

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

Apologetic Knowledge: The Modern Church Planter

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to
the Faculty of the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

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Lynchburg, Virginia

December 2023

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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This project addresses a critical need within the ministry field, focusing on pastors affiliated with the church planting networks Excel Leadership Network and Transformation Ministries. The context is shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on church planting, with a shift to online services and emerging challenges in ministry. The problem is the significant lack of knowledge of apologetics among church planters, hindering their ability to effectively articulate and defend the Christian faith in today's postmodern world, particularly when engaging with non-believers. This DMIN action research project aims to create a concise video curriculum that equips pastors with fundamental apologetics knowledge. Given the demanding schedules of church planters, the curriculum's goal is to be time-efficient while providing the foundational principles of apologetics. The video format is designed to pique the interest of planters and empower them to handle apologetic discussions effectively. The ultimate aim is to enhance the pastors' abilities to incorporate apologetics into their preaching, address complex questions from their congregation, and engage with a more questioning society. Research methods involve assessing pastors' existing apologetics knowledge and their needs in this area and developing and implementing the video curriculum. By providing a concise and accessible resource, this project seeks to influence pastors within church planting networks, enabling them to become more well-rounded in their ministry. It aims to equip them with tools to strengthen their theology base, enhance their teaching, and engage effectively in apologetic discussions, ultimately serving their congregations and those seeking answers in a secular world.

Keywords: apologetics, church-planter, preaching, theology, video curriculum,

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Abbreviations

COVID-19	<i>Coronavirus-2019</i>
DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
FTA	<i>Fine Tuning Argument</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This chapter provides information regarding specific background data for this Doctor of Ministry (DMIN) project since the reader needs to understand the context of this project. The backgrounds and definitions provided help the reader easily understand the terms and information used in the project. This chapter examines the various ministries participating within their specific contexts and parameters. This background information identifies the modern-day pastor and the current state of apologetics within the church. In addition, the chapter fully explores the overall goal of the project and the problem being examined.

Ministry Context

This paper identifies pastors from all over the country who are in the church planting networks of Excel Leadership Network and Transformation Ministries. Both networks are set up to provide financial support to the churches in the network and periodic training to create healthy and growing churches. Networks are designed for the church plants that do not have a sending church to plant and support them financially or those who seek a community that can assist in teaching and connection. Church planting has a long history going back to the Apostle Paul in the New Testament.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic limits current demographic information on church planting. Presumably, all the information available is skewed because of the pandemic, and the lasting effects will not be known until a complete season without the pandemic. For example, the reported attendance and numbers for a church plant launch in 2019 are very

different from those of a church plant launch in 2021. It is unknown whether the numbers in 2021 are the "new normal" or simply the result of the pandemic. During the pandemic, many churches moved to an online format only, making it difficult to determine how many people were genuinely watching from home.¹ Several churches that were planted were birthed in the online-only venue, and it allowed some to start earlier than anticipated because churches could start sharing services online.²

As a result of churches moving to online services, people have been watching church remotely, which has not necessarily translated to a loss of finances for those church plants. "A quick survey of Nexus churches reveals that two-thirds have seen their offerings either increase or plateau during COVID-19, with the remaining one-third reporting decreases."³

Excel Leadership Network describes its mission as "to spot and equip high-level leaders who feel called to plant churches around the world," and it exists to "prepare these leaders, send them out, and support them through the journey of church planting."⁴ In addition, Excel is designed to help provide support to church planters and help supply them with confirmation for the church planting calling in their lives. Excel Leadership Networks offices are in Elk Grove, California, but they support church plants scattered throughout the country.⁵ The location of their headquarters does not limit them, and Excel does not limit inclusion regardless of location and has general limitations concerning theology. They even have churches in other countries like

¹ Bob Smietana and Elizabeth E Evans, "Streaming Online Has Been a Boon for Churches, a Godsend for Isolated," *Religion News Service*, February 2, 2022, <https://religionnews.com/2022/02/01/streaming-online-has-been-a-boon-for-churches-a-godsend-for-isolated/>.

² BP Staff, "Southern Baptists Grow in Number of Churches, Plant 588 New Congregations amid Covid-19 Pandemic," *Baptist Press*, 2021, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/southern-baptists-grow-in-number-of-churches-plant-588-new-congregations-amidst-covid-19-pandemic/>.

³ Phil Claycomb, "How the Pandemic Impacted Planting Churches," *Christian Standard* 156, no. 1 (January 1, 2021): 55.

⁴ Excel Leadership Network, "Excel Leadership Network," eXcel Leadership Network, 2021, <https://excelnetwork.org/>.

⁵ Ibid.

Mexico. However, for the purposes of this project, all pastors are from the United States. Excel has been around for over a decade and was started by J.D. Pearring. He is a former church planter and author on church planting. The most recent data shows that Excel invested in helping 250 churches since its inception.

Transformation Ministries began when it separated from the American Baptist Churches USA. Before becoming Transformation Ministries, it was known as American Baptist Churches of the Pacific Southwest.⁶ The separation occurred in 2006 when the American Baptist Churches of the Pacific Southwest separated and became Transformation Ministries.⁷ As a result, Transformation Ministries no longer ties itself to a specific denomination, so there are many different denominations represented in this church planting network. There is no clear indication of the factors that led to Transformation Ministries becoming a non-denominational network, but it seems related to emerging theological concerns within the preceding denomination. It can only be noted that denomination is not a factor when Transformation Ministries considers eligible churches for their network. "Because we believe all men and women are made in the image and likeness of God, we embrace and celebrate the multiplicity of generations, ethnic backgrounds, and cultural expressions within the body of Christ modeling reconciliation to the world."⁸ They celebrate the churches as the variety of the kingdom of God.

Similar to the Excel Leadership Network, Transformation Ministries is located in California, specifically in Covina, California.⁹ Their vision is a God-empowered movement of churches with every pastor growing, every church healthy, and every community transformed for

⁶ "Transformation Ministries," The Barnabas Group, accessed October 11, 2023, <https://orangecounty.barnabasgroup.org/ministry/transformation-ministries/>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Transformation Ministries, "Transformation Ministries," Transformation Ministries, March 4, 2022, <http://www.tmchurches.org/>.

⁹ Transformation Ministries, "Transformation Ministries."

Christ.¹⁰ Transformation Ministries describes its mission as to build a movement of mission-empowered relationships by deepening and developing pastors as spiritual leaders. Additionally, their mission is to coach and provide a network for churches to help them achieve greater health and missional vitality, as well as support and initiate viable church-planting partnerships.¹¹

Dr. William Nolte provides leadership for Transformation Ministries as the CEO. Additionally, various leaders are in charge of other specific areas. J.D. Pearing, the founder of Excel Leadership Network, is the church planting lead of Transformation Ministries.¹² While there is some overlap, the two organizations exist as entirely different entities. However, that is not all the networks share with each other. Transformation Ministries is designed to assist church planters on their journey, and while most of its churches are West Coast-based, they are expanding to the Midwest and throughout the country. Additionally, they share their non-denominational approach to church planting, and they have potential applicants go through a process referred to as a Discovery Center. They describe this process as only partly an evaluation. It is meant to help the candidate feel confident about their next best step in ministry.¹³ This is a requirement for planters to be part of either organization. The process does not determine the candidate's apologetics knowledge, but it defines the calling of church planting on the candidate's life. They have agreed to allow planters in their networks to participate in the project if the pastor is so inclined to. The resulting data may eventually be used to change or alter aspects of the discovery center to determine a candidate's apologetic knowledge.

As part of each organization, these organizations provide training to help further the planter's home church and help them become a better leader. However, the church planter has

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Excel Leadership Network, <http://excelnetwork.org>.

¹³ Ibid.

certain obligations as well. The church planter should attend connection events and reach an agreed-upon percentage of their overall tithes and offerings to give back to the organizations in perpetuity. This serves to reinvest in future planters and help financially with the organization's constant investment of other resources into the planter. In order to ensure this continual obligation on behalf of the planter and the organization, a signed contract is required.

Problem Presented

Pastors are answering what they believe to be a calling from God, but this often comes without education and background. While there are certainly questions regarding the pastor's theology, apologetics is more about applying the proof of that theology to others. In today's postmodern world, a pastor's ability to articulate why it is reasonable to believe in a God is necessary. This is perhaps even more true in a church planting situation where they will be interacting with nonbelievers regularly.

Pastors lacking an understanding of apologetics will not only affect their ability to answer questions from their congregation but also affect what topics are covered through their teaching. The lack of coverage of apologetics is increasingly vital in this increasingly secular age, and generations are affected without the teaching as more families are left without the reasoning behind the Christian faith.

Today's world has become increasingly secular. "A slight majority of Americans agree that Scripture's message is particularly helpful; 54 percent say the Bible contains everything a person needs to live a meaningful life. This view has fallen significantly since last year when over two thirds of adults (68%) affirmed the Bible as an important source of wisdom."¹⁴ The increased loss of faith in the Bible will likely translate to a loss of faith and understanding in

¹⁴ "State of the Bible 2021: Five Key Findings," Barna Group, accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.barna.com/research/sotb-2021/>.

God. Pastors need to be able to address the more complicated questions that stem from a more questioning society. If pastors are unable to engage, who can skeptics turn to? The problem is that many incoming church planters with the Excel Leadership Network and Transformation Ministries do not have a basic knowledge of apologetics.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to create a basic video curriculum that can change these pastors' knowledge of apologetics and address the shortcomings of their apologetic knowledge. Pastors in church plant settings have a full schedule and often do not have time for extracurricular activities. The goal is a video curriculum that does not take a lot of time but provides pastors from the Excel Leadership Network and Transformation Ministries with the building blocks of understanding for apologetics, for them to have an answer to those whose acceptance of God is not intrinsic.

The videos will be shorter because the purpose is not to provide pastors with an in-depth knowledge of apologetics. Instead, it is to help effect change so church planters can explain and understand the basic building blocks of apologetics. In addition, the purpose of the video course is to help pique the interest of the planters so that they might further expand their knowledge on their own. Overall, the goal is to empower and equip pastors with the tools needed to increase apologetics in their preaching and enable them to have discussion strategies in apologetic conversations. Especially in the context of church planting, pastors will occasionally engage in apologetic debates. Plus, as discussed earlier, pastors at any stage of ministry are busy, especially in church planting, and they are less likely to devote themselves to something that will take the bulk of their time. "When factoring out those who are not full-time, the median number of hours

full-time senior pastors work for their churches each week is 55 hours, with 42 percent working 60 or more hours."¹⁵

Basic Assumptions

It is assumed to a certain degree that those with little to no exposure to apologetics will display growth by participating in the project. This will be measured by a questionnaire that is taken prior to and after the project. However, it can also be assumed that there are those with more apologetic knowledge than anticipated will skew the overall results. Finally, it can be assumed that average growth will be noticeable given both of these assumptions. That is true, even given the assumption that a few participants will not complete the project at the very least.

It can be assumed that all of the participants are church planters and pastors since that is a prerequisite of the project. It can be reasonably assumed that because all participants are involved in full-time ministry, there is a vested interest in the furthering of the Christian faith. As a result of that fact, it can also be assumed that there is reasonable knowledge of the Bible and biblical truths. As such, an overview of the Bible and the reality of God need not be provided to the participants of the study.

Definitions

Throughout this paper, specific words or phrases will be used that the reader will need to understand the full definition of because their use will be commonplace throughout the project—specifically, different elements of apologetics, including the Christian worldview. An agreed-upon definition will allow the reader to engage appropriately with the project. While some of the

¹⁵ Lifeway Research, “Pastors’ Long Work Hours Come at Expense of People, Ministry,” *Lifeway Research*, July 12, 2021, <https://research.lifeway.com/2010/01/05/pastors-long-work-hours-come-at-expense-of-people-ministry>.

definitions may be understood via context, having a working definition will clarify the paper and the project.

Apologetics. Over time, the understanding of what includes apologetics continues to evolve. "The increasingly visible broadening of the scope of the study of apologetics, in both its direct and indirect forms, raises questions of definition. Where do the boundaries of apologetics lie?"¹⁶ While the scope of the definition of apologetics can be extremely broad, the overall goal remains the same. "If one understands apologetics as the thoughtful defense of the Christian faith against nonbelievers and mission more generally as the proclamation of the Christian message to nonbelievers, then the two concepts, though different, are so interrelated that they are difficult to separate from each other."¹⁷ This definition falls short because viewing apologetics as a defense implies the Christian is providing a counterattack. In reality, apologetics is being able to offer reasonable answers to why Christianity can be trusted. Apologetics is based on 1 Peter 3:15, where Christians are always told to have a reason for their faith and to be able to provide an answer. It is from the Greek word *apologia*.¹⁸ The term *apologia* shows up in Paul's letter to the Philippians, too (Phil 1:15-18). Paul is discussing those who preach the Word of God. "Some preached Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others preached Him out of good will (v. 15). Those who preached out of good will did so in love (v. 16), knowing that Paul was in chains because of his defense of the gospel. The word 'defense' is the Greek *apologia*, also used in verse 7."¹⁹

Begging the question. In today's modern language, it is often used as a phrase meaning "that raises the question." However, for the use in this paper, the meaning will be more

¹⁶ David Pickering, "Reflections on the Changing Landscape of Apologetics," *New Blackfriars*. 103, no. 1103 (2022): 101.

¹⁷ Thomas Schirmacher, "Observations on Apologetics and Its Relation to Contemporary Christian Mission," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 44, no. 4 (November 2020): 359.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 359.

¹⁹ Robert Lightner, "Philippians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. JF Walvoord and RB Zuck, vol.2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 651.

consistent with its use in logical thinking and reason. Question begging is more circular reasoning where someone presupposes the argument's conclusion or the point of issue.²⁰ An example of the argument would be 'P, therefore P,' which assumes the conclusion of the reasoning at the start of the argument.²¹

Christian Worldview. James Sire's definition of worldview is "a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions ... which we hold ... about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being."²² The Christian worldview is a similar framework within the context of Christianity. When individuals begin viewing their worldview through the lens of the Bible and the lens of Christianity, those individuals place their worldview's authority with Scripture. The understanding of what is true is dependent on that worldview.²³ The worldviews that people hold are the filter in which life is viewed, and while mainly based on cultural norms, a Christian worldview is markedly different.²⁴

Cosmological Argument. The cosmological argument has a prevalent place in apologetics. Understanding the argument's basic premise is necessary when discussing participants' understanding. The "Cosmological arguments for the existence of God defend the idea that God is a necessary being who has always existed."²⁵ It is the idea that there was nothing

²⁰ David Copp, "How to Avoid Begging the Question against Evolutionary Debunking Arguments," *Ratio: An International Journal of Analytic Philosophy* 32, no. 4 (December 1, 2019): 235.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 235.

²² Benjamin J. Burkholder, "Heading toward the Environmental Eclipse of Christian Worldview? A Review of Recent Work in Christian Environmental Ethics," *Religious Studies Review* 42, no. 3 (2016): 181.

²³ Patricia L. Nason "Biblical Worldview and Christian Religious Education," *Practical Theology (Baptist College of Theology, Lagos)* 8 (2015): 9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁵ Atle Ottesen Søvik, "It Is Impossible That There Could Have Been Nothing: New Support for Cosmological Arguments for the Existence of God," *Neue Zeitschrift Für Systematische Theologie Und Religionsphilosophie* 60, no. 3 (2018): 453.

at the beginning of the creation of the universe except for God, who is a being who has always existed. From what can be understood on a scientific basis, something is formed out of nothing. The argument's fundamental formula is as follows: "1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause. 2. The universe began to exist. 3. Therefore, the universe has a cause."²⁶

To take this formula one step further and usher in the understanding of a God-created universe: "4. The cause of the universe is either impersonal in nature or a personal, non-temporal, supernatural being. 5. The cause cannot be impersonal nature since that is included in whatever begins to exist. 6. Therefore, a personal, non-temporal, supernatural being exists."²⁷

Discovery Center. Throughout the project, references will be made to the Discovery Center process. "The Discovery Center is [Excel Leadership Network's] assessment process and the whole focus is helping leaders take their next step in ministry."²⁸ It is designed to help church planters determine if church planting is their actual next step in ministry or if their giftedness is intended for something else. The Discovery Center is designed to last two and a half days. It is facilitated by other church planters and ministry professionals to ensure the candidates are supported and evaluated well.²⁹

Fine-tuning Argument. The fine-tuning argument is similar in nature to the cosmological argument because it attempts to explain the universe's origin. However, it is not concerned with the very start of the universe but more with how all necessary factors worked together for life to exist in this universe. "The fine-tuning argument (FTA) typically begins with the claim that it is extremely improbable, relative to chance alone, that various physical constants and quantities

²⁶ Ibid., 461.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Excel Leadership Network, <http://excelnetwork.org>.

²⁹ Excel Leadership Network, <http://excelnetwork.org>.

have the life-permitting values they in fact have."³⁰ Essentially, the likelihood that all of the elements needed for life to exist and for humanity to survive on this earth is so remarkable from a probability standpoint that it seems unrealistic that it happened at all.

Theology. A working definition of Christian theology is not something that is readily agreed upon and can vary greatly depending on the approach. Theology can be such a broad term, especially when considering the scope of all that it entails. For this project, theology will be viewed through a Christian lens. Christoph Hübenthal provided a definition in the *International Journal of Public Theology*. "Accordingly, the proposed definition might read as follows: Theology, committed to the essential validity claim of the Christian faith praxis, is an academic reflection on behalf of this praxis for the sake of the praxis' self-understanding, continuation and amelioration."³¹ However, when dealing with a definition like that of theology, the sheer range is immense. "By this very content, theology as a whole is committed to the practical challenges of 'leadership in the Christian church,' and practical theology especially has to deal with rules of church leadership."³² Even more is needed when it comes to a definition of theology—the working definition of theology for this paper is the study of God, done within the context of Scripture.

It is important to note that because of the varied backgrounds of the participants, everyone's theology cannot be mutually shared. Fundamentally, all participants will have some agreement and disagreement in their theology and will all agree on its scope. The scope is that theology is what is specifically believed about the Christian faith and the way the church handles

³⁰ Joel Ballivian, "Fine-Tuning Arguments and Biological Design Arguments: Can the Theist Have Both?," *Religious Studies* 57, no. 3 (September 2021): 484.

³¹ Christoph Hübenthal, "Apologetic Communication," *International Journal of Public Theology* 10, no. 1 (2016): 10.

³² Wilhelm Gräb, "Practical Theology as Theology of Religion: Schleiermacher's Understanding of Practical Theology as a Discipline," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 9, no. 2 (2005): 182.

those beliefs. Still, the specific definition of all that theology will vary significantly between individuals and, as a result, will directly impact the way each participant views theology. The goal is to cling to the apologetic nature and not jump into the foray of the sticky discussion of theology. However, apologetics and theology overlap often, and one can influence and direct the other.

Limitations

There are, of course, limitations when it comes to any project-based research or things that are not controllable via the design of the project. Many of these are related to the participants in the study. As part of the process to capture the effectiveness of the apologetic course, a baseline of knowledge needs to be established. Even though their answers will remain anonymous, participants can search for the answers to the baseline questions to avoid the potential embarrassment of getting them incorrect. Participants will be advised against this and assured that the project is more interested in the overall data than their specific answers, but their compliance with this cannot be controlled.

Additionally, participants leaving the project are not under the project's control. This could happen immediately after the pre-project questionnaire is filled out. Perhaps participants will determine that watching through the curriculum is too much of a burden and abandon it before completion. Participants might even complete every step along the way except for the last questionnaire. Furthermore, they might feel compelled to ensure that they show some progress on the last questionnaire. Participants may also only watch part of the curriculum or not provide the curriculum with their full attention. Unfortunately, participants may not watch all the curriculum videos, and they may not watch all the videos to completion. In that situation, the results might be skewed because there would be no complete guarantee that their effort matches the amount necessary for growth to be seen.

Lastly, while numerous church planters are a part of the Excel Leadership Network and Transformation Ministries, there is no guarantee there is interest in participating in the study. Whether it be hubris or just time-related, there is no control that the overall goal of fifty participants will be reached. Conversely, there might also be perceived pressure from the organizations to participate in the study. While this project exists outside of the coaching that both organizations provide, church planters might perceive this as something the organizations are offering. Or participants may feel the Excel Leadership Network or Transformation Ministries expects that they participate in the study, and perhaps the reason for participating is irrelevant to the results. The expectation is that pastors would see this as a learning opportunity or, at the very least, a chance to assist in the research and the potential advancement of apologetic teaching.

Delimitations

There are also a number of items under the control of this project. The most vital is that all participants will be church planters and will belong to either Excel Leadership Network or Transformation Ministries. The length of the curriculum can also be controlled to a certain extent. While it cannot be ensured how long the participants will watch each video, they can be incentivized to do so by keeping the length brief. As mentioned earlier, church planters have hectic schedules, and keeping each video less than five minutes will increase their likelihood of being watched.

More data provides more trustworthy results, so more participants would be preferred, but the minimum can be placed at ten participants to guarantee a varied amount of data. While lower than desired, that amount is achievable for participants who will fully complete the program. That minimum will not produce the amount of data that would be ideal for this type of project but will facilitate enough data to determine if the project's thesis is correct. Furthermore,

while the definition of what is “essential” apologetics will vary depending on the person and approach, the project will provide a foundation for each of the participants and their view of apologetics going forward.

Thesis Statement

If church planters had access to a short video curriculum on apologetics, they would be better suited to teach it and help their overall theology base. This basic understanding of apologetics will not just weave into how these pastors shepherd their congregations. Understanding viewpoints that are outside their own will also influence the instruction and teaching of their congregations—allowing these pastors to have a greater influence on those who are not existing Christians.

Church planters have much to manage as they begin the steps to get a church off the ground, especially in its early days. If the amount of curriculum seems overwhelming, many will abandon it before its completion. So, each week of the apologetics curriculum will be short and expand on one of the pillars of apologetics so that even though the pastor may not be able to answer every question, it provides them with a framework for explanation.

The thought is that, additionally, apologetics does not just increase the pastor's ability to answer questions from skeptics, but it expands their Christian worldview and provides a perspective beyond their own. This will help pastors provide different options while preaching because they completely understand all they are trying to reach. A complete apologetic understanding can directly affect multiple areas of a pastor's life and make them more well-rounded in their ministry. If church planters can receive limited apologetic video training, then they will increase their overall knowledge and confidence.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In pursuit of a Doctor of Ministry, there is a culmination of effort and knowledge in a project. The project's goal is to display the students' knowledge and add to the academic discussion and further research in a particular area. While the journey through classes helps provide the student with a context, research for the project has the author exploring in-depth the topic or topics of their choosing involving his project. The following review explores the topic of modern apologetics and the teaching of apologetics. Additionally, it provides research exploring the view of apologetics in today's climate and pastoral knowledge, examining where apologetics is today.

Literature Review

In contemporary society, determining the critical and effective methods of apologetics is a subject of much debate. One cannot apply a one-size-fits-all solution to every apologetic scenario when examining the gospel.¹ In other words, there is not one specific verse or approach that can answer every apologetic question. Furthermore, while there may not be a universal solution for every interaction, there are varying opinions on which type of apologetics is the most effective. Should one engage in a debate on worldview or demonstrate how faith influences one's behavior, as outlined in Matthew 5:13-16, to nonbelievers? The reality is that in today's culture, faith is no longer the default position, and apologetics has become a necessity, whether or not

¹ William Edgar, "Does Our Lord Ask Too Much? A Neglected Issue in Apologetics Today," *Unio Cum Christo* 6, no. 1 (January 2020): p. 117, <https://doi.org/10.35285/ucc6.1.2020.art7>, 128.

they are referred to as such.² This literature review will delve into the topic of apologetics within the context of the modern world.

Today's Apologetics

Apologetics can be defined in various ways depending on the approach. One of the most notable definitions was given by John Hughes, who described it as the act of presenting the Christian faith in a manner that not only engages with but also criticizes and responds to other views.³ According to author Andrew Moore, the use of apologetics began to take shape around the sixteenth century when Christians started using natural arguments to convince nonbelievers of the existence of God.⁴ In essence, apologetics is a tool for defending and justifying one's faith while engaging with and persuading those who hold different beliefs.

As far back as thirty years ago, John Cooper wrote that society's worldview was changing and giving way to postmodernism, explaining that this postmodernist thought was permeating the world's understanding of truth. "Though perhaps not an articulated worldview, postmodernism is at least a cluster of anti-modernistic attitudes that pervade both elite and popular culture. Postmodernism denies the Enlightenment maxim that reason and truth are everywhere and always the same."⁵

Throughout history, individuals seeking to embrace Christianity have often had questions about its fundamental teachings. However, in today's society, the nature of these inquiries has evolved. Rather than solely questioning the validity of Christianity, individuals are also

² Joshua D. Chatraw, "We Need to Stop Apologizing for Apologetics: But It Might Be Time for It to 'Grow Up,'" *Christianity Today* 62, no. 4 (May 2018): 60.

³ Paul Avis, "Apologetics and the Rebirth of the Imagination," *Ecclesiology* 9, no. 3 (2013): 307.

⁴ Andrew Moore, "From Rational Apologetics to Witness Apologetics," *Antonionum* 90, no. 2 (April 2015): 281.

⁵ John W. Cooper, "Reformed Apologetics and the Challenge of Post-Modern Relativism," *Calvin Theological Journal* 28, no. 1 (April 1993): 109.

evaluating its ethical implications. For instance, a person with same-sex attraction may contemplate whether God intends for them to lead a life of loneliness and isolation if they choose celibacy. Similarly, a person of color may express frustration with the notion that preaching the gospel alone is sufficient, arguing that justice is a necessary component of their faith.⁶ This raises the question of what justice is and how it relates to the Christian faith. As society continues to transform, the scope of apologetics expands to encompass these changing cultural values.

It is crucial that pastors recognize the impact of cultural changes, as failure to do so may lead to a growing disconnect between them and mainstream society. Disregarding such shifts may render them irrelevant to nonbelievers, who are more likely to find their message outdated and out of touch with contemporary trends.⁷ However, the significance of Christianity in providing answers to cultural inquiries cannot be overstated, as it can pave the way for the upcoming era of apologetics. It is through this process that pastors can bridge the gap and connect with a wider audience while still remaining true to their faith.

The shift in apologetics and evangelism is growing in significance within the context of the church and religious communities. In recent times, church leaders are moving toward a less evangelistic approach. A notable survey conducted in 2005 revealed that more than half of the pastors who participated had not made any concerted evangelistic efforts within the preceding six months.⁸ This, in turn, meant that they had not actively shared the gospel with nonbelievers during that time.

⁶ Jonathan Dodson et al., “Pastoral Apologetics for a New Era,” The Gospel Coalition, June 16, 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/pastoral-apologetics-new-era/>.

⁷ Andrew Corbett, “Why We Need Apologetic Pastors, Part 1,” Reasons to Believe, May 13, 2021, <https://reasons.org/explore/blogs/reflections/why-we-need-apologetic-pastors-part-1>.

⁸ “Evangelism & Apologetics,” *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*, vol. 19, no. 4, May 2006, p. 47.

This change in approach underscores the importance of apologetics. Apologetics plays a crucial role in connecting nonbelievers with the message of Jesus. It bridges the complexities of faith and the questions that often arise in the minds of those who may be skeptical or seeking answers. By equipping individuals with apologetic tools and strategies, the church can effectively engage with nonbelievers, addressing their doubts, concerns, and queries, ultimately facilitating a more meaningful and constructive dialogue about faith. In an era where evangelism may be dwindling, apologetics offers a valuable means to share the gospel and build connections with those who have not yet embraced the message of Jesus.

When delving into the realm of apologetics, a significant aspect to ponder is how it affects the promotion of Christianity. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a revered individual who wears multiple hats as a minister, physician, and author, posits that apologetics has had a negative impact on the advancement of Christianity in the past few decades, even suggesting that it has caused more harm than good.⁹ The discipline of apologetics aims to furnish logical grounds for the tenets of Christianity. However, it is quite puzzling to observe that this particular field might actually be doing more damage than good. A comprehensive review of related literature reveals several contributing factors to this perception, with one significant factor being the current cultural and societal climate. The present era is often characterized as one that places great emphasis on scientific inquiry. This development has afforded modern-day atheists the opportunity to propagate their beliefs during a time when the influence of religion is waning, or at the very least, in a state of decline.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid., 61.

¹⁰ H. G. Stoker, "Facing the Apologetic Challenges of Scientific Atheism," *Unio Cum Christo* 3, no. 2 (January 2017): 186.

Given the evolving landscape, it has become increasingly crucial for apologists to grasp the intricacies of the Christian worldview. Anglican priest Myron Penner asserts that this is of utmost importance:

When—as in the modern epistemological paradigm—the truth of the gospel is construed solely in objective terms, as contained in propositions, doctrines and intellectual positions, and when the rationality of belief is regarded as of primary importance in legitimizing faith, the main issue on which a witness will focus is the reasonableness of a nonbeliever's beliefs, positions or worldview.¹¹

The inquiry at hand concerns the progression and usefulness of apologetics in promoting the cause of Christianity, especially in light of the contemporary scientific era. Is there any real value in apologetics? According to certain authors, such as Arthur Eggert, employing science or human models to elucidate the intricate workings of the universe holds no apologetic merit, as it remains uncertain to what extent God operates beyond the confines of natural laws.¹² There are some who disagree with this perspective and believe that science is simply a means of explaining the world that was created by God.

Science and Christianity are not incompatible. Theologian Alister McGrath notes that while science and Christianity may have distinct and notable differences between them, there is overlap that helps one to understand the world system.¹³ Theology Professor Henk Stoker states that the two are not at odds and do not stand apart from one another; in fact, Christianity is responsible for the birth of science as it is known today.¹⁴ Eggert also has reservations regarding the teaching of apologetics. He thinks it does more harm than good when churches teach apologetics when they do not fully understand science. This is because the audience can barely

¹¹ Myron B. Penner, "Ironic Witness: Embodying Faith in a Postmodern Age," *The Christian Century* 130, no. 14 (July 10, 2013): 31.

¹² Arthur A. Eggert, "Creation, Science, and Our Approach in Apologetics," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 112, no. 4 (Fall 2015): 269.

¹³ Alister E. McGrath, "New Atheism--New Apologetics: The Use of Science in Recent Christian Apologetic Writings," *Science and Christian Belief* 26, no. 2 (October 2014): 103.

¹⁴ Stoker, 189.

comprehend concepts the teacher barely understands.¹⁵ In essence, the Bible's scientific references are not meant to be scientific textbooks but are acknowledged as accurate when they do address scientific matters. This perspective allows for recognizing the Bible's historical and cultural context while acknowledging its potential relevance to scientific understanding.

Apologetist Yannick Imbert stresses the need for teachers to understand and comprehend. “We have become so used to interpreting the Scriptures that we may have forgotten that biblical interpretation can look obscure and even illegitimate to our contemporaries. For example, the christological interpretation of the Old Testament, even if necessary, still needs to be justified in order for our contemporaries to see its legitimacy.”¹⁶ A modern skeptic will no longer accept the Bible as the status quo, but even the use of interpreting the Bible will need to be justified to make a point.

According to some individuals, the issue lies in the way contemporary apologetics is applied. During an interview with Kristi Mair, Joshua Chatraw, who directs the Center for Public Christianity, explained several concerns with prevalent apologetics. Chatraw contends that Christianity is perceived as "irrelevant" in today's society due to various factors, including exhaustion with religion and the numerous distractions in contemporary culture.¹⁷ “Apologetics is one of those things in life that is easy to do badly, and difficult to do well.”¹⁸

With the seemingly ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the current state of affairs has only served to exacerbate the sense of uncertainty and unease that many people are experiencing in

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 276.

¹⁶ Imbert, Yannick. “The End of Reason: New Atheists and the Bible,” *European Journal of Theology* 22, no. 1 (2013): 57.

¹⁷ “The Problem with Popular Apologetics: Nonbelievers Need Something More than a Rational Trail of Evidence,” *Christianity Today* 64, no. 5 (July 2020): 75.

¹⁸ James Patrick Green, “‘Giving Reasons for Our Hope’: The Role of Apologetics in the Church Today,” *Grace & Truth* 26, no. 1 (April 2009): 9.

their everyday lives. There appears to be a rising cultural shift where more people are abandoning Christianity, and the term "deconstruction" is frequently used to describe this process. The process involves questioning and examining one's faith to reveal what remains, which may result in a loss of belief. While this may not always be the case, according to Chatraw, when it does occur, it may be partly due to the prevailing view in popular apologetics that it has all the answers.¹⁹

Effective Apologetics

While Apologetics may not possess all the answers, it serves as a valuable tool in elucidating the reasoning behind Christianity's faith-based belief system. However, the literature suggests that there exists a certain degree of disagreement among authors, scholars, and theologians regarding the most effective means by which apologetics can convey the truth. The crux of the argument seems to revolve around whether knowledge or relationship holds the more critical role in this endeavor. According to Henk Stoker, who is a professor of theology, the concept of apologetics goes beyond simply defending one's faith. He concurs with the views of renowned Christian apologist leaders that it also encompasses the act of proclaiming the truth and providing individuals who hold divergent worldviews with a Christian perspective.²⁰ The focal point of the discussion revolves around determining the most efficient approach toward achieving what Stoker has brought forth. One scholar, John B. King Jr., presents an argument put forth by an apologist. According to King, the apologist's argument entails two steps. Firstly, the apologist aims to demonstrate the inadequacy of non-Christian beliefs in accounting for human experience, thereby reducing them to absurdity. Subsequently, the apologist proceeds to show

¹⁹ Ibid., 74.

²⁰ Stoker, 199.

that Christian presuppositions are, in fact, capable of accounting for human experience.²¹

Another in this category is the late theologian Norman Geisler, who viewed the modern version of apologetics to defend the absolute nature of truth, the exclusivistic nature, and lastly, to defend the credibility of miracles.²² Theologian Paul Avis offers a unique perspective on the concept of apologetics. He suggests that the term itself may be outdated and not entirely fitting for modern times. While within Christianity, it is understood to mean the defense of the faith, Avis notes that the term "apologize" in its common usage refers to expressing remorse or regret. Instead, Avis proposes that apologetics aims to connect other faiths and belief systems while simultaneously sharing the tenets of Christian theology. In essence, Avis acts as a bridge between these two seemingly opposing viewpoints, advocating for a more inclusive and open-minded approach.²³

There are differing views regarding the role of apologists in the Christian faith. Some argue that apologists tend to overlook the significance of the gospel and the importance of living a life modeled after Jesus. On the other hand, Jonathan Ruehs, an apologist himself, posits that while there may be various ways for Christians to seek evidence of God's existence, establishing meaningful relationships with others is ultimately the key to resolving their uncertainties and apprehensions.²⁴ This means while it is imperative to note that offering elaborate and apologetic explanations can be helpful, it is one's conduct that has the most profound impact on nonbelievers.

Ruehs opines that apologetics is often perceived as a mere intellectual debate.

Nevertheless, it is vital to understand that apologetics is not limited to just intellectual reasoning.

²¹ John B. King Jr., "Presuppositional Apologetics and the Theology of the Cross," *Word & World* 38, no. 3 (Sum 2018): 284.

²² Norman L Geisler, "Proclaiming the Changeless Truth in These Changing Times," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 55, no. 1 (Fall 2012): 44.

²³ Avis, 303.

²⁴ Jonathan Ruehs, "Millennials and Maslow: First Article Needs and Christian Apologetics," *Missio Apostolica* 21, no. 1 (May 2013): 59.

Several other factors contribute to the stance of a nonbeliever.²⁵ In regards to the current state of apologetics, Chatraw has expressed concerns and believes that a relationship approach is the most effective. He argues that the greatest impact of apologetics occurs when the followers of God embody the gospel. When individuals outside of the community witness a group that genuinely loves and cares for one another and the world and exemplifies grace, it creates an alluring atmosphere and establishes credibility.²⁶ He feels that apologetics can become very one-sided, with the apologist talking and the other person listening. However, the apologist is not asking about their life or journey to see how their personal experience might align with the Christian story.²⁷

There are some who might think relying solely on discourse to persuade others about the gospel is too restrictive. "Rather than positing an intrinsic link between Christian apologetics and languages—as if we could single-handedly produce faith in others through our discourses—should we not expand our way of thinking so that apologetics no longer is seen as a propositional affair?"²⁸ For many people, apologetics is not just about having the correct answer but also about leading a proper lifestyle. As followers of Christianity, it is imperative Christians conduct themselves in a manner that exhibits exemplary behavior and conveys a willingness to take responsibility for errors. "In a sense, the Christian life is a silent apologetic. It shows the world the beauty, meaning, and confidence that are found in a relationship with Christ."²⁹ In some instances, the example of Christ may be more convincing than any discourse.

²⁵ Ibid., 56.

²⁶ Chatraw, 75

²⁷ Ibid., 74.

²⁸ Christophe Chalamet, "Renewing Christian Witness in Europe—a Proposal," *Religions* 14, no. 3 (2023): p. 391, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030391>, 3-4.

²⁹ Samuel Degner, "Christian Apologetics in a post/modern context," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 117, no. 2 (2020): 105.

Penner believes that Christians have been misconstruing the true essence of an ideal apologist. Rather than being perceived as an analytical individual such as a scientist, lawyer, or any other form of respected intellectual, apologists should strive to emulate the apostles. They should base their message on the Word of God rather than solely on their own thoughts in order to establish a strong foundation.³⁰ Thomas Schirmacher, the Associate Secretary-General for Theological Concerns at the World Evangelical Alliance, shares the same belief as Penner. Schirmacher confirms that apologetics only serves to remove obstacles and should not be seen as a replacement for the gospel. He further emphasizes that Christians should not only defend their faith but also demonstrate their Christian hope in every possible way.³¹ King might have outlined how apologists handle things formally for the opposing argument, but he lands firmly in this camp.

Often, this theology remains in the background, providing a basis for the method. Of course, in an encounter with a trained philosopher, one may have to lay bare the foundation of one's thought and trace out its implications in detail. But this does not happen in every encounter. Furthermore, it is seldom necessary to be overly formal: first deconstructing the non-Christian view and only then moving on to consider the Christian view. Often, the discussion moves back and forth.³²

King and others see apologetics as more relationship and conversation-based. They do not view it as a formal proceeding where an apologist tears down the arguments of a skeptic one by one in a prearranged way. Instead, they view apologetics as something that is demonstrated through the actions of one's life, and those around them observe that and are drawn closer to Jesus as a result. Additionally, this allows them to acquire relational equity to speak about faith when the opportunities arrive.

Teaching Apologetics Today

³⁰ Penner, 31

³¹ Thomas Schirmacher, "Observations on Apologetics and Its Relation to Contemporary Christian Mission," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 44, no. 4 (November 2020): 366.

³² King, 289

The most effective apologetics is still something up for debate. Part of this review was also to determine how it should be taught. Most of the teaching themes focused on a balance between formal apologetics and relationship-based apologetics. Apologetics Professor William Edgar advises Christian apologists to take the time to listen to those around them.³³ Edgar addresses something all too common with apologists that he feels ends up with them missing the mark. In the process of apologetics, the goal is not to win an argument; the goal is to win a soul for Christ.³⁴ Being possessed by winning can happen in the course of an argument. However, each person discusses beliefs with a person who is worthy and needs hope and forgiveness in addition to a rational faith argument.³⁵ Theologian Alister McGrath contends that even describing Christianity in an apologetic setting would require rational and moral dimensions and understanding that attempts to reduce to anything less are difficult.³⁶ So, teaching the rational arguments of apologetics is vital, but it is not the only valuable approach to teaching apologetics.

Stoker says that Christians need to realize that they are not just called to live out the gospel in apologetic life, but they are called to live it out in every aspect while those watching can better understand the Word of God according to their individual worldview.³⁷ Author Ted Turnau echoes the idea that Christians need to help them see how God interacts with their world. "Apologetics is not primarily about neutral 'facts' but rather about the relevance of the facts. The truth of Christianity concerns not only its rationality but also its beauty, goodness, and the overall existential 'rightness' of Christianity for the human condition. This is how Christianity

³³ Edgar, 119

³⁴ Ibid., 129.

³⁵ Chatraw, 61.

³⁶ McGrath, 112.

³⁷ Stoker, 188.

connects with desire. Apologetics must relate the truth of the gospel to human desire.”³⁸ It is not enough to know the arguments. It is imperative that Christians need to know what connects with the skeptic whom they are trying to reach. Schirmacher points out that Paul actually addressed this very thing in Athens and that apologists need to be willing to study other religions and see other worldviews to adapt to the needs of the nonbeliever.³⁹

A New World

The perception of Christianity in modern times has undergone a significant shift from the traditional view. It is no longer merely seen as being incorrect, but there is growing evidence to suggest that it is viewed as oppressive by many. This has become a cause for concern, as the evidence of this perception is becoming more widespread.⁴⁰ In modern times, the younger generation known as Millennials is increasingly expressing skepticism towards ideas and beliefs that were ingrained in them during their upbringing, and in some cases, they may even be resisting these teachings of their youth. This includes their religious convictions, particularly their faith in Jesus Christ.⁴¹

According to Eugene Trager, individuals who identify as modern agnostics are faced with doubts on two distinct fronts. Firstly, they question the depiction of God as presented in Scripture. Secondly, they express skepticism towards the idea of a God who desires a personal connection with humanity.⁴² According to Glenn Siniscalchi, there is a sense of hesitation due to

³⁸ Ted Turnau, “Popular Culture, Apologetics, and the Discourse of Desire,” *Cultural Encounters* 8, no. 2 (2012): 26.

³⁹ Schirmacher, 365.

⁴⁰ Chatraw, 61.

⁴¹ Ruehs, 56.

⁴² Eugene P. Trager, “Evangelizing a Modern Agnostic Culture,” *Cross Currents* 70, no. 4 (December 2020): 357.

the association of Christianity with certain instances of violence. This association is not only limited to historical events but also some instances of violence that occur in present times.⁴³

Pastor Eric Hanson addresses this modern view and the new atheist movement. He feels that it is the church's responsibility to address this new atheism movement and develop a voice against it, but the church has been mostly silent so far.⁴⁴ Additionally, Dr. Benno Van Den Toren, Professor of Intercultural Theology at the Protestant Theological University, warns of the risk this poses and how society gives more authority to science than religion and faith.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the need for the church to intervene is there. Neil Powell, who is the founding pastor of City Church Birmingham, states, "It is a sobering fact that in the West, churches cannot be planted quickly enough to meet the gospel need. If churches within the same regions continue to plant in isolation from one another, the challenge will remain insurmountable."⁴⁶

Another challenge in this new world is the movement to postmodernism. Postmodernism is not something that is easily defined. According to postmodern views, the idea of truth being an absolute and universal description of reality has changed in the West. Truth is no longer something that is discovered but rather determined by individuals. Richard Rorty expressed this belief: "Truth is made rather than found."⁴⁷ The problem is that in the modernist view, Christians do not have a seat at the table in the discussion. "In the debate over Christianity, modernists

⁴³ Glenn B. Siniscalchi, "Does Christianity Cause Violence?: The New Atheism and Negative Apologetics," *Heythrop Journal* 61, no. 4 (July 2020): 608.

⁴⁴ Eric I. Hanson, "The Hope of Grace: An Essay Exploring the New Atheism, the Church, and the Gospel," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 44, no. 2 (2017): 4.

⁴⁵ Benno Van Den Toren, "Distinguishing Doctrine and Theological Theory - A Tool for Exploring the Interface between Science and Faith," *Science & Christian Belief* 28, no. 2 (October 2016): 73.

⁴⁶ Neil Powell, "The Nature and Necessity of Church-Planting Movements," *Foundations (Affinity)* 72 (Spr 2017): 25.

⁴⁷ Glenn B. Siniscalchi, "Postmodernism and the Need for Rational Apologetics in a Post-Conciliar Church," *Heythrop Journal* 52, no. 5 (September 2011): 751.

claim that Christians don't have sufficient evidence and argument. Postmodernists question whether Christians have any right to claim that they know any truth at all."⁴⁸

This effect on the church and the greater realm of apologetics cannot be overstated. "Many postmodernists do not see truth as an objective description of reality. As a result of this paradigmatic shift, the church's central claims are no longer seen as binding on all persons."⁴⁹ So, individuals are determining for themselves whether a truth makes sense for them and not whether it is empirically true. It makes rejecting the tenements of Christianity easier because individuals can deny them based on whether or not it works for them.

While truth is not easier to define than postmodernism, philosopher Douglas Groothuis argues that humans inherently understand the meaning of truth. "It is evident that we have some intuition of the meaning of truth, even if we cannot articulate it very well philosophically. Truth is something we may know, or fail to know, but it is not something we should manipulate according to our own desires, fears, whims, or hatreds."⁵⁰ Truth is vital not only to the apologetic world but to the secular world.

The lens of the world regarding truth has shifted. This change has permeated into those who are filling the church pews. "Because of that, preachers seeking to reach unbelievers with the Gospel must endeavor to understand the foundations and ramifications of postmodern thought."⁵¹ In the postmodernist world, pastors of church plants need to be able to utilize apologetic knowledge to reach people.

⁴⁸ John M. Frame, *Christianity Considered: A Guide for Skeptics and Seekers*, ed. Todd Hains, Mark L. Ward Jr., and Elizabeth Vince (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 13.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 768.

⁵⁰ Douglas R. Groothuis, "Why Truth Matters Most: An Apologetic for Truth-Seeking in Postmodern Times," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, vol. 47, no. 3, Sept. 2004, pp. 442.

⁵¹ Michael W. Miller, "Apologizing to Postmoderns: Developing an Effective Apologetic for Contemporary Gospel Preaching," *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 60.

Church Planting

After conducting a thorough literature review, it was found that there is a lack of information regarding the demographics and educational backgrounds of incoming church planters. Furthermore, due to the fact that each church or denomination is responsible for its own ordination process, there is no consistent method in place to ensure that pastors possess knowledge of apologetics at any level. This lack of apologetic knowledge within the realm of church planting has gone unnoticed and could potentially be hindering church growth and the establishment of multiple church plants.

While there is no specific demographic information, there has been acknowledgment that there needs to be some consistency in the training of church planters. "High priority must be given to training of church planters in all departments of church life, including the educational and parachurch bodies."⁵² It is challenging to make church planting education a reality due to the differing views and priorities of various denominations and networks. Unfortunately, this problem is unlikely to be solved as there are too many differing scriptural views and priorities.

The information on training church planters consists of best practices and evaluating planters. As mentioned, this is divided by denomination and network; however, there is no mention of equipping these pastors with apologetic understanding. There is more of a focus on calling. "If you try to train someone not gifted or called to this challenging task, you frustrate everyone involved."⁵³ The support provided does not address the addition of apologetic training or guidance for pastors to preach with an apologetic approach.

Conclusion

⁵² Johannes Reimer, "Empowering Church Planters.: Which Training System?," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 40, no. 1 (January 2016): 81.

⁵³ John Worcester, "Biblical Principles of Training Church Planters," *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 18, no. 2 (Fall 2021): 261.

In conclusion, the field of apologetics in the context of modern society is a complex and evolving one. The literature review reveals a diverse range of perspectives on the role, effectiveness, and teaching of apologetics. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach, it is evident that apologetics plays a crucial role in defending and justifying one's faith, engaging with other worldviews, and providing answers to cultural inquiries. However, the changing cultural landscape, scientific advancements, and societal shifts necessitate a thoughtful and adaptive approach to apologetics.

One key aspect that emerges from the literature is the importance of relationships and lived examples in effective apologetics. It is not solely about intellectual arguments and propositions but about embodying the gospel and demonstrating genuine love, grace, and understanding toward others. Apologists should strive to bridge the gap between their faith and the world around them, connecting with people on a personal level and engaging in meaningful conversations that address their doubts and concerns.

Furthermore, the teaching of apologetics requires a balanced approach that encompasses both formal arguments and relational engagement. While intellectual rigor and logical reasoning have their place, teaching apologetics should also emphasize the importance of listening, empathy, and understanding. By cultivating a deep understanding of the Christian worldview and demonstrating its relevance to the questions and challenges of the modern world, teachers can equip believers to engage in fruitful conversations and make a compelling case for their faith.

In a world where faith is no longer the default position and skepticism abounds, apologetics serves as a vital tool for Christians to navigate the complexities of the contemporary landscape. By embracing a dynamic and adaptable approach that combines intellectual rigor with relational engagement, apologetics can effectively address the doubts, questions, and cultural shifts of contemporary society. Ultimately, the goal is not only to defend and justify one's faith

but also to build bridges, foster understanding, and exemplify the gospel's transformative power through both words and actions.

Theological Foundations

The scope of this action research project discusses apologetics and the knowledge of those teaching it, specifically pastors. The theological framework to correspond with this is apologetics and teaching. Undoubtedly, the most popular verse when discussing the need for apologetics in the modern Christian world is 1 Peter 3:15. It reads, "But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet 3:15, New International Version).

Peter implores Christians to be ready for questions from those who do not believe. "Peter builds off the Isaiah quotation by noting how a Christian who possesses the proper attitude in such circumstances may have the opportunity to respond to questions from unbelievers about the hope within them."⁵⁴ Peter alerts all readers that a "defense" or apologia is needed for those wondering about the Christian faith. The actual word defense suggests to scholars that this is in reference to actual court cases where believers responded to accusations.⁵⁵ This does not mean Christians should only provide a defense in a courtroom setting; far from it. "The exhortation here is instructive, for Peter assumed that believers have solid intellectual grounds for believing the gospel. The truth of the gospel is a public truth that can be defended in the public arena. This does not mean, of course, that every Christian is to be a highly skilled apologist for the faith."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Douglas Mangum, ed., *Lexham Context Commentary: New Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 1 Pet 3:13–17.

⁵⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *New American Commentary: Vol.37 1, 2 Peter, Jude* (Nashville, TN:Broadman & Holman, 2003), 174.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 174-175.

Schreiner goes on to point out that Peter is explaining that believers should have at least a fundamental understanding to explain to nonbelievers why they believe Christianity is true.

Many people see 1 Peter 3:13 as a valuable apologetic verse, emphasizing its significance in defending and explaining their faith. However, it is also worth noting that this verse highlights the importance of one's way of life over mere knowledge. "Peter is chiefly concerned with helping his readers work through a proper response to suffering while acting righteously. That this topic has massive apologetic implications shows how closely the lifestyle of the believer is connected to God's revelation of himself in his saints."⁵⁷ In other words, contextually, where this verse appears is regarding how to act while suffering. Therefore, it is not just a verse about having a defense for the faith but imploring believers to live out the faith they are defending.

First Peter 3:15 is not the only verse encouraging Christians to be able to respond to answers to questions about their faith. For example, Jude 22-23 reads, "Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh" (Jude 22-23, NIV). This verse specifically directs believers to show mercy to those in doubt. Additionally, it implores believers to make an effort to reach those who doubt. "Our duty in the presence of the apostasy is to earnestly contend for the faith..."⁵⁸ Likewise, 1 Peter 3:15 tells believers to respond with gentleness and respect. The theme of both verses is to answer questions with mercy, gentleness, and kindness.

Throughout this project, this theme should remain at the forefront.

Moreover, the Epistles written by the apostles contain numerous instances where they encouraged believers to be equipped with the knowledge and wisdom necessary to defend their

⁵⁷ Timothy E. Miller, "The Use of 1 Peter 3:13-17 for Christian Apologetics," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 174, no. 694 (April 2017): 209.

⁵⁸ Keith Brooks, *Summarized Bible: Complete Summary of the New Testament* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 88.

faith. In Colossians 4:5-6, the Apostle Paul advises, "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person" (Col 4:5-6, NIV). This exhortation highlights the importance of being prepared to respond to questions and objections from those outside the faith, emphasizing the need for believers to possess a robust apologetic foundation.

Additionally, the Apostle Peter, known for his unwavering faith and boldness, exhorted believers to be ready to give a defense for their hope. In 1 Peter 3:14-16, he writes:

But even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect (1 Pet 3:14-16, NIV).

Peter's words emphasize that believers should not shy away from engaging in intellectual dialogue or addressing the doubts and objections of others. Instead, they should respond with gentleness and respect while providing a rational and well-reasoned defense of their faith. The Bible is full of other areas that talk about kindness and gentleness. A great example is 2 Timothy 2:24-25. This passage underscores the character qualities that pastors should embody when engaging in apologetics. It emphasizes the importance of kindness, patience, and gentleness, even when addressing opponents or those who hold differing views. The ultimate goal is not to win arguments but to lead others to repentance and a true knowledge of the truth found in Christ.

Christians need to understand that mercy comes naturally to devout followers of Jesus. Jude references it first that Christians should see that they are not good enough for God's favor and that no one else is good enough for God's favor either.⁵⁹ "What is more natural, then, as we understand that we are objects of God's mercy, than that we should be merciful to those who are

⁵⁹ R. C. Lucas and Christopher Green, *The Message of 2 Peter & Jude: The Promise of His Coming* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 226.

on the fringes of the church? The fact that the two different objects of mercy should come so closely together must mean that Jude wants us to understand what the hope of mercy is."⁶⁰

This action research project is not only for believers in general but for pastors exclusively. The Bible speaks on this issue regarding the qualifications of a pastor. For this paper, the terms "elder," "pastor," and "overseer" are used interchangeably to mean the same church position. Titus addresses the qualifications of a pastor and discusses the needs as they relate to the topic of apologetics. Titus 1:9 reads, "He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9, NIV). Teachers, pastors, and leaders should be held to a higher standard. "These leaders must be able to argue for and against, as well as give general exhortations, which requires at least a rudimentary knowledge of rhetoric and apologetics. This is one of the reasons this material has been put in a rhetorically apt format for use in oral teaching and proclamation."⁶¹ Undoubtedly, it is of utmost importance for leaders to possess a deep understanding of Scripture in order to engage in knowledgeable discussions with individuals who hold differing beliefs. Nevertheless, this particular point merely emphasizes the significance of this comprehensive initiative aimed at enhancing the apologetic expertise of pastors.

It is not just direction from Scripture that points to the necessity of this, but there are examples of pastors using apologetics in the Bible. One strong example is in the Book of Acts. Acts 18:27-28, "When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate,

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John*, vol. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 117.

proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah" (Acts 18:27-28, NIV). This verse references that Apollos was not just teaching Christians but was doing the work of apologetics.⁶² "As v. 28 puts it, he thoroughly refuted the arguments of the Jews in Achaia in public, proving (επιδεικνυς) from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah. This last verse reflects the language of public debate used of a contest in which rhetoric is used, which involves arguments (or 'proofs') and refutations offered back and forth to convince the audience."⁶³ This verse demonstrates the early church used apologetics while early church leaders helped offer proof of the hope that lived within them.

Furthermore, Apollos is such a perfect example of the crux of the project of this action project. The example of Apollos in the book of Acts highlights the transformative power of apologetics in the life of a pastor. Apollos was a gifted speaker who passionately proclaimed the message of Christ but lacked a comprehensive understanding of the Scriptures. When Priscilla and Aquila took him aside and provided him with further instruction, Apollos became even more effective in defending the faith. This biblical account underscores the importance of ongoing mentorship and learning for pastors in the realm of apologetics. It encourages pastors to seek guidance from seasoned apologists and engage in continual education to sharpen their skills in presenting a reasoned defense of the Christian faith. Apollos serves as an early biblical benchmark that this type of instruction can be effective.

While the Bible gives backing to the use of apologetics through specific verses, it is also demonstrated by early church leaders. "When speaking in Athens, Paul defended the existence of the Creator by quoting Greek philosophers, without expressly reverting to the biblical

⁶² Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 568.

⁶³ Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 568.

testimony."⁶⁴ Paul demonstrates such a great example of apologetics because he uses what is understood by his audience to articulate his point.

The prominence of apologetics in the early church serves as a powerful testament to its enduring significance. Just as the early church leaders recognized the importance of equipping themselves and others with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in apologetics, today's pastors and church leaders must prioritize the cultivation of apologetic competence within their congregations. By fostering a culture that values intellectual engagement and equipping believers to provide reasoned and persuasive defenses of their faith, pastors and leaders can empower their communities to navigate the challenges of a skeptical world with confidence and clarity.

Conclusion

In Christian teaching and pastoral leadership, the study of apologetics is of great importance. First Peter 3:15 highlights the need for believers to be ready to defend their faith when questioned while also emphasizing the importance of doing so with kindness and respect. This verse urges believers to have a fundamental understanding of their faith and the ability to explain why they believe in Christianity. Other passages, like Jude 22-23, reinforce the theme of responding to questions and doubts with mercy and kindness.

The role of pastors in apologetics is crucial, as they are called to be shepherds and teachers within the church. Titus 1:9 underscores the necessity for pastors to firmly hold to the trustworthy message of the gospel, being equipped to encourage others through sound doctrine and refute opposing views. Pastors should possess a deep understanding of Scripture and engage in knowledgeable discussions with those who hold different beliefs. The example of Apollos in

⁶⁴ Ron Kubsch and Thomas Schirmacher, "Apologetics : Intellectually Bearing Testimony to the Christian Faith," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 46, no. 4 (November 1, 2022): 297.

Acts 18:27-28 further illustrates the use of apologetics in the early church, where he vigorously refuted opponents and proved from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.

Apologetics can also be effectively used by pastors to engage with the broader society. The approach of the Apostle Paul in Athens, where he tailored his message to the cultural context by quoting Greek philosophers, demonstrates the relevance and effectiveness of apologetics in reaching different audiences. By employing reasoned arguments and engaging with the knowledge and perspectives of others, pastors can bridge the gap between faith and the world, offering a defense for the hope that Christians possess.

In essence, apologetics is not merely an academic exercise or an optional pursuit for believers. It is an essential aspect of Christian discipleship, a means by which believers can fulfill the biblical mandate to engage with the doubts and objections of those who question the Christian faith. As pastors and leaders equip themselves and their congregations with apologetic tools, they contribute to the growth and strengthening of the body of Christ, enabling believers to effectively engage with the world and proclaim the truth of the gospel with conviction and love.

In conclusion, the study of apologetics is not only commanded in Scripture but also exemplified by early church leaders and pastors. Pastors, as shepherds and teachers, should strive to develop a comprehensive understanding of apologetics to equip themselves to answer questions, address doubts, and engage with diverse worldviews. By embracing the call to be prepared to defend their faith with gentleness and respect, pastors can effectively fulfill their role as ambassadors of Christ and communicate the hope found in the gospel.

Theoretical Foundations

Throughout the course of the research conducted for the paper at hand, the researcher understood that there exists a dearth of available projects that share a comparable nature with the one being discussed. However, others have remarked on the lack of trained ministers to

accommodate what is being taught into practice. "Perhaps even more disturbing, the chronic propensity to minimize the value of academic theology seems to extend beyond the laity.

Prospective ministers trained within the evangelical academy often show little ability or desire to incorporate a well-formed evangelical theology into their ecclesial duties."⁶⁵

Despite the existence of studies that gauge an individual's foundational knowledge on a particular subject, further educate them on the same, and then retest them to observe an enhanced level of comprehension, no project was discovered that specifically caters to church planters while affording them access to a curriculum that aims to augment their apologetic knowledge. It is this distinctive approach that distinguishes this project from others in the same field.

It has become apparent that there is a significant lack of guidance when it comes to constructing a comprehensive and effective apologetics curriculum. The process of determining the most suitable sequence for delivering such a framework is also unclear. To address this issue, a course has been designed comprised of three distinct modules. These modules delve into the rationale behind faith, the most common arguments against it, and how to respond to committed skeptics. Each module is further divided into multiple sub-sections, which provide a more comprehensive understanding of each core concept.

Although apologetics instruction has been a long-standing fixture in religious institutions and universities, contemporary evidence suggests that a deeper grasp of apologetics can be attained through diligent study. For example, Liberty University utilized what they referred to as the Creation Worldview Test.⁶⁶ David DeWitt desired to see the effects of an apologetics course on students' worldviews and provided a pre and post-test to see the effect the apologetics class

⁶⁵ Gerald Hiestand, "Pastor-Scholar to Professor-Scholar: Exploring the Theological Disconnect between the Academy and the Local Church," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 70, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 356.

⁶⁶ Tom Henderson, Steve Deckard, and David A. DeWitt, "Impact of a Young-Earth Creationist Apologetics Course on Student Creation Worldview," *TJ* 17, no. 1 (April 1, 2003): 111.

would have. He measured what students learned and how students' opinions changed after taking an apologetics class taught from a Young Earth Creationist perspective.⁶⁷ The study found students had significant improvements in every aspect of the Young Earth Creationist worldview.⁶⁸ While the project's goal was to show things specifically from a Young Earth Creationist bent, it showed something much more significant in the process. It showed how a concentrated curriculum, even an apologetic one, altered students' understanding and worldview. It did so through the collection of a pre and post-test as well.

Across the country, there are various courses and programs offered in both academic and religious settings to enhance one's knowledge of apologetics. It goes without saying that the existence of such programs indicates that they do provide some level of understanding to those who pursue them. However, the depth and scope of these programs can vary greatly from one institution to another and, consequently, from one religious community to another. Despite the availability of these programs, it remains unclear if pastors specifically would benefit from a more targeted and comprehensive curriculum in apologetics that could not only enhance their understanding but also ignite their interest in the subject matter.

Victor Nelson embarked on a venture to encourage pastors to incorporate more apologetic examples in their preaching. Although he acknowledges that his project yielded mixed outcomes due to the global COVID-19 pandemic and some inadequacies in the survey methodology, he did observe a notable uptick of 69 percent in the usage of apologetic illustrations.⁶⁹ This promising development can undoubtedly be attributed to the concerted and collaborative efforts of the project.

⁶⁷ Henderson, Deckard, and DeWitt, "Impact of a Young-Earth Creationist," 111.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁶⁹ Victor Henry Nelson Jr., "Teaching Pastors of the Atlantic District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod to Utilize Apologetic Illustrations in Preaching," *The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*, (2021), 77.

There are those who believe that apologetics has become overly focused on academia, including author Gerland Hiestand. He argues that the secularization of Christian scholarship has had a negative impact on the church's message and caused the focus to redirect. "I believe the contextual shift of evangelical theologians from the local church to that of the academy has slanted evangelical theology toward distinctly apologetic concerns; the result is a theological project lacking in ecclesial focus."⁷⁰

There exists a discourse concerning the optimal approach to engage in apologetics with individuals who do not hold religious beliefs or subscribe to atheism. Various articles delve into the biblical evidence and expound on the most effective methods to present arguments. These articles explicate the importance of comprehending one's audience, recognizing the individuals who possess influence over the audience, and employing arguments that carry weight with said audience.⁷¹

Although the articles offer a well-founded biblical framework for employing apologetics as a means of connecting with nonbelievers, they do not provide any guidance on how to train others to do so. This is particularly true for pastors, who may not possess the necessary skills to effectively reach out to nonbelievers. In order to be successful, followers would need to be trained in apologetics and then follow the example of the early church leaders. However, this approach is useless if they lack the knowledge to do so or have only limited knowledge of apologetics.

As previously stated, there exists a theological foundation for this form of education, which holds especially true for those who serve as pastors and leaders within the church. Nevertheless, given the vast array of denominations and the inherent complexities of faith, there

⁷⁰ Hiestand, 357.

⁷¹ Alister E. McGrath "Biblical Models for Apologetics : Part 4, W. H. Griffith Thomas Lectures, Dallas Theological Seminary," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155, no. 620 (October 1, 1998): 393.

is no universal benchmark or examination that a pastor must pass in order to be deemed qualified for instructing the gospel. Consequently, the extent of knowledge possessed by most pastors, especially those who are involved in church planting, remains an elusive mystery, and it is possible that their knowledge base surpasses what is currently estimated.

Conclusion

After conducting research, it has become apparent that there is a lack of comprehensive projects and curricula specifically designed to enhance the apologetic knowledge of church planters and pastors. Although studies have been conducted to gauge individuals' foundational knowledge and the effectiveness of educational interventions, none were found that catered specifically to this target group. This project takes a unique approach to address this gap and highlights the need for a curriculum that comprehensively and effectively addresses the apologetic needs of pastors.

While academic and religious settings offer existing programs and courses in apologetics, it remains unclear whether pastors would benefit from a more targeted and comprehensive curriculum. Although these programs provide some level of understanding to those who pursue them, the depth and scope of these programs can vary significantly. The example of Victor Nelson's project, which aimed to encourage pastors to incorporate apologetic examples in their preaching, demonstrated promising results despite challenges faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This highlights the potential impact of concerted efforts to enhance pastors' apologetic skills even under challenging circumstances.

To engage in apologetics with nonbelievers effectively, pastors need a biblical framework as well as the training and knowledge to connect with them. While articles offer guidance on effective methods of presenting arguments and understanding one's audience, there is a lack of guidance on training pastors and leaders in apologetics. Although the theological foundation for

apologetics education is evident, the extent of pastors' knowledge and training in this area remains uncertain. A well-designed and comprehensive curriculum can address this gap and equip pastors with the necessary skills to engage in apologetics effectively.

In summary, there is a pressing need for a targeted and comprehensive apologetics curriculum for church planters and pastors. The existing gaps in available projects and the varying depth of apologetics programs indicate the necessity for a curriculum that enhances pastors' understanding and skills in this area. With the right curriculum and training, pastors can effectively engage with nonbelievers, present persuasive arguments, and address the challenges and doubts they may face. By equipping pastors with a solid foundation in apologetics, this project can contribute to the growth and effectiveness of the church in engaging with the world around them.

Conclusion

It has been observed that some incoming church planters who are affiliated with the Excel Leadership Network and Transformation Ministries may lack a fundamental understanding of apologetics. To address this issue, a DMIN action research project has been initiated to develop a comprehensive video curriculum that can effectively enhance the pastors' knowledge of apologetics. The main objective is to equip these church planters with the necessary skills and knowledge to teach apologetics with confidence and ease. By providing them with access to a concise apologetics video curriculum, they will have a better grasp of theological concepts, which can ultimately benefit their overall ministry.

After conducting a thorough literature review and examining the theoretical foundation on the subject, it is evident that there is a significant lack of readily available information on the most effective way to instruct apologetics. This is surprising given the clear indication of its importance within Scripture and the heightened responsibility placed upon those who are listed

as pastors or leaders. However, there is a wealth of material available on the most effective ways to reach nonbelievers. This information highlights the fact that once knowledge is obtained, it can be utilized to provide answers to those with faith-based questions through the effective use of apologetics.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that numerous universities and local churches have implemented apologetic curricula, indicating a growing interest and recognition of the importance of this field of study. It is apparent that there is a demand for teaching apologetics, and the effectiveness of such teachings cannot be underestimated. However, it is concerning that modern church planters are not being thoroughly tested or challenged on their qualifications, particularly in the area of apologetics. Therefore, the provision of a comprehensive curriculum for this subject matter would not only be beneficial but also arguably necessary, given the current climate and cultural attitudes towards faith.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter delves into the design of the project, outlining the crucial steps required to secure permission from various networks and the prerequisites for potential participants. It also provides an intricate description of the project's nature and execution, along with an exposition of the tools needed for independent completion. Additionally, it will provide a background to the question of participants. Furthermore, it furnishes a more comprehensive elucidation of the project's scope, thereby enhancing the overall understanding of the project and its implementation.

Intervention Design

The project encompasses a diverse range of church planters, hailing from different geographical locations, possessing various levels of educational training, influenced by different denominations, and ranging in age. Furthermore, each participant has a unique duration of their respective church plant. This was a deliberate decision to showcase the diverse degrees of comprehension of apologetics from pastors and their ministry circumstances. Despite these differences, the participating individuals share a commonality - they belong to either the Excel Leadership Network or Transformation Ministries, possibly both.

To qualify for the study, individuals must meet two primary criteria: they must be a member of either the Excel Leadership Network or Transformation Ministries, and they must have planted a new church or be in the process of planting a church. In other words, even though the church has not officially started, all the necessary steps to becoming a church have begun. While there is no time limit on the age of the church, there will be no consideration for pastors who have planted churches outside of these networks as they would not meet all the

requirements regardless of the age of the church. Additionally, this project does have IRB approval (see Appendix L).

The results of extensive textual research and analysis show that there has never been a project like this focused on apologetics and church planting. Across the country, universities and colleges offer courses on the topic of apologetics. However, this particular project offers an unparalleled experience that is not the norm for standard academic courses. The author is not delusional enough to think that this is the first apologetic course offered. However, it is categorically different from an academic setting because there is no grade measurement, and the video portion of the project is all self-paced.

Moreover, this project is unique in that it exclusively involves church planters as participants and aims to gauge their foundational knowledge and progress after completing the project. While the requirements to plant a church vary by network and denomination, there are no universal rules for what is needed to start a church. As a result, there is no hard data on the apologetic knowledge of church planters or pastors in general, for that matter. Also, information about enrollment in academic courses is unlikely to be broken down by church planters or future church planters. Additionally, in contrast to typical college courses, this project does not involve homework assignments - participants will only learn through video lectures.

All project participants completed the Discovery Center¹ process before approval for their involvement in the church planting ministry. Each planter is either in the process of starting their church or has officially begun having church services following the Discovery Center process. Regardless of the planter's background and apologetic knowledge, a pre-project questionnaire determines the planter's baseline knowledge and, by extension, their experience. (see Appendix G). Therefore, the project will avoid any participant with a master's degree,

¹ See Chapter 1, Ministry Context.

specifically in apologetics, to avoid obvious outliers in the pre-project data. However, other advanced degrees may be part of the project, including those with theology master's degrees. Individuals who express interest in taking part in the study will be invited to complete the pre-screening questionnaire, which is a crucial component of the screening procedure. A specific question on the questionnaire inquires whether the respondent possesses an advanced degree, particularly in apologetics. Once all the candidates have responded to the questionnaire, those who possess an advanced degree in apologetics will be excluded from participation in the study, and their data will be expunged from the project.

Table 1. Research Project Overview and Design.

Research Project Overview and Design	
Step 1	Send out emails to pastors in both networks.
Step 2	Record six sessions of curriculum from outlines.
Step 3	Upload all six sessions to private YouTube link.
Step 4	Determine number of participants, ensure not over max.
Step 5	Randomly choose candidates to interview for their thoughts on apologetics.
Step 6	Conduct interviews and note pre-curriculum apologetic thoughts.
Step 7	Proceed through six-week timeline and answer any questions that may come up along the way.
Step 8	Send out post-curriculum questionnaire to participants.
Step 9	Randomly choose candidates to participate in focus group to determine thoughts on apologetics post-curriculum.
Step 10	Analyze the data through interviews, questionnaires, and focus group to find any common trends.
Step 11	Disseminate if the project hits a post-questionnaire success rate of 75%.
Step 12	Deliver results and synthesize them into project paper.

In order to ensure the accuracy and objectivity of the intervention, a questionnaire has been selected as the primary tool for data collection (see Appendices C & I). The objective is to gather data in a data-driven manner without relying on subjective opinions. To achieve this goal,

Google Forms will be used to assess the project participants across multiple demographics such as age, duration of church planting, apologetic backgrounds, and location. To establish a baseline understanding of apologetics knowledge, a pre-questionnaire (see Appendix C) will be administered before the intervention. To determine the impact of a minimum six-week apologetics course on the pastors' overall understanding of apologetics, a post-questionnaire (see Appendix I) will be administered following the curriculum.

The pre-questionnaire is there to provide a base knowledge understanding for all participants. Questions will be covered throughout the curriculum in the pre-questionnaire. However, a few of the questions will not be covered. The purpose of this is to examine whether lateral knowledge of apologetics will help provide an increase in knowledge. Lateral, meaning it is not explicitly covered but in the same field. Perhaps the participants research more apologetics on their own, or the general study of apologetics increases overall apologetic understanding.

Still, the project explicitly addresses the bulk of the questions. Initially, the pre-questionnaire would allow the participants to write their answers to questions. However, an analysis revealed that the act of grading these answers subsequently would necessitate the introduction of subjectivity, thus potentially distorting the data in favor of portraying a positive outlook for the project. As a result, the author adopted the multiple-choice format for the pre and post-questionnaires.

There are drawbacks to the multiple-choice format. For starters, a good portion of apologetics is challenging to define and often subjective. Answers and definitions were provided in the most favorable and vague circumstances to be as inclusive as possible. Constructing plausible yet ultimately flawed choices is central to the effectiveness of multiple-choice questions. These alternatives should not be readily identifiable as patently incorrect, as this would compromise the assessment's integrity. Instead, they should represent viable but

ultimately unsound options, provoking participants to engage analytically with the material. The ethical dimension of assessment design necessitates an avoidance of deception. The objective is to stimulate thoughtful consideration rather than to lead participants into erroneous choices. Questions or answer choices that mislead or obfuscate undermine the assessment's ability to gauge participants' comprehension accurately.

Many of the questions, outside of the preliminary name and project agreement, allowed the participants to answer, "I am not sure." There are several justifications for this approach. Firstly, it affords participants the opportunity to acknowledge their lack of knowledge regarding a particular question, and subsequently, the post-questionnaire can ascertain if their understanding changed. Secondly, it relieves participants from feeling compelled to hazard a guess when they are unsure of the answer. By omitting such responses, there is a risk of introducing bias into the pre-curriculum data, as it overlooks the potential of participants making arbitrary guesses that may accidentally yield correct answers.

Additionally, the deliberate exclusion of a requirement for participants to provide a guess or approximation when confronted with an unknown answer is crucial to preserve the integrity of the data. Forcing participants to guess or speculate may lead to inaccurate responses, potentially distorting the true extent of their knowledge. By abstaining from such coercive tactics, the research design emphasizes the importance of genuine responses, aligning with the objective of obtaining an accurate assessment of participants' pre-curriculum knowledge levels.

Participants will be requested to furnish details regarding their educational background, specifically specifying their level of education and whether they possess an advanced degree in the field of apologetics. Collecting information about participants' educational qualifications serves several valuable purposes within the context of apologetics studies. This will provide a knowledge base and help with research analysis post-curriculum.

One of the initial questions pertains to the definition and significance of apologetics. This is a crucial question to pose, particularly when working on a project that centers on this subject matter. Gaining an insight into the participant's comprehension and knowledge of the topic is critical to establishing the appropriate tone for the entire project. The wrong answers were a play on the word "apologizing" and an in-depth study of the Bible. On the surface, most pastors would seem to know the term apologetics or perhaps even look it up after being invited to the study. However, it is valuable because knowing the definition of apologetics and understanding apologetics are two vastly different things.

The next question stayed with the understanding of the word apologetics. However, more than that, it helps establish a basic understanding of the history of the Bible. The participants can choose between the correct answer, Greek or Latin, or it is a metaphor, as well as the standard "I'm not sure." If they know the term originated from the New Testament, they can surmise it is mostly likely Greek in origin. This question is to continue establishing a baseline of knowledge and ease the participants into the more complex questions.

The following question centers around the cosmological argument. The correct response for the cosmological argument is that the universe had to have a cause outside of itself. The wrong responses all center around the idea of space. Two focus on the idea that mankind's location within the cosmos proved God's existence. While the other one claims the vastness of space is the definition for the cosmological argument. The question is here because the cosmological argument is part of the project's curriculum. Additionally, it is a classic argument for God's existence. Even if the participants have heard it stated differently, if they are familiar with the argument, they should be able to answer correctly.

The next question is, "Does absolute truth exist?" This question pertains to a line of reasoning within apologetics that if absolute truth exists, it affects human understanding of

morality and can point to an absolute truth of God the Creator. While it may not be an argument in and of itself, it points to other arguments. This question does not need to be multiple choice because there are only two answers, "Yes" or "No." As a result, this question does not include the "I am not sure" response. Plus, it seems fitting that a question about the inherent nature of absolute truth only has two responses.

The fifth question asks if there is a difference between relative and absolute truth. This question is there to determine if the participants view these terms to be the same in nature. It helps establish that, regardless of a correct answer to the prior question, they do not fully understand absolute truth if they view relative and absolute truth the same. The inherent nature of relative and absolute are at odds with one another. This question does allow the participant to say they are not sure.

Question number six pertains to the definition of the fine-tuning of the universe. The correct response to this question is that the improbable existence of humanity ultimately points to a creator. One of the wrong answers is that it is a theory that demonstrates that evolution can only occur through intelligent design. While including some buzzwords occasionally connected to apologetics, this response aims not to confuse participants. This question aims to generate more believable incorrect responses and to distinguish recognition-based responses. Included in the wrong response is that the fine-tuning of the universe is an experiment that can prove God and the length of Christianity proves God's existence.

The following question is whether participants understand the term "worldview." Among the practical applications of apologetics, the method is to understand the worldview of the person conversing about faith. This task will be challenging in practice if there is no understanding of worldview. This question will help establish if participants are even familiar with the term. They can also respond with "Maybe."

The eighth question delves deeper into the concept of worldview. Rather than inquiring about the participant's comprehension of the term, it probes whether participants possess a worldview of their own. Intriguingly, this query bears a resemblance to the notion of absolute truth, for responding in the negative, that one lacks a worldview paradoxically becomes a worldview in itself. This intriguing twist serves to solidify an understanding of the participants' grasp of the previous question, as their response to this inquiry carries significant implications for the project.

The following question involves the law of causality. It simply asks participants if they understand it or not. This is an essential part of apologetic arguments. It asserts that every event or phenomenon must have a preceding cause or causes. In an apologetic context, where one seeks to defend a particular belief or worldview, the law of causality is helpful to bolster arguments for the existence of God. Many of these questions are foundational in understanding modern apologetics and will help gauge how much the participants need to learn.

The next question aims to determine whether non-believers adopt their faith gradually or all at once. This is important to establish the worldview of those involved in the project. In apologetics, it is common for people to feel the need to convert non-believers by the end of a conversation. However, it takes time for people to process the information presented and adjust their worldviews according to what they learn. Therefore, it can be surmised that non-believers generally come to faith gradually. If participants feel the other way, their answers may change by participating in the project and hearing more about apologetic methods.

The last question of this session asks the participants if they believe there is an absolutely correct version of theology that is knowable on earth. This question is also a yes, no, or maybe response. The nature of this applies to the participant's worldview. From an apologetic standpoint, they can disrupt progress made with a non-believer by attempting to correct the non-

believer's theology before they even believe. This question will help determine whether the participants are more inclined toward this thinking.

The following section differs from the previous multiple-choice format. It focuses on participants' self-perceived ability to handle specific apologetic arguments. In this part, participants must assess common apologetic arguments and rate their own capabilities on a scale from one to ten for each argument. This section's inclusion is for several reasons. Firstly, it helps to understand participants' self-perception, offering insight into their confidence levels when dealing with apologetic discussions. It allows the project to glimpse how they view their strengths and weaknesses in this intellectual domain. Self-assessment provides a unique window into participants' self-perceived competence and confidence levels. It encourages individuals to introspect and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses within the field. This self-awareness can be a valuable tool for personal growth and development, aiding participants in identifying areas where they may require further study or exploration. Lastly, this allows data that can explore the correlations between self-perception, confidence, and actual proficiency in apologetics and opens up avenues for in-depth studies that enhance our understanding of apologetics education outcomes.

Moreover, these self-assessment questions are for multiple purposes. One key goal is to track and evaluate potential shifts in participants' self-perception resulting from their completed curriculum. Since the curriculum covers various apologetic arguments, comparing participants' self-assessments before and after exposure to the curriculum helps assess the educational experience's impact. This assessment reveals whether participants have become more confident, less confident, or remained unchanged in response to the curriculum content.

It is essential to note that apologetic arguments were intentionally selected apologetic arguments for this self-assessment section. While the curriculum explicitly addresses some

arguments, it omits others. This deliberate choice of arguments allows the project to investigate whether participants have gained confidence in handling arguments not explicitly covered after engaging with the curriculum. In essence, this section serves as a comprehensive tool to measure the curriculum's multifaceted effects on participants' self-perception and ability to engage in apologetic discourse effectively. These statements range from the more apologetically involved to more standard questions that even the less apologetically inclined pastor can likely handle with ease.

This first argument is "The Bible has too many contradictions." Critics often argue that the Bible contains numerous inconsistencies and contradictions. Nevertheless, pastors regularly delve into the intricacies of the Bible during their weekly discussions and are accustomed to encountering individuals who find it challenging to reconcile different aspects of the text. This observation highlights the participants' level of confidence in their ability to navigate the complexities of the Bible.

The following argument is "All religions have part of it right." This is for the participants to determine if, when faced with this type of argument, they are comfortable handling it. It is not uncommon for non-believers to believe a portion of multiple religions. Because the curriculum includes this, it necessitates pre and post-measurements to determine if it increases confidence levels.

The next argument is, "It is impossible to know that God exists." Agnosticism posits that the existence of God is inherently unknowable. This perspective often stems from the belief that God is transcendent and not subject to empirical observation or scientific verification. On the surface, this is not a debate, but in the course of apologetics, it is something that participants will need to be able to address.

Another common argument addressed is, "I do not believe a good God sends people to Hell." Measuring the confidence in this argument is helpful because people do not always believe in God. However, they do not agree with commonly held Christian beliefs about God or struggle to understand why God would allow certain things. The curriculum does not explicitly address this argument, but its inclusion aims to determine if other apologetic knowledge increases the confidence level.

Another common argument that will be measured is: "The Bible has gone through too many translations to be accurate at this point." Some arguments pertain to the existence of God or arguments on whether God is good, and then there are arguments regarding the reliability of the Bible. In order to be effective, apologetics must proficiently handle both sides of the debate. This means not only defending the faith and presenting compelling arguments for the existence of God or the goodness of God but also providing well-reasoned responses to challenges to the Bible's authenticity due to its history of translations. The curriculum includes a discussion of part of this argument. Along the same lines is the argument that "Humans wrote the Bible." This argument deals with the idea of biblical inerrancy. Regardless of the personal conviction of the apologist on the doctrine of inerrancy, the validity of the Bible needs to be able to be argued proficiently. This argument ultimately pertains again to the validity of the Bible, which ultimately leads to the validity of the Gospels and the life of Jesus Christ.

This leads to the following argument: "I am not sure Jesus existed." This partly is a discussion regarding the validity of the Bible but also a discussion around the historicity of Jesus. Perhaps participants will feel confident that the Bible proves the existence of Jesus, or they might point to other historical documents. Regardless, this confidence will be measured in the pre and post-questionnaire and addressed as part of the curriculum. The next argument frequently focuses on the resurrection if there is agreement that Jesus existed but lingering skepticism.

Participants must gauge their confidence in addressing the statement: "Maybe the disciples were all just overcome with grief and believed they saw Jesus again." The questionnaire further explains that statement with the caveat: "Referring to the appearances of Jesus after the resurrection." The curriculum explicitly addresses the topic and provides guidance on how to respond. Skepticism with the disciplines carries over to the following argument: "The men who wrote the Bible just wanted power and glory." This argument is about the disciples and the resurrection and biblical inerrancy. While the arguments may seem similar, they all require a different approach and a different knowledge base to address them adequately. The participants may measure themselves the same for these various arguments, but they could also measure differently, which would require them to acknowledge the intricacies of each.

The upcoming arguments all center around the concept of God as the Creator. In the field of apologetics, discussions often extend beyond the mere existence of God and delve into questions regarding His nature, particularly focusing on whether He is inherently good and genuinely cares for humanity. Therefore, participants will assess their confidence in addressing the following statement: "God seems egotistical because He needs people to worship Him." This argument is significant within the realm of apologetics because it probes deep into the theological aspects of God's character and the nature of divine worship. Additionally, participants will determine their confidence in addressing the problem of evil through the argument, "God cannot exist because of all the evil in the world." This further addresses the nature of God not in how He views Himself but in how He views humanity.

Some debates revolve around religion and its impact on humanity. For example, some might argue, "I am a good person, and I don't believe in God." This argument encompasses the nature of God, morality, and the Christian faith. It questions the meaning of "good" and what constitutes access to heaven. The curriculum covers this topic and delves into the concept of

morality. Morality is particularly relevant when discussing "goodness" and the history of religion. The statement "Religion has caused so many problems" is also a topic of discussion. This statement does not question whether God exists but argues whether believing in Him is good. It raises important questions about religion's role in society and its impact on humanity. Measuring their confidence in addressing this statement forces participants to confront the complexities of religion and its impact on humanity.

Lastly, the assertion that "God cannot logically exist" is a philosophical argument that challenges the very concept of God's existence. In the realm of apologetics, addressing this argument requires a thoughtful and nuanced response that engages with various aspects of philosophy and theology. Earlier in the questionnaire, there was a focus on the scientific reasoning behind the existence of God. However, since the curriculum covers not just science but logic, this needs to be measured on both sides of the curriculum.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Determining success in the context of apologetic knowledge can be a challenging task. Nevertheless, the intervention hopes to elevate participants' understanding of apologetics. To evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention, a successful outcome would be one in which at least 75 percent of the participants demonstrate an increase in their post-test knowledge. It is reasonable that at least half of the participants will experience a natural improvement in their apologetic skills. However, given the increased awareness, a higher standard for success must be set. Therefore, aiming for 75 percent of participants to experience growth in knowledge is a reasonable goal. It is unnecessary to set a specific bar for their previous score, as any score that exceeds their baseline would be considered a success toward the 75 percent target.

The participants will be evaluated together to determine the project's overall success because, regardless of background, the project's goal is for 75 percent of the participants to score

better on the post-test than on the pre-test. However, because of the various backgrounds of the participants, it makes sense to divide them into different groups to see how their backgrounds may affect their overall performance. Therefore, all participants follow the same program but will be subdivided after the project to determine how their academic knowledge and age affected their success.

The best participants for the study are those who meet the criteria previously outlined, which are pastors in either Excel Leadership Network or Transformation Ministries and have either planted or are in the process of planting a church. Additionally, those pastors will be the only ones accepted. However, it might prove most interesting for the participants to have little to no previous academic apologetic knowledge to see truly what growth can be achieved during the course of the project. Ideally, the best participants would be willing to complete the project to its completion and do so at a pace that makes sense. The goal is to have the project completed within eight weeks.

The reason for selecting those previously described is that it addresses the overall thesis, which conveys that the average church planter in Excel Leadership Network or Transformation Ministries is not equipped in apologetics to the level necessary for church planting.

Alternatively, perhaps the more significant issue at hand is that they are potentially unaware of the current status of apologetic knowledge. Inviting pastors outside of those networks makes the scope of the entire project much more extensive as it would be anyone who planted a church.

Since the process of church planting varies from organization to organization, keeping within the networks allows some consistency regarding the circumstances that led to their church planting.

If it were open to any church pastor, it would drastically change the parameters mainly because it would allow those who did not start their church to be part of the project.

It is uncertain what level of interest the project will generate among the church planters who will be contacted to participate. While this may not appear to be an issue at first, it should be noted that the maximum number of participants is limited to one hundred. If more than one hundred participants successfully complete the project, the data of the last ten individuals who complete the post-project questionnaires will, unfortunately, have to be dropped in order to ensure that the maximum number of participants remains at one hundred.

Since it seems to be a foregone conclusion that not all participants who sign up for the project see it through to completion, the goal is to stack as many people as possible to compensate for that. Additionally, having more people creates a more significant amount of data to analyze. Anyone who does not fully complete the project from beginning to end will be excluded from the overall data for analysis. They did not receive the entire curriculum, and there would not be information on how much they learned, so their pre-questionnaire might taint the results since they cannot be part of the 75 percent goal.

Participants will be notified via email requesting their assistance in the project (see Appendix B). The networks also provide information for all church planters assuming that not everyone or even most will participate. The approval of both Excel Leadership Network and Transformation Ministries is needed to allow pastors in their networks to participate and their network names to be used in the project (see Appendices J & K). Both organizations have already agreed to participate in the project. Both networks are waiting for the next steps. The email outlines the requirements of the project and the participant's role in it. It also details the nature of the project and that their expertise and knowledge are not being challenged but are helping to either prove or perhaps disprove a hypothesis.

Each participant's consent will be given after being informed of the entire scope of the project and ensuring complete confidentiality (see Appendix A). There is no reason for them not

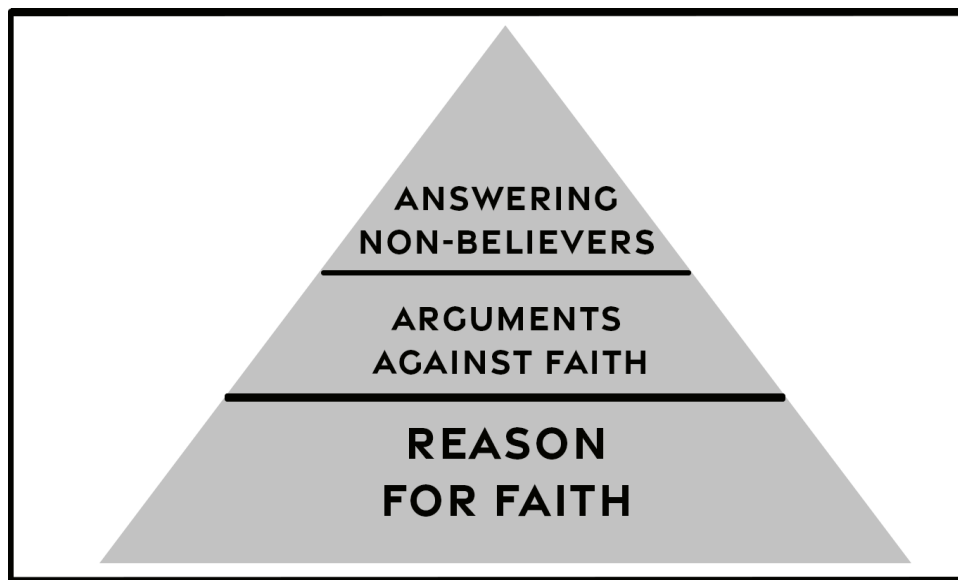
to be dishonest in their pre-curriculum and post-knowledge base exams. Additionally, their specific information will not be kept, and it will not be provided to the public. Given the project's limited scope, time, and commitment, it should be easier to commit to the process. It can be ensured that each participant knows the details and length of the project. Furthermore, the commitment desired from the participants is for the entire length of the project. The goal is to try to circumvent people who might abandon the project midway through as much as possible. Plus, being honest about the project's scope on the front end allows participants to make a more educated choice when deciding to participate in the project (see Appendix C).

The project will be a video curriculum based on the overall topic of apologetics and responses to common questions. The video curriculum features the author as the instructor addressing the necessary framework for apologetics. There are specific words on the screen, and graphics are utilized when necessary to provide emphasis and punctuate a point. The course is designed to last six weeks but can be completed at the participant's own pace if their schedule allows.

Church planters have extremely busy schedules.² Therefore, videos will be uploaded with a private address on YouTube to ensure the most effortless viewing ability without needing to download. The series lasts six weeks with three different segments, each two weeks in length. The time limit goal for each video session is under ten minutes. While this is a lofty goal, given the information that needs conveying, the thesis is that pastors can increase their knowledge with minimal instruction. The project goes on for eight weeks, noting that it is only six weeks of curriculum. However, there needs to be time to onboard other potential participants as the project gets started. Potential participants will not be added after two weeks into the six-week

² Tanner, Thomas C., "Healthy Church Planting: Using Spiritual Disciplines in Training Church Planters," (PhD diss., Asbury Theological Seminary).

curriculum because it takes six weeks for people to complete the program. After that, they would be forced to move quicker than outlined. It is meant to be at their leisure over the six weeks. The project curriculum has three distinct segments designed to build upon the previous segment. The goal for each segment, which consists of two weeks each, builds from the previous segment (see figure 1). The starting segment builds the foundation, with the last one being more nuanced and less common apologetic discussions. The starting segment, The Reason for Faith, builds the



foundation for the rest of the course. The last lesson, Answering Non-Believers, is more nuanced and less common apologetic discussions (see Appendix D). This segment teaches why Christians can confidently believe that God exists. These cover broad-based arguments such as the fine-tuning argument and how the universe's very nature points to God. This also ties into the cosmological argument as well. Additionally, other solid reasons for God will also be showcased here. Outside of more scientific and reasoned arguments, this segment also covers how Christians can believe in the resurrection and the evidence surrounding it.

Figure 1. The building of each segment of the curriculum.

The second segment is the standard arguments against faith (see Appendix E). This segment covers common questions or specific doubt bases. Questions like "How can God be good if there is so much evil in the world?" or "Aren't all religions partly true?" This segment does not provide answers to all questions but teaches more of a foundation on the nature of these questions and the Christian point of view. This section helps with the agnostic worldview, and the more detailed questions will be handled in the next segment.

The last segment responds to devout non-believers (see Appendix F). Here, participants learn about morality and take a deeper dive into moral relativism, especially as it pertains to absolute truth. Additionally, they experience a discussion about the nature of miracles and their role in the Christian worldview. Lastly, this segment works toward combining all the previous segments to coalesce into a compelling, reasonable argument with non-believers.

In order to triangulate the research, there will be three different modes of information gathering. The central parts of the project are the pre and post-questionnaires (see Appendices C & I). Additionally, prior to the start of the curriculum, the author compiles individual interviews with multiple participants to gauge their current apologetic knowledge (see Appendix G). Finally, in the end, there are a couple of focus groups to determine how members of each respective network feel about the curriculum and their view on apologetics post-completion progress (see Appendix H).

Potential Biases

Various biases can influence participants in the study of apologetics, potentially impacting their perspectives, approaches, and, ultimately, the project itself. These biases encompass denominational beliefs and theological leanings and can shape pastors' approach to apologetic arguments. For example, certain denominational beliefs may limit participants'

understanding of the nature of apologetics. Similarly, pastors may hold preconceived notions of apologetics based on their theological bias.

Among the biases that pastors may carry, their theological perspective is one of the most significant. This bias can impact the selection of apologetic arguments and the framing of theological discussions within congregations. Pastors from different theological backgrounds may prioritize arguments that align with their theological convictions. For instance, pastors with conservative theological backgrounds tend to emphasize defending and upholding traditional doctrines and beliefs. In contrast, those from more liberal traditions tend to prioritize arguments and discussions that are more open to accommodating modern perspectives and views.

Theological bias can affect the extent to which pastors engage with apologetic topics that resonate with their theological positions while neglecting others. It can also influence pastors' response to challenges to their faith, affecting their openness to apologetic arguments that challenge their theological beliefs. For instance, a pastor who firmly believes in the reliability of the Bible may be more inclined to accept apologetic arguments that support biblical inerrancy and less willing to evaluate arguments challenging the Bible's historical accuracy critically. This confirmation bias can limit the pastor's ability to engage with diverse apologetic viewpoints and may hinder constructive dialogue with congregants who hold different perspectives.

Personal beliefs and faith experiences can also impact participants' willingness to engage with apologetics. Some individuals may be more open to questioning their beliefs, while others may be more defensive or resistant to apologetic arguments that challenge their understanding of their faith. Personal experiences in ministry and interactions with congregants may shape pastors' views on apologetics. Those who have encountered more skepticism or questions from their congregants might see a greater need for apologetics, while others may not perceive it as necessary.

Additionally, the successful implementation of any educational program hinges on a series of foundational assumptions, and one particularly critical assumption in the curriculum at hand pertains to the honesty of participants in their pre-curriculum and post-knowledge examinations. While trust in participants' integrity is undeniably crucial, it is equally important to acknowledge the potential biases that can creep in due to participant self-reporting.

One of the primary concerns regarding self-reporting is that it can lead individuals to provide responses that they perceive as expected rather than reflecting their genuine beliefs or knowledge. In the context of apologetics education, participants might feel inclined to overstate their initial knowledge or exaggerate their post-curriculum gains, driven by a desire to align with perceived expectations or to present themselves in a more favorable light. This inclination to present oneself positively can distort the accuracy of self-reported data. This does not include the bias in their ability. Especially in the pre-curriculum, participants could measure themselves confidently high when they only think they understand the argument. While the questionnaire measures confidence level in handling arguments, since it is all self-perceived, the participants may evaluate themselves in how they wish they were versus how they actually are.

The curriculum's structure prominently positions the author as the sole instructor, a setup that carries the potential for introducing biases in both content delivery and the subsequent evaluation process. This configuration prompts consideration of the significant influence the author's perspective and teaching style may wield over participants throughout the course. The following delves into the potential implications of this instructional model, recognizing that while it offers unique advantages, it also brings forth specific challenges that warrant attention.

The author's selection and incorporation of specific topics and content within the curriculum may stem from their personal beliefs, values, and priorities. This subjective approach can have positive and negative implications regarding the presentation of information. On one

hand, it can stimulate students' critical thinking skills by questioning the material presented and engaging in rigorous debate. Conversely, it can lead to a biased representation of the subject matter, potentially marginalizing alternative viewpoints or less common apologetic discussions.

At its core, the author's role as the primary instructor in the curriculum provides a cohesive and unified educational experience. Participants benefit from a consistent voice and approach throughout the course, ensuring the material is coherent. The author's deep understanding of the subject matter, expertise, and passion for the topic can undoubtedly enhance the quality of instruction. Consequently, participants may appreciate the clarity and depth of knowledge conveyed by the author, fostering a more engaging and informative learning environment.

However, this very advantage brings to light a potential bias inherent in the instructional model. Participants may inherently absorb the author's perspective, framing, and interpretation of apologetic concepts. This influence can manifest in several ways, beginning with the course content itself. The author's choice of topics, emphasis on certain arguments, and potential omission of alternative viewpoints may reflect personal biases, conscious or unconscious. Consequently, participants may be exposed primarily to the author's preferred apologetic approaches and arguments, limiting their exposure to the diversity of thought within the field.

Furthermore, the teaching style employed by the author can subtly shape participants' reception of the material. The author's pedagogical approach, teaching methods, communication style, and presentation techniques can significantly impact participants' engagement and understanding. Participants may find themselves more receptive to an instructor whose style resonates with their learning preferences, potentially leading to a deeper connection with the content. Conversely, those learning styles that differ from the author's approach might encounter challenges in fully grasping the material.

To address these potential biases, the project needs to incorporate methods for triangulating self-reported data with objective measures of knowledge growth. Utilizing diverse assessment tools and evaluation methods can enhance the curriculum's ability to gauge participant progress accurately. To achieve a more comprehensive understanding of participant development, the project will combine personal interviews, focus groups, and self-reported data with a pre and post-curriculum questionnaire, reducing the potential influence of these various biases.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the success of the apologetic knowledge intervention project hinges on several key factors and considerations. The project's primary goal is to enhance participants' understanding of apologetics, with a specific target of at least 75 percent of participants demonstrating an increase in their post-test knowledge. This target addresses the knowledge gap in apologetics within the selected networks of Excel Leadership Network and Transformation Ministries.

The project focuses on a carefully selected group of participants, primarily pastors involved in church planting within these networks, to achieve this goal. This group represents the project's core demographic, aligning with the thesis that many church planters lack adequate apologetic knowledge for their ministry. The project's scope remains limited to these networks to maintain consistency in the church planting process and to facilitate meaningful comparisons.

Recruitment efforts will strive to engage as many participants as possible, with a maximum limit of one hundred individuals. While acknowledging that not all participants may complete the project, a larger pool of participants ensures robust data for analysis. Participants who do not complete the entire curriculum will be excluded from the final analysis to maintain the integrity of the project's goals.

The curriculum comprises three segments designed to build participants' apologetic knowledge progressively. These segments cover foundational concepts, common challenges to faith, and responses to non-believers' inquiries. The course structure aims to provide a comprehensive and well-rounded education in apologetics. However, the project also recognizes potential biases that may influence participants' apologetic engagement. These biases encompass denominational beliefs, theological leanings, and personal faith experiences. Theological bias, in particular, can significantly impact the selection of apologetic arguments and the willingness to engage with diverse perspectives.

The project also acknowledges potential biases in self-reporting, where participants may provide responses they believe align with expectations rather than their genuine beliefs. Moreover, the instructional model, with the author as the primary instructor, introduces the potential for content and presentation biases. While this approach ensures a cohesive educational experience, it also necessitates awareness of the author's influence on participants' perspectives.

The intervention will ensure that the church planters from Excel Leadership Network and Transformation Ministries will receive some or perhaps additional training in basic apologetics. With the intervention, they would no longer remain undereducated and would now utilize apologetics in their interactions. Additionally, this overall knowledge is likely to seep into their preaching and help persuade those who need apologetic reasoning in order to begin believing. Furthermore, it brings awareness to both networks if the problem is prevalent and allows each to make further modifications to their onboarding process. Alternatively, at the very least, increased questioning as to the value of apologetics in the church planting process.

In summary, the success of the apologetic knowledge intervention project rests on a multifaceted approach that involves careful participant selection, targeted curriculum design, and an awareness of potential biases. While challenges and uncertainties exist, the project aims to

contribute meaningfully to enhancing apologetic knowledge among pastors engaged in church planting, ultimately benefiting their ministry and the broader Christian community.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The initial goal of this project was to have both respective networks send out an email offering participation. Unfortunately, the networks became less receptive as the beginning of the project drew near, at least concerning the entirety of the organizations receiving emails about participating in the project, which was part of the originally arranged agreement. As a result, the scope of the project became much more limited in extent, and the number of participant possibilities significantly shrank in size. The range initially included thousands of church planters from across the country. However, it ended up being participants who, through individual contact, were asked to participate in the project. It is important to note that upon completing the project, the Transformation Ministries Network experienced a change in leadership. Consequently, the organization is currently deliberating the future utilization of this apologetic curriculum.

Nevertheless, all participants still met the qualifications outlined for the project's scope, and the project reached a minimum of ten participants. While this drastically decreased the number of participants, it likely increased the project completion percentage because participants could individually have direct contact. However, while this likely increased the project's completion, it still did not have a 100 percent completion rate. Eighty-five percent of the original participants completed the project, and 15 percent only started it. The 15 percent did the pre-questionnaire portion but did not watch all the videos to take the post-questionnaire. It is unknown whether the participants finished the curriculum and did not take the post-curriculum questionnaire or if they abandoned the videos sometime before.

Pre-Curriculum Interviews

Engaging in pre-curriculum discussions with participants yielded a range of perspectives on the definition and role of apologetics. While participants offered diverse definitions, a more cohesive viewpoint emerged regarding the practical role of apologetics within their congregational settings. These discussions shed light on participants' perceptions of the priorities and concerns of congregants, shedding light on the utilization of apologetics in the context of contemporary church engagement.

Regarding definitions of apologetics, the participants' responses spanned a spectrum. One participant aligned with the curriculum's definition, describing apologetics as "a defense of the faith." Another participant approached apologetics from a slightly different angle, interpreting it as "proving the existence of God." Lastly, another participant articulated a broader perspective, viewing apologetics as "addressing questions" related to individuals' faith journeys. While these definitions encompass varying aspects of apologetics, they all underscore the concept of providing reasoned responses and addressing inquiries related to matters of faith.

However, these participants found greater agreement in their perceptions of the role that apologetics plays within the context of their church communities. They each concluded on their own that, by the time individuals arrive at their congregations, there is often a foundational belief in the existence of God. This shared perspective suggests that newcomers to their churches primarily focus not on existential questions regarding God's existence but on understanding God's goodness and the potential for their faith to bring meaning to their lives.

This emphasis on God's benevolence and the pursuit of a meaningful life reflects the shifting landscape of spiritual inquiries among congregants. It implies that contemporary churchgoers are often more concerned with the practical implications of faith and its relevance to

their daily lives. Consequently, the participants noted that they do not devote significant time to apologetics in church settings.

Notably, all interviewees struggled to recall recent instances when apologetics had taken center stage in conversations with new congregants. This observation underscores the notion that, in practice, apologetics may not be the focal point of these interactions. Instead, discussions often revolve around topics that resonate more directly with individuals' immediate spiritual and existential needs.

One participant candidly expressed the belief that apologetic knowledge might not be of paramount importance for pastors. Building upon the premise that most newcomers to church already believe in God's existence, they proposed that pastors should prioritize a deeper understanding of the Bible and theology. This perspective aligns with the evolving priorities of congregants, emphasizing the need for spiritual guidance, ethical teachings, and theological insight that resonates with contemporary life.

One of the participants in the study exhibited a distinct perspective on the value and importance of apologetics within the context of the modern church. While acknowledging that their knowledge in this area was limited and characterized as "cursory," this participant passionately underscored the pivotal role that apologetics could play in shaping the church's future. Their viewpoint revolved around the notion that the pastor's capacity to engage in high-level discussions on apologetics was not just valuable but, in fact, held the potential to influence the trajectory of the contemporary church significantly.

Interestingly, despite the varying viewpoints, the participants expressed enthusiasm about the project, indicating a willingness to engage with apologetics to gain additional biblical insight. This openness to increased apologetic understanding highlights the participant's commitment to expanding their knowledge and effectively addressing a wide range of congregational needs.

The pre-curriculum discussions with participants illuminated a nuanced perspective on the definition and role of apologetics within contemporary church contexts. While definitions varied, a shared emphasis emerged on the practical relevance of faith, God's goodness, and the pursuit of meaning in congregational engagements. The observed dearth of recent apologetic conversations with newcomers suggests that apologetics may occupy a less prominent role in these interactions. However, participants' openness to acquiring apologetic knowledge underscores the dynamic nature of religious discourse and the ongoing need for informed engagement with diverse spiritual inquiries within church communities.

Questionnaire Results

The preliminary questions were to ensure participants knew the scope of the study and to determine a baseline of apologetic knowledge as it pertains to this study. Out of the participants, only 9 percent had a high school education, while the rest had at least a college degree. In addition, 27 percent of the participants had a master's degree, and 9 percent had a terminal degree. Finally, while it was not a disqualifying factor, 0 percent of the participants had an advanced degree, specifically in apologetics. As a result, each portion of education received some representation within the project.

Next, there were twenty-five knowledge-based questions for each participant. In addition, there were ten multiple-choice questions, and the remaining fifteen were self-determined ratings of effectiveness based on apologetic scenarios. The first question was a multiple choice question asking for the meaning behind the word apologetics. A basic understanding of apologetics is the defense of the faith, and 100 percent of the participants answered that question correctly. The 100 percent accuracy was confirmed in the pre- and post-questionnaires. As a result, there was no percentage change with that question because of the curriculum.

The question regarding the origin of the term "apologetics" unveiled an interesting shift in participant responses before and after completing the curriculum. Initially, in the pre-curriculum assessment, 27 percent of participants expressed uncertainty about the term's origin, while the majority, constituting 73 percent, correctly identified it as of Greek origin. This response distribution reflected a common knowledge gap among the participants regarding this particular etymological detail.

However, the post-curriculum assessment brought about notable changes in participant responses. While the percentage of participants who were unsure ("Not Sure") decreased from 27 percent to 9 percent, indicating a significant reduction in uncertainty, there were other shifts in responses as well. Specifically, 9 percent of participants, after completing the curriculum, mistakenly attributed the term to Latin origin. This unexpected response suggests that the curriculum might have introduced some confusion or ambiguity surrounding the term's historical derivation.

Interestingly, despite these shifts, the curriculum positively impacted participants' understanding of the term's origin. The correct identification of "Greek" as the term's origin increased from 73 percent in the pre-curriculum assessment to 82 percent in the post-curriculum assessment, marking a 9 percent increase in participants providing the correct answer. This upward trend indicates that the curriculum contributed to a more precise understanding of the term's etymology among the participants.

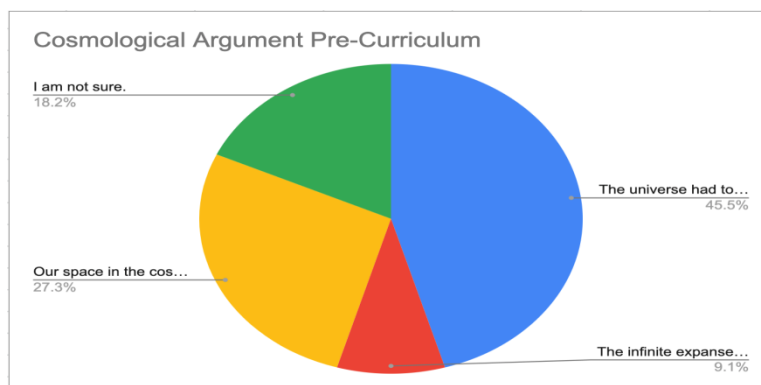


Figure 2. Cosmological Argument Pre-Curriculum.

The question exploring the participants' understanding of the cosmological argument provided valuable insights into the impact of the curriculum on their knowledge and comprehension of this complex apologetic concept. In the pre-curriculum questionnaire, 45 percent of the participants correctly identified the cosmological argument. This initial response rate indicated that a substantial portion of the participants had a baseline understanding of this specific apologetic argument. However, the remaining 55 percent of participants displayed varying degrees of uncertainty or misinformation. Notably, 36 percent selected one of the multiple-choice incorrect answers, while 19 percent admitted their lack of knowledge by responding with "not sure."

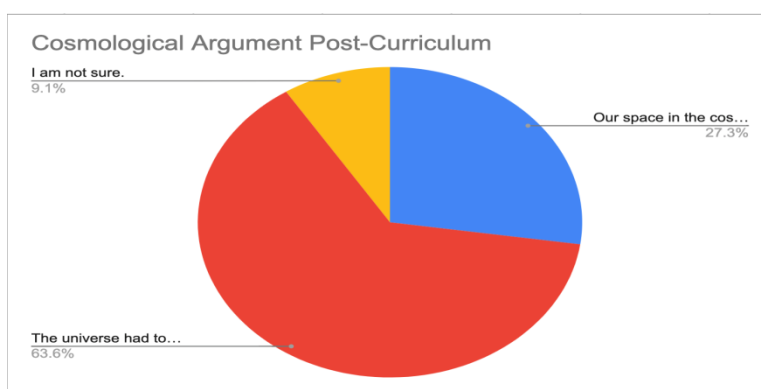


Figure 3. Cosmological Argument Post-Curriculum.

After completing the curriculum, the participants' understanding of the cosmological argument exhibited notable improvements. The percentage of participants providing the correct

answer increased from 45 percent to 64 percent, reflecting a significant 19 percent rise in accurate responses. This suggests that the curriculum effectively conveyed the essence and nuances of the cosmological argument to many participants. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that 27 percent of the participants still answered the question incorrectly after completing the curriculum. This indicates that while the curriculum positively impacted a majority of participants, a subset continued to struggle with grasping the cosmological argument. Interestingly, the percentage of participants responding with "not sure" decreased from 19 percent in the pre-curriculum assessment to 9 percent in the post-curriculum assessment. This reduction in uncertainty suggests that the curriculum provided participants with greater confidence in their responses, even if they did not answer correctly.

The pair of questions examining the existence of absolute truth and the distinction between absolute and relative truth provided a fascinating insight into the participants' understanding and the curriculum's impact on these fundamental apologetic concepts. The first question, "Does absolute truth exist?" offered only two possible responses: yes or no. The correct answer was unequivocally "yes," affirming the existence of absolute truth. Intriguingly, participants unanimously answered this question correctly in both pre-curriculum and post-curriculum assessments. The 100 percent accuracy rate remained consistent, indicating that the curriculum did not significantly alter participants' perception of the existence of absolute truth. This confirmed the participants' conviction in absolute truth, uninfluenced by the curriculum.

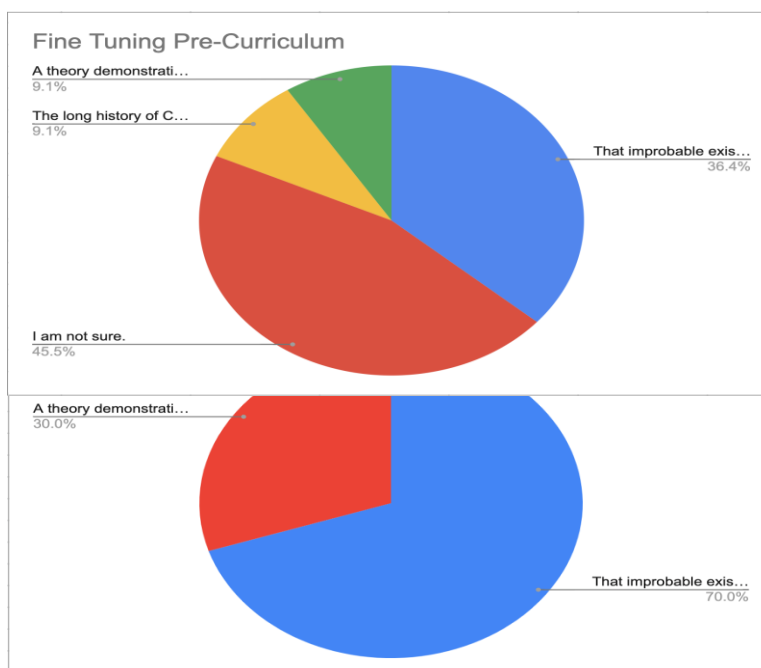
The subsequent question, "Is there a difference between relative truth and absolute truth?" introduced an element of complexity by providing a "maybe" option in addition to the binary choices of "yes" or "no." In the pre-curriculum assessment, 91 percent of participants correctly affirmed the difference, while 9 percent responded with "maybe." This response distribution suggested a consensus among participants regarding the distinction between relative and absolute

truth, with a small percentage opting for a tentative response. After completing the curriculum, the participants' responses to this question shifted. In the post-curriculum assessment, 100 percent of participants correctly recognized relative and absolute truth differences.

The question probing the concept of the fine-tuning of the universe provided valuable insights into the impact of the curriculum on participants' comprehension of a complex apologetic argument. In the pre-curriculum questionnaire, participants encountered a question with multiple-choice options, aiming to assess their knowledge of the fine-tuning of the universe. The response distribution in this phase revealed a significant gap in participants' understanding of this intricate concept. Only 27 percent of participants answered the question correctly, indicating that a minority had a prior grasp of the fine-tuning argument. An overwhelming 45 percent of participants expressed uncertainty by selecting "unsure," while the remaining 28 percent answered incorrectly. This distribution highlighted the challenges and gaps in participants' knowledge concerning the fine-tuning of the universe before engaging with the curriculum.

Figure 4. Fine Tuning Pre-Curriculum.

After completing the curriculum, participants' responses to the question exhibited considerable improvement. A notable 70 percent of participants provided the correct response



post-curriculum, signifying a significant increase in understanding. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that 30 percent of participants still responded with an incorrect answer despite the curriculum. This indicated that while the curriculum positively impacted the majority, a significant portion of participants continued to grapple with the concept of fine-tuning. The curriculum's effectiveness in enhancing participants' understanding of the fine-tuning argument was evident in the 70 percent correct response rate post-curriculum, compared to the meager 27 percent in the pre-curriculum assessment. The reduction in the percentage of participants unsure about the answer was also noteworthy, as fewer individuals remained uncertain post-curriculum.

Figure 5. Fine Tuning Post-Curriculum.

However, it is important to note that the curriculum did not entirely eliminate incorrect responses, emphasizing the complexity of the fine-tuning argument and the diverse levels of prior knowledge among participants. The 30 percent of participants who still provided incorrect answers indicated the need for continued education and reinforcement of this apologetic concept. The questions addressing participants' understanding of the term "worldview" and their acknowledgment of possessing one shed light on the curriculum's influence on their perceptions of this crucial aspect of apologetics. In both the pre-curriculum and post-curriculum assessments, all participants unanimously indicated that they understood the term "worldview." Before engaging with the curriculum, this unanimous understanding suggested that participants had a baseline familiarity with the concept, at least in its terminology.

The more intriguing aspect of this assessment was whether participants believed they had a worldview. In the pre-curriculum assessment, 82 percent of participants affirmed that they possessed a worldview, indicating that a strong majority acknowledged their worldview's existence. In contrast, 18 percent responded with "maybe" or even "no," reflecting some

uncertainty or reluctance among a minority of participants to embrace the concept of a personal worldview.

After completing the curriculum, there was a noticeable shift in participants' responses regarding the existence of their worldview. The percentage of participants who acknowledged having a worldview increased from 82 percent in the pre-curriculum assessment to 91 percent in the post-curriculum assessment, representing a significant 9 percent increase. This change indicated that the curriculum played a pivotal role in clarifying the concept of worldview and fostering a more confident acceptance of its presence among participants. However, it is worth noting that 9 percent of participants still maintained that they did not possess a worldview even after the curriculum.

During the pre-curriculum phase, the questionnaire asked participants if they understood the law of causality. The responses demonstrated a certain degree of variation in participants' comprehension. Specifically, 27 percent of participants indicated that they did not understand the concept, while the remaining 73 percent confidently stated that they did possess an understanding of the law of causality. This distribution highlighted that a significant proportion of participants already had some familiarity with this fundamental philosophical principle before engaging with the curriculum.

After completing the curriculum, there was a notable change in participants' responses regarding their understanding of the law of causality. The percentage of participants who initially claimed not to understand the concept decreased substantially from 27 percent to 9 percent. This 18 percent reduction in participants expressing uncertainty or lack of comprehension indicated that the curriculum positively influenced clarifying the law of causality for a notable portion of participants. Moreover, the proportion of participants who confidently affirmed their understanding of the law of causality increased from 73 percent to 91 percent post-curriculum.

The question inquiring whether non-believers come to faith gradually or all at once delves into a theological consideration that revealed nuanced perspectives without a distinct "correct" answer upon closer examination within the focus groups. Instead, it provided valuable insights into the participants' evolving views on this intricate theological matter before and after engaging with the curriculum.

During the pre-curriculum assessment, the questionnaire presented participants with this thought-provoking question. The responses were diverse and reflected the complexity of the theological concept under consideration. Notably, 9 percent of participants believed non-believers come to faith "all at once," suggesting a conviction in the potential for sudden, transformative faith experiences. Another 9 percent remained uncertain, emphasizing the uncertainty surrounding this theological question. The majority, comprising 82 percent, asserted that non-believers transition to faith gradually, indicating that their view is that faith evolves over time through a gradual process.

Upon completing the curriculum, participants revisited this theological question, offering fresh insights into their perspectives. While the diversity of responses persisted, there were important changes in participant views. The percentage of participants who remained unsure about whether non-believers come to faith gradually or all at once remained constant at 9 percent. This indicated that some participants maintained a level of uncertainty even after engaging with the curriculum, suggesting the continued complexity of the theological matter. Participants who believed in a gradual transition to faith exhibited the most significant change. Post-curriculum, a substantial 91 percent of participants asserted that non-believers come to faith gradually, marking a noteworthy increase from the 82 percent in the pre-curriculum phase. This shift suggested that the curriculum had influenced participants to lean more toward the perspective that faith development typically occurs over an extended period. Surprisingly, the

percentage of participants who believed in a sudden conversion experience remained unchanged at 9 percent. This indicates that, despite the curriculum, a consistent subset of participants maintained their conviction in the possibility of non-believers experiencing a rapid and transformative faith conversion.

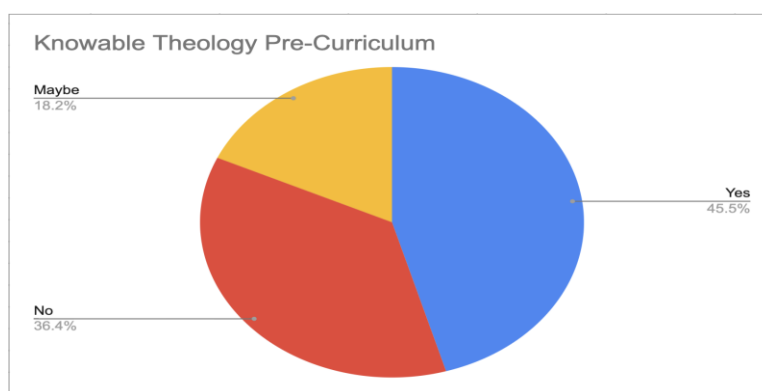


Figure 6. Knowable Theology Pre-Curriculum.

The question regarding the existence of a perfect and knowable theology on earth presented an interesting theological inquiry. Initially, the answer straightforwardly is "no." However, as participants engaged in discussions during the focus groups, it became evident that the question had more complexity than anticipated.

In the pre-curriculum questionnaire, participants encountered this theological question. The responses were diverse and distributed across three distinct categories. Notably, 36 percent of participants responded with "no," indicating their belief that no perfect and knowable theology is attainable on earth. Another 18 percent expressed uncertainty by selecting "maybe possible," suggesting a degree of openness to the idea of attainable perfect theology. In contrast, 45 percent of participants answered affirmatively, asserting that achieving a perfect and knowable theology in our earthly context was possible.

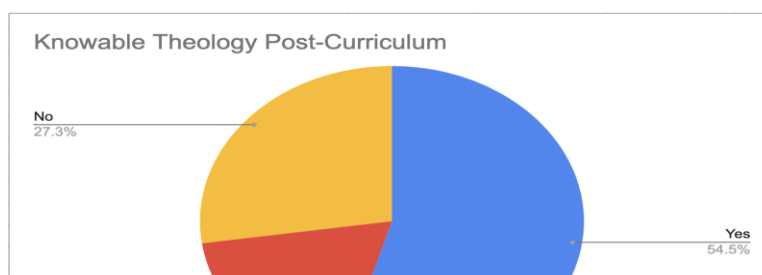


Figure 7. Knowable Theology Post-Curriculum.

The curriculum's influence on participants' perspectives became evident when their responses were reevaluated post-curriculum. The changes in responses reflected the curriculum's impact on their understanding of the attainability of perfect theology on earth. The percentage of participants who believed in the possibility of a perfect and knowable theology increased from 45 percent in the pre-curriculum phase to 55 percent post-curriculum. This is surprising, especially considering this was the opposite idea when writing the questionnaire. Conversely, participants who rejected the possibility of perfect theology decreased from 36 percent in the pre-curriculum phase to 27 percent post-curriculum. The "maybe" responses remained stable at 18 percent both before and after the curriculum, suggesting that a subset of participants maintained a degree of uncertainty about this complex theological question.

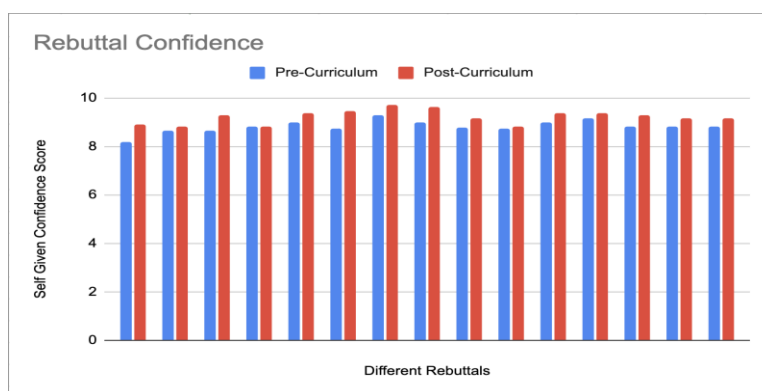


Figure 8. Rebuttal Confidence.

The next section of the pre-curriculum assessment asked participants to assess their effectiveness in employing various apologetic rebuttals (see Appendix C & I). This self-assessment provided valuable insights into participants' perceived proficiency in apologetics before and after engaging with the curriculum. Before commencing the curriculum, participants evaluated their effectiveness in utilizing a range of apologetic rebuttals. Their self-assessments

revealed an overall average rating of 8.67 (mean) regarding effectiveness across these various apologetic rebuttals. This average rating indicated that participants, on average, considered themselves to be reasonably proficient in employing apologetic strategies to defend their faith.

Upon completing the curriculum, participants revisited their self-assessments, providing updated ratings for their perceived effectiveness in apologetic rebuttals. The overall effectiveness rating post-curriculum demonstrated a noticeable increase, reaching an average of 9.20 (mean). This increment of 6.11 percent signified a positive shift in participants' confidence and self-perceived proficiency in apologetics following their exposure to the curriculum. This is especially noteworthy because the ratings were so high that there was little room for improvement.

Beyond the overall increase in self-assessed effectiveness, participants exhibited changes in confidence levels in each specific apologetic rebuttal. In all cases, participants reported higher confidence levels in their ability to employ these rebuttals effectively post-curriculum. Notably, there was not one rebuttal for which participants' confidence levels remained the same. Every single rebuttal received a confidence boost from pre-curriculum to post.

Participants began with a pre-curriculum average effectiveness rating of 8.23 (mean) when addressing the assertion that the Bible contains contradictions. Following their engagement with the curriculum, their confidence in responding to this challenge increased significantly, with the post-curriculum rating rising to 8.83 (mean). This transformation reflected the curriculum's effectiveness in equipping participants to address concerns related to potential contradictions within the Bible, boosting their overall self-assurance in this regard.

Before the curriculum, participants rated themselves with an average effectiveness score of 8.58 (mean) when countering the claim that all religions contain elements of truth. Post-curriculum, their confidence in addressing this argument saw a positive shift, with the rating

increasing to 8.83 (mean). This change demonstrated that the curriculum further bolstered participants' proficiency in explaining the unique aspects of their faith amidst the diversity of religious beliefs.

Participants' initial self-assessment in responding to the challenge of questioning the existence of God stood at 8.50 (mean) pre-curriculum. Following the curriculum, their confidence surged, resulting in a post-curriculum rating of 9.30 (mean). This significant improvement showcased the curriculum's efficacy in equipping participants with robust arguments and knowledge to defend the existence of God effectively.

The participants began with a pre-curriculum average effectiveness rating of 8.75 (mean) when addressing the assertion that a good God would not send people to hell. Post-curriculum, their confidence in responding to this argument remained stable, with a slight rating increase to 8.83 (mean). While there was no significant increase, this result indicated that participants did see an uptick in articulating their beliefs regarding the relationship between a good God and the concept of hell.

The challenge related to the number of translations the Bible has undergone, with a pre-curriculum rating of 8.81 (mean). After completing the curriculum, participants displayed a heightened confidence level in addressing this argument, as their post-curriculum rating increased to 9.25 (mean). This change underscored the curriculum's effectiveness in equipping participants with the knowledge and responses necessary to counter skepticism about the Bible's translations.

Participants initially rated themselves with an average effectiveness score of 8.58 (mean) when addressing the assertion that humans wrote the Bible. Post-curriculum, their confidence levels experienced a substantial boost, with the rating reaching 9.41 (mean). This transformation

highlighted the curriculum's success in enhancing participants' ability to articulate the divine inspiration and reliability of the Bible despite its human authorship.

The challenge of doubting the existence of Jesus had a pre-curriculum rating of 9.08 (mean). Following the curriculum, participants displayed increased confidence in their ability to address this argument, with their post-curriculum rating climbing to 9.66 (mean). This shift highlighted the curriculum's effectiveness in equipping participants with historical and theological knowledge to affirm the existence of Jesus.

Participants' initial self-assessment responding to the claim that disciples merely experienced grief-induced visions of Jesus after the resurrection sat at 8.66 (mean) pre-curriculum. Post-curriculum, their confidence in addressing this argument markedly increased, with the rating rising to 9.50 (mean). This change indicated the curriculum's efficacy in providing participants with the tools to explain the credibility of post-resurrection appearances.

Before the curriculum, participants rated themselves with an average effectiveness score of 8.54 (mean) when addressing the assertion that the writers of the Bible were motivated by power and glory. Following the curriculum, their confidence levels experienced an increase, with the post-curriculum rating reaching 9.16 (mean). This transformation showcased the curriculum's success in equipping participants to articulate the writers' genuine motivations for writing the Bible.

The challenge of questioning why God would need people to worship Him began with a pre-curriculum average effectiveness rating of 8.50 (mean). Post-curriculum, participants exhibited higher confidence in responding to this argument, with the rating increasing to 8.83 (mean). While the change was not as pronounced as in some other rebuttals, it indicated that the curriculum contributed to enhancing participants' responses regarding God's nature and worship.

Participants' initial self-assessment when addressing the problem of evil had a rating of 8.72 (mean) pre-curriculum. Following the curriculum, their confidence in addressing this challenging argument experienced a significant boost, with the rating climbing to 9.33 (mean) post-curriculum. This shift highlighted the curriculum's effectiveness in equipping participants with the philosophical and theological tools to tackle the problem of evil persuasively.

Before engaging with the curriculum, participants rated themselves with an average effectiveness score of 9.03 (mean) when responding to the claim that one can be a good person without belief in God. Post-curriculum, their confidence levels remained high, with the rating holding steady at 9.33 (mean). This result indicated that participants maintained their proficiency and saw a slight increase in articulating the relationship between belief and morality.

The challenge asserting that religion has caused many problems had an initial effectiveness rating of 8.83 (mean) pre-curriculum. After completing the curriculum, participants displayed increased confidence in their ability to address this argument, with the rating rising to 9.33 (mean). This change showcased the curriculum's success in equipping participants to offer nuanced responses regarding the role of religion in societal issues.

Participants began with a pre-curriculum average effectiveness rating of 8.58 (mean) when addressing the assertion that the logical existence of God is untenable. Following the curriculum, their confidence levels experienced a noticeable boost, with the rating reaching 9.25 (mean) post-curriculum. This transformation underscored the curriculum's effectiveness in equipping participants with logical and philosophical arguments for the existence of God.

These individual assessments of participants' confidence levels in addressing specific apologetic challenges highlighted the curriculum's overall success in enhancing their proficiency across a diverse range of apologetic rebuttals. The substantial improvements in confidence levels

underscored the curriculum's effectiveness in equipping participants with the knowledge and responses necessary to defend their faith effectively and persuasively.

Focus Group

Participants in the focus group expressed predominantly positive views about the project. They identified a specific curriculum segment as particularly valuable, which sparked a consensus within the group. This section dealt with the concepts of absolute truth and moral relativism, topics that participants deemed highly relevant and significant in today's cultural landscape.

The unanimous agreement among participants regarding the significance of the section on absolute truth and moral relativism was rooted in its perceived relevance to contemporary culture. They recognized the prevalence of moral relativism and the denial of absolute truth in society, emphasizing the need for addressing these challenges within apologetics education. Furthermore, participants believed that these discussions could guide individuals toward acknowledging the existence of absolute truth, which they considered a pivotal step in addressing skepticism and relativism.

While participants shared an appreciation for the project's value, their level of interest in pursuing additional apologetic studies varied. Some participants expressed a strong inclination to explore the subject further by reading apologetics books in the future. Their motivation stemmed from the depth of information presented in the project, which they found engaging and intellectually stimulating. They also realized that the curriculum had only scratched the surface of apologetics, fueling their desire for more comprehensive resources.

Participants acknowledged the curriculum's purpose of providing a broad overview of apologetics, which necessitated relatively brief coverage of each topic. This balance between breadth and depth was appreciated by some but left others desiring more in-depth exploration of

specific subjects. Despite these varying preferences, participants recognized the value of maintaining a manageable project length, which encouraged commitment and engagement.

While participants held a positive view of the project overall, they also discussed aspects they believed could be omitted. This topic sparked differences of opinion within the group. Some participants expressed greater interest in the logic and scientific apologetic perspective, desiring more extensive coverage in these areas. On the contrary, one participant did not see the value in explaining agnostic and atheistic worldviews within the project, deeming them less relevant within a religious educational context.

The focus group discussion provided valuable insights into participants' diverse perspectives and preferences regarding the apologetics action research project. While they shared a consensus on the importance of addressing absolute truth and moral relativism, their interest in further apologetic study varied. Differences in opinions also emerged concerning the removal of specific project components, reflecting individual preferences for certain apologetic viewpoints and the desire for a more comprehensive exploration of particular topics. These findings underscore the dynamic nature of apologetics education and its impact on learners, highlighting the need for a balanced approach that caters to diverse learner needs and interests.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The thesis of this action research project is that if church planters had access to a short video curriculum on apologetics, they would be better suited to teach it and help their overall theology base. Reviewing the data, the percentage difference with each specific measurement may have been lower than desired, but the overall increase is not deniable. Having viewed a minimal course on apologetics, the participants increased their knowledge base. This increase can be observed across questions of knowledge and self-rating questions after viewing the curriculum.

Despite initial discussions and mutual agreement between the two organizations, Excel Leadership Network and Transformation Ministries, regarding the implementation of the project, neither organization executed the project as anticipated. This unexpected turn of events significantly impacted the project's scope and, consequently, the available dataset for analysis. The outcome is that the potential impact of the curriculum on a larger scale remains largely unknown and unexplored. The failure to roll out the project as planned created a substantial limitation in gathering sufficient data to draw comprehensive conclusions about the curriculum's efficacy. This limitation prevents researchers from assessing its potential benefits, shortcomings, and areas needing improvement on a broader scale. As a result, critical insights that could have informed the refinement and optimization of the curriculum for wider dissemination remain unknown.

The uncertainty surrounding the project's impact at scale underscores the importance of effective project management and execution in research and educational initiatives. In future endeavors, it will be essential for organizations to not only agree to projects but also ensure their

successful implementation to generate meaningful and comprehensive data that can inform decision-making and enhance the effectiveness of educational programs.

The first knowledge-based question on the questionnaire aimed to determine if the participants understood the term "apologetics." The questionnaire was presented as a multiple-choice question, assuming incorrect answers from at least one participant. Surprisingly, all participants responded to this question correctly by identifying the term's meaning. This initial success, however, revealed an important nuance: knowing the meaning of a term does not necessarily translate into practical knowledge or a deeper understanding of the subject matter, as was subsequently discovered.

The follow-up question delved into the etymology of the word "apologetics." To answer this question confidently, participants needed to understand the meaning of the term and its origin. If they could correctly deduce that "apologetics" originated from the New Testament, they could have ascertained its origin was Greek. However, the results were somewhat unexpected. Before engaging with the curriculum, 27 percent of the participants expressed uncertainty about the word's origin. This uncertainty raised an intriguing question: Would it be an unfair assumption that knowing the meaning of a word implies knowledge of its origin? Interestingly, despite an overall increase in participants' understanding of apologetics, 9 percent transitioned from uncertainty about the word's origin to suggesting that it had a Latin origin after completing the curriculum. Notably, the curriculum did not contain any references to the Latin language.

The next question was regarding one of the more popular scientific apologetic answers regarding the universe's origin, the cosmological argument. Unfortunately, the answers to this pre-curriculum question were inconsistent, with over half the participants claiming they did not know the answer or getting it incorrect. After viewing the curriculum, this answer solidified to 64 percent, getting the answer correct. The video curriculum never provides the definition

explicitly, but the general concept is thoroughly covered. Providing the definition needed for the questionnaire either verbally or via on-screen text could be considered memorization. In this case, the increase in participants' scores suggests that their improvement stemmed from a more profound understanding of the cosmological argument rather than rote memorization. This underscores the value of fostering a genuine understanding of complex concepts over mere recitation of definitions.

While the curriculum's impact on participants' understanding of the cosmological argument is commendable, it is essential to recognize that there may still be room for improvement in future iterations. One key consideration is the need for a clear definition of the concept, which the curriculum should have explicitly provided. Striking a balance between conveying the general concept and ensuring participants access essential definitions could enhance the curriculum's effectiveness. The cosmological argument is an essential concept in apologetics because it provides a narrative to discuss the origins of the universe.

The curriculum's effectiveness in enhancing understanding of the fine-tuning argument was evident in the 70 percent correct response rate post-curriculum, compared to the meager 27 percent in the pre-curriculum assessment. The reduction in the percentage of participants unsure about the answer was also noteworthy, as fewer individuals remained uncertain post-curriculum. However, it is essential to note that the curriculum did not entirely eliminate incorrect responses, emphasizing the complexity of the fine-tuning argument and the diverse levels of prior knowledge among participants. The 30 percent who still provided incorrect answers indicated the need for continued education and reinforcement of this apologetic concept.

Both fine-tuning and cosmological arguments were part of the same section during the presentation. It is perplexing why the fine-tuning argument saw such a strong comprehension increase while cosmological saw a slight improvement. Especially considering the cosmological

argument already had a strong response; roughly half answered correctly during the pre-curriculum. Perhaps their presentations being close to one another confused the participants.

The following two questions were to determine if the participants understood absolute truth and to verify that they knew the difference between relative and absolute truth. There was no growth for the participants needed to understand absolute truth and little margin in the difference between relative and absolute truth. Only 9 percent said there might be a difference between absolute truth and relative truth, but there was absolute agreement that there was a difference post-curriculum. The purpose of these questions was that this would translate into not only a discussion about God being an absolute truth but also help provide context behind the worldviews that everyone has. While the participants agreed that they understood the term worldview, 9 percent still felt they had no worldview after the curriculum. Their worldview was that they did not have a worldview.

These questions verified that participants understood that when talking to non-believers, their individual worldviews shape how they see the world. Understanding the worldview of whom they are speaking is vital to provide context for the belief in God. Surprisingly enough, even though participants understood the logical reasoning behind absolute truth, it did not fully translate to worldview. Notably, the curriculum did not make this connection obvious. The goal was that understanding that claiming a lack of absolute truth was a self-defeating statement would extend to the idea of self-defeating statements in general. The success shows that while this was true for most, it was not understood by all.

The purpose of including the question regarding whether believers come to faith gradually or all at once was to encourage participants to consider the concept of a gradual spiritual journey. This question was a crucial component of the curriculum, emphasizing the idea that non-believers typically do not experience an instantaneous conversion; instead, the process

often unfolds over time. It sought to underscore the importance of patience and persistence in religious discussions.

However, as the discussions within the focus groups progressed, it became apparent that this question introduced a layer of complexity when delving into the workings of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's role in the conversion process can vary greatly from person to person, making it challenging to generalize whether faith is a gradual or sudden transformation for all individuals. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that this question did have a discernible impact on the participants' perspectives, nudging them toward the notion that faith often develops gradually. It reinforced the idea that spiritual journeys are unique and can encompass various stages and phases, fostering a deeper appreciation for the diversity of experiences when it comes to matters of faith. However, it is impossible to know whether this was because of the leanings of the presenter and the initial goal or a general change of perception.

The intriguing observation of a subset of participants transitioning from providing correct answers in the pre-curriculum assessment to selecting incorrect responses in the post-curriculum assessment prompts several thought-provoking questions. This phenomenon suggests a multifaceted dynamic in learning and knowledge acquisition. One possible explanation for this alteration in participant responses is introducing new information or alternative perspectives within the curriculum. As participants engage with the instructional content, they may encounter concepts, arguments, or viewpoints that challenge or modify their initial understanding. This exposure to fresh insights can trigger a reevaluation of their prior knowledge and prompt them to reconsider their positions. However, it is especially intriguing that a few participants took steps backward despite having their correct answers validated and ensured accuracy.

As part of the curriculum, participants conducted a self-assessment to gauge their understanding and competence in apologetics. The initial expectation was that, given the

participants' limited grasp of the fundamentals of apologetics revealed by the pre-questionnaire, they would likely rate themselves lower overall in this self-assessment. However, the outcomes of this self-assessment were quite surprising. Instead of indicating a humbler self-evaluation, participants initially exhibited a somewhat inflated view of their knowledge and ability to navigate apologetics. This unexpected self-assessment trend suggested that participants may have held a more confident perception of their apologetic abilities than was warranted by their actual knowledge.

Curiously, many participants rated themselves with perfect scores of ten before and after the assessment despite having answered several questions incorrectly in the preceding questionnaire. This phenomenon could be attributed to a desire among pastors and participants to feel well-prepared and capable of handling apologetic challenges should they arise. It may reflect a sense of responsibility and confidence in their role as spiritual leaders, where they believe they should possess a high level of competence in addressing matters of faith and belief. This intriguing self-assessment outcome underscores the importance of aligning self-perception with actual knowledge and skills, highlighting the need for ongoing training and education to bridge gaps between perceived and actual competence in apologetics.

In the post-curriculum forum, participants brought up a crucial aspect of engaging with individuals who do not believe in God: the initial focus is not always on persuading them to believe in God outright. Instead, the emphasis often lies in demonstrating that the Christian God is upright and deserving of devotion. This approach seeks to establish a foundation of credibility and goodness before delving into discussions about faith itself. This insight sheds light on why pastors and participants might have initially rated themselves highly in apologetics. It could be because apologetics, as a practice, may not be their primary focus when engaging in

conversations with non-believers. Instead, their primary objective is to establish the credibility and moral character of the Christian God, which they may feel confident in doing.

Another perspective to consider is that these pastors may individually possess a sense of assurance in their ability to address rebuttals and challenges to their faith. They might feel well-prepared to respond to inquiries and objections, which could boost their self-assessed competence in apologetics. However, it is essential to recognize that their confidence in their responses may not necessarily translate into satisfactory persuasion for someone else. In essence, this discussion highlights the multifaceted nature of apologetics and the importance of addressing the intellectual and moral dimensions of faith discussions. It underscores the need for pastors and participants to continually refine their apologetic skills and adapt their approaches to engage with individuals of varying beliefs and worldviews effectively.

The curriculum did not explicitly address every rebuttal and objection the questionnaire listed. Instead, the curriculum's primary objective was to assess whether the process of learning more about apologetics and honing their skills in responding to various objections would result in participants feeling more self-assured in their ability to handle such rebuttals. While the curriculum did not provide specific, direct answers to every rebuttal presented, it succeeded in achieving its broader goal – participants in all categories exhibited an increase in both their knowledge and confidence in the realm of apologetics after engaging with less than an hour of video instruction. Moreover, beyond the specific findings discussed, this study underscores the critical importance of equipping church planters with a comprehensive understanding of apologetics. As evidenced by the results, even after completing the video curriculum, some participants still grappled with foundational concepts, such as the cosmological argument and a basic understanding of the origins and meaning of the term "apologetics" itself.

These outcomes suggest that future iterations of the curriculum should place more emphasis on these fundamental concepts to ensure that church planters possess a robust grasp of the topic. A solid foundation in apologetics is crucial for effectively engaging with diverse individuals and addressing their questions and objections. By enhancing the curriculum's coverage of these essential concepts, church planters can better serve as knowledgeable and confident ambassadors of their faith, equipped to engage in meaningful discussions with individuals of various beliefs and worldviews.

Furthermore, while the video curriculum successfully contributed to an overall boost in the confidence levels of church planters when it comes to apologetics, they need to maintain a realistic perspective regarding their knowledge and abilities. Effective teaching and meaningful discussions about apologetics with their congregations require an accurate understanding of their strengths and areas for growth. Subsequently, exploring strategies and approaches to help church planters develop a more precise self-assessment of their apologetics knowledge and capabilities is crucial.

Future research endeavors could delve into innovative ways to facilitate church planters' self-assessment in apologetics, fostering a more nuanced and accurate perception of their readiness to engage with complex theological and philosophical matters. By providing tools and methodologies for self-evaluation, future efforts could empower church planters to identify areas where they may require further training or resources.

In conclusion, this study is a compelling testament to the potential benefits of providing church planters access to concise video curricula on apologetics. The observed improvements in knowledge and comprehension of the subject matter underscore the value of such educational resources in enhancing the capabilities of these dedicated individuals. However, this research

also illuminates the need for continuous refinement in the delivery of apologetics education, emphasizing that there is no endpoint to pursuing knowledge in this field.

The findings herein emphasize that a comprehensive understanding of apologetics fundamentals is essential. While the curriculum was successful in enhancing certain aspects of knowledge and confidence, it is clear that there are foundational concepts that require more in-depth coverage. Future iterations of apologetics training should prioritize these fundamental aspects, ensuring church planters possess a rock-solid foundation to build their expertise.

Moreover, assisting church planters in assessing their proficiency accurately is paramount. The observed trend of inflated self-assessment highlights the importance of humility and self-awareness in the roles of these spiritual leaders. It is not enough to merely possess knowledge; it is equally vital to recognize one's areas of strength and areas that require growth. Future research initiatives should explore innovative strategies and methodologies for facilitating more precise self-assessment, equipping church planters to evaluate their readiness to genuinely engage with complex theological and philosophical matters.

Looking ahead, the implications of this study extend beyond the immediate context of church planters. They resonate with the broader landscape of theological education, highlighting the potential of modern instructional methods, such as video curricula, in enhancing the knowledge and competencies of individuals dedicated to religious leadership. Furthermore, the emphasis on self-assessment calls for a paradigm shift in preparing spiritual leaders to navigate the challenges of a diverse and pluralistic world.

Ultimately, this research encourages a holistic approach to equipping church leaders that goes beyond knowledge acquisition and dives deep into fostering humility, self-awareness, and adaptability. Doing so can empower these leaders to engage in more informed, nuanced, and meaningful conversations about faith and belief in religious settings. The ripple effect of this

approach can extend far beyond the confines of the congregation, influencing and inspiring individuals seeking spiritual guidance and understanding in an ever-evolving world.

APPENDIX A

Consent

Title of the Project: Apologetic Knowledge: The Modern Church Planter

Principal Investigator: Matt Dilley, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be part of either the Excel Leadership Network or Transformation Ministries and have either planted or in the process of planting a church. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

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

The purpose of the study is to explore the apologetic knowledge of the modern church planter. Additionally, to see if a short video based curriculum can increase that knowledge. Finally, to see if this increases pastors interest in apologetics.

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 things:

1. A handful of participants will be interviewed over video for 15 minutes about their knowledge and thoughts are on apologetics. Their information will remain confidential.
2. All participants will be asked to watch a video curriculum once a week for six weeks on the topic of apologetics. Each video will be less than 10 minutes in length.
3. Randomly selected members would be asked to participate in a focus group where the study will be discussed. The focus group will be 30 minutes and while other participants will be part of it, the answers will remain confidential in the study.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study are an increased knowledge, desire, or at the very least a refresher in apologetics.

Benefits to society include a knowledge pastor in apologetics can answer difficult questions to those who are genuinely interested.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study include are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks that you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants responses will be confidential.

- Participants responses will be kept in Google Docs, but the information will be disposed of digitally three years after the completion of the project and will remain password protected.
- Participants responses will only be video recorded if they are selected for interviews prior to the project or a focus group post project. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Participants responses will to the questionnaire will need to be associated with their name only to remove them from the study should they decide to leave the project or end up leaving before it is concluded. Additionally, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, Excel Leadership Network, or Transformation Ministries. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

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 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. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

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

The researcher conducting this study is Matt Dilley. 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, Dr. Thomas Spotts, [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 Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at 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

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher 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.

The researcher has my permission to video me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Pastor:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research is to explore the apologetic knowledge of the modern church planter. Additionally, to see if a short video based curriculum can increase that knowledge. Finally, to see if this increases pastors interest in apologetics, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be part of either the Excel Leadership Network or Transformation Ministries and have either planted or in the process of planting a church. Participants, if willing, will be interviewed over video for 15 minutes about their knowledge and thoughts are on apologetics. All participants will be asked to watch a video curriculum once a week for six weeks on the topic of apologetics. Each video will be less than 10 minutes in length. Randomly selected members would be asked to participate in a focus group where the study will be discussed. The focus group will be less than 30 minutes.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please click here, <https://shorturl.at/ahjI0>, to begin the questionnaire associated with the project.

A consent document is provided as the first page of the survey. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please click the link to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Sincerely,

Matt Dilley
Graduate Student


PRE-CURRICULUM QUESTIONNAIRE

These are sample questions from the questionnaire. However, it will be multiple choice for responses.

Sample Questionnaire	
Question 1	Did you read the consent form thoroughly and consent to participating in this project?
Question 2	What level of education have you completed?
Question 3	Do you have an advanced degree specifically in apologetics?
Question 4	What does the term “apologetics” mean?
Question 5	Where does the term “apologetics” come from?
Question 6	What is the cosmological argument?
Question 7	Does absolute truth exist?
Question 8	What is the difference between relative truth and absolute truth?
Question 9	What is the fine-tuning of the universe?
Question 10	Do you understand the term “worldview?”
Question 11	Do you believe you have a “worldview?”
Question 12	Do you understand the law of causality?
Question 13	Are there steps to faith?
Question 14	Do you believe there is correct version of theology that can be understood on earth?
————	Which response matches most closely to how you would respond to following statements? (Multiple choice responses offering only one “apologetic” response)
Question 15	“The Bible has too many contradictions.”
Question 16	“All religions have part of it right.”
Question 17	“It is impossible to know that God exists.”

Question 18	“I don’t believe a good God will send people to hell.”
Question 19	“The Bible has gone through too many translations to be accurate at this point.”
Question 20	“The Bible was written by humans.”
Question 21	“I am not sure Jesus existed.”
Question 22	“Maybe the disciples were all just overcome with grief and believed they saw Jesus again.”
Question 23	“The men who wrote the Bible just wanted power and glory.”
Question 24	“God seems to be full of himself because he needs people to worship him.”
Question 25	“God cannot exist because of all the evil in the world.”
Question 26	“I’m good and I don’t believe in God.”
Question 27	“What about all the problems religion has caused?”
Question 28	“God cannot logically exist.”

APPENDIX D

SEGMENT 1

This is the outline for weeks 1 and 2 or Segment 1 of the course - The reason for faith.

I. Introduction

I. What is apologetics?

I. Definition

II. What is the goal of apologetics?

I. Is it to win arguments or win people?

III. How can we know God exists?

I. Cosmological Argument

II. Fine Tuning Argument

III. The Nature of the Universe

IV. Other Common Existence of God Arguments

II. Truth of the Resurrection

I. Why can we believe it is true?

I. Eye-Witnesses

I. They believed to their death

II. The age of the gospels

I. How quickly after the resurrection

III. James and Paul

I. What it means for them to believe

IV. Grief Visions

APPENDIX E

SEGMENT 2

This is the outline for weeks 3 and 4 or Segment 2 of the course - Arguments Against Faith

I. Arguments Against Faith

I. Refresher on previous Segment

I. The nature of doubt

I. An overview of common objections

II. How can God be good if there is much evil in the world?

I. The basics of morality

II. The philosophical conclusion

III. Aren't all religions partly true?

I. The blind men and the elephant argument

II. How can Christianity be the "right" one?

IV. The nature of the Bible

I. Multiple translations

II. Contradictions

III. The human element

II. The Agnostic's Worldview

I. The difference in Atheism and Agnostic

II. Can God be proven?

I. The opposite can't be proven

II. Lives are lived in the unprovable

APPENDIX F

SEGMENT 3

This is the outline for weeks 5 and 6 or Segment 3 of the course - Devout Non- Believers

I. What is atheism?

I. Determining what they believe

I. Explaining worldviews

II. Explaining faith

II. What is absolute truth?

I. The truth about truth

II. Moral relativism falls apart

III. A deeper discussion about morality

I. Does morality come from evolution?

IV. Nature of miracles

I. Do miracles still happen?

II. What constitutes a miracle?

V. Putting it all together

I. Sample discussions

II. Reminder of goal

I. If there is an abundance of reason why don't they believe?

II. The problem of ego

III. A summary of apologetics

APPENDIX G

PRE- CURRICULUM INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

All interviews will be held prior to the start of the curriculum. They will take place exclusively online likely using the app Zoom. They will take place at a time of convenience for the randomly selected interviewees. The first three questions are the questions that every interviewee will be asked. The rest of the questions may be asked depending on the participant's responses.

Interview Questions	
Question 1	Can you provide your definition of apologetics?
Question 2	What role do you feel like apologetics plays in modern Christianity?
Question 3	Describe the last time you utilized or referenced an apologetic method.
	Potential Questions
Question 5	Do you think apologetic knowledge is helpful for church planters?
Question 6	What do you hope to get out of the project?
Question 7	Rate your knowledge on a scale from 1-10

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

The focus groups will take place the week after the curriculum has been completed. They will take place entirely online and will most likely be using Zoom. They should have no more than 8 participants in a group. However, there will be at least three. The group will have a scheduled time with the goal of being all picked participants to partake.

Focus Group Questions	
Question 1	What was valuable thing learned from the project?
Question 2	Did you interest in apologetics increase?
Question 3	Was there anything that surprised you or stuck out to you during the project?
Question 4	Will you read any apologetic books in the next year?
Question 5	What would you have added to the project?
Question 6	What would you have taken out?

APPENDIX I
POST CURRICULUM QUESTIONNAIRE

These are sample questions from the post curriculum questionnaire. However, it will be multiple choice for responses. This will match the questions from the pre curriculum questionnaire.

Sample Questionnaire	
Question 1	Did you read the consent form thoroughly and consent to participating in this project?
Question 2	What level of education have you completed?
Question 3	Do you have an advanced degree specifically in apologetics?
Question 4	What does the term “apologetics” mean?
Question 5	Where does the term “apologetics” come from?
Question 6	What is the cosmological argument?
Question 7	Does absolute truth exist?
Question 8	What is the difference between relative truth and absolute truth?
Question 9	What is the fine-tuning of the universe?
Question 10	Do you understand the term “worldview?”
Question 11	Do you believe you have a “worldview?”
Question 12	Do you understand the law of causality?
Question 13	Are there steps to faith?
Question 14	Do you believe there is correct version of theology that can be understood on earth?
————	Which response matches most closely to how you would respond to following statements? (Multiple choice responses offering only one “apologetic” response)
Question 15	“The Bible has too many contradictions.”

Question 16	“All religions have part of it right.”
Question 17	“It is impossible to know that God exists.”
Question 18	“I don’t believe a good God will send people to hell.”
Question 19	“The Bible has gone through too many translations to be accurate at this point.”
Question 20	“The Bible was written by humans.”
Question 21	“I am not sure Jesus existed.”
Question 22	“Maybe the disciples were all just overcome with grief and believed they saw Jesus again.”
Question 23	“The men who wrote the Bible just wanted power and glory.”
Question 24	“God seems to be full of himself because he needs people to worship him.”
Question 25	“God cannot exist because of all the evil in the world.”
Question 26	“I’m good and I don’t believe in God.”
Question 27	“What about all the problems religion has caused?”
Question 28	“God cannot logically exist.”
Question 29	How old is your church plant?

PERMISSION REQUEST - EXCEL LEADERSHIP NETWORK

April 25th, 2022

JD Pearring
Director
Excel Leadership Network
8737 Santa Ridge Circle
Elk Grove, CA 95624

Dear Mr. Pearring,

As a graduate student in the Doctorate of Ministry program at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate of Ministry Degree. The title of my research project is Apologetic Knowledge: The Modern Church Planter. My research aims to determine and provide help for the level of apologetic knowledge of the modern church planter.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct research about and contact the church planters of Excel Leadership Network. Further, I am asking that church planters from the network assist in this research project.

Participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire regarding their apologetic knowledge, followed by a 6-week online apologetic curriculum, and then taking the questionnaire to see what changes may have occurred. Additionally, random participants may be asked questions before and on completion of the curriculum. 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 respond by email to [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Matt Dilley
Doctoral Student

APPENDIX K

PERMISSION REQUEST - TRANSFORMATION MINISTRIES

April 25th, 2022

JD Pearing
Church Planting Director
Transformation Ministries
70 S. Village Oaks Dr.
Suite 101
Covina, CA 91724

Dear Mr. Pearing,

As a graduate student in the Doctorate of Ministry program at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate of Ministry Degree. The title of my research project is Apologetic Knowledge: The Modern Church Planter. My research aims to determine and provide help for the level of apologetic knowledge of the modern church planter.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct research about and contact the church planters of Transformation Ministries. Further, I am asking that church planters from the network assist in this research project.

Participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire regarding their apologetic knowledge, followed by a 6-week online apologetic curriculum, and then taking the questionnaire to see what changes may have occurred. Additionally, random participants may be asked questions before and on completion of the curriculum. 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 respond by email to [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Matt Dilley
Doctoral Student

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June 29, 2022

Matt Dilley
Thomas Spotts

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY21-22-1231 Apologetic Knowledge: The Modern Church Planter

Dear Matt Dilley and Thomas Spotts,

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

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

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

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,

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