this question, all the participants, regardless of their choices, affirmed that science as they know it does not disprove God in any way. The responses show individuals understood the gravity of the question and, most importantly, gained knowledge they were previously ignorant of from the focus group sessions.

Question 7: In your own words, were you able to connect the Creation story of the teachings with the Resurrection?

Question 7 cements the study as achieving its overall objective regarding connecting the dots of Creation and the Resurrection and having individuals understand both events as miracles of and from the Divine order of the Trinity (*Elohim*). The heart of the study lay in this question when connecting the power in creation with that in Christ's Resurrection as a powerful for the proclamation of the gospel and defense. Eight individuals responded to "a," one individual responded to "b," two individuals responded to "c," and four individuals responded to "d." The reader must remember that these are open-ended responses to the above question. The variety in the responses shows the vitality of the study and the learning gathered from the participants. The four responses are as follows:

- a. Yes, because I saw where God was involved in both occurrences from the study.
- b. Yes, as both occurrences are not scientific.
- c. I learned that Darwin and Spencer suggested that creation was a part of evolution which is not the case.
- d. I learned that the miracle of creation is the same as the miracle of the resurrection.

Summary of Results

After an intensive implementation, the study revealed the hypothesis of the researcher that NLCC and EVCS leaders and believers have a robust understanding of the significant biblical principles covered in the study's questions but lack knowledge of how to articulate the message.

Leaders Only

The "Leaders Only Results," featured five questions, where leaders demonstrated biblically solid knowledge regarding leaders' understanding of the Resurrection and the connection with the Genesis account of Creation and miracles. There were no dissenting or confusing views on the questions except for the question on natural law, where the leaders seemed to differ in their understanding and knowledge of the question.

Leaders and Believers

The study looked at leaders and believers, examining ten questions. Many questions focused on biblical principles regarding Christ's Resurrection, miracles, Jesus being the promised Lamb of God, and their understanding of the Great Commission. However, the study showed that participants were not on the same page regarding a personal understanding of the following questions: active witnesses of Christ, the gospel is the only good news, and defending the Resurrection. Although the Bible is replete with its narrative of events surrounding Christ's

Resurrection and the first-century witnesses of the claim, leaders must emphasize the importance of making believers aware of other secondary and tertiary avenues of exploration the believer can arm themselves with when engaging in apologetics or witnessing. One's testimony, although admirable, cannot suffice or replace the preaching of the gospel or stand in the way of due diligence to give a sound reason for Christ's Resurrection.

Double-Up Responses

Participants gave Doubled-Up answers for six questions, with the primary responses coming from those in the congregation and not the leaders of NLCC or EVCS. The results prove that leaders must ensure their parishioners know Scripture and focus on articulating the gospel's message coherently and winsomely. The dissonance with these questions did not affect the overall nature of the study but proves that addressing these subject matters is of utmost importance. However, contentions surround the two questions, with the most responses centered on "Being an active witness and using one's testimony as a tool to defend the Resurrection." Both questions received six responses, respectively. There is nothing wrong with giving personal testimonies. Nevertheless, during any conversation on the validity of the Resurrection, the name of Christ must be front and center.

Focus Group Results

Individuals came away with an understanding and desire to move forward in the witness of Christ. Based on the open-ended questions, the focus group revealed that participants fully appreciated the teachings. They gained valuable insight from the study's materials to aid them in their quest to become effective witnesses for Christ and the Resurrection. The only question that resulted in negative feedback from the focus group was question 3, dealing with absolute and relative truth. Eight participants never saw the need or how the question fits into the overall

learning and defense of the Resurrection. Conversely, the various responses to this question did not negatively affect the outcome of the results based on the teachings and knowledge participants gained.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This DMIN action research project aims to bolster leaders of NLCC and EVCS to defend the Resurrection against objections by using focus training groups. Leaders and believers in Christ live in a fallen world with its tentacles of pride, anger, deceit, and misinformation. These vices reach out aggressively to wrap and warp individuals' minds, rendering them mummified and enslaved. In all walks of life, individuals are crying out for help. Sadly, those who claim to have the truth of God's Word face personal and bitter battles as they struggle to overcome or maintain life in the world's affairs. It is not hard to see where the disconnect is spouting from, as individuals at NLCC and EVCS are more preoccupied with the status quo of mediocrity rather than submitting to the revelatory nature of the Word of God by the Holy Spirit, which then becomes lost in many translations and interpretations.

However, as leaders begin to see the need for and importance of the mandate to teach and defend Christ's Resurrection, the way forward becomes accessible in the Spirit. Leaders must first catch the vision and have a sincere and earnest desire to seek after the face of God, without which things remain the same. Those of the first-century church who turned the world upside down with a poorly received message did so because they believed in the resurrected Lord. The Apostles saw and had fellowship with Jesus. However, although the modern church is not privy to this physical occurrence with Christ, the Bible is replete with evidence and support that God dwells with those who believe through the work and manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

The researcher gauged "Leaders' Only Questions" with five survey questions in Section 1 by focusing on key points relating to the Genesis account of Creation to Christ's Resurrection. The researcher structured the questions in this fashion to see where leaders are in their knowledge and understanding of foundational doctrines. Leaders must have a firm grasp of

Scripture since any teachings from or about the Bible stem from an individual's knowledge of and interpretation of Scripture. NLCC and EVCS leaders must ground their hermeneutical and epistemological positions based on sound, biblically based truth within the context of Scripture, and anything outside of those results in deception and misinterpretation. Therefore, leaders should be careful to remain in the confines of Scripture and what constitutes truth. Is the idea of truth only relative? What is truth, and how does an individual attain it? Jesus made a specific statement in one of His "I am" statements found in John 14:6. Consequently, whatever is true defines an exegesis that forms doctrines, religious mores, and principles. Leaders must be mindful of this fact.

Section 2, dealing with "Believers only Questions" explored foundational truths that every leader and believer should know, examining the individual's understanding as it pertains to their articulation of the gospel and the witness of it through subsequent defense. Table 2 shows that thirty-eight individuals answered ten questions. However, ten individuals answered only two questions, accounting for thirty-seven percent of the results, while eighteen answered only one. The study tackled the double-up results in Section 3. Section 3 dealt with "Doubled-up Questions" featuring participants answering two questions. Although one individual gave three responses from the results, responding with two or three answers to a question does not create an outlier for the overall research but only complements its findings. The study has thirty-eight participants, eleven of whom Doubled-Up on their responses for questions 2,4,7,8,9,10. Table 3 shows the Doubled-Up responses and their results.

Section 4 was the "Focus Group," and the last section of the study, featuring fifteen individuals participating in the focus group teachings that occurred for two Sundays, with Table 4 representing the results displaying individual questions and answers. However, the information

gathered was valuable as the results show the overall consistency the researcher expected. Based on these responses from the open-ended survey questions, the survey revealed that individuals gained valuable knowledge to defend Christ's Resurrection from the focus group. What was the outcome of the study's limitations and delimitations? The aim was to seek ways to overcome limitations and delimitations without skewing the project results and address the problem presented. Therefore, based on the study, the focus group results acted as confirmation because individuals reported walking away with more excellent knowledge and understanding than they ever had.

Reiterating the goals at NLCC and EVCS is not laborious, as the intent to teach and equip leaders about defending the Resurrection and becoming effective witnesses while instructing congregants to do the same is crucial. The materials in the study focused on outlining to leaders as a primary emphasis the links tying together Creation, miracles, the Resurrection, and subsequent gospel witnessing. The results showed that leaders, NLCC, and EVCS parishioners were adept at the fundamentals of their beliefs based on the study questions. However, NLCC and EVCS leaders and congregants are ill-equipped to defend the merits of Christ's Resurrection. The next step in the process is that leaders become serious in instructing fellow believers on the urgency and importance of the gospel's message to effect change. Therefore, before any leader can take up this challenge, they must first understand and appreciate the power involved in Creation and Christ's Resurrection.

Many may argue, why use the Bible to prove that the Resurrection occurred? Or why depend on any historical or archaeological data to support the Resurrection claim? However, on a superficial level, one could ask why historical material, be it theological or secular, should stake one's claim or position as being authentic. There is a certainty to life, but death is equally

sure and more pronounced as its shadowy tentacles reach out for the living. But a remarkable phenomenon in history took away the power and sting of death: the Resurrection of Christ. No more should humanity face death as an unwelcomed and dreaded enemy in fear. Yet, millions of individuals pass through this life into eternity without hope of salvation or understanding the hope brought through the Resurrection. Therefore, it is incumbent on leaders to prioritize teaching and preaching the gospel and those they oversee in the ministry.

Literary Comparison: Fact Finding Mission

The study exhausted many materials throughout the research, looking at literature connecting Christ's Resurrection to fulfilling the Great Commission. What the study revealed is nothing out of the ordinary when it comes to the topic in question. There were no presented materials that opposed the nature and conclusions of the literature review or the intended purpose of the researcher as it relates to the topic in question.

One of the aims of the DMIN project is active research, which results in choosing a specific area of study relating to a perceived problem in any organization or body the researcher deems necessary to address to solve a problem. The study highlighted that New Life Christian Center and Eagle View Christian Center leaders are ill-equipped to defend the Resurrection against objections expressed by our culture. The problem statement clarifies that the overall objective of this DMIN action research project aims to equip (bolster) leaders of New Life Christian to defend the Resurrection against objections using focus training groups. Therefore, based on the problem presented, the study sought materials that spoke for and against the intended purpose of the researcher. The results showed nothing outside the ordinary but only confirm the hypothesis and convey materials that would answer the call to sufficiently address the project problem. Hypothetically, the project posed that if leaders are equipped to defend the

Resurrection of Jesus Christ, then they modeled for our congregation a more confident witness to the gospel. Consequently, the literature review highlighted arguments about Christ's Resurrection that would then be used to address the problem of the study in focus groups.

The literature review indulged in the idea that the God of Creation was also present at the Resurrection eternally and personally. It offered theories that supported Christ's Resurrection and those opposed to its actuality. The review examined nine specific views that directly disagree with or support Christ's Resurrection narrative. Specifically, the research reviewed the RCC Purgatory theory (Christ's Resurrection does not have the power to ensure immediate regeneration after death), Swoon Theory (Jesus was never crucified or placed on a tree but fainted), the Twin Theory or Substitution Hypothesis (Jesus had a twin who took His place, most notably Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Christ), and the Stolen Body Theory (the disciples stole Jesus's body). The Hallucination Theory implies that the disciples and followers hallucinated the Resurrection narrative because of the shock of Jesus's sudden crucifixion. During mass hallucinations, individuals usually have different rather than the same experiences. The Wrong Tomb Theory suggests that the disciples and guards went to the wrong tomb. However, this theory begs the question that even if the disciples went to the wrong tomb, the ruling authorities would have also gone to the wrong grave. That would not have been the case because the ruling class knew precisely where the tomb was due to Roman soldiers and Jewish palace guards' constant watch. The Alien Theory suggests that Jesus was an alien from another world and copied a first-century Jewish male. The proponents of this view cite John 10:16 as a possible reference to Jesus's knowledge and acceptance of the existence of other people. The Legend Theory believes that Jesus was an actual historical figure but asserts that the legend of Jesus's importance grew over time. Julius Müller states:

"Most decidedly must a considerable interval of time be required for such a complete transformation of a whole history by popular tradition when the series of legends are formed in the same territory where the heroes lived and wrought. Here, one cannot imagine how such a series of legends could arise in a historical age, obtain universal respect, and supplant the historical recollection of the true character and connexion of their heroes' lives in the minds of the community, if eyewitnesses were still at hand, who could be questioned respecting the truth of the recorded marvels. Hence, legendary fiction, as it does not the clear present time, but prefers the mysterious gloom of grey antiquity, is wont to seek a remoteness of age, along with that of space, and to remove its boldest and rare and wonderful creations into a very remote and unknown land."

Strauss bases the Legend Theory on the notion that it occurred in the same era as the living witnesses and disciples. However, the time for a legend to take effect would be around two centuries, at least far removed from the time of the New Testament documents. That would be just the right time for the arrival of the apocryphal gospels.

However, the Gospels are the critical sources of the Resurrection and chart a smooth course on the rough seas of human contradictions and heresies that bombard its claims over the years in this elaborate proclamation for the bodily Resurrection of Christ, an essential doctrine for the Christian faith. Hence the study examined theories that Gary Habermas, in support of Christ's Resurrection, puts forward in the Minimal Facts Theory, which proposes a list of twelve views. This research deals with three of Habermas' twelve: Jesus's disciples believed that Christ rose from the dead (Mark 16: 6-7-9, 11-12, 14, 15-20; John 2:17, 22, 22, 12:16); James, the brother of Jesus believed in Christ as the Messiah (James 1:1); and Paul's conversion to the Christian way (Acts 9:1-22).

The study also examined evidence for Christ's Resurrection from historical data and creed through the lenses of the Synoptic Gospels and the book of John. Additionally, the study looked at evidence in the Creation and found that miracles give humanity a chance to acknowledge and believe in God (John 11:40-44). Using the arguments and theories presented in

the literature review and in the focus groups, NLCC and EVCS believers have a firm understanding and grasp that a miracle is an event that defies logic and must be highly unusual, resisting the confines of natural laws and affirmed by individuals and eyewitnesses as an exceptional and infrequent occurrence.

Research Implications

So what? Leaders at NLCC and EVCS must not lose sight of the objective, as the problem statement suggests that NLCC and EVCS leaders are ill-equipped to defend the Resurrection against objections expressed by our culture. Many religious studies explored the Resurrection and fulfillment of the Great Commission as separate research topics. However, the implication of this study brings to light an idea that the researcher never examined before until the commencement of this study. The Resurrection of Christ is intimately connected to our fulfillment of the Great Commission as seen through the lens of Creation. Connecting these two aspects of theology is rare. Yet making those connections helps to fulfill the purpose of this DMIN action research project to equip (bolster) leaders of NLCC to defend the Resurrection against objections in focus training groups. Armed with such knowledge, individuals begin to align the extraordinary work of *Elohim* in the Creation story with that of the Resurrection. The research implications become more evident as leaders and parishioners of NLCC and EVCS witness become more potent as they preach and teach the gospel's message, bringing hope and salvation. The study affirmed that focus group participants accessed the information presented in the literature review and found it rewarding, thereby proving the thesis statement that by equipping leaders to defend the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, they will model for their congregation a more confident witness to the gospel. Therefore, the implications are that leaders at NLCC and EVCS can use the information given in the focus groups to teach others on a

broader scale as they go forth in power and authority in the Great Commission, using the connection between the Creation and Resurrection as gospel conversation starters.

Research Applications

The intervention design used quantitative closed-ended design questions to gather results and open-ended qualitative questions to ensure a check on learning. The study examined the data analysis section and considered four areas:

1. Leaders-only Results
2. Leaders and Believers Results
3. Results for individuals answering more than one question
4. Focus Group Results

The results of the study and focus group applied on a broader scale to support and lend credence to the ministry context of both EVCS and NLCC. The church and school are already serving a culturally diverse community in the capacities of learning, after-school care, and daycare. Based on the focus group results, leaders can institute and implement the teaching content into these areas of ministry, as well as Sunday School classes, teaching groups, and forums, and some aspects of the EVCS curriculum. As leaders apply what they have learned to the church body, the church becomes an active organism of change for the community, affecting other ministries, giving insight, and affording change to other local congregations. By applying diligent study, individuals can go to their places of influence armed with this knowledge to bring forth change and impact others, even if just as an icebreaker, by introducing the topic of the connection between the Resurrection and the Great Commission to begin a conversation. The results from the focus group participants made it clear that change can occur as individuals gain valuable insight into areas they had never considered before.

Research Limitations

The study required using sources no more than five years old; the researcher allowed for sources up to ten years old from the current year of the thesis submission. There may be abundant sources outside this date range, which could assist the researcher in confirming the overall study. Any material or sources used outside of the acceptable date range of five years highlighted and connected information pertinent to the study. The purpose of using a few older sources mixed with contemporary sources was to enforce the research paper's panoramic view of this narrow topic.

Time was also a limitation because individuals may not be readily available to participate in the scheduled focus groups. The researcher evaluated the burden of accessibility with the chosen individuals for the process. For example, how long can the researcher engage the selected participants, and what is a convenient time? The researcher understood that the limitation placed on the study's methodology do not arise in a vacuum but is part of a well-thought-out approach to give the stakeholders a voice by explicitly using the action research method. However, conducting these workshops or focus groups may be a problem due to the unavailability of participants and time constraints. The study used a convenient sample comprising NLCC and EVCS participants to complement the implementation and intervention of the design project. The convenient sample used individuals present at both institutions because it factored in the fact that the study occurred in the summer months when many individuals will be away on vacation. The study also limited participants by age, allowing only those who are at least eighteen years old to participate.

In terms of delimitations, the research chose to use Matthew 28:19-20 and 1 Peter 3:15 as foundational Scriptures for the study. The study used other Scriptures only in a supportive role to

lend credence to the research. The research narrowed the focus, setting aside the many other intriguing and essential doctrines of the Christian faith to focus on the doctrines of Creation, the Resurrection, and the believer's duty not only to understand these doctrines but also to articulate this position to others convincingly. As the study took shape and form, the results demonstrated from the knowledge gained that the cornerstone of the Christian faith battles many alternate views.

Further Research

There were no gaps in the study. However, addressing the problem could be a challenge as many participants were over forty years old. Although the analysis presented success for the present problem, the drawback for the researcher is that many individuals may resort to old ways of doing things, which is inactivity. Therefore, the researcher believed the implementation of constant Sunday School teachings and the school's involvement in the mission of the gospel kept individuals from becoming complacent. The hope was that any possible research for future study expanded to explore *Elohim's* robust nature and attributes. The Bible is replete with many of these comparisons, not unlike *Elohim's* power involved in Creation as well as His presence at the Resurrection.

One of the issues facing the church is the leaders' inability to teach the word of God effectively. Based on the results from the focus group leaders, and congregants at NLCC and EVCS find it much easier to see and understand the Scriptures from the metanarrative of Christ's Lordship and ultimate rule and reign. Individuals armed with this information can apply the study's results in teaching others God's purpose in Genesis and the Resurrection. Leaders and congregants can use this message in Sunday school and any preaching engagement within or outside the church. The purpose of the study's use engaged the outside world with knowledge

that is foreign to them and educated those within the church to increase what they already know to apply wisdom and understanding when ministering the gospel's message.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 states, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." The preceding Scripture is a segway in making the point that the defense of Scripture is only as good as individuals' work in studying its contents. To fear God and keep His statutes is more advantageous as all knowledge will cease to exist, and only the revelatory aspect of eternity will face individuals who decide to follow Christ or not. The Scripture behooves the believer to study, so NLCC and EVCS leaders must be the first to effectively bring across the defense of God to those with whom they have direct influence.

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APPENDIX A
SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS AND CONGREGANTS/OTHERS

The Resurrection and the Witness Survey Questions (For Leaders)

1. What do you believe about Genesis' account of Creation?
 - e. That the Genesis account occurred as stated in the Bible.
 - f. That the Genesis account cannot be verified by science.
 - g. I studied information about Creation which assisted me to resolve concerns about science and the Bible.
 - h. I do not understand the question.

2. What do you think or believe is a miracle?
 - e. A miracle is a supernatural event which is specific in its purpose as ordained by God.
 - f. A miracle is not a supernatural event, but only natural processes affected by science.
 - g. A miracle is produced by believers in the church actively witnessing individuals for them to have positive changes to their lives and is reserved for leaders of the church.
 - h. I do not understand the question.

3. What do you understand about natural law and Creation?
 - e. That natural law confirms Creation.
 - f. That natural law denies Creation.
 - g. That natural law only exists because of Creation.
 - h. I do not understand the question.

4. Do you believe that the same power in Creation was involved in Christ's Resurrection?
 - e. Yes, because the God of Creation was also present in the Resurrection.
 - f. No, the power in the Resurrection was different from the power in Creation.
 - g. I believe that this question is illogical to my belief in Christ.
 - h. I do not understand the question.

5. Do you believe that the Apostle's primary message was about the deity, death, and resurrection of Christ?
 - e. Yes, because the Scriptures evidence this to be true.
 - f. No, because they mentioned other things that exalted Christ.
 - g. The method was more important than the message to win lost souls at any cost.
 - h. I do not understand the question.

The Resurrection and the Witness Survey Questions (For Leaders and Believers)

1. To your understanding, were the birth and resurrection of Christ considered to be miracles?
 - a. Yes, they were miracles as both were supernatural acts.
 - b. No, they were not miracles because they cannot be verified by science.
 - c. I do not believe they were miracles.
 - d. I do not understand the question.
2. What do you believe about Jesus' Resurrection?
 - a. Jesus' Resurrection proved that God the Father sent him.
 - b. Jesus' Resurrection cannot be verified by science; therefore, it is a myth.
 - c. I did not believe until someone showed evidence for Jesus' Resurrection.
 - d. I became a Christian because of the Resurrection's historical and archaeological evidence.
3. Do you believe that Jesus is the promised Lamb of God who came as the final sacrifice to redeem humanity from sin?
 - a. Yes, because my life improved after I started following Christ.
 - b. No, because one man cannot die for the sins of the world.
 - c. I believe that Christ died but only for those who are predestined.
 - d. I do not understand the question.
4. Do you believe you are an active witness for Christ?
 - a. Yes, because I share the gospel with every opportunity.
 - b. No, because I share the gospel message partially.
 - c. I share the gospel through the life I live.
 - d. Active witnessing is ONLY reserved for leaders/members of the church. If you choose this answer, circle one (Leaders/Members).
5. Do you believe that the gospel message is the ONLY good news about Christ?
 - a. Yes, because it is the message of God for salvation from the beginning.
 - b. No, the gospel message is only one area of salvation.
 - c. The gospel message has no real impact on my life.
 - d. I do not understand the question.
6. What do you understand is the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20)?
 - a. It is a command to witness about Christ's Resurrection.
 - b. It is just another message by Christ in the New Testament.
 - c. I am too shy to be a witness or to do witnessing.
 - d. I am not sure what to make of it.

7. If you were challenged about the validity of Christ's Resurrection, could you defend it (1 Peter 3:15)?
 - a. Yes, with sufficient evidence for the claim.
 - b. No, I would not know where to begin.
 - c. I only have some knowledge.
 - d. I would use my personal testimony.
8. Do you believe that your personal testimony is a source for defending Christ's Resurrection?
 - a. Yes, because it changed my life.
 - b. No, because personal testimonies are not sufficient evidence.
 - c. I defend the gospel through the life I live.
 - d. I do not understand the question.
9. What do you think or believe is a miracle?
 - a. A miracle is a supernatural event which is specific in its purpose as ordained by God.
 - b. A miracle is not a supernatural event, but only natural processes affected by science.
 - c. A miracle is general in its purpose and can occur anywhere at any time.
 - d. I do not understand the question.
10. What do you believe are the key arguments for God's existence?
 - a. Only biblical evidence.
 - b. Biblical, historical, and archeological evidence.
 - c. I never gave it a thought before. I just blindly accepted God's existence.
 - d. I do not understand the question.

Please answer the following biographical information for recording purposes only:

Age:

Gender:

Educational Level:

How long have you been a believer in Christ?

APPENDIX B
RESPONSE FORM

New Life Christian Center



April 16, 2023

[Redacted]

Dear Michael Thomas:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled, "*The Resurrection and the Witness*," I have decided to grant you permission to conduct research at Eagle View Christian School and New Life Christian Center.

I grant permission for Michael Thomas to contact potential participants at Eagle View Christian School and New Life Christian Center, to invite them to participate in his study.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

Pastor

[Redacted]

APPENDIX C

CHECK ON LEARNING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Qualitative Survey Questions-After Session Survey to assess progress: The purpose of this second set of questions is to ascertain what individuals have learned during the teaching sessions. The teaching will address the questions in the survey but in greater detail over the Sunday School time slot of 1-hour. Again, dependent on the Pastor's permission, I will conduct these sessions and will forward these questions to the participants to ascertain their understanding and growth from the presented teachings.

1. In what ways was the teaching helpful to you?
2. Based on this teaching, what key arguments are there for or against the Resurrection?
3. What is the difference between absolute and relative truth?
4. Based on the teachings, how would you go about defending the Resurrection if asked?
5. What evidence do you believe exists for Christ's Resurrection?
6. Has science disproved God?
7. In your own words, were you able to connect the Creation story of the teaching with the Resurrection?

APPENDIX D

PERMISSION LETTERS, REQUEST, AND CONSENT FORMS

Consent Letter

Title of the Project: The Resurrection and the Witness

Principal Investigator: Michael Thomas, Doctoral Candidate, Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University.

Invitation to be Part of a Study

You are invited to participate in a study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, and a born-again believer in Christ as described in John 3:7, “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’” (NKJV).

Taking part in this study project is voluntary. Therefore, please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this study.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to educate leaders and believers about Christ’s Resurrection and its defense.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

Participate in an in-person questionnaire survey consisting of fifteen questions which should take approximately ten minutes to complete, if not less.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Benefits to society include greater knowledge and understanding of the Resurrection of Christ and its impact on culture to winsomely articulate its defense.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will your personal information be protected?

The records of this fifteen-question survey study will be kept private. All research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or the researcher.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

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

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Michael Thomas. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above. I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

April 16, 2023



Pastor

~~[REDACTED]~~

Dear ~~Robert H. [REDACTED]~~

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The title of the research is, “The Resurrection and the Witness,” and the purpose of my research is to educate leaders and believers about Christ’s Resurrection and its defense.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at [REDACTED]
and [REDACTED]

Participants will be asked to complete the attached survey/contact me to schedule an interview/etc. 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, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Michael Thomas
DMIN Candidate

Research Participants Needed

The Resurrection and the Witness

Are you 18 years of age or older?

Are you a born-again believer in Christ as described in John 3:7?

“Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’” (NKJV)?

If you answered yes to each of the questions listed above, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this research study is to educate leaders and believers about Christ’s Resurrection and its defense.

The survey will ask participants to complete a fifteen-question study about their understanding of the Resurrection and their witness and defense of such.

Participants will not receive any compensational benefits, as this study is about an individual’s understanding of Christ’s Resurrection and being effective witnesses.

If you wish to participate, please complete the fifteen-question study immediately, or return it to me within one week of issuance. You can contact me at [REDACTED] for further information/clarity or with any concerns regarding the questions.

A consent document will be given to you at the time of the interview questions.

Thank you for your assistance.

Michael Thomas, a doctoral candidate in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Please contact Michael Thomas at [REDACTED].

APPENDIX E

CONDUCTING TEACHING SESSIONS

Sunday 1


1. The first 30-minute block will address the Creation and its importance.
2. The second 30-minute block will address resurrection and its importance.



Sunday 2

1. The first 30-minute block will address opposition to the Creation and defense.
2. The second 30-minute block will address oppositions to the Resurrection and defense.

APPENDIX F

IRB APPROVAL LETTER



 Products ▾
  Michael Thomas ▾

[Dashboard](#)
[Studies](#)
[Submissions](#)
[Tasks](#)

[Studies](#)
[Study Details](#)

+ New Submission

Study Details

Submissions

Approved

IRB-FY22-23-1378

PDF

Delete

The Resurrection and the Witness

Approval Date:	Expiration Date:	Organization:	Active Submissions:
04-11-2023	N/A	School of Divinity	N/A
Admin Check-In Date:	Closed Date:	Current Policy	Sponsors:
N/A	N/A	Post-2018 Rule	N/A

Key Contacts¹

Attachments

Team Member	Role	Number	Email
Roy Lucas	Co-Principal Investigator		relucas@liberty.edu
Michael Thomas	Principal Investigator	4345822000	mthomas125@liberty.edu
Michael Thomas	Primary Contact	4345822000	mthomas125@liberty.edu

