

## **ABSTRACT**

### **SEEING THE BIG PICTURE:**

#### **A STUDY OF WALK THRU THE BIBLE'S OLD TESTAMENT SEMINAR'S IMPACT ON THE SPIRITUAL HEALTH OF PARTICIPANTS**

by

Robbie D. Phillips

The average Bible student's understanding of the Old Testament storyline is prone to a significant level of vagueness. Walk Thru the Bible is a parachurch organization that specializes in presenting Bible instruction seminars. Their flagship seminar, Walk Thru the Old Testament, rehearses the Old Testament narrative, providing a memorable overview of the major people, places, and events of the Old Testament. Walk Thru the Bible has demonstrated a consistent focus on education, with a special interest in the student's retention and post-seminar study. The focus of this research was different from Walk Thru the Bible ministries' normal focus; the goal was to evaluate the impact of the Old Testament seminar on spiritual health, as reported by participants.

Pretests utilizing Raymond Paloutzian and Craig W. Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale provided spiritual health measurements prior to participation in the Walk Thru the Bible Old Testament seminar. The post-series tests provided a measure of spiritual health of participants following participation in the Walk Thru the Bible Old Testament seminar. In addition, follow-up interviews inquired about specific elements of the seminar that participants reported as affecting their spiritual health.

The pre- and posttest measurements had no significant movement due primarily to high pretest scores on spiritual well-being. Participants began with long-term faith, high

Bible knowledge, and high spiritual well-being. A high majority of participants did report a strong interest in and commitment to reading their Bible, something Walk Thru the Bible has reported historically. In addition, demographic factors showed little or no impact of results.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **PROBLEM**

#### **Introduction**

I attended a Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar near the end of my completion of a masters' degree in Bible and theology. My degree included three years of study and a thesis, yet the seminar had a surprisingly significant impact on me. The Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar is a bird's-eye overview of the biblical story from Genesis to Malachi. Understanding the wider storyline of the Old Testament bridged gaps and made connections within my existing knowledge of the Old Testament. It also influenced me on a personal level. The day was full of *aha* moments that affected me both educationally and spiritually.

The spiritual impact of the seminar centered mostly on a shift in perspective. The seminar enabled me to include the big picture context of Scripture more readily in my study. Seeing the wider context improved my understanding of the text. Context, both immediate and the wider narrative, was more consistently an essential *key* to the meaning of a passage. This connection to context also increased my confidence in understanding of text's meanings.

Moreover, seeing the wider narrative drew my attention to God as the author of the story. More than just an affirmation of the Bible's inspiration, this perspective shaped the way I viewed the present moment. God was the source of the story, the authority of the text and the hand on the lives of the biblical characters. He was both in the text, and outside the text. He was working in the biblical story and seeking to work in my story.

The rehearsal of the biblical narrative started at the beginning and ended at the feet of the current reader—me.

The challenge, as well as the benefit, that comes with understanding the storyline of Scripture is especially present in the study of the Old Testament. A common denominator among students is the challenge of keeping the wider biblical narrative in place when studying or teaching a passage of Scripture. Old Testament scholar Dr. Sandra Richter, after years of teaching and observation, notes that for most students of the Old Testament, “the dates, names and narratives lie in an inaccessible heap” (18). Moreover, this absence of an accurate knowledge of the biblical storyline can rob the student of a healthy understanding and application of Scripture.

This struggle with gaps in biblical knowledge, especially the Old Testament narrative, is not rare. Bible reading and study commonly focus on short passages of Scripture without significant consideration of the connection to the wider biblical context. Gordon D. Fee notes that students often read the Bible with a “terribly fragmented understanding of what it’s all about” (“Why Christians”). Professor Michael Goheen warns that those who study the Bible have divided it “into bits—moral bits, systematic-theological bits, devotional bits, historical-critical bits, narrative bits, and homiletical bits” (472). This approach to the reading and study of Scripture naturally produces gaps in biblical knowledge, especially in relation to the wider narrative. In other words, studying Scripture in small *bits* contributes to the absence of knowledge of the biblical storyline that exists among many students.

Many pastors and teachers reject an overly fragmented approach to Bible study and advocate reading Scripture in connection with the wider story (Fee, “Why

Christians”; N.T.Wright, “How Can the Bible” 24; Peterson, 48; Vanhoozer, *Lost in Interpretation* 94). Pastor and author, Eugene H. Peterson notes, “It takes the whole Bible to read any part of the Bible” (48). Moreover, Professor Joel B. Green writes, “Reading the whole text and reading the text as a whole, together with the attention to sequence ... [is a] nonnegotiable protocol for the competent interpreter” (8). The whole narrative of Scripture is indeed receiving greater attention.

A growing number of resources and organizations focus on education in the wider biblical storyline. One of those organizations is Walk Thru the Bible Ministries. In fact, Walk Thru the Bible is a veteran example of this type of focus; instructors began teaching the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar in 1976. Walk Thru seminar instructors display a picture of an unassembled puzzle and compare the content of the seminar to a puzzle box top, to which one frequently refers in order to identify where the various puzzle pieces fit.

The significance of knowing the biblical narrative involves more than having the knowledge to understand a passage in context, although that goal is indispensable. In addition to providing knowledge that fills gaps and makes connections, the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar, offers the participant the whole biblical storyline itself. The big picture narrative quality of the biblical storyline has its own unique impact on the student of Scripture.

British scholar N. T. Wright argues that the Bible needs to be read “in its own terms, as an overarching story” in order to influence the reader fully (“Book” 8). He even suggests obedience to Scripture stems from seeing the wider biblical narrative and the “extra-textual reality” toward which it points (7). Conversely, the lack of knowledge of

the biblical storyline leaves the student, as one professor writes, with “no comprehensive grand narrative to withstand the power of the comprehensive humanist narrative that shapes our culture” (Goheen 472). The wider biblical narratives’ importance goes beyond information.

Too often Scripture, as mentioned, is engaged not in its own overarching narrative but as isolated pieces analyzed for the usefulness of the moment. Ironically, this approach may actually lessen the Bible’s usefulness and impact on the reader. Most Bible students learn about the *trees*. They often review detailed accounts of the various *leaves* but they seldom see the grandeur of the forest, the *whole* biblical story. If the Bible student misses the awe-inspiring vistas of the larger storyline of Scripture, the story of a creative, compassionate, redeeming Father, they miss much more than information; they miss spiritual formation. Considering the potential dysfunctions inherent in the void of an understanding of the biblical storyline, the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar may play an important role, not only in the students’ biblical education but also in their spiritual health.

The Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar continues to be progressive in its focus on teaching the biblical storyline. The goals measured in the seminar, however, are more traditional. Education is a primary measure of seminar success, especially retention. For example, the seminar ends with a final review and celebration of the successful rehearsal of the Old Testament storyline.

Commitment to read the Bible is another seminar result Walk Thru the Bible measures. Walk Thru the Bible Ministries considers this commitment their “best testimony”; Walk Thru the Bible proudly notes that 75 percent of seminar participants

commit to read their Bible daily (“Live Events”). Walk Thru the Bible Ministries’ primary aim is to fan a “desire to study the Bible,” a commendable goal worthy of measurement (Hunt and McCauley 17). The seminar content essentially serves as an educational tool that encourages a commitment to Bible reading.

However, in my own experience, the seminars’ impact was both educational and spiritual. As mentioned, the spiritual impact of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar has not been the focus of measurements. Moreover, scholars have increasingly noted that knowing the biblical storyline plays a role in both education and spiritual health. For these reasons, I want to evaluate the spiritual influence of the seminar, not simply as a means to the future end of increased Bible study but the spiritual impact of the seminar itself. What impact does reviewing the big picture of the Old Testament narrative have on the students’ spiritual life is a primary focus of this research.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the research was to evaluate the impact of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar on participants’ spiritual health. Subjects were participants in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar.

### **Research Questions**

The questions below served as tools in conducting the research for this ministry research project.

#### **Research Question #1**

What were the participants’ self-perceptions of their spiritual health, as measured by Paloutzian and Ellison’s Spiritual Well-Being Scale, prior to their participation in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar?



## **Research Question #2**

What were the participants' self-perceptions of their spiritual health, as measured by Paloutzian and Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale, following their participation in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar?

## **Research Question #3**

What specific aspects of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar did participants report as influential on their spiritual health as revealed in the follow-up phone interviews?

## **Definition of Terms**

The following terms require definition.

### **Walk Thru the Bible Old Testament Seminar**

The Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar is a live, four-hour seminar, usually taught in churches, that provides an overview of the storyline of the Old Testament, focusing on the major people, places, and events.

### **Walk Thru the Bible Ministries**

Walk Thru the Bible Ministries is a parachurch ministry based in Atlanta, Georgia. Bruce Wilkinson founded it in 1976 in order to offer the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar to a national and international audience.

### **Spiritual Health**

Spiritual health refers to participants' self-report in relation to a personal sense of satisfaction and purpose in life, along with a positive self-assessment of their connectedness to/or relationship with God. Raymond F. Paloutzian and Craig W. Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) is a self-evaluation questionnaire that

measures satisfaction in “relation to God and self and provides a general assessment of spiritual well-being” (Ellison and Smith 43). In this research, the SWBS served as the pre- and posttest measurement tools.

### **Ministry Intervention**

The design of this research was a quantitative quasi-experimental method with qualitative interview questions (see Appendix C). Walk Thru the Bible Ministries’ Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar served as the intervention element. The measure of change was ascertained by utilizing Paloutzian and Ellison’s Spiritual Well-Being Scale.

The pre-series tests provided self-report of spiritual health among the survey participants prior to participation in the seminar. The post-series tests measured the self-report of spiritual health among the survey participants following their participation in the seminar. Follow-up interviews inquired about specific elements of the seminar that affected the spiritual health of participants.

### **Context**

Walk Thru the Bible Ministries, founded by Bruce Wilkinson in 1976, specializes in teaching Bible seminars that have a unique focus on the storyline of Scripture. Their flagship seminar, Walk Thru the Old Testament, is an overview of seventy-seven major people, places, and events in the biblical narrative from Genesis to Malachi. The average seminar contains four hours of instruction and is highly interactive, utilizing movement, visual aids, repetition, and humor. Instructors, frequently ministers or teachers trained by Walk Thru the Bible, most often teach the seminar in a church.

Research participants came from among adults who attended, participated, and completed one of three Walk Thru the Old Testament seminars. I taught all three

seminars in Independent Christian Churches located in Northeast Tennessee. Northeast Tennessee sits at the foot of the Appalachian Mountains and is a largely rural area, although the last two decades have seen significant growth in city populations and demographic diversity. Urban, suburban, and rural congregations hosted seminars.

The urban congregation was West Main Street Christian Church. The church is small and financially challenged. The church is also racially diverse. In addition, the church members are mostly older. The congregation's building is located in downtown Johnson City, Tennessee.

First Christian Church was the suburban congregation. It is a mid-sized, middle-class congregation. The church is mostly Caucasian and has both younger and older members. The church building is located in a middle-class, suburban neighborhood in Greenville, Tennessee.

The rural congregation was Lynnwood Christian Church. The church is a small congregation comprised of older members with a few younger members and children. The church is financially challenged due to its small size. The church building is located in Watauga, Tennessee.

The majority of the seminar participants (59 percent) were women. Men were a minority of the subjects (37 percent). One participant did not indicate their gender on the demographic questions form. A clear majority of the seminar participants (62.9 percent) was 50 or older and an even more significant majority (74 percent) was 40 or older.

### **Methodology**

The design of this research was a quantitative quasi-experimental method with qualitative elements also included. I collected data in pretests and posttests, and follow-

up interviews. I used Paloutzian and Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale. The pre-series tests provided self-report of spiritual health among the survey participants before their participation in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar. The post-series tests measured the self-report of spiritual health among the survey participants following their participation in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar. The follow-up interviews inquired about specific elements of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar that affected the spiritual health of the participants. I asked participants broad, open-ended questions to prompt discussion and follow-up questions to identify different elements of the seminar that had an impact on their spiritual health.

### **Participants**

Participants were adults who attended Walk Thru the Old Testament seminars hosted by three different churches. Urban, suburban, and rural congregations hosted the seminars. Sixteen adults attended the urban seminar. Sixteen adults attended the suburban seminar. Eighteen adults attended the rural seminar. Forty-three of the fifty-one seminar attendees (82 percent) participated by completing the initial Spiritual Well-Being Scale, and twenty-seven of the participants who completed the initial Spiritual Well-Being Scale completed a corresponding posttest (64 percent).

### **Instrumentation**

The surveys or questionnaires that provided measurements in the pre- and posttests of the research were Paloutzian and Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale. The Spiritual Well-Being Scale is a twenty-item self-assessment instrument that provides a subjective measurement of personal satisfaction in connection to one's relationship with God and self. It is widely used, easily understood, and requires a minimum of time to

complete. It is nonsectarian and easily scored (Paloutzian and Ellison 2-4). In addition, a portion of participants took part in follow-up phone interviews that utilized a semi-structured interview protocol with grand tour and prompt questions designed to ascertain specific elements of the seminar that influenced participants' assessment of their spiritual health.

### **Variables**

The independent variable was the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar. The dependent variable was the perceived influence on spiritual health brought about by the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar. Intervening variables included existing Bible knowledge, presence and length of Christian faith, educational level, and church attendance.

### **Data Collection**

I administered pre- and posttests utilizing Paloutzian's and Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale to seminar participants. The pretests were completed and collected on the day of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar. Participants also received an envelope to address to themselves for the posttest mailing. The subjects then participated in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar. I mailed the posttests one to two weeks following the seminar. I also provided a stamped envelope addressed to me. I received the posttest back one to two weeks later. I conducted the follow-up phone interviews with participants who had volunteered to be interviewed during the two weeks following the posttests.

**Data Analysis**

Paloutzian and Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale contains twenty items. Ten of the items represent a subscale focused on personal appraisal of satisfaction expressed in relation to God, and ten of the items measure personal satisfaction in relation to self/life. Rating occurs on a six-point Likert scale, scoring the items from one to six with the higher number representing greater spiritual well-being.

I compared pre- and posttest results from the instrument to measure the effect on spiritual health of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar. In addition, I analyzed interview answers to discover specific elements of the seminar that respondents reported as having an impact on their spiritual lives.

**Generalizability**

The research evaluated instruction in the biblical storyline of the Old Testament, as presented in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar, in relation to the participants' spiritual health. Understanding the relationship between knowledge of the biblical storyline and spiritual health appeals to those who are personally seeking greater spiritual health or to those who teach Old Testament, the biblical storyline, spiritual formation, Christian worldviews or metanarratives (metanarratives refer to overarching stories that explain or teach worldviews).

Results would also be of interest to anyone concerned with studying the Old Testament and its storyline, spiritual health, Christian worldview or metanarratives. In addition, they would be of interest to those considering the spiritual health and biblical knowledge of congregations similar to the ones that hosted seminars.

The research would also assist teachers or students looking for creative methods to teach the Bible, the biblical storyline, spiritual formation, Christian worldview or metanarratives. The seminar exposes students to a highly interactive teaching experience. Participant feedback related positively to teaching style.

### **Theological Foundation**

Many biblical passages model the practice of rehearsing the wider narrative of Scripture (e.g., Neh. 9; Josh. 24; Ps. 78). These passages contain an intentional focus on the narrative storyline of Scripture, which is often educational in nature. One can easily see this role in passages related to Israel's need to remember its own history. Nearly the entire book of Deuteronomy, for example, is a review of Israel's history with God. This new generation of Israelites needed to know this history, and Moses reviews it for educational reasons. The same pattern can be seen in Joshua 24 when the people are reminded of all God had done and challenged to be faithful. Nehemiah 9 has a similar review of God's faithfulness in Israel's history. However, the influence of these texts is not limited to education.

Rehearsing the storyline can also be formative. The language of the people's response in Deuteronomy is very personal; they are not simply confirming the reception of educational information. Likewise, Joshua's familiar and passionate challenge, "Choose this day whom you will serve" (Josh. 24:15, NIV) connects directly to the review of Israel's history. Moreover, Nehemiah and Ezra's words moved the people from sobbing to celebration. Each passage contains an element of personal application. In some ways, the impact of the wider narrative is similar to the Prophet Nathan's use of a narrative story to convict King David with the words, "You are that man" (2 Sam. 12). At

the same time, the impact of the wider narrative is much more than insight aided by the delay of the punch line in a narrative plot; the insight is connected to the wider narrative content of the storyline itself.

The early Church fathers saw the unique and inherent value of teaching students the wide narrative of Scripture. In addition, medieval cycle plays frequently retold the chronological storyline of Scripture. Over the past several hundred years, many missionaries have embraced Bible storying in their efforts to impact people with the Scriptures. Bible storying is a simple retelling of the biblical stories in a chronological pattern that follows the wider narrative of Scripture. In addition, contemporary preaching theory has grown to lament the absence of a focus on the wider narrative of Scripture and more and more it advocates the unique value and organic nature of considering the whole narrative in preaching.

The Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar has been championing the unique value of rehearsing the Old Testament storyline for decades. The seminar leads the student through a memorable, big picture overview of the Genesis to Malachi narrative. Walk Thru the Bible Ministries consistently measures the educational impact and retention of the seminar with a review at the end. In addition, they have documented high levels of commitment to increased personal Bible reading. Commitment to personal Bible reading and educational retention of the Old Testament storyline are the primary goals of the seminar, therefore the spiritual impact of the seminar is not measured. The spiritual impact of the seminar is the focus of this research.

The grand narrative of God's work in the Old Testament is a witness of God's faithful work through, among, and even in spite of his people. Richter challenges Bible



students to be very thoughtful in their application of Scripture, especially selections from the Old Testament. She notes that the text “tells the people of God something about their past and therefore their God” (4). Understanding the big picture of Scripture invites the student to understand Scripture and history in the context of God’s activity and mission. It also challenges the student to understand his or her own life in the context of what God has done in the past and is still doing today.

### **Overview**

Chapter 2 reviews biblical examples of rehearsing the storyline and literature related to the narrative overview of the Old Testament. It also provides a review of historical and contemporary examples of rehearsing the storyline, including the Walk Thru the Bible ministries and the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar. In addition, Chapter 2 discusses the spiritual health measurements used in the research and surveys the unique spiritual benefits of reviewing the biblical storyline.

Chapter 3 is a fuller explanation of the research design, participants, context, variables, data collection, and analysis. It goes into detail concerning the actual steps and procedures implemented in the research. It provides the steps that another could follow to reproduce the research.

Chapter 4 presents an exposition of the results of the pretests, the one to two-week follow-up posttests, and follow-up interviews. It also provides details concerning the demographics of the research participants. In addition, tables and statistics present data that can be compared and contrasted to more easily point to and examine the effect of the seminar on the participants.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the results, their interpretation, relevance, and implications for the church and ministry. Chapter 5 discusses the limitations of the study. In addition, Chapter 5 reviews unexpected findings and recommendations for future study in this area.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE

#### Introduction

My personal experience of rehearsing the Old Testament storyline at a Walk Thru the Bible seminar imparted educational and spiritual benefits. Unfortunately, the study of Scripture often focuses on small passages without connection to the wider biblical narrative. The absence of the knowledge of the biblical storyline increases the likelihood of the student misunderstanding and, therefore, misapplying the passage.

Scholar, Brevard S. Childs, protests elevating disconnected “inert shreds” of Scripture above the narrative whole (*Introduction* 73). Moreover, pastors and teachers are also promoting an approach to teaching and preaching that considers the wider narrative storyline as a core part of the process. One author writes, “It is the Church’s grand narrative, which is essential not only for its own identity but for the salvation of the world” (Walker 98). The wider narrative of Scripture plays a formative role in the life of Christians and the church.

Walk Thru the Bible Ministries places a unique focus on the narrative storyline of Scripture. Their Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar is a rehearsal of the Genesis to Malachi narrative, reviewing seventy-seven major people, places, and events. Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar participants often report a high level of commitments to increased Bible reading (“Instructor FAQ”)

Like much of evangelical Christianity, increased exposure to the Bible is assumed to equal spiritual growth. This assumption is not an altogether unreasonable connection; however, intentional measurement of the spiritual influence of the Walk Thru the Old

Testament seminar is lacking. This ministry research project is a remedy. I researched the impact of instruction in the biblical storyline of the Old Testament, as taught in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar, on the spiritual health of participants.

### **Theological Foundations**

The overarching narrative of the Old Testament serves a role that is both educationally necessary and spiritually formative for the student. This narrative storyline, as received in the Genesis to Malachi canon, serves as a synthetic guide to the Scriptures, encouraging holistic reading and drawing the student into the story itself (Childs, “Recovery”). The storyline is the wider frame in which all the parts find their place and meaning. In this context, narrative refers to much more than a genre of Scripture; the narrative storyline of the Old Testament is a unique and organic part of the study and application of Old Testament Scriptures.

Unfortunately, the dominant methods of study often disconnect the text from the wider narrative storyline. The historical-critical focus on the genre and historical details frequently override the role of the larger narrative in which the text is rooted. The text becomes a fragment, isolated from its narrative context. The student reduces context to genre and historical setting without reference to the whole narrative. Historical-critical study, for example, can be so driven to “recover an original literary or aesthetic unity” (Childs, *Introduction* 74) that it fails to accept and understand the texts’ own shape. The text, as received, is never really heard; instead, it is immediately filtered through the reader’s historical-critical presuppositions.

This fragmentation of Scripture is often the norm for academic study, which, under the influence of enlightenment thinking, isolates biblical texts in a defensive role

under historical-critical examination (Childs, *Introduction* 53). The unified narrative of the Bible is not even considered (34). In fact, scholars are “trained ... to be suspicious of attempts to read the Bible as a (unified) whole” (Bartholomew and Goheen 1). Not only is Scripture fragmented for academic study, it is isolated for teaching and preaching and personal or devotional reading. Ironically, all of these, study, preaching, teaching, personal, and devotional reading, suffer from the disconnection of the text from the whole narrative.

The concern among many scholars and pastors to remedy the fragmentation of Scripture in study and teaching is not a rejection of historical-critical study. These scholars advocate embracing both a commitment to a holistic narrative storyline and the use of historical-critical methods (Barr 352; Childs, *Introduction* 45; Newbigin, *Open Secret* 81). The focus, rather, is on a positive understanding of the significance of the narrative storyline itself. Professors Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen exemplify this approach:

We do not for a moment deny the value of a healthy historical criticism in reading the Bible. However, we do wish to privilege the final form of Scripture as we have it, and we maintain that in this final form all the books, in one way or another are closely connected to God’s unfolding story. (18)

The value of the whole biblical narrative, for many scholars, is connected to the authoritative nature of the Scriptures.

The focus on the narrative storyline is not a focus on narrative as a genre of Scripture. In addition, it is not an exploration of narrative or story as a form of communication. It is also somewhat different from a metanarrative, which operates with the freedom to emphasize, arrange or even choose the stories in the narrative for

theological reasons. Nonetheless, there is not always a clear separation in a focus on an overview of the wider storyline of Scripture from the discussion of metanarratives. One should also note the term metanarrative is still somewhat fluid in its use and definition: “The divine drama, told in Scriptures, offers a story, which is the story of the whole world,” thus becoming, in one sense, a metanarrative (Bartholomew and Goheen 13). In this research, the genesis to Malachi storyline is itself the focus without an intentional connection to a theological or worldview theme or lesson.

The biblical storyline is a necessary part of an accurate understanding of Scripture, which “cannot be understood apart from the underlying narrative context” (Loughlin 62). In addition, understanding the wider narrative is an organic part of the power of Scripture to be spiritually formative, adding even more importance to a holistic approach to Scripture. As one article notes, “If the story of the Bible is fragmented into bits (historical-critical, devotional, systematic-theological, moral) it can easily be absorbed into the reigning story of culture” (Bartholomew and Goheen, 9) ceasing to serve its formative role in the life of the reader. Moreover, the Scriptures themselves model this educational and formative value of the wider biblical story.

### **Old Testament**

Large portions of Deuteronomy’s review the wider, narrative storyline for education and formation. Deuteronomy is less a presentation of new material than it is a “pause” and “representation” of the Biblical storyline (Alexander and Baker 182-83). In his farewell address, Moses retold Israel’s history, reviewing and renewing their covenant with God. He connected his review and instruction with Israel, their ancestors and their future Kings (Vanhoozer, *Theological Interpretation* 72). In addition, the words

of his address merit careful preservation and review as authoritative witness in the life of Israel (Childs, *Introduction* 63). The text attributes significant importance to reviewing the narrative story of Scripture.

The generous use of first person language in Deuteronomy 26:5-9 emphasizes the formative role of reviewing the narrative storyline:

[Y]ou shall make this response before the Lord your God: “A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me.” You shall set it down before the Lord your God and bow down before the Lord your God.

The personal language encourages the hearers to review their place in the story and their identity as a nation.

Joshua 24:1-16 is another example of emphasis on the wider narrative storyline. Like Moses, Joshua delivered a farewell address. He reviewed the biblical narrative from Abraham to the recent conquest of Canaan, then recited and renewed Israel’s covenant with God. His words were deemed authoritative, and he even wrote in the book of the law (Josh. 24:26). His authority, however, was not an extension of Moses’ leadership but was derived from the divine authority behind Moses’ words (Childs, *Introduction* 63). In this sense, the narrative storyline points beyond itself to God as author. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson refer to this passage as a “retrospective that demonstrates the grace and faithfulness of Yahweh” (565). The wider narrative helps the reader look beyond the immediate story to the larger story and its author.

This passage is also rich with the use of personal language. Joshua challenges the people with these words:

[C]hoose this day whom you will serve.... [A]s for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; and the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God. (Josh. 24:15-18)

In similar fashion to the passage in Deuteronomy, the people are both reviewing the historical storyline and a “narrative reflection on the identity of the people of God” (Arnold and Williamson 569). The Biblical writers connect reviewing the wider narrative with information and formation.

Nehemiah 9 also contains a narrative overview of the wider biblical storyline. The book of Nehemiah records the events that occur after the Persians conquered Babylon, ended the Hebrew exile, and allowed Nehemiah to lead a group to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls. In chapter eight, a reading of the law and celebration of God’s faithfulness precede the overview and renewal of the covenant that follows in chapter nine. Too often interpretations of the narratives in Nehemiah disappear behind the debate many scholars hold over the historical sequence of events (Childs, *Introduction* 630). However, others note that the narrative is a focus on the “history of salvation” without the historical-critical concern for chronological exactness (Williamson 81).

The overview of the biblical storyline plays a key role in interpretation and application in the passage. In Nehemiah 8, the people respond to the reading of the law with sobbing. The leaders remind the people that the joy of the Lord is their strength or



shelter (Swanson 5057). Ezra and Nehemiah then instruct the people to celebrate the feast of booths or shelters (Swanson 5057). The feast is a reminder of the wider history, specifically God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. The countenance of the people shifts from sobbing to celebration. The shift is dramatic. Ancient rabbis said, "[H]e who has not seen Jerusalem during the feast of booths does not know what rejoicing means" ("Light from the Sidra"). The review of the wider narrative informed and inspired a shift in perspective that led to the celebration.

The address in Nehemiah 9:6-37 continues the focus on the wider narrative with a review of Israel's history. Beginning with Abraham, he retells the biblical storyline leading up to the very moment in which the hearers reside. The people begin by referring to the sins of their ancestors but end by confessing their own sins, using personal pronouns. The focus is on God; *you* or *yours* occurs in nearly every verse of chapter nine, all referring to God. God's historic faithfulness, mercy, and providential hand on the life of Israel are the dominant themes of the Ezra-Nehemiah narrative (Arnold and Williamson 293). The passage is a reminder of God's faithfulness in light of Israel's disobedience. This *reminder* ends like the passage in Deuteronomy, with a renewal of the covenant.

Many Psalms weave the same themes of God's faithfulness and Israel's unfaithfulness in their own reviews of the biblical storyline (Vanhoozer, *Theological Interpretation* 62). The same goals of education and formation appear. The readers are to learn from Israel's previous mistakes and remember, review, and faithfully recite the story (Ps. 78). The narrative review should lead to worship and a continued retelling of the story as witness to all nations (Ps. 105). The review of the biblical storyline

encourages greater perspective in the readers, helping them see their sins as easily as they see their ancestors' sins and to see God's grace in the past as a hopeful reminder for the present. The mistake to avoid, according to the psalmist, is forgetting the grand narrative of God and his faithfulness (Ps. 106).

Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9 contains an overview of the biblical storyline. Like Nehemiah 9, the passage has a reflective tone and contrasts Israel's disobedience with God's continued faithfulness. Debates on eschatology, dates and authorship often leave the theological message of Daniel neglected. One writer called the book of Daniel "a salvation-history metanarrative" (Vanhoozer, *Theological Interpretation* 242). As mentioned, even the plain overview of the Biblical storyline is interpreted or understood by some as a metanarrative, a grand story into which all other smaller stories fit. For the purposes of this research, Daniel 9 serves as one more example of reviewing the wider storyline intentionally and with an eye toward education and formation.

The lines between a metanarrative and a simple overview of the biblical storyline are not necessarily rigid. However, as soon as the primary intention of a narrative overview adopts a theological message and embraces intentional neglect, editing or arranging of elements, then it has become something other than the simple narrative overview upon which this research focused. Likewise, when narrative as a form becomes the crucial topic and incorporates flexibility about the content the narrative form receives, then it too is dissimilar to the seminar's overview. The primary theme connects to a straightforward focus on the review of the biblical storyline; nonetheless, a few of the examples cited may have characteristics of a metanarrative or even narrative as a communication style.

## New Testament

Although occurring in the New Testament, Stephen's sermon in Acts 7:1-53 is another example of a narrative overview of the Old Testament storyline and the role it can play in understanding and applying the truth of Scripture. Acts 6 says that Jewish leaders were jealous of Stephen's wisdom and framed him by arranging false witnesses to accuse him of preaching against the law and the temple. Acts 7:1 begins, "Then the high priest questioned Stephen, 'Is what these people are saying true?' Stephen replies, 'Brothers and fathers listen to me!'" The words translated, "listen to me" are strong words in the original language. Stephen pleaded, "[Y]ou need to hear what I have to say!" (Robertson; Acts 7:1). Stephen's pleading connects to more than the sharing of information with the leaders.

Stephen's message was a review of the storyline of the Old Testament. He reviews the call and covenant with Abraham (Acts 7:1-8), Joseph and Israel in Egypt (Acts 7:9-19), Israel's enslavement, the early days and call of Moses to lead Israel to freedom (Acts 7:20-34), Israel's wilderness wanderings (Acts 7:35-43), and the tabernacle and the temple (Acts 7:44-50). Stephen then applies the message to the leaders by accusing them of misunderstanding their spiritual roots;

Stephen has been telling them about their ancestors, and now he insists that the council [members] are worthy descendents of their fathers-but not those fathers who served God. Rather, they are the descendents of those who opposed God's messengers. (Adeyemo 1312)

He reverses the place the leaders assume they hold in the storyline of the Bible. Like Nehemiah 8 and 9, Stephen's sermon is also a powerful example of the role the narrative storyline can play in understanding and applying Scripture.

A variety of passages in the Old Testament (and the New Testament ) use parts of the larger biblical storyline to teach a lesson for their current readers; however, many of the texts quickly drift from the larger storyline, and the references to the wider context become mere *illustrations*. The focus in this review has been the intentional incorporation of the biblical storyline itself in teaching examples found in Scripture, not as mere technique or illustration, but as a core part of the content and application of the passages examined.

### **Historical Overview**

An emphasis on the value of the narrative storyline of Scripture continues in early Church history. Origin (185-254) and Augustine (354-430) both believed Christians needed to learn an overview of the grand storyline of Scripture (Steffen and Terry 317). Augustine recommended to fellow teachers that instruction of new converts include a full narration of Scripture beginning with Genesis 1 and leading up to the “present times of the church,” (qtd. in Steffen and Terry 317) the goal being that the student be able to “give a comprehensive statement of all things, summarily and generally” (317). These early Church leaders included the New Testament in their focus, but their example still demonstrates the valuing of the storyline itself.

A similar theme is present in medieval plays. Some of the plays lasted a full day. They were called cycle plays and consisted of reenactments that “dramatized Bible stories from creation to consummation to teach ... the stories of the Bible” (Steffen and Terry 318). One medieval cycle play began in the predawn hours in order to tell the story of creation “when the first light penetrated the darkness” (319) and ended the drama “in twilight with the story of the judgment of God.” Some of the plays might be more like

metanarratives in that the focus is on stories related to theological lessons, but the dominant focus was on a chronological overview of the Biblical storyline.

More recently, missionaries embraced the value of teaching an overview of Scripture's storyline. Often called Bible storying, Tom Steffen and James O. Terry, Jr. cite evidence in the work and teaching of missionaries over many centuries. The authors note it in the work of Father Francis Blanchet (1795-1883), Johannes Gustav Warneck (1834-1910), Christian Keysser (1877-1961), Hans-Ruedi Weber (1923-present), Donald McGavran (1897-2000), Raymond and Dorothy Valenzuela (1939-present), Vincent Donovan (1926-2000), Professor Gabriel Fackre (1926-present), and many others (Steffen and Terry 320-29). For the most part, Bible storying has focused on the narrative storyline content and not simply narrative style communication.

For some, however, a focus on story or narrative as a communication method has become the primary center of attention. The International Orality Network, the God's Story Project, and Chronological Bible Storying are all contemporary missions-related parachurch organizations that share strong interest in the value of teaching an overview of the storyline of Scripture. However, a commitment to canonical or chronological sequence of the biblical narrative is inconsistent. Groups sometimes arrange passages in the storyline in order to communicate certain theological truths; these theological lessons are the real content, with narrative simply used as a method. Again, editing, arranging or emphasizing some portions of the narrative over other portions leads some of the approaches to resemble metanarratives more than the simple overview of the biblical story.

A focus on narrative as method more than content has dominated contemporary homiletical theory. Narrative in preaching theory often receives vague and differing definitions. It can refer to sermons that simply use stories; Thomas G. Long's classic homiletical textbook, *The Witness of Preaching*, includes "here's a story" as one of the stock sermon forms (167). For others, narrative preaching refers to preaching from a narrative text (Cahill 133). Homiletics professor Richard Thulin comes closer to our discussion; he considers retelling the Biblical narratives as the foundation for preaching and affirms the high value of the wider Biblical storyline (Robinson 7). However, like many, he ultimately champions narrative simply as an effective form or useful structure in communication.

Most discussion of narrative and preaching concentrates on form. Narrative preaching most frequently receives a definition related to the construction of a narrative plot (Kalas, *Preaching* 74; M. Smith 9; Craddock, *Preaching* 130; Boone 162). The text's content or genre is not a factor (Cahill 133). The whole point of Eugene Lowry's influential book, *The Homiletical Plot*, is to define narrative preaching as any preaching that uses plot for the structure, regardless of other factors.

However, many pastors and writers are demonstrating a growing awareness of the need to focus on the whole narrative (Willimon and Lischer 335-36). Some recent homiletical thought has embraced the storyline of Scripture as a core part of narrative preaching (Green and Pasquarello 17). Moreover, these authors have recognized the unique role the biblical storyline holds in faithfully communicating the biblical message, citing both a hermeneutical necessity for interpretation within the biblical story and the formative need to "call God's people to live in the biblical story" (Bartholomew and

Goheen 6). Preaching and teaching the wider biblical narrative helps form the listener with the biblical story in perspective.

While Fred B. Craddock connects the wider story of Scripture with a Christian metanarrative, his newest definition and discussion of narrative preaching advocates a clear connection between narrative preaching and the larger narrative of Scripture:

Given the discontinuities and discords of postmodern life, we would be well advised to bring our metanarrative out of the silence of assumed background and set it in the foreground, fully articulated. Without a doubt, these master narratives, these claims of meaning and movement and purpose in the world, would be heard, not as supporting the gospel, but as gospel themselves, as welcomed good news. (Craddock, “Story” 98)

These developments in homiletical thought represent a genuine shift toward more holistic study and teaching of the Scriptures.

Many scholars are attributing increasing significance to the importance of the whole narrative storyline of Scripture. Lesslie Newbigin notes, “Preaching has to be firmly and unapologetically rooted in the real story.... [T]his way can only happen when the Bible in its canonical wholeness recovers its place...” (qtd. In Willimon and Lischer 333-35). Reviewing the narrative of Scripture can serve as one encouragement to recover a more holistic handling of the Bible. One author urges, “The interpreter must see the message of the text not only in its immediate historical-cultural context but also in its broadest possible context...” (Greidanus 95). This sort of championing of the value of examining the broader context of a passage is easily seen in the recent modern example, Walk Thru the Bible Ministries.

### **Walk Thru the Bible**

As a student at Dallas Theological seminary, Bruce Wilkinson researched teaching methods for his masters thesis. His research led him to design a creative

approach to teaching the Bible, which became the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar (Hunt and McCauley 10). Wilkinson founded Walk Thru the Bible Ministries in 1976 and immediately began teaching the seminar. The seminar is live, lasts about four hours, and most often occurs in a church setting. A New Testament version was added in 1978, but Walk Thru the Old Testament remains their flagship and most popular offering, according to Director of Events and Services, Sandy Edison.

As mentioned, the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar begins with the instructor displaying a picture of an unassembled puzzle. Instructors use the puzzle image to suggest that students of Scripture often understand pieces of the Old Testament but need to see the whole picture in order to place the pieces in the correct location. They compare the content of the seminar to a puzzle box top to which one frequently refers in order to identify where the puzzle pieces fit.

The heart of the seminar is the review of the seventy-seven major people, places, and events of the Genesis to Malachi narrative. The Walk Thru Old Testament seminar moves with a narrative flow; it is “driven by the question ‘what happened next?’” (Dinkins, “Adaptation” 121). Creative teaching combined with consistent focus on the storyline content create a memorable, big picture narrative, a framework for understanding the Old Testament. Augustine understood the value of the storyline as a framework; he instructed his teachers to present the biblical storyline to students, noting that passage details “should be passed over rapidly” (Steffen and Terry 317) and later “introduced and woven into the narrative” (317).

Memory also plays a large role in Walk Thru the Bible’s creative teaching style. In his book *The Seven Laws of the Learner*, Wilkinson writes, “Effective teachers



identify the irreducible minimum and teach it in such a way that 100 percent of the students master it deep enough to have it lodged in their long-term memory” (188).

Ronald T. Habermas and Klaus Issler highlight the role memory plays in Walk Thru the Bible teaching:

Bruce Wilkinson, president of Walk Thru the Bible, in his Seven Laws of the Learner seminar, suggest that it is the responsibility of the teacher to provide meaningful memory aids for learning a subject. In effect, when students must develop their own memory aids or summary outlines for a subject, they are taking on a major part of the teaching task themselves. One of the great benefits of Walk Thru the Bible Old Testament ... seminars is the summary outline of Bible history that seminar participants easily learn through creative, participative, activities. (383)

The role memory plays is a very practical one: if the biblical storyline is going to aid the student in understanding and applying Scripture, then he or she needs to be able to recall it easily.

A Walk Thru the Bible Instructor uses multiple teaching methods in their seminars to aid in content retention. A seminar instructor incorporates eleven paths of effective communication from Dr. Donald K. Smith’s twelve paths of effective communication:

1. Verbal—speech (the majority of the 6-hour seminar is speaking).
2. Written—symbols (the manual has both text, charts and diagrams).
3. Numeric—numbers (periods of years and dates are mentioned).
4. Pictorial—two-dimensional (the manual includes colorful pictures and graphs).
5. Artifactual—three-dimensional (object lessons).
6. Audio—nonverbal sounds and silence (music, reflection times).
7. Kinetic—body motions (hand signs).
8. Optical—light and color (the four color manual and overheads).
9. Tactile—touch
10. Spatial—utilization of space (layout of room as a map).
11. Temporal—utilization of time (schedule of the day, breaks, lunch).
12. Olfactory—taste and smell. (144)

These “pipelines of communication” (Dinkins, “My Journey” 23) along with frequent repetition, key words, rhythm, rhymes, and acrostics add to the seminar’s effective use of communication techniques and mnemonic tools (Malhorta 147).

Creative teaching style is organic to the seminar. Wilkinson describes the teaching style of Walk Thru the Bible in an interview as (1) synthetic—it gives an overview of the “forest” (broad sweep of the Bible) with little stress on the trees (details); (2) participatory—the teacher engages the students in learning; (3) memorable—it contains a variety of mnemonic aids; and, (4) fun (Hunt and McCauley 11). Innovative teaching methods are core to in Walk Thru the Bible Ministries; however, the seminar’s primary concentration is on content. Even the focus on creativity is simply a tool toward learning and retention.

Critics might suggest that the great variety in methods is juvenile, but Walk Thru the Bible Ministries see them as worthy efforts to advance the knowledge and application of Scripture. Christian author Marlene D. LeFever, very much in the spirit of Walk Thru the Bible Ministries, affirms creative teaching.

Am I right to assume that Jesus, were He among us in human form today, would use all the methods available—role-play, lecture, storytelling, drama, questions, and on and on—to bring people closer to Him.... The creator is our model. We must be creative teachers. (63)

Walk Thru the Bible’s methods, while diverse and creative are servants to the greater goal of instilling the content in students’ minds and hearts.

Wilkinson and Walk Thru the Bible display a passion for teaching the Bible. Article one of Wilkinson’s seminary doctrinal statement includes a straightforward conviction: “We believe that all the Scriptures were designed for our practical instruction” (“DTS Doctrine Statement”). From the beginning of Wilkinson’s research, as

a student at Dallas Theological Seminary, his primary goal was to increase the connection between the student and the Bible to fan the flame of personal Bible study (Hunt and McCauley 17). A “key to unlock the treasures of God’s Word” (“Instructor Training”) is Walk Thru the Bible’s description of the seminar. A strong, even automatic, connection between exposure to the Bible and spiritual growth is assumed.

Wilkinson’s seminary teacher and mentor, Howard Hendricks, writes, “Your task as a communicator is not to impress people, but to impact them; not just to convince them, but to change them” (63). The goals of the seminar reflect the simple focus on biblical content:

- 1) Walk through the major people, places, and events of the Old Testament.
- 2) Arrange the major people, places, and events in chronological order.
- 3) Locate the major geographical shifts in the Old Testament.
- 4) Know the Key words of the Old Testament books of history.
- 5) Tie together the structure of the Old Testament books.
- 6) Hear about Walk Thru the Bible’s helpful ministry tools for continued learning and growth.
- 6) Rekindle your desire to read the Bible and pray daily.
- 7) Understand Walk Thru the Bible’s life changing applications from the Old Testament. (Wilkinson, *Walk Thru the Bible* 3)

Instructors are trained to understand goal number six as holding the most prominent position in the seminar. The goal is to lead the student toward increased Bible reading and study. In addition, keeping with the commitment to help participants remember, the first letters of each goal combine to spell WALK THRU.

The high regard for Scripture, simple focus on Bible content, and variety in instructional method also empower Walk Thru the Bible seminars to be effective in a variety of settings. John Hoover, a Walk Thru the Bible leader involved in international ministries, describes the versatility of the seminar:

At least 50 participants are preferred to create group dynamics, but the seminar has been taught to only a handful or to thousands, as at Willow

Creek Community Church. WTB is easily translated into other languages as evidenced by the over 40 languages and 85 countries in which it is taught.... It is used as a tool in illiterate contexts (Africa); an evangelistic tool (Kenya); a church planting tool (India); a seeker sensitive tool (aboriginal tribesmen—Australia); a 77 Step Thru the Bible (Russia) and a long-term curriculum tool (Ukraine). (qtd. in Dinkins, “My Journey”)

While based in North America, Walk Thru the Bible teaches seminars internationally in over ninety other countries (Edison). In addition, Walk Thru the Bible has trained over forty-thousand indigenous teachers in eighty-five countries (“Promotional Materials”). Walk Thru the Bible instructors have taught more live seminars than any other Bible seminar group worldwide (Wilkinson, *Closer Walk* 11).

In North America, “more than 2 million men, women, and children have attended 30,000 live seminars in 10,000 churches representing 100 denominations” (“Promotional Materials”). The Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar remains their most requested, even with the addition of a New Testament and six other seminars (Edison). Their prime focus is to connect the student with the Bible. However, beyond measuring the connection of the student with the Bible, which Walk Thru the Bible Ministries does well, I want to examine the spiritual influence of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar itself.

### **The Narrative Storyline and Spiritual Formation**

Instruction in the narrative storyline of Scripture helps the student become a more educated student. It is essential that the larger narrative context play a role in interpretation of a passage of Scripture. Dr. Donald E. Demaray notes, “[C]ognizance of the entire Bible keeps interpretation in line” (46). In addition, N. T. Wright highlights the impact that understanding the whole narrative can have when he writes about Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7:

Stephen takes the bull by the horns, and goes for the big picture. What you need, he says, is ... [to] tell the story again from the very beginning and get it right this time ... so to arrive at the present moment at exactly the right speed and from exactly the right angle. Then, and only then, will you understand who Jesus is. (*Acts* 110)

Stephen's use of the grand narrative is intentional and directly connected to understanding the revelation of God rightly. Stephen's inclusion of the wider historical context and the storyline of Israel's history demonstrate the powerful role the narrative storyline plays in the understanding of Scripture.

Fee, in his classic interpretation book *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, cites misunderstanding of the biblical narrative as a key reason the Bible is often read poorly (89). Moreover, J. Ellsworth Kalas points out that understanding the grand narrative improves the reader's understanding of every Scripture passage (*Preaching* 15). Psalms 78, 105, and 106 are examples of the educational role of the wider biblical narrative, advocating the frequent review of the storyline. Knowing the overarching biblical narrative can prevent misunderstanding and, therefore, misapplication of Scripture.

Stated more positively, the intentional framing of Scripture in the grand narrative story of the Bible supports the importance of context. One of the most important rules in understanding a passage of Scripture is its location or context, in relation to the surrounding text and storyline. Most students would affirm the importance of considering context when studying a passage of Scripture but are inconsistent in practice, especially in relation to the wider narrative. The short-term educational benefits of receiving the knowledge of people, places, and events can grow into long-term habits that address the vital need of understanding and applying Scripture in context.

Learning the larger storyline of Scripture has a long-term impact, too.

Understanding the wider narrative can become second nature, encouraging a more natural, even extemporaneous inclusion of the wider context in study of Scripture. It also influences personal reading of Scripture, learning to back up and remind oneself of the big picture as a regular part of Bible study. The knowledge of the context not only corrects misunderstanding; it also encourages an enlarged perspective (see Ps. 106). In this sense, the educational and informational aspects of the storyline are formative themselves.

Seeing the wide narrative of the biblical story is part of the aim of Ezra's words in Nehemiah 9 and Stephen's words in Acts 7. They both retell the storyline in order to correct the hearers' present interpretation and application. In addition, the impact goes beyond the teaching moment; the big picture context also adds protection from future misunderstanding. One Christian scholar points out the formative value of instruction in Biblical narrative when he writes that the way "to avoid being swept into another story is by challenging and subverting those rival stories with the biblical narrative" (Goheen 478). The wider narrative of Scripture shapes the student beyond the immediate clarity it brings to the passage.

Understanding the wider narrative shapes the students perspective. The master narrative plays a special role in how people think. People learn and change their thinking more naturally in the context of grand narrative thinking. The wider narrative serves as a frame for other pieces of information. Pioneering research in cognitive science and linguistics has pointed to the importance of *framing*. George Lakoff, a professor at the University of California, defines frames as the mental structures that shape the way

people see the world (Deutschman 3). Alan Deutschman writes, “The big challenge in trying to change how people think is that their minds rely on frames, not facts. We may be presented with facts, but for us to make sense of them, they have to fit [our frames]” (3). According to Deutschman’s research, narrative frames guide thinking (5). In other words, thinking is influenced and changed more easily when the larger narrative is included in the education efforts.

Narrative overviews, such as those in Psalms 78, Deuteronomy, or Joshua 24, use the overview of Israel’s history to challenge the hearers, not only to learn lessons but also to shape their thinking, their worldview, and their identity. The greater encounter between student and Scripture is not a result of the narrative style of instruction but the narrative content itself. The grand narrative approach creates a different level of encounter with Scripture than does fragmented teaching of linear, propositional truth; it invites the student to a God-shaped framework or worldview. Interaction with the wider narrative context of a passage draws the reader into the text by encounter, not merely explanation (Cahill 134; Childs, “Recovery”).

A narrative overview of the biblical story line invites students to consider their place in the story of God. The encounter with Scripture is an encounter with the story of God and with God himself. Fee discusses this personal interaction with the narrative of Scripture:

Narratives are stories—purposeful stories retelling the historical events of the past that are intended to give meaning and direction for a given people in the present.... [T]he story they (Bible narratives) tell is not so much our story as it is God’s story—and it becomes ours as He “writes” us into “it.” (*How to Read the Bible* 90)

When the student encounters the wider narrative, he or she is invited to consider the source of the narrative itself: “The goal is to first have the listener encounter the event in a narrative format and then see God as the cause of effect behind the event” (Dinkins, “Adaptation” 121). The bigger picture can open up the readers’ eyes to the larger realities behind the text.

When students learn the biblical narrative, they discover not only the context of the text but also their own context. Kalas refers to this connection between the grand plot and communication as a sort of “existential” interaction with Scripture (*Hop* 16).

Christopher J. H. Wright notes that reading Scripture with the grand plot invites the reader to join the biblical narrative (Goheen 471). Personal application seems almost inherent in a narrative overview of Scripture. The grand storyline leads up to the present moment, calling the hearer or reader to take their place in the story.

The ability to frame everyday life in the larger context of God’s story is formative. As mentioned, it can help the student see things with greater perspective, overlooking small things and remembering the more important issues. Moreover, it can infuse each moment with God himself. Days and minutes are no longer isolated experiences, solely measured by human perspective; they are part of a larger story, God’s story. The consistent inclusion of the Genesis to Malachi narrative when reading Scripture reminds the student to view the Bible as it presents itself, as a witness to divine reality (Childs, *Introduction* 73).

A larger perspective based on Scripture’s storyline is part of the connection between seeing the big picture and spiritual formation. Richard Lischer makes similar observations about the Church and its use of the wider story of Scripture:



Some Narrative preachers treat the gospel as though it were one of several species under the genus “story,” when in fact the Bible’s narrative of salvation sets the standard for what a story should be. Only by the light of the gospel do we discover our true beginning, middle, and end. Preachers have drifted far from the true ground of narrative preaching. We tell stories by reason of our humanity. In the pulpit, however, preachers tell the story because God got involved with a particular people in a specific time and place, and that involvement generated a history in which we are privileged to participate by faith.... [T]he preachers’ task is not to tell bunches of substitute stories ... but to tell the one story. (“Stick with the Story” 11)

Lischer rightly connects narrative not simply with a form of communication, but with the content of the wider biblical storyline and then links the storyline with formation in the community of faith.

Deeper, more significant formative meaning is related to an overarching narrative; the big picture reveals meaning beyond the immediate. Joel B. Green and Michael Pasquarello write, “We typically explain our behaviors not by physical and chemical chains of cause and effect, but through the historical narratives...” (15). They go on to ask, “What stories will shape us? For Christians, the answer is nonnegotiable: Our task is to make our lodging the Genesis-to-Revelation narrative so that our modes of interpretation are conformed to the biblical narrative, so that this story decisively shapes our lives” (17). This grand narrative perspective is part of the gospel, the good news to the church and those outside the church.

As the grand narrative is taught, students can see and understand the larger story of God as an invitation to a God-infused worldview. Equipping disciples with a grand biblical narrative is the core of the church’s task and identity. Goheen writes about the central role the wider story of Scripture holds in the life of the church:

The church ... does not comprehend its missionary identity, as it should. And we will not recover our missional identity unless, both in the church

and in the academy, we recover Scripture as one story in which we are called to find our true place. (477)

The overview of Scripture lays the foundation for the student to shape their worldview by the worldview of Scripture.

At the center of the one story, the grand narrative of Scripture is the story of God and his activity or mission in the world. Author, C. Wright sees the mission of God and Christians' role in it "as a framework in which we can read the whole Bible. Mission is a major key that unlocks the whole grand narrative of the canon of Scripture" (17). The mission of God is to reconcile all the nations to himself and can be seen in Abraham's call to bless the nations and in each covenant formed with Noah, Abraham, Israel, or David. It calls out in the patience of God with Israel, in the prophets' pleading hearts, and in the predication of a coming Messiah who will suffer to redeem Israel and all people, including the current students of the Scriptures.

The larger storyline of the Bible is a witness to all of struggling humanity. It offers a context for wrestling with ultimate questions of meaning (i.e., Why are we here?), origin (i.e., Where did we come from?) and destiny (i.e., What is our future?). In Luke 24 Jesus answers distraught men who have lost faith by explaining to them the larger picture concerning his death (and resurrection), from Moses, the Law, and the prophets. He instructs the men in an overview of God's work throughout the Old Testament. His instruction provides a new understanding of the Scriptures, which, in turn, give the men a fresh understanding of themselves and the moment or context in which they stand. The men become men not full of discouragement but full of hope.

Understanding the larger narrative equips the student with unique qualities to help share the message of the purpose of God in history and today. One author writes, "The

narrative is an excellent form of proof because it places into context an event showing how the parts fit within the whole” (M. Smith 13). N. T. Wright reflects on Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7 as a contemporary model for sharing the work of God:

One of the great acts of Christian theology is to know how to tell the story: the story of the Old Testament, the story of Jesus as both the climax of the Old Testament and the foundation of all that was to come (not, in other words, a random collection of useful preaching material with some extraordinary and “saving” events tacked on the end), and the story of the church from the first days until now. Sometimes we, too, have to take a long walk back and have another run at things to make sure we get things in the proper rhythm,... sometimes a story is the only way of telling the truth.” (*Acts* 110)

Wright’s concern is not story as a method for method’s sake, but story as a servant to the one story of Scripture, to presenting the truth rightly. The larger context frames the biblical story in such a way that it is more readily understood and received as the truth that it is.

N. T. Wright notes that the “whole point of Christianity is that it offers a story which is the story of the whole world” (*New Testament* 41-42). The grand narrative of Scripture is a natural aid to apologetics; more than an aid, the grand narrative is an apologetic. The world, like the church, needs to understand, embrace, and retain the real framework or worldview—God’s, the one based in reality. Newbiggin shares a telling story in his book *A Walk through the Bible*:

Many years ago, a Hindu friend of mine, a very learned man, said to me something I have never forgotten: I can’t understand why you missionaries present the Bible to us in India as a book of religion. It is not a book of religion—and anyway we have plenty of books of religion in India. We don’t need any more! I find in your Bible a unique interpretation of universal history, the history of the whole of creation and the history of the human race. And therefore a unique interpretation of the human person as a responsible actor in history. That is unique. There is nothing else in the whole religious literature of the world to put alongside it. (4)

One might even say that telling the full story of the Bible is the primary mission of the church. To be formed by the story is to be a carrier of the story, to pass it along, as a natural result of its shaping you.

Missionaries often taught a chronological overview of Scripture saw unique benefits of instruction in the grand narrative of Scripture (Steffen and Terry 325-27). The whole message went forth, the oral presentation style increased cultural relevance and the narrative overview provided a framework for further teaching of the gospel (Lovejoy 11-12). In addition, harmful restructuring (synchronism) of the *new* message decreased dramatically, and apprehension, retention, and sharing the good news grew significantly (Steffen and Terry 326-27).

The narrative summaries in Scripture are more than just practical recaps; they are part of the biblical stories themselves (Davis and Hayes 42). The summaries are part of the life-changing power of Scripture, the inspired word of God. When the grand narrative is not taught, the Christian narrative is robbed of its impact on the church (and the world). A secular, human-centered perspective on history and Scripture is more easily embraced because it is often more readily available.

In our opinion grand narratives or worldviews cannot be avoided—part of being human means indwelling and living out of some such basic narrative albeit unconsciously. Unavoidably these narratives compete with each other and claim to tell the truth about the world in which we live, and undoubtedly some are much healthier than others. Thus, it is not a question of whether we indwell a grand narrative but of which one we indwell. Our contention is that the norm for the Christian story is the Bible, which itself has the shape of a grand story. Christian should therefore make every effort to allow their narratives to be formed by Scripture. (Bartholomew and Goheen 25)

Again, while a simple overview of the Old Testament is not a metanarrative itself, it could serve as a foundation that allows the biblical story to influence interpretation and

application of texts. That foundation of seeing Scripture from a wide-angle view can serve as the beginning of a framework or worldview shaped by Scripture.

### **Research Design**

The research used a quantitative quasi-experimental design with a qualitative interview element. The goal was to measure the impact of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar on the spiritual health of participants. Participants completed surveys prior to and one to two weeks following the seminar in order to measure the spiritual impact of the seminar. Sixteen seminar attendees also participated in semi-structured phone interviews following the seminar designed to add specificity to the questionnaire results.

Pre-and posttests were designed to determine the relationship between the participants and the intervention (the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar). I assumed the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar would have a spiritually positive influence on participants. The pretest established a measure of spiritual well-being prior to the seminar, and the posttest measured the change in spiritual well-being scores.

Paloutzian and Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale was used for the pre- and posttests. The scale serves as a "global psychological measure of one's perception of spiritual well-being" (Boivin, Kirby, Underwood, and Silva 382). The Spiritual Well-Being Scale measures spiritual health with vertical (relationship with God) and horizontal (satisfaction with life) elements (Ellison 331). The vertical dimension is measured in a religious well-being subscale (RWB) and the horizontal dimension is measured with an existential well-being subscale (EWB). The subscales provide a dual focus on the participants' relationships with God, their surroundings, and community.

The Spiritual Well-Being Scale is highly validated (Souza et al. 39). The scale has been used in many settings, including congregations (39). The scale's measure of spiritual well-being has served to "aid in accessing the impact of church programming, events or activities" (Paloutzian and Ellison 4). The Spiritual Well-Being Scale's history and application matches the focus of this research as well.

In addition, semi-structured interview protocol served as an effective tool for additional data collection. It allowed for both structure and liberty, guiding participants yet encouraging free sharing: "Semi-structured interviews allow respondents to be the experts and inform the research" (Leech 668). The addition of qualitative interviews to the quantitative surveys provided greater data depth for analysis and comparison (see Appendix C).

### **Summary**

Unfortunately, "Bible training institutes often promote fragmentation, [and] ... fragmented grasp of the Bible often results in some people missing the big picture. Caught up in the details and minutiae, Bible students often fail to see God's overall plan" (Steffen 45-46). Academic training fragments Scripture, along with preaching and devotional reading which focus on similar fragmentation of texts. "The Bible has become a springboard for personal piety and meditation, not a book to be read.... [W]e seem to want to teach timeless Christian themes that spring from those stories, while leaving the stories themselves behind" (Burge 1). Context free texts have too often become the normal interaction with Scripture.

The grand and complex spans of the Old Testament Scriptures are especially prone to the neglect of the wider storyline. Fee in a lecture titled "Why Christians Read

Their Bibles Poorly” cites the confusing terrain of much of the Old Testament as a major cause of the problem. He says, “[H]elp is needed for the modern person to navigate their way through this tricky terrain.” Unfortunately, much of modern Bible study instruction is a main cause of fragmentation and poor knowledge of the Old Testament terrain.

The historical-critical approach to Bible study can easily slip into a cross-examination model where Scripture takes on a defensive position. The text is isolated from the surrounding narrative context, and questions of setting and genre become the near exclusive method of search for texts’ messages. The biblical storyline is overshadowed and the text, as received, does not gain a proper hearing.

As has been seen, the Scriptures themselves model the importance of considering the wider biblical narrative. Nearly the entire book of Deuteronomy is a review of the biblical storyline, rehearsing Israel’s calling and God’s provision. Joshua 24 demonstrates the same practice of rehearsing the larger narrative story leading up to the moment of review. Nehemiah 9 is another example of reviewing the storyline in a spiritually informative and formative manner. A review of the Old Testament narrative dominates Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7 as well. Moreover, Daniel 9 and several Psalms contain similar examples.

In Deuteronomy 26, Joshua 24 and Nehemiah 9 personal pronouns mark the people’s response. In addition, all three chapters contain a renewal of the covenant between God and Israel. Obviously, the wider narrative review often has a personal impact. The impact of the wider narrative review can be the joyful realization that God is as forgiving today as he has been in the past, as in Psalm. 78. The wider context can also lead the reader to a pain-filled moment of confrontation with their own role in the

thwarting of God's work, like the Jewish leaders in Acts 7. Unlike the audience in Nehemiah, the Jewish leaders in Acts rejected the messenger and killed the messenger. In addition, as in Joshua 24, the larger narrative can challenge the audience to see all that God has provided and choose to serve him boldly.

Early Church leaders also saw the wisdom of teaching the wider narrative storyline of the Bible. Teachers were encouraged to teach an overview that would serve as a frame for more detailed study in the future. Reenactments during the Middle Ages focused on reviewing the big picture of the Bible narrative. Some plays would begin early in the morning in order to review the entire narrative of Scripture before evening. Missionaries for the past few centuries have embraced Bible storying. Bible storying is a retelling of the biblical storyline and its stories in sequence. Ministry leaders note that it decreased the abuse of Christian truths in pagan cultures because it anchors them in the biblical narrative (Steffen and Terry 326). In addition, they also note that it leads to a greater accuracy and confidence in sharing the biblical story.

Contemporary homiletical theory, while often dominated by an understanding of narrative as a form or structure for communication, has embraced a growing conviction of the need to consider the broader narrative context of a passage. Moreover, leading homileticians are touting the unique and crucial assets that the wider storyline brings to the handling of a text (Craddock, "Story" 98). They recognize the wider narrative context as a hermeneutical necessity for accurate interpretation of a passage of Scripture. In addition, homileticians advocate a deepening understanding of the wider narrative context and its central role in spiritual formation (Green and Pasquarello 17).



The biblical story line is an organic part of the study and application of Old Testament Scriptures. In regard to the Old Testament, the Genesis to Malachi canon serves as a unifying guide to the Scriptures. The wider narrative storyline is vital to accurate interpretation. In addition, it encourages a holistic reading of the passage and engages the student with the story itself, not merely the dissected portions. This connection with the wider narrative invites the student to consider a more personal interaction with the Scripture passage. The student then asks broader and, at the same time, more personal questions. Why a student may question if a verse is original to a passage or an edition made by an editor, albeit valid questions, examining the overarching narrative raises additional questions, such as asking oneself where he or she fits into the story.

Including the wider narrative in the study of a passage may expand the influence of the text more fully to the reader (i.e., framework or worldview). Newbigin in his milestone book *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* writes, “The way we understand human life depends on what conception we have of the human story [the wider narrative]. What is the real story of which my life story is a part?” (15). He goes on to conclude, “Christianity’s contribution ... is the Bible’s story” (182). The wider biblical narrative is the background, the back-story, for humanity. As Craddock notes, when proclaiming the content of the wider biblical narrative, the “claims of meaning and movement and purpose in the world, [are] heard, not as supporting the gospel, but as gospel themselves, as welcomed good news” (“Story” 98). The wider narrative helps the reader begin to see life from the larger biblical perspective.

The wider narrative review of Scripture often puts life itself in context. The choices of the hearers are framed in the context of the divine reality revealed through Scripture. Joshua's challenge to his people to "choose this day whom you will serve" comes in the context of reviewing their available choices—"the Lord," seen in his historical faithfulness to Israel or "the gods of your fathers ... beyond the river ... or the gods of the Amorites" (Josh. 24:14-15). If read rightly, the context of Scripture should always be personal.

The Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar is a contemporary model of reviewing the biblical storyline. The seminar is a live, five-hour seminar that teaches the Genesis to Malachi narrative of the Old Testament. The seminar is creative and memorable. Instructors make a special effort, through innovative teaching methods, to help the students retain the content.

The unique interest of this research, however, is not merely the educational impact of a seminar but the personal and spiritual impact. Measuring the educational impact is valuable, but Walk Thru the Bible Ministries has done little research on spiritual influence of the seminar. The focus of this research is the neglected question, "What is the spiritual impact of reviewing the Old Testament storyline, as presented in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar?"

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Problem and Purpose

One often hears the phrase *taken out of context* applied to the use of Scripture. Knowledge of the Old Testament is especially prone to vagueness or even a complete absence of an accurate understanding of the wider context or storyline. More and more scholars, pastors, and other ministry leaders are addressing the need for a better understanding of the wider biblical storyline. The Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar is one ministry that meets the “need for clarity and connection” (“Live Events”) by teaching a memorable overview of the Old Testament storyline.

The seminar has a proven record of leading participants toward increased personal study: three-fourths of participants commit to daily Bible reading (“Instructor FAQ”). Studying the wider biblical narrative also includes a personal, spiritual impact. The biblical story line invites readers, as one author notes, “to find ourselves imaginatively ... entering the story, [and] taking our place in the plot” (Peterson 48). The personal, spiritual impact of the seminar has not received the level of measurement applied to the educational elements. Researching the spiritual impact of the seminar is the focus of this project.

The purpose of this study was to measure the effect of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar on the spiritual health of participants, who served as the subject group. Seminar participants completed spiritual health surveys prior to and following the seminar. Sixteen participants also took part in follow-up phone interviews.

### **Research Questions and/or Hypotheses**

The following questions assisted in measuring the influence of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar on the spiritual health of participants.

#### **Research Question #1**

What were the participants' self-perceptions of their spiritual health, as measured by Paloutzian and Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale, prior to their participation in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar?

The Spiritual Well-Being Scale "provides an overall measure of the perceived spiritual quality of life, as understood in two senses—a religious sense and existential sense" (Paloutzian and Ellison 2). The existential measurement focuses on purpose and satisfaction in life. The religious measurement focuses on the subject's relationship with God. A higher score on the Spiritual Well-Being Scale equates with a "more intimate and positive relationship with God" (Ellison 336). The scale provides an uncomplicated self-report of spiritual health that worked well with the research.

#### **Research Question #2**

What were the participants' self-perception of their spiritual health, as measured by Paloutzian and Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale, following their participation in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar?

Participants completed the Spiritual Well-Being Scale survey a second time, one to two weeks following the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar. The second Spiritual Well-Being Scale test measured the self-perception of spiritual health following participation in the seminar. I compared the results of the second test to the results of the

first tests. The comparison measured changes in spiritual health following participation in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar.

### **Research Question #3**

What specific aspects of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar did participants report as influential on their spiritual health as revealed in the follow-up phone interviews?

Sixteen of the participants in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar who completed pre- and posttests took part in follow-up interviews, which I conducted by phone. I asked participants four grand tour questions designed to help them ascertain connections between the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar and changes in their spiritual health (see Appendix C). In addition, follow-up and prompt questions were included to help participants expand and clarify answers.

### **Participants**

Subjects were participants in three different Walk Thru the Old Testament seminars. The different seminars represented varied demographic locations in urban, suburban, and rural congregations. I taught the seminars at Independent Christian churches located in Northeast Tennessee. Northeast Tennessee is a largely rural area, which sits at the foot of the Appalachian Mountains. However, the area has experienced significant growth in urban and suburban populations, along with demographic diversity during the past two decades.

Fifty-one adults attended the seminars. Attendees who completed *either* the pre *or* the posttests were divided equally among the different seminar locations; attendees completed fourteen pre- and nine posttests from each location. Forty-two seminar

attendees (82 percent) completed the initial survey. Twenty-seven of those attendees (64 percent) completed the post-survey through the mail.

Twenty-seven (52 percent) attendees participated in the research by completing both a pre and posttests. Sixteen research participants (59 percent) were female and ten (37 percent) were male. One research participant did not indicate their gender on the demographic questions form. Seventeen of the participants (62.9 percent) were over the age of 50. Twenty of the participants (74 percent) were over the age of 40. All of the subjects were Christians who attended church on a regular basis. In addition, all of the seminar participants had been Christians for longer than five years.

### **Design of the Study**

The research was a quantitative quasi-experimental design. In addition, the study included a qualitative element in the form of a semi-structured follow-up interview. A control no group was not part of the study. I collected data from three different seminar locations.

### **Instrumentation**

This project called for researching the impact of a Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar on the spiritual health of participants. I administered pretests utilizing Paloutzian's and Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale to seminar participants. The subjects then participated in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar. Research participants came from three different seminar locations—urban, suburban, and rural. One to two weeks following the seminars, I administered posttests through the mail using the same Spiritual Well-Being Scale. In addition, I conducted follow-up phone interviews with a portion of participants one to two weeks after the posttests. I analyzed the test and

interview results in order to identify the impact of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar on the self-perceived spiritual health of participants.

Paloutzian's and Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale provides a subjective measurement of personal satisfaction in relation to one's relationship with God and self; it is a simple tool for the participants to measure their own self-perceived spiritual health (Boivin, Kirby, Underwood, and Silva 382). It is a pencil and paper instrument and can be administered and scored in a reasonably brief time. The questionnaire contains twenty items that use a six-point Likert scale. The items are anchored with the phrases *strongly agree* and *strongly disagree* (Paloutzian and Ellison 4). They are scored from one to six with the higher number representing greater spiritual well-being. The Spiritual Well-Being Scale is easy to understand, nonsectarian, and works well with a wide variety of groups.

The Spiritual Well-Being Scale is comprised of two subscales that provide a dual focus on the participants' relationships with God and their surroundings and community. The existential measurement focuses on purpose and satisfaction in life. This *horizontal* element focuses on relationships and satisfaction with self and community (Boivin, Kirby, Underwood, and Silva 382). The questions in the existential element do not contain specifically religious language (Boivin, Kirby, Underwood, and Silva 382). The religious measurement focuses on the subjects' relationships with God. The religious measurement is referred to as the *vertical* element (Ellison 331). The questions in the religious element all reference *God*. The ten questions from each subscale are combined to create the test score. A higher score on the Spiritual Well-Being Scale equates with a

“more intimate and positive relationship with God” (Ellison 336). The scale provides a holistic measure of the subjects’ self-perception of their spiritual health.

The Spiritual Well-Being Scale is considered one of “best validated and most widely used” in the measurement of general spiritual well-being (Souza et al 39). Other scales measure change in behaviors such as church attendance, which may or may not represent spiritual health or well-being, or Bible reading, which Walk Thru the Bible already measures. The subjective focus on the subjects’ self-report of spiritual health meshed well with the understanding of spiritual health used in this study. In addition, the simplicity of language and practicality of the instrument worked well with the large variety of participants represented in the different seminar locations. These facts, along with the proven reputation of the scale, made it the right choice.

Moreover, the Spiritual Well-Being Scale has been used in numerous studies and is highly validated (Souza et al 39). “The Spiritual Well-Being Scale can be used in congregational settings in order to assess the religious and existential well-being,” and it can be used to “assess any increase or decreases in well-being over time due to the implementation of church programs or other activities” (Paloutzian and Ellison 4). The history of the Spiritual Well-Being Scale’s application matches the focus of this research well.

A portion of seminar participants took part in follow-up interviews conducted by phone (interview participants indicated their willingness to take part in the phone interviews when providing contact information on a separate form). The phone interview was semi-structured and consisted of four broad or grand tour questions designed to help participants identify aspects of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar that had an



impact on their spiritual health. Semi-structured interview protocol served as an effective tool for additional data collection. It allowed for both structure and liberty, guiding participants, yet encouraging free sharing. “Semi structured interviews allow respondents to be the experts and inform the research” (Leech 668). The flexibility of the semi-structured interview method was useful for guiding participants in discussing the spiritual influence of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar on their spiritual health (see Appendix C).

### **Variables**

The independent variable was a Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar. Research subjects participated in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar, which leads participants in learning and retaining the storyline of the Old Testament. The subjects completed Paloutzian and Ellison’s Spiritual Well-Being Scale prior to and one to two weeks following their participation in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar.

The dependent variable was the perceived influence on spiritual health as a result of participation in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar. The goal was to examine the spiritual health of participants before and after their participation in the seminar. In addition, phone interviews provided specific feedback from participants regarding the spiritual impact of the seminar.

Intervening variables such as the presence and length of personal Christian faith, church attendance, existing biblical knowledge, and educational level were measured by basic demographic questions added to the survey. Identifying those participant characteristics allowed them to be factored into research results.

### **Reliability and Validity**

The Spiritual Well-Being Scale has been used in numerous studies and is highly validated (Souza et al 39). The scale has high reliability. Reliability coefficients across multiple studies are  $\alpha = .93, .99, .99, \text{ and } .82$  (Paloutzian and Ellison 2). In addition, Paloutzian and Ellison's research showed the Spiritual Well-Being Scale has high validity scores (3). Paloutzian and Ellison conclude, "The Spiritual Well-Being Scale can be used in congregational settings in order to assess the religious and existential well-being" (4). In addition, they note that it can be used to "assess any increase or decreases in well-being over time due to the implementation of church programs or other activities" (4). Measuring increase or decrease in spiritual well-being from a church program or activity matches the focus of the research well.

In addition, semi-structured interview protocol served as an effective tool for additional data collection. It allowed for both structure and liberty, guiding participants yet encouraging free sharing. "Semi structured interviews allow respondents to be the experts and inform the research" (Leech 668). The subjective nature of assessing spiritual well-being was served well by allowing the participants to be the authority and not solely the research instrument.

### **Data Collection**

Participants completed Paloutzian and Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale prior to participating in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar. Pretests of seminar participants established a standard by which to compare spiritual health measurements in the future. Participants also completed the Spiritual Well-Being Scale one to two weeks after the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar. Comparing Spiritual Well-Being Scale

test results before and after participation in the seminar aided in assessing the impact of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar on participants' perception of their spiritual health.

Completion of the pretest occurred on the day of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar. I provided seminar participants with a pencil, a Spiritual Well-Being Scale, and an envelope. I briefly explained my research and invited participants to spend a few quiet moments completing the surveys before beginning the seminar. I instructed participants to write the middle two digits of the last four digits of their social security number in the upper, right-hand corner of the survey. I also explained that the survey was two sided, one side containing the Spiritual Well-Being Scale and the other side containing a notice of consent, brief instructions, and basic demographic questions (see Appendixes A and B). In addition, I asked them to address the envelopes to themselves to aid in mailing the repeat survey the week following the seminar. I assured them the questionnaires were anonymous and would be handled confidentially. After the test was completed, I collected the test and envelopes personally, allowing participants to place them in two separate boxes. I thanked the group and began the seminar.

At the end of the seminar, participants were invited to complete a form that requested their phone number. I asked participants to indicate on the form their willingness to participate in brief phone interviews the week following the posttest mailings. I followed the same procedure at each seminar. I used different color paper for the surveys at each location. The color-coding aided in identifying the specific demographic locations. The test, envelopes, and contact forms completed at the seminar were placed in my private bag and kept secure. The week following the seminars, I

placed blank surveys, along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope in the envelopes addressed by participants at the seminar and mailed them.

The week following the mailing of the posttest, I called the participants who indicated on their contact form a willingness to take part in phone interviews. After polite introductions and confirmation of acceptable timing of the call, I proceeded with the interview. I asked four grand tour interview questions to aid participants in sharing specific aspects of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar that affected their spiritual lives (see Appendix C). I took detailed notes on the answers given to the questions and asked clarifying and prompt questions when needed. The notes taken were placed in a folder labeled interviews for later analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

I collected the Spiritual Well-Being Scale questionnaires. Test results for both pretests and posttests were tallied. A series of t-tests were used to determine change between pre- and posttest scores. I compared the results in order to measure the changes and ascertain the effect of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar on the participants' self-reported spiritual health.

I also analyzed and categorized the answers generated through the follow-up phone interviews. I reviewed the analysis results and looked for consistency in the subjects' responses. I noted patterns as examples of specific elements that affected spiritual health.

In addition, I collected basic demographic information. The demographic were analyzed to ascertain their relationship to Spiritual Well-Being test scores. Through a series of statistical tests comparing means (ANOVA ) gender, geography and preexisting

level of Bible knowledge were examined in relation to the subjects' Spiritual Well-Being tests scores.

### **Ethical Procedures**

The questionnaires were anonymous: The Spiritual Well-Being Scale does not require personally identifiable information from subjects. Tests did have numbers but remained unassociated with individual identities. Only a statistics consultant and I had access to the test results during the tabulation process. At all other times, I kept test results secure in a private case, accessible by me alone.

Completion of the questionnaire was voluntary. Minimal demographic information was also collected; however, it would not support identifying participants individually. The demographic information was provided on the reverse side of the tests and was, therefore, like the test, handled confidentially, not associated with individual identities and accessed only by a statistics consultant and me.

The follow-up interviews were also voluntary. Respondents indicated on a separate form provided at the seminar their willingness to participate in the follow-up phone interviews. Personally identifiable information was not associated with the answers given in the interviews. In addition, contact information, collected to facilitate the follow-up tests and phone interviews, was kept separate from the questionnaires and interviews.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### Problem and Purpose

I attended a Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar toward the end of my seminary career and learned quite a bit. It filled gaps in my knowledge of the Old Testament. The gaps are produced, in part, by the common practice for Bible reading and study to focus on short passages of Scripture without considering the wider storyline. Moreover, a vague knowledge of the context of Scripture is also common, especially in relation to the Old Testament.

Fortunately, an increasing number of pastors and teachers are proactive in advocating reading Scripture in connection with the wider biblical storyline. They realize the absence of knowledge of the biblical storyline increases the likelihood of misunderstanding a passage. In addition, misunderstanding a passage easily leads to misapplication, affecting the student's hermeneutics and formation. The wider narrative storyline is organic to a central purpose of the Church, advancing a biblically informed, spiritually formative worldview.

In my experience, not only did the seminar increase my knowledge, it influenced my spiritual life. As I reflected on the spiritual impact of the seminar, I realized that education was the primary measure of seminar success. The focus was always on retention of the material (review *quizzes* are a staple of the seminar). Intentional measurement of the spiritual influence of a seminar was impossible to find. This research seeks to investigate the effect learning the Genesis to Malachi narrative, as presented in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar, has on the spiritual formation of seminar

participants. Seminar participants served as my subject group. Paloutzian and Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale measured the spiritual health of seminar participants in tests administered pre- and post-seminar. Following the posttests, a portion of the participants took part in semi-structured phone interviews.

### **Participants**

Participants came from urban, suburban, and rural congregations that hosted Walk Thru the Bible seminars. Sixteen adults attended the urban seminar, sixteen adults attended the suburban seminar and eighteen adults attended the rural seminar. Forty-three of the fifty-one seminar attendees (82 percent) participated by completing the initial survey, and twenty-seven of the participants who completed the initial survey completed corresponding posttests (64 percent). Those who completed both the pre and posttests (52 percent) became the basis of the research.

The majority of the participants who completed both pre and posttests were women (59 percent). Men were a minority of the subjects (37 percent). One participant did not indicate their gender on the demographic question form. A clear majority of the seminar participants (62.9 percent) were 50 or older and an even more significant majority (74 percent) was 40 or older (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Gender and Age Demographics of Participants (N = 27)**

Age	N	%
18 to 22 years old	1	3.7
22 to 30 years old	1	3.7
31 to 40 years old	5	18.5
41 to 50 years old	3	11.1
51 to 60 years old	9	33.3
61 years old and older	8	29.6

Men = 10, Women = 16, No Response = 1

The educational level of participants was evenly split between high school graduate and college degree (44.4 percent each). A small percentage held masters degrees (11.1 percent). No participant had completed doctoral level education (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Educational Demographics of Participants**

Education	N	%
High school	12	44.4
College	12	44.4
Masters	3	11.1
Doctoral	0	0

All of the participants identified themselves as Christians. No participants reported being a Christian for less than five years, and only one participant reported being a Christian for less than ten years. An overwhelming majority of participants reported



being Christians for more than ten years. In addition, all participants reported attending church on a regular basis (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Presence and Length of Faith Demographics of Participants (N=27)**

<b>Christianity</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Less than 5	0	0
5 - 10 years	1	3.7
Over 10 Years	26	96.3

The majority of participants (41.8 percent) identified their knowledge of the Bible as average. A large number (37 percent) reported having a good knowledge of the Bible. No participants rated their Bible knowledge as poor and nearly 15 percent rated their Bible knowledge as excellent (see Table 4).

**Table 4. Bible Knowledge Demographics of Participants (N=27)**

<b>Knowledge of the Bible</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Poor	0	0
Average	13	48.1
Good	10	37.0
Excellent	4	14.8

The number of participants in the seminar was equal in the three different demographic locations. The different locations were urban, suburban, and rural. Moreover, Spiritual Well-Being Scale scores showed no significant differences in relation to the different locations (see Table 5).

**Table 5. Seminar Location Demographic of Participants (N=27)**

<b>Geographic Location</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Urban	9	33.3
Suburban	9	33.3
Rural	9	33.3

The other demographic factors did not yield significant results. Educational level, presence and length of faith, and church attendance displayed significant uniformity; the differences noted were slight. In addition, the number of participants was relatively small; the limited number of subjects in different conditions or categories did not warrant comparisons. Producing significant findings would be extremely improbable.

Additionally, the SWBS showed good reliability with the current sample. The Cronbach's alphas for pre- and post testing were .845 and .882 respectively, indicating strong internal consistency. Also, the test-retest coefficient was .766, indicating reliability in scores across time. The two subscales of the SWBS showed similar patterns with both high internal consistency and strong test-retest reliability (see Table 6).

**Table 6. Cronbach's Reliability Alpha Coefficients for the SWBS (N = 25)**

Test	Cronbach's Alpha
Pre-swb	.845
Post-swb	.882
Pre-rwb	.754
Post-rwb	.778
Pre-ewb	.831
Post-ewb	.840

### Research Question #1

What were the participants' self-perceptions of their spiritual health, as measured by Paloutzian and Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale, prior to their participation in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar?

I administered Paloutzian and Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale. It measures relationship with God (vertical) and satisfaction with life (horizontal) elements (Ellison 331). The vertical relationship with God is categorized as religious well-being. The horizontal element (i.e. satisfaction with life) is categorized as existential well-being. The scores from categories are combined for the overall Spiritual Well-Being score. The scale has twenty items on a six-point Likert scale, anchored with the phrases *strongly agree* and *strongly disagree* (Paloutzian and Ellison 4).

A series of dependent sample *t*-tests explored any changes in SWB from before to after the Walk Thru the Bible seminar. Overall SWB scores did not change significantly from pretest ( $M = 105.77$ ;  $SD = 2.04$ ) to posttest ( $M = 106.44$ ;  $SD = 11.30$ ),  $t(24) = -0.46$ ,  $p = .651$ . In addition, no significant change from pretest ( $M = 54.74$ ;  $SD = 5.08$ ) to posttest ( $M = 55.26$ ;  $SD = 5.89$ ),  $t(26) = -0.77$ ,  $p = .447$ , was found in RWB.

Likewise, EWB did not show a significant change from pretest ( $M = 50.44$ ;  $SD = 7.24$ ) to posttest ( $M = 50.84$ ;  $SD = 6.91$ ),  $t(24) = -0.39$ ,  $p = .704$  (see Table 7).

**Table 7. Means and Standard Deviations for the SWBS**

	Pretest <i>M (SD)</i>	Posttest <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t (df)</i>	<i>P</i>
SWB (n = 25)	105.77 (2.04)	106.44 (11.30)	-0.46 (24)	.651
RWB (n = 27)	54.74 (5.08)	55.26 (5.89)	-0.77 (26)	.447
EWB (n = 25)	50.44 (7.24)	50.84 (6.91)	-0.39 (24)	.704

Table 7 shows the correlation coefficients for the pre- and posttest scores on each sub-scale of the SWBS. All of the pretest scores are strongly positively correlated with the posttest scores for that factor, with Pearson product moment correlation coefficients ranging from .731 to .790,  $p < .001$ . The correlations between RWB and EWB were low, ranging from .348 to .657,  $p < .05$  (see Table 8).

**Table 8. Correlations for Pre- and Posttest Scores on the SWBS**

SWB, RWB, EWB	Preswb	Postswb	Prerwb	Postrwb	Preewb	Postewb
Preswb	1.000	.766**	.797**	.633**	.913**	.744**
Postswb	.766**	1.000	.675**	.887**	.635**	.931**
Prerwb	.797**	.675**	1.000	.790**	.480*	.482*
Postrwb	.633**	.887**	.790**	1.000	.384*	.657**
Preewb	.913**	.635**	.480*	.384*	1.000	.731**
Postewb	.744**	.931**	.482*	.657**	.731**	1.000

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## SWBS and Gender

To explore the changes in spiritual well-being over time between men and women, a series of 2x2 repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Men ( $M = 108.65$ ;  $SD = 7.22$ ) did not report significantly different levels of SWB than did women ( $M = 105.76$ ;  $SD = 11.64$ ),  $F(1, 22) = 0.54$ ,  $p = .469$ . In addition, a main effect for time of testing was not indicated,  $F(1, 22) = 0.50$ ,  $p = .532$ , with scores not changing from the pretest ( $M = 106.67$ ;  $SD = 9.35$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 107.29$ ;  $SD = 10.69$ ). Finally, an interaction effect between gender and time of testing was not indicated,  $F(1, 22) = 1.90$ ,  $p = .182$  (see Table 9).

In addition, men ( $M = 57.50$ ;  $SD = 3.22$ ) did not report significantly different levels of RWB than did women ( $M = 54.16$ ;  $SD = 5.31$ ),  $F(1, 22) = 3.85$ ,  $p = .061$ . In addition, a main effect for time of testing was not indicated,  $F(1, 22) = 0.413$ ,  $p = .527$ , with scores not changing from the pretest ( $M = 55.23$ ;  $SD = 4.48$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 55.69$ ;  $SD = 5.21$ ). Finally, an interaction effect between gender and time of testing was not indicated,  $F(1, 22) = 0.002$ ,  $p = .966$  (see Table 9).

Finally, men ( $M = 51.10$ ;  $SD = 6.49$ ) did not report significantly different levels of SWB than did women ( $M = 50.93$ ;  $SD = 7.45$ ),  $F(1, 22) = 0.004$ ,  $p = .951$ . In addition, a main effect for time of testing was not indicated,  $F(1, 22) = 0.48$ ,  $p = .495$ , with scores not changing from the pretest ( $M = 50.79$ ;  $SD = 7.17$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 51.21$ ;  $SD = 6.80$ ). Finally, interaction effect between gender and time of testing was not present,  $F(1, 22) = 3.18$ ,  $p = .089$  (see Table 9).

**Table 9. Means and Standard Deviations for SWBS by Gender and Time of Testing**

	Pretest <i>M (SD)</i>	Posttest <i>M (SD)</i>
SWB		
Men ( <i>n</i> =10)	107.10 (6.01)	110.20 (8.42)
Women ( <i>n</i> =14)	106.36 (11.37)	105.21 (11.91)
RWB		
Men ( <i>n</i> =10)	57.30 (2.95)	57.80 (3.49)
Women ( <i>n</i> =14)	53.94 (4.86)	54.38 (5.76)
EWB		
Men ( <i>n</i> =10)	49.80 (6.29)	52.40 (6.69)
Women ( <i>n</i> =14)	51.50 (7.90)	50.36 (7.00)

### SWBS and Geography

To explore the changes in spiritual well-being over time among people from different geographic regions, a series of 2x3 repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Those from an urban setting did not report significantly different levels of SWB than did those from suburban or rural areas,  $F(2, 22) = 0.20$ ,  $p = .817$ . In addition, a main effect for time of testing was not present,  $F(1, 22) = 0.21$ ,  $p = .650$ , with scores not changing from the pretest ( $M = 105.76$ ;  $SD = 10.21$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 106.44$ ;  $SD = 11.30$ ). Finally, interaction effect between geographic location of the church and time of testing was not indicated,  $F(2, 22) = 1.18$ ,  $p = .327$  (see Table 10).

In addition, those from an urban setting did not report significantly different levels of RWB than did those from suburban or rural areas,  $F(2, 22) = 0.34$ ,  $p = .718$ . A main effect for time of testing was not revealed,  $F(1, 22) = 0.58$ ,  $p = .455$ , with scores not changing from the pretest ( $M = 54.74$ ;  $SD = 5.08$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 55.26$ ;  $SD =$

5.59). Finally, interaction effect between geographic location and time of testing was not present,  $F(2, 22) = 0.58, p = .569$  (see Table 10).

Finally, those from an urban setting did not report significantly different levels of EWB than did those from suburban or rural areas,  $F(2, 22) = .173, p = .681$ . A main effect for time of testing was not indicated,  $F(1, 22) = 0.015, p = .985$ , with scores not changing from the pretest ( $M = 50.44; SD = 7.24$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 50.84; SD = 6.91$ ). Finally, interaction effect between geographic location of the church and time of testing was not present,  $F(2, 22) = 1.10, p = .350$  (see Table 9).

**Table 10. Means and Standard Deviations for SWBS by Geography and Time of Testing**

	Pretest <i>M (SD)</i>	Posttest <i>M (SD)</i>
SWB		
Urban	105.33 (15.26)	103.33 (13.51)
Suburban	105.22 (5.12)	108.56 (7.47)
Rural	107.00 (8.33)	107.71 (13.02)
RWB		
Urban	54.22 (6.67)	53.78 (6.70)
Suburban	55.33 (3.08)	56.67 (3.39)
Rural	54.67 (5.41)	55.33 (6.34)
EWB		
Urban	51.11 (9.32)	49.56 (7.42)
Suburban	49.89 (5.49)	51.89 (4.86)
Rural	50.29 (7.24)	51.14 (9.04)

**SWBS and Bible Knowledge**

To explore the changes in spiritual well-being over time among people with varying degrees of Bible knowledge, a series of 2x3 repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Those with average Bible knowledge did not report significantly different levels of SWB than did those with more Bible knowledge,  $F(2, 22) = 1.59, p = .226$ . In addition, a main effect for time of testing was not indicated,  $F(1, 22) = 0.22, p = .647$ , with scores not changing from the pretest ( $M = 105.76; SD = 10.21$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 106.44; SD = 11.30$ ). Finally, interaction effect between Bible knowledge and time of testing was not present,  $F(2, 22) = 0.407, p = .670$  (see Table 11).



**Table 11. Means and Standard Deviations for SWBS by Bible Knowledge and Time of Testing**

	Pretest M (SD)	Posttest M (SD)
SWB		
Average (n = 12)	102.75 (12.85)	102.17 (14.17)
Good (n = 9)	107.89 (6.55)	110.33 (6.89)
Excellent (n = 4)	110.00 (6.38)	110.50 (6.38)
RWB		
Average	53.38 (5.44)	52.92 (6.20)
Good	55.90 (5.00)	57.70 (4.42)
Excellent	56.25 (3.86)	56.75 (3.40)
EWB		
Average	49.08 (8.59)	49.50 (8.33)
Good	50.78 (5.80)	51.33 (6.28)
Excellent	53.75 (6.08)	53.75 (1.71)

In addition, those with average Bible knowledge did not report significantly different levels of RWB than did those with more Bible knowledge,  $F(1, 22) = 1.78, p = .189$ . A main effect for time of testing was not indicated.  $F(1, 22) = 0.66, p = .42$ , with scores not changing from the pretest ( $M = 54.74; SD = 5.08$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 55.26; SD = 5.59$ ). Finally, testing showed no interaction effect between group Bible knowledge and time of testing,  $F(2, 22) = 1.21, p = .317$  (see Table 10). Finally, those with average Bible knowledge did not report significantly different levels of EWB than did those with more Bible knowledge,  $F(2, 22) = .70, p = .508$ . Testing showed no main effect for time of testing,  $F(1, 22) = 0.072, p = .791$ , with scores not changing from the pretest ( $M = 50.44; SD = 7.24$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 50.84; SD = 6.91$ ). Finally, research revealed no interaction effect between Bible knowledge and time of testing,  $F(2, 22) = .015, p = .985$  (see Table 11).

The demographic factors—age, educational level, presence and length of faith, and church attendance—did not display significant influence on testing outcome. These factors displayed significant uniformity. Existing differences were slight, and the number of participants was small. The small number of participants in different conditions or categories did not warrant fruitful comparisons.

### **Research Question #2**

What were the participants' self-perceptions of their spiritual health, as measured by Paloutzian and Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale, following their participation in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar?

The participants reported on Spiritual health as measured by Paloutzian and Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale. Paloutzian and Ellison's scale measures relationship with God (vertical) and satisfaction with life (horizontal) elements (Ellison 331). The scale anchors participant responses with the phrases "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree" and contains twenty items, using a six-point Likert scale (Paloutzian and Ellison 4).

A series of dependent samples *t*-tests explored any changes in SWB from before to after the Walk Thru the Bible workshop. Overall SWB scores did not change significantly from pretest ( $M = 105.77$ ;  $SD = 2.04$ ) to posttest ( $M = 106.44$ ;  $SD = 11.30$ ),  $t(24) = -0.46$ ,  $p = .651$ . In addition, no significant change from pre ( $M = 54.74$ ;  $SD = 5.08$ ) to posttest ( $M = 55.26$ ;  $SD = 5.89$ ),  $t(26) = -0.77$ ,  $p = .447$ , was found in RWB. Likewise, EWB did not show a significant change from pre ( $M = 50.44$ ;  $SD = 7.24$ ) to posttest ( $M = 50.84$ ;  $SD = 6.91$ ),  $t(24) = -0.39$ ,  $p = .704$  (see Table 7).

**Table 7. Means and Standard Deviations for the SWBS**

	Pre-Test <i>M (SD)</i>	Post-Test <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>t (df)</i>	<i>P</i>
SWB (n = 25)	105.77 (2.04)	106.44 (11.30)	-0.46 (24)	.651
RWB (n = 27)	54.74 (5.08)	55.26 (5.89)	-0.77 (26)	.447
EWB (n = 25)	50.44 (7.24)	50.84 (6.91)	-0.39 (24)	.704

Table 8 shows the correlation coefficients for the pre- and posttest scores on each component of the SWBS. All of the pretest scores appear strongly positively correlated with the posttest scores for that factor, with Pearson product moment correlation coefficients ranging from .731 to .790 ( $p < .001$ ). The correlations between RWB and EWB range from low .348 to moderate .657 ( $p < .05$ ; (see Table 8).

**Table 8. Correlations for Pre- and Post-Test Scores on the SWBS**

	Preswb	Postswb	Prerwb	Postrwb	Preewb	Postewb
Preswb	1.000	.766**	.797**	.633**	.913**	.744**
Postswb	.766**	1.000	.675**	.887**	.635**	.931**
Prerwb	.797**	.675**	1.000	.790**	.480*	.482*
Postrwb	.633**	.887**	.790**	1.000	.384*	.657**
Preewb	.913**	.635**	.480*	.384*	1.000	.731**
Postewb	.744**	.931**	.482*	.657**	.731**	1.000

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### SWBS and Gender

To explore the changes in spiritual well-being over time between men and women, a series of 2x2 repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Men ( $M = 108.65$ ;  $SD = 7.22$ ) did not report significantly different levels of

SWB than did women ( $M = 105.76$ ;  $SD = 11.64$ ),  $F(1, 22) = 0.54$ ,  $p = .469$ . In addition, a main effect for time of testing was not indicated,  $F(1, 22) = 0.50$ ,  $p = .532$ , with scores not changing from the pretest ( $M = 106.67$ ;  $SD = 9.35$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 107.29$ ;  $SD = 10.69$ ). Finally, interaction effect between gender and time of testing was not present,  $F(1, 22) = 1.90$ ,  $p = .182$  (see Table 9).

**Table 9. Means and Standard Deviations for SWBS by Gender and Time of Testing**

	Pretest <i>M (SD)</i>	Posttest <i>M (SD)</i>
SWB		
Men ( $n = 10$ )	107.10 (6.01)	110.20 (8.42)
Women ( $n = 14$ )	106.36 (11.37)	105.21 (11.91)
RWB		
Men ( $n = 10$ )	57.30 (2.95)	57.80 (3.49)
Women ( $n = 14$ )	53.94 (4.86)	54.38 (5.76)
EWB		
Men ( $n = 10$ )	49.80 (6.29)	52.40 (6.69)
Women ( $n = 14$ )	51.50 (7.90)	50.36 (7.00)

In addition, men ( $M = 57.50$ ;  $SD = 3.22$ ) did not report significantly different levels of RWB than did women ( $M = 54.16$ ;  $SD = 5.31$ ),  $F(1, 22) = 3.85$ ,  $p = .061$ . A main effect for time of testing was not present,  $F(1, 22) = 0.413$ ,  $p = .527$ , with scores not changing from the pretest ( $M = 55.23$ ;  $SD = 4.48$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 55.69$ ;  $SD = 5.21$ ). Finally, testing showed no interaction effect between gender and time of testing,  $F(1, 22) = 0.002$ ,  $p = .966$  (see Table 9).

Pre- and posttest scores on the RWB among men was slightly higher than among women. Male scores from pretest to posttest on the RWB showed the most increased

movement over female scores than the EWB or overall SWB scores. However, a greater number of participants would need to be tested in order to verify if, indeed, these differences could be considered significant.

Finally, men ( $M = 51.10$ ;  $SD = 6.49$ ) did not report significantly different levels of SWB than did women ( $M = 50.93$ ;  $SD = 7.45$ ),  $F(1, 22) = 0.004$ ,  $p = .951$ . In addition, main effect for time of testing was not present,  $F(1, 22) = 0.48$ ,  $p = .495$ , with scores not changing from the pretest ( $M = 50.79$ ;  $SD = 7.17$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 51.21$ ;  $SD = 6.80$ ). Finally, interaction effect was not present between gender and time of testing,  $F(1, 22) = 3.18$ ,  $p = .089$  (see Table 9).

### **SWBS and Geography**

To explore the changes in spiritual well-being over time among people from different geographic regions, a series of 2x3 repeated measures analyses of variance was conducted. Those from an urban setting did not report significantly different levels of SWB than did those from suburban or rural areas,  $F(2, 22) = 0.20$ ,  $p = .817$ . In addition, main effect for time of testing was not present,  $F(1, 22) = 0.21$ ,  $p = .650$ , with scores not changing from the pretest ( $M = 105.76$ ;  $SD = 10.21$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 106.44$ ;  $SD = 11.30$ ). Finally, interaction effect was not present between location of the church and time of testing,  $F(2, 22) = 1.18$ ,  $p = .327$  (see Table 10).

**Table 10. Means and Standard Deviations for SWBS by Geography and Time of Testing**

	Pretest <i>M (SD)</i>	Posttest <i>M (SD)</i>
SWB		
Urban	105.33 (15.26)	103.33 (13.51)
Suburban	105.22 (5.12)	108.56 (7.47)
Rural	107.00 (8.33)	107.71 (13.02)
RWB		
Urban	54.22 (6.67)	53.78 (6.70)
Suburban	55.33 (3.08)	56.67 (3.39)
Rural	54.67 (5.41)	55.33 (6.34)
EWB		
Urban	51.11 (9.32)	49.56 (7.42)
Suburban	49.89 (5.49)	51.89 (4.86)
Rural	50.29 (7.24)	51.14 (9.04)

In addition, those from an urban setting did not report significantly different levels of RWB than did those from suburban or rural areas,  $F(2, 22) = 0.34, p = .718$ . Time of testing had no main effect  $F(1, 22) = 0.58, p = .455$ , with scores not changing from the pretest ( $M = 54.74; SD = 5.08$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 55.26; SD = 5.59$ ). Finally, interaction effect was not present between location and time of testing,  $F(2, 22) = 0.58, p = .569$  (see Table 10).

Finally, those from an urban setting did not report significantly different levels of EWB than did those from suburban or rural areas,  $F(2, 22) = .173, p = .681$ . Time of testing had no main effect,  $F(1, 22) = 0.015, p = .985$ , with scores not changing from the pretest ( $M = 50.44; SD = 7.24$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 50.84; SD = 6.91$ ). Finally, interaction effect was not present between location of the church and time of testing,  $F(2, 22) = 1.10, p = .350$  (see Table 10).

### SWBS and Bible Knowledge

To explore the changes in spiritual well-being over time among people with varying degrees of Bible knowledge, a series of 2x3 repeated measures analyses of variance was conducted. Those with average Bible knowledge did not report significantly different levels of SWB than did those with more Bible knowledge,  $F(2, 22) = 1.59, p = .226$ . In addition, main effect for time of testing was not present,  $F(1, 22) = 0.22, p = .647$ , with scores not changing from the pretest ( $M = 105.76; SD = 10.21$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 106.44; SD = 11.30$ ). Finally, interaction effect was not present between Bible knowledge and time of testing,  $F(2, 22) = 0.407, p = .670$  (see Table 11).

**Table 11. Means and Standard Deviations for SWB by Bible Knowledge and Time Of Testing**

	Pre-Test <i>M (SD)</i>	Post-Test <i>M (SD)</i>
SWB		
Average ( $n = 12$ )	102.75 (12.85)	102.17 (14.17)
Good ( $n = 9$ )	107.89 (6.55)	110.33 (6.89)
Excellent ( $n = 4$ )	110.00 (6.38)	110.50 (6.38)
RWB		
Average	53.38 (5.44)	52.92 (6.20)
Good	55.90 (5.00)	57.70 (4.42)
Excellent	56.25 (3.86)	56.75 (3.40)
EWB		
Average	49.08 (8.59)	49.50 (8.33)
Good	50.78 (5.80)	51.33 (6.28)
Excellent	53.75 (6.08)	53.75 (1.71)

In addition, those with average Bible knowledge did not report significantly different levels of RWB than did those with more Bible knowledge,  $F(1, 22) = 1.78, p =$

.189. Time of testing had no main effect,  $F(1, 22) = 0.66$ ,  $p = .42$ , with scores not changing from the pretest ( $M = 54.74$ ;  $SD = 5.08$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 55.26$ ;  $SD = 5.59$ ). Finally, interaction effect was not present between group Bible knowledge and time of testing,  $F(2, 22) = 1.21$ ,  $p = .317$  (see Table 11).

The research indicated a small trend of participants with excellent Bible knowledge prior to the testing scoring higher on the post RWB scale. Subjects with excellent Bible knowledge showed greater movement from pretest to posttest on the RWB than participants with good or average Bible knowledge. However, a larger number of participants would need to be tested in order to verify if, indeed, the differences has no significance.

Finally, those with average Bible knowledge did not report significantly different levels of EWB than did those with more Bible knowledge,  $F(2, 22) = .70$ ,  $p = .508$ . Time of testing had no main effect,  $F(1, 22) = 0.072$ ,  $p = .791$ , with scores not changing from the pretest ( $M = 50.44$ ;  $SD = 7.24$ ) to the posttest ( $M = 50.84$ ;  $SD = 6.91$ ). Finally, interaction effect was not present between Bible knowledge and time of testing,  $F(2, 22) = .015$ ,  $p = .985$  (see Table 11).

The demographic factors—age, educational level, presence and length of faith, and church attendance—did not display significant influence on testing outcome. These factors displayed significant uniformity. Existing differences were slight, and the number of participants was relatively small. The small number of participants in different conditions or categories did not warrant fruitful comparisons.



### **Research Question #3**

What specific aspects of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar did participants report as influential on their spiritual health as revealed in the follow-up phone interviews?

Sixteen participants agreed to take part in phone interviews following the SWBS posttest. Eight were from the urban congregation, four participated from the suburban congregations and four from rural congregations. Six of the interview participants were male. Ten of the interview participants were female.

The dominant responses in the interviews related to an increased knowledge of the Old Testament. All of the interview participants reported greater knowledge of the biblical storyline (50 percent) or of the Bible in general (100 percent). Better understanding of the Bible was one of the primary effects the seminar reported by participants.

In relation to spiritual formation, the response most often shared was excitement to read the Old Testament more often (75 percent). Smaller numbers of participants mentioned other interests that the seminar spawned, including learning more about Old Testament geography and the parallels of extra-biblical-history with Bible history.

Some participants spoke more directly about formation issues. Over half mentioned personal application of the content, citing identification with the struggles of Old Testament characters. Others mentioned seeing God or themselves differently and feeling more confident and hopeful about their faith.

Individuals also mentioned varieties of other factors. One participant mentioned the presence of the Holy Spirit and the fellowship of the seminar. Another subject

reported a strong sense of connection with the others and the enjoyment of conversations with other participants about their new knowledge of the Old Testament they now shared.

Over half of those interviewed commented on the creative style of the seminar. According to respondents, the creative style made the seminar fun. In addition, the interactive style helped the students understand the material, making the seminar's content more accessible.

Several participants spoke of practical help from the seminar. One person said, "Now when I read the Psalms, I think of King David." Another shared, "I understand the Sunday school lessons much better." Still another shared, "I feel closer to God. I look at him in a new light." The responses connect to both educational benefits and spiritual insight and influence.

In addition to appreciation of the creative teaching style, the most consistent answers centered around reading the Old Testament more. The participant who said, "I am less intimidated by the vastness of the Old Testament and feel more willing and able to read it," represents the most common theme in the responses. This theme connects to Walk Thru the Bible Ministries' main goal of helping participants read the Bible more. In addition, while not automatically connected to spiritual formation, the increased pursuit of Bible study is a spiritual benefit.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

The major findings were surprising on several levels. While they were not what I expected or hoped for, they shed light on many aspects of the research topic. The obvious comes to mind. Research is extremely beneficial, even without getting the expected results or maybe *especially* when not getting the expected results.

Here is a brief summary of the major findings:

- Significant movement in spiritual well-being between the pre- and post-measurements was absent.
- Gender, location (urban, suburban, rural), age, education level, and existing Bible knowledge did not exercise significant influence on the movement between pre- and post-spiritual well-being survey results.
- Essentially, all participants tested began and ended with high spiritual well-being test scores.
- Increased knowledge of the Old Testament, along with interest and willingness in reading the Old Testament was the most widely reported impact of the seminar.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

After attending a Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar, I was amazed at how much I learned. The Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar is a big picture overview of the biblical storyline from Genesis to Malachi. The seminar's overview approach fills in knowledge gaps possessed by most students. The knowledge gaps exist because reviewing the overarching biblical narrative is much less common than detailed study of smaller portions of Scripture. The seminar affected me spiritually, too. I more easily saw God as the source of the grand narrative and reflected on the story he was writing today. Analyzing this spiritual impact was of special interest to me, and while Walk Thru measures education well, they have examined little about the seminar's spiritual influence.

Multiple passages in Scripture review the overarching storyline for educational and spiritually formative purposes. Deuteronomy reviews Israel's history and leads the people in personal response, including renewing their covenant relationship with God. Joshua 24 and Nehemiah 9 contain similar examples. Moreover, research connects a wider narrative understanding with effecting influence on thinking and worldview. In addition, a growing number of teachers and pastors understand the wider narrative storyline of the Bible as playing an essential role in the church's mission to advance a biblically informed, spiritually formative worldview.

As mentioned, Walk Thru the Bible measures the educational impact of the seminar but has not directly measured its spiritual effect. My research question asked what effect on spiritual well-being reviewing the Genesis to Malachi narrative, as

presented in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar, had on participants. Paloutzian and Ellison's Spiritual Well-Being Scale measured the spiritual health of seminar participants in pre- and post-seminar surveys. Following the posttests, a portion of the participants also took part in semi-structured phone interviews.

### **Major Findings**

Several of the research results were not as I had expected; nonetheless, they shed light on the topics studied. Additional insights related to topics that were not the primary focus also emerged. Four major findings highlight the results of the research.

#### **The Absence of Significant Movement in Spiritual Well-Being Measurements in Pre- and Posttests**

I had expected significant movement between the pre- and post-spiritual well-being measurements. I operated with the assumption that the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar would have a clearly positive impact on the participants in regards to their spiritual health. The results surprised me, and I discovered the subjects, themselves, were the key to understanding the results.

Seminar participants identified themselves as Christian (100 percent). In addition, all but one participant had been a Christian for more than ten years. All participants also identified themselves as regular church attendees. Moreover, over half of the participants rated their Bible knowledge as good or excellent. The remainder rated their Bible knowledge as average. Not a single participant rated himself or herself as *poor* in Bible knowledge. Finally, every participant scored high on his or her spiritual well-being pre-seminar measurement. In other words, the group was mature enough to score high on the pretest and leave less room for movement in the posttest results.

In hindsight, I observe that many of the characters in biblical passages that include a review of the storyline had a unique need of the review. Deuteronomy's focus is the second generation of Israelites who may not remember the journey and history they share with their parents. The *audience* in Nehemiah has just returned from the exile and almost immediately requests a needed reading of the Law. The leaders in Acts 7, while knowledgeable of the Old Testament, are accused, by Stephen, of misunderstanding their history in a fundamental manner.

Craddock's comments on changes in narrative preaching reference his observation of significant dissonance of postmodern life ("Story" 97). He is pointing to the change in the listening audience. Knowledge of the biblical storyline is no longer consistently present in the average student or listener. This absence of knowledge of the wider storyline causes the review to be especially powerful. My participants were uniquely mature in their Bible knowledge and spiritual well-being, as compared to some of the participants in the texts.

A couple of additional factors are the possible assumption that exposure to the Bible is equal to spiritual formation and the role of intentional application of the storyline in the teaching process. They relate to one another. I may have assumed that simple exposure to a review of the storyline would be automatically equal to spiritual formation. The automatic connection between exposure to Scripture and spiritual formation is an assumption I criticized earlier, yet I may have made the same mistake. The second observation relates to the first. The biblical examples of a review of the storyline contain guided application in the form of personal responses to the storyline built into the review.

This intentional application was not deliberately present in the Walk Thru the Bible reviews of the storyline.

### **The Measured Demographics Exerted Little Influence on Spiritual Well-Being**

#### **Measurement Results**

The absence of significant connection between demographics and spiritual well-being was also an unexpected result. I did not have specific expectations of how gender, age, geographic location, educational level, or Bible knowledge would affect spiritual well-being in relation to the impact of the seminar, but I expected some distinctions. No significant relationship was observed between the demographics measured and pre- and post-spiritual well-being measurements.

The data in Chapter 4 confirmed these results on multiple levels. In addition, no significant differences in the demographics measured in relation to the different geographic locations of the congregations appeared in the research results. This continuity across demographics and geography is good news, which suggests spiritual well-being issues transcended the demographic categories and that future surveys might not need to factor in multiple demographics and locations as much as I assumed. The biblical passages reviewed do not discuss demographics, except to suggest different age levels participate and benefit from the reviews (Ps. 106).

Research results suggested a connection between a higher level of existing Bible knowledge and greater movement between pre- and post-spiritual well-being; however, the participant group size was too small to conclude this definitely. A similar, slight trend appeared in that male participant scores experienced greater movement between pre- and post-measurement on the religious well-being portion of the scale. These were the only

two demographic factors in spiritual well-being movement. Unfortunately, these trends only suggest a possible pattern that might appear if a larger population participated in testing.

### **High Spiritual Well-Being Measurement Scores among Participants in Both Pre- and Post-Surveys**

High spiritual well-being scores in both pre and posttests was another unexpected result. The explanation likely connects to the already mentioned demographics of participants. All of the participants identified themselves as long-term Christians who attended church often, had average or better Bible knowledge, and enjoyed relatively high spiritual well-being. Participants voluntarily chose to attend an Old Testament seminar, indicating a preexisting interest in Bible study and the Old Testament. This demographic factor was the single exception to the absence of significant connection between demographics and spiritual well-being scores.

As mentioned, a simple comparison of existing Bible knowledge and spiritual well-being scores reveals a slight connection between greater knowledge and higher spiritual well-being scores; however, group size and other factors prevent making definitive conclusions. In addition, research does not support an automatic connection between Bible knowledge and spiritual well-being. Acts 7 illustrates the faulty assumption that Bible knowledge equals spiritual maturity; the Jewish leaders had biblical knowledge but lacked spiritual maturity.

However, the literature review (Steffen and Terry 317; Deutschman 5; Cahill 134; Childs, “Recovery”) suggests some connection between greater Bible knowledge, especially knowledge in the form of the overarching story, and spiritual formation.



Knowledge of the wider storyline can exert influence on thinking and worldview. The aforementioned presence of intentional application may also be a factor in the Biblical evidence. A future study would benefit from measuring the spiritual impact of Walk Thru the Old Testament seminars with and without intentional application of the storyline. In addition, pre- and post-measurements with a special focus on worldview could also shed light on the relationship between worldview and rehearsing the wider narrative.

### **Widely Reported Increased Confidence and Interest in Reading the Old Testament Scriptures**

A greater interest and confidence in reading the Old Testament was an expected result. Walk Thru the Bible promotes a commitment to read the Bible as its most significant statistic. They are right. The most consistent theme in the follow-up interviews was a desire and willingness to read the Bible more often. Interestingly, the participants' commitment to read the Bible did not connect itself with the usual language of *should* and *ought*, instead, participants sounded eager and confident in their new desire to study the Old Testament.

This result overcame issues related to the participant demographics (i.e., high pretest SWBS scores, high Bible knowledge). The response was consistent and dominant among all participants; everyone communicated an excitement about future reading. Following up on the commitments to read the Bible in three and six months and measuring the long-term impact of the seminar would be interesting.

Of course, the biblical examples of storyline reviews affirmed the value of rehearsing the history. Deuteronomy and Joshua point to the sacredness of the time of review and challenge. Psalms 78, 105, and 106 commanded the people to review the

history, teach it to children and share it with the nations as a witness. In addition, pastors and scholars (e.g. , Bartholomew and Goheen 6; Goheen 471; Newbigin, *Gospel* 17; Green and Pasquarello 15) alike point to the unique value of the grand storyline of Scripture, not only to aid in accurate interpretation but also to impart a foundation for thinking (i.e. , a framework or worldview).

### **Implications of the Findings**

The formative role of intentional application within the sharing of the biblical storyline may be underestimated. It was not a consistent theme in the literature review; however, in hindsight I see its presence in the biblical examples of rehearsing the storyline more clearly. Deuteronomy, Joshua, Nehemiah, Acts, and the Psalms all have clear moments of intentionally connecting the wider narrative to the student. Many of the application moments are teeming with personal pronouns. The people respond with creedal-like affirmations of their understanding and applications of the storyline. Teachers, preachers, and professors may resist the practical *spelling out* of the implication and application of Scripture *too* much. As mentioned, a future research project might measure the spiritual effect of Walk Thru the Old Testament seminars with and without elements of responsive, personal affirmation of the application of the storyline to the students.

Second, the connection between exposure to Scripture and spiritual formation may be greatly overestimated. I do not want to discount the suggested link between higher biblical knowledge and higher spiritual well-being scores, but as the previously mentioned passage in Acts 7 illustrates, biblical knowledge and spiritual well-being do not automatically arrive clustered together. The weakness in the assumption of an easy

connection between Bible knowledge and spiritual growth likely relates to the first implication: the tendency to underestimate the value of interweaving application and instruction. As mentioned, the passages in Scripture model intentional application, but this modeling appears less frequently in scholarly writings. If students and teachers follow the models in Scripture, they would embrace stronger personal, responsive application in teaching the storyline. The connection between intentional, personal, responsive application and spiritual formation would serve well as another element for future researchers to investigate.

The influence that demographics, such as gender, age, education, geography, and Bible knowledge, wielded was insignificant. This third implication points to the likelihood that focus on demographic factors was less relevant than I assumed. As mentioned earlier, the biblical examples model the diversity of age but do not address other demographic issues directly. In this study, spiritual well-being issues transcended the demographics measured, which is good news. A similar study in the future may not need to consider those same demographic measurements.

Fourth, the presence of high pre- and post-spiritual well-being scores suggests that the participants and those of similar demographics are in good spiritual health. In addition, the voluntary nature of participation in the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar influences the study group; participants are self-selected individuals with an interest in Bible study and the Old Testament. High spiritual well-being scores in pretest are encouraging. It also provides direction for future study. A similar study may benefit from considering an intentional focus on participants who are more in need of the seminar's content. As mentioned, several of the examples from Scripture share a common

theme in that the participants were in unique need of the instruction in the wider narrative.

### **Limitations of the Study**

An increase in the number of participants would have improved the ability to ascertain significant results from the data collected. The small number of participants was a limitation of the research. A repeated project might focus less on demographics and more on the size of the congregations. Rural and urban congregations do not always yield significant population numbers. On a practical level, offering the seminar on a Sunday, combining multiple congregations, subsidizing or waving all seminar costs, could also increase the size of the population tested.

A second limitation was the focus on demographics and diverse congregational locations. Gender, age, location, education, and Bible knowledge made no real difference in the results. A future study could focus on a single seminar hosted by a large, diverse, congregation. In this setting, some demographics could still be measured and the teaching element would be uniform. However, church seminars and workshops struggle to attract large attendances, despite the best efforts of those involved (megachurches being the exception).

A third limitation was the subjects themselves. All of the participants, except one, identified themselves as having been Christians for more than ten years. They all attended church regularly. Every participant had average or better knowledge of the Bible and measured high in spiritual well-being on their pretests. These characteristics did not leave much room for advance in the spiritual well-being measurements. As previously

suggested, a future study might focus intentionally on a group with greater need of the seminar's content.

A lack of intentional focus on personal application of the biblical storyline was a fourth limitation. The Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar focuses aggressively on content review and retention. The seminar is effective in this regard. However, simple responsive moments of application that follow the models mentioned earlier from the biblical examples might have improved the seminars' spiritual impact.

An instrument that allowed more feedback related to worldview changes might improve research. This fifth limitation relates to the discussion in Chapter 2 (Newbigin, *Gospel* 17; Green and Pasquarello 15; Deutschman 5; Cahill 134; Childs, "Recovery) of the value of narrative education and frameworks for student consideration. Replacing the Spiritual Well-Being Scale or adding a second instrument that measured more worldview elements would improve the research.

The sixth limitation also relates to research instrumentation. A more sophisticated interview process would improve research results. The main improvement would be additional questions (i.e., worldview questions) and for increased detail in the follow-up questions. Improvement in the interview would allow for greater discovery of various factors that influenced participants and increased exploration of those themes.

A seventh and final limitation is the close proximity of the pre- and posttests. Allowing more time between the pre-tests/seminar and the posttest would be a significant improvement. Increased time between measurements would take into consideration the process of spiritual formation, which occurs over a longer period than this research allowed. In hindsight, the spiritual influence that the seminar had on my life came about

over an extended period; I incorrectly condensed the process of spiritual formation. Post-measurements over a longer period would improve the research.

### **Unexpected Observations**

A central, unexpected outcome was the lack of significant movement in the pre- and post-spiritual well-being measurements. I had assumed exposure to the overview of Scripture in the seminar would increase in spiritual well-being, which was not the case for reasons already discussed. This surprise led to other helpful insights that I might otherwise not have discovered. Therefore, I am glad, even for the unexpected and unwanted results.

I was also surprised to see so little interaction between spiritual well-being measurements and location, age, gender, education and Bible knowledge. Again, I assumed that demographics factors measured would play some role in the spiritual well-being measurement results; however, there was not a demonstrated connection between demographics and results, apart from the connection between high pretest scores and the report of long-term faith and church attendance from participants, which is a good discovery. This positive connection did influence recommendations for future studies (see recommendations).

A third unexpected observation was the high pre- and post-spiritual well-being scores measured in every participant. My assumption was that a large number of participants would start low and move to a higher spiritual well-being score. The nearly universal high scores on pretests was a positive surprise. As discussed earlier, the scores were likely a reflection of the demographics; participants were mature Christians with

average or better knowledge of the Bible. In this sense, demographics exercised influence on the research results.

I might not have noticed the consistent use of personal language combined with intentional application of the storyline in the biblical examples, if the spiritual well-being test movement had not been so insignificant. However, this fourth unexpected observation is perhaps the most interesting. Pastors and teachers sometimes avoid application in teaching for fear that they are dumbing down the content; however, the biblical examples frequently included intentional, personal response or application of the teaching.

### **Recommendations**

Teaching an overview of the biblical storyline, both Old and New Testament, on a regular basis remains a core value. Walk Thru the Bible's own research supports the value of teaching the big picture of Scripture. Whether or not Walk Thru the Bible material is used, I am convinced students benefit from learning the wider narrative. The interviews indicated how well received and helpful an understanding of the biblical storyline was for students. The Psalms and other passages examined modeled, commended, and even commanded believers to teach, review, and share the Biblical storyline. In addition, many clergy, teachers and scholars champion the grand storyline as crucial for interpretation, formative for worldview, and essential for the mission of the church.

Additionally, I would recommend including teaching the overview within a larger plan of reading and study. Following the review of the wider narrative, students were strongly motivated to read the Bible on their own. Incorporating an overview of Scripture

with a preplanned reading plan and study that is more detailed could greatly magnify the impact of the time in study.

Targeting the best audience is another recommendation. While every believer will benefit from an overview of the biblical narrative, it would serve students new to the study of Scripture especially well. The overview would provide needed knowledge and would serve as a foundation for continued study. Again, every Bible student needs it, but new students will receive a framework for further study and thinking from the overview. Augustine commended new converts be taught an overview of the Scriptures, so that the details might be weaved back into the right location in the storyline.

I also would recommend teaching an Old Testament overview with intentional personal application of the storyline. The responses filled with personal pronouns in the passages examined are good models. As mentioned, I suspect deliberate application woven into the teaching, especially teaching an overview, is underestimated. In addition, the novelty of the abundance of freshly discovered facts and a perception of the Old Testament as less relevant than the New may also thwart application; therefore, it needs to be intentional. A future study might measure the spiritual effect of Walk Thru the Old Testament seminars with and without elements of the personal application responses included in the review of the storyline in order to measure the role of intentional, personal application.

### **Postscript**

I have a great deal of respect for research. I see more fully not only the large amount of work that goes into research but also the tremendous practical benefit for the



church. As this paper is a research project, my comment may sound self-serving; nonetheless, it stands out as a deeper conviction that will guide my ministry.

In addition, I hold even more appreciation and interest in the Walk Thru the Bible seminar. I see great potential in combining an overview of Scripture with a pre-planned reading program and continued reading and study. Moreover, integration of the intentional application and worldview elements mentioned add even more excitement to the prospect of teaching a Genesis to Malachi narrative (and Matthew to Revelation).

Utilizing a bigger picture overview approach in teaching and integrating further study would assist in ongoing research of the value of the wider biblical storyline. Professors, pastors, scholars, and teachers could continue to improve instruction and content with pre- and post-measurements. The testing of the influence of intentional application in the near creedal-like responses modeled in Deuteronomy is a great example of a practical use of some of the lessons I have learned. Even outside the context of a Walk Thru the Bible seminar, a pastor or professor might create methods to measure the impact of the different elements mentioned. My hope is to bring this sort of evaluation, measurement, and refinement into my own teaching and preaching.

Teaching and preaching with the wider narrative in mind is now an even deeper conviction I hold. I hope to continue the practice of framing the text in the larger narrative context. Sometimes it may only serve as additional information, but other times it sheds vital light on the meaning of the text or even introduces a worldview-shaping power to the lesson. The familiar words in Nehemiah take on greater and greater meaning as you widen the storyline. The fuller narrative of God's repeated extension of grace shapes Moses' offering of his own life for the sake of the Israelites. N. T. Wright's

language when he writes of telling the biblical “story again from the very beginning ... so to arrive at the present moment at exactly the right speed and from exactly the right angle...” (*Acts* 110) speaks to the value of the wider storyline on personal application of Scripture. In this manner, as Craddock writes, the overview is heard as good news, the gospel itself, for many today who no longer know or understand the biblical narrative as the back-story for humanity (“Story” 98).

## APPENDIX A

### SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING SCALE

For each of the following statements, circle the choice that best indicates the extent of your agreement or disagreement as it describes your personal experience:

SA = Strongly Agree  
MA = Moderately Agree  
A = Agree

D = Disagree  
MD = Moderately Disagree  
SD = Strongly Disagree

- |  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| 1. I don't find much satisfaction in private prayer with God.                  | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 2. I don't know who I am, where I came from, or where I'm going.               | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 3. I believe that God loves me and cares about me.                             | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 4. I feel that life is a positive experience.                                  | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 5. I believe that God is impersonal and not interested in my daily situations. | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 6. I feel unsettled about my future.   | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 7. I have a personally meaningful relationship with God.                       | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 8. I feel very fulfilled and satisfied with life.                              | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 9. I don't get much personal strength and support from my God.                 | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 10. I feel a sense of well-being about the direction my life is headed in.     | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 11. I believe that God is concerned about my problems.                         | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 12. I don't enjoy much about life.   | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 13. I don't have a personally satisfying relationship with God.                | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 14. I feel good about my future.   | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 15. My relationship with God helps me not to feel lonely.                      | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 16. I feel that life is full of conflict and unhappiness.                      | SA MA A D MD SD |
| 17. I feel most fulfilled when I'm in close                                    |                 |

communion with God.	SA MA A D MD SD
18. Life doesn't have much meaning.	SA MA A D MD SD
19. My relation with God contributes to my sense of well-being.	SA MA A D MD SD
20. I believe there is some real purpose for my life.	SA MA A D MD SD

## APPENDIX B

### CONSENT, CONFIDENTIALITY AND DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS FORM

Consent: You indicate your voluntary agreement to participate in the research by completing this survey.

Confidentiality: Surveys are confidential; each test will only be identified with a code number. No personally identifiable information will be collected or associated with the survey.

#### Instructions:

1. Please write the middle two digits of the last four numbers of your Social Security number in top right-hand corner of this sheet.
2. Complete both sides of sheet.

Demographic Questions (please circle your answers below).

1. Are you Male or Female?

2. What is your age?

18-22              23-30              31-40              41-50              51-60              61 and older

3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

High School/GED

College Degree

Masters Degree

Doctorial Degree

Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Are you a Christian?

Yes

No

5. If yes, how long have you been a Christian?

Less than 5 years

5-10 years

Over 10 Years

6. How often do you attend church?

Every week

Once or twice a month

Not very often

7. How would you rate your knowledge of the Bible?

Excellent

Good

Average

Poor

## **APPENDIX C**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How has your spiritual life been affected by the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar? Can you give me an example?
2. Can you share any stories of experiencing something differently in your spiritual life because of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar? How was the seminar connected to that experience?
3. What effect did the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar have on your personal Bible reading?
4. What aspect of the Walk Thru the Old Testament seminar had the most lasting influence on you? Why?

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