

ABSTRACT

A BIBLE STUDY ABOUT STUDYING THE BIBLE: AN INTRODUCTION TO INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

by

Kevin Bryan Barnes

The Bible provides everything necessary to learn about God, receiving salvation, and living a life that glorifies God. The Wesleyan tradition champions God's Word as the primary resource for making decisions and guiding one's life. One who considers the value and availability of the Bible might assume that all Christians would regularly read Scripture. Sadly, fewer and fewer Christians take the time to study the Bible. This dissertation evaluates the change in Scripture reading habits based on the results of participation in a six-week introductory level inductive Bible study.

Looking specifically at persons from the worshiping community at Wesley Way United Methodist Church, I offered a six-week introductory level inductive Bible study to the entire congregation. I also personally invited selected persons who have participated in several Bible studies. The inductive Bible study covered the Gospel of John. The participants completed a questionnaire prior to the first evening of the study to establish a base for the participants' biblical knowledge, attitude, reading habits, and familiarity with the inductive study method. Upon the completion of the Bible study, the participants completed a post-Bible study questionnaire to determine changes in the participants' biblical knowledge, attitude, reading habits, and familiarity with the inductive study method. Four weeks after the completion of the Bible study, I held a focus group to discover if any participants were studying Scripture more than they were prior to

participating in the Bible study and to determine if they were applying the inductive Bible study habits.

The findings suggest that, while Christians respect the Bible as an authoritative book, they are not reading it very often nor understand it on a conceptual or structural level. The findings also reveal a desire by Christians for their senior pastor to be the provider of scriptural information and interpretation; directly or indirectly related to this desire is the trend of hesitancy for Christians to interpret the Bible on a conceptual level. This type of interpretation requires a more structured reading of the Bible than many Christians prefer to endeavor. The inductive Bible study method fostered a better understanding and respect for the structure and intentionality with which the Bible was written and assembled.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

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Dissertation Coach

Date

Director, Doctor of Ministry Program

Date

Dean of the Beeson Center

Date

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Kevin Bryan Barnes

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CHAPTER 1

NATURE OF THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter provides a backdrop for the impetus and purpose of project. The first section introduces the burden and the events that brought it to the forefront as the topic of this dissertation. The following is a statement of the problem, the purpose of the project, and the research questions. The rationale of the project explains why this study is important and includes a list of definitions for key terms. Next is a description of the study parameters that includes a demographical description of the participants and their involvement in the study. The remainder of this chapter includes the research methodology, literary review, data collection, and data analysis. The final sections of this chapter address the likelihood of this study being repeated and the potentiality of the results being duplicated followed by the project overview.

Personal Introduction

“Church folk are peculiar folk.”

I received this wisdom from a retired clergyman not long after I entered my first appointment as a provisional elder in the United Methodist Church. His many years in the pastorate provided ample evidence for such a statement. The man who gave me this advice was a much beloved clergy who once served that church several years prior to his retirement. That dictum rang true for me even though my amount of experiences with church folk paled in comparison to his. Six years have passed since I received that description of the people I dedicated my life to serve. The wisdom within the statement rings truer as the amount of my experiences with church folk increase.

Leading Bible studies was one of my responsibilities at that church. Up to that point, I had written and led many Bible studies during my years as a youth pastor.

Leading Bible studies, Sunday school classes, and small group discussions with teenagers taught me to assume my audience did not have an in-depth knowledge of the Bible. I came to realize their understanding of the Bible did not result from a personal study habit. Most of the teenagers gained their knowledge about the Bible from conversations at school, theological references in popular songs, cultural understandings, various denominational influences, stories they remember from their youth, and the like. I learned something from their lack of scriptural knowledge: they do not have a personal habit of reading the Bible.

Most of the students in the youth group excelled in academics and were gifted athletes; they were simply not interested in reading the Bible on their own time. Therefore, I wrote Bible study curriculum that assumed the participants had little to no knowledge about the Scripture passages. I did not know much about the Bible in my teenage years, so I did not have unrealistic expectations on them. With each study I wrote, my goal was to present the truths of Scripture in an intriguing, educational, and applicable manner. The gospel of Scripture is powerful enough to withstand the constant bombardment of competing ideologies, but I believe my role as a pastor is to aid the Holy Spirit's efforts in teaching the gospel. As my experiences with church people expanded beyond teenagers, I soon realized teenagers were not the only ones avoiding the Bible. Even considering adults who grew up going to church regularly, finding an adult with a working knowledge of Scripture is rare.

For those who grow up in the American South, it is easy to acquire at least a superficial familiarity of the stories and basic concepts in the Bible. However, for those who grew up in the context of a Christian community where people teach from the Bible regularly via weekly sermons and small groups, the expectation is greater for adults to possess an in-depth knowledge of scriptural stories and concepts.

There are several examples in the Bible of people proclaiming the importance of living in God's word (Ps. 119:10-11; 1 Tim. 3:16-17; Deut. 6:1-9; Ps. 119:105). John Wesley deemed "reading, hearing, and meditating" on the Scriptures "to be ordained of God, as [one of] the ordinary channels of conveying [God's] grace to the souls of men" (*The Wesley Center Online: Sermon 16 - The Means Of Grace*). The early Church Fathers also weighed in on the importance of knowing Scripture. John Chrysostom, who because of his preaching prowess is called Golden-mouthed, claims, "This is the cause of all evils, the not knowing the Scriptures" (Chrysostom). I believe Chrysostom is utilizing hyperbole to strengthen his claim but let us not miss his point. There is a high importance to reading and knowing the Scriptures in order to avoid falling to the temptation of evil.

Jesus gives us reason to learn the Bible when he says we live not only by the nutrition of bread, "but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Also in Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus instructs his disciples to go into the world making disciples by baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything he commanded. Christians must utilize the Bible in order to learn Jesus' commands so that we can teach them.

God provided humanity with God's written word. For those who have access to that word, the responsibility is to read it. For the followers of Jesus, not reading the Bible

evades the divine opportunity to learn from the God of the universe. When given such an opportunity, church folk who consciously avoid it are “quite peculiar” indeed.

In an effort to inspire adults to read their Bible more, I created a Bible study designed to offer participants a new way to learn from Scripture. The curriculum is an introduction to the inductive Bible study method. The inductive method allows the readers to learn about a situation in the Bible by expanding their lens to see the bigger picture surrounding that situation and to let that information shape the knowledge about the original situation. My goal of presenting the inductive study method is to remove the intimidation factor from reading the Bible and teach participants a rewarding way to learn from the Bible as they read it. I hope that the participants’ productive reading will inspire them to read the Bible more.

Statement of the Problem

There was a time in the not too distant past when conventional wisdom instructed preachers to craft sermons as though they are teaching the Bible to third graders. This approach implies that congregations proved to their preachers that they had understood nothing more than an elementary understanding of the Bible. According to the Guinness World Records, the Bible is the bestselling book of all time (*Best Selling Book of Non-Fiction, Guinness World Records 2016*). Even though Bibles are readily available, and Bible studies are available in almost every church, preachers experienced a level of scriptural comprehension from their congregation as that of third graders. This is unfortunate. It is my experience that Christians are not reading their Bibles. The common reason I have heard as to why people do not read their Bible is that it is too difficult to understand. Whether the names of people and places are too difficult to pronounce, the

concepts are too lofty, or have a high intimidation factor, many Christians are not willing to put the time into reading the Bible even though many would agree it is crucial for the Christian faith.

The resistance to personal Bible study among adult Christians creates a minimal and shallow understanding of Scripture. Therefore, congregations are filled with people who will not receive scriptural revelations unless they receive them from their preacher. While that is a legitimate means, I also believe the Holy Spirit can speak divine revelation into people through personal Bible study. If Christians began studying their Bibles to discover a better understanding of Jesus Christ and how to live accordingly, their relationship with the Triune God would strengthen and thus their relationship with others would as well. I believe teaching Christian adults the inductive style of studying the Bible will help them remove their fear and increase their awe of Scripture via a growing familiarity that results from this style of study.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the changes in scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits among persons in the worshiping community of Wesley Way United Methodist Church as the result of participating in a six-week introductory level inductive Bible study dealing with the Gospel of John.

Research Questions

The overall purpose of the study revolves around the potentiality of a certain type of Bible study inspiring Christian adults to read the Bible apart from corporate Bible studies. The research questions focus on the participants' scriptural attitude, knowledge, and reading habits because the assumption entering this study is that all of the

participants have a positive attitude about the Bible, a moderate amount of knowledge, and no personal reading habits. The study utilizes an inductive Bible study method because the assumption is that none of the participants has prior knowledge of this method; thus, the inductive method of studying the Bible intends to be the catalyst for the change in the frequency and depth of the participants' personal Bible reading. The Bible study method is the catalyst, but a change in their scriptural attitude, knowledge, and reading habits is the goal. Therefore, the research questions focus on the participants' pre and post attitude, knowledge, and reading habits of the Bible.

Research Question #1

What were the scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits among persons in the worshipping community of Wesley Way United Methodist Church who attended the six-week study prior to the study?

Research Question #2

What were the scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits among persons in the worshipping community of Wesley Way United Methodist Church who attended the six-week study after the study?

Research Question #3

Over a post-study four-week period, what sustainable changes occurred and what aspects of the six-week study had the greatest impact on the observed changes in the scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits among the participants?

Rationale for the Project

John Wesley considers "searching the Scriptures" a work of piety in which the reading, meditating, and hearing of Scripture is one of the "ordinary channels" through

which God might extend prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace (Collins). Whether one subscribes to this Wesleyan understanding of better receptivity of grace, reading the Bible is an effective means to learn about the essentials of the Christian faith. With the availability and the abundance of translations, it seems Christians would be in the habit of reading the Bible, but that is not the case.

A professor of New Testament at Wheaton College writes that he has friends who tell him “a working knowledge of the Bible does not matter. The Christian faith, they argue, is a matter of faith and the Spirit—not reason, not theology. Christianity is not about a recitation of facts about the Jesus of history; is it about knowing the living Christ, the Jesus of the church who indwells his people today” (Burge 47). This common rationale puts a high emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit to be the connector of Christians and Christ. The reliance upon faith seems to shortcut the work of a relationship with someone like discovering tendencies and preferences that are revealed only after spending a great deal of time together with the person. This low theology of Scripture is not new. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) writes in his book *On Christian Faith* that “religion was not a ‘knowing’ or ‘doing,’ but a ‘feeling of absolute dependence’” (Kerr 213). However, although some scholars believe the translated phrase “feeling of absolute dependence” is mistranslated (Behrens 1998; Finlay 2005), Schleiermacher’s emphasis away from studying Scripture remains. This mindset seems to be prevalent in the congregations where I have served.

A Christian belief system with a high dependence on faith and little desire for scriptural intelligence is prone to suffer from a simple, or superficial, understanding of Scripture. The Bible’s message is one of salvation, but it presents this message through a

variety of forms, categories, and languages (Leithart 34). Without the desire to learn the meaning behind the passages and the author's situation, the Christian is prone to slipping into a fundamentalist interpretation of Scripture. Although fundamentalism has many different faces, the common thread is the reluctance to biblical criticism. This reluctance to asking critical questions of the Bible is rooted in an interpretive scheme originated in the United States in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (Rogerson 124).

Inductive Bible study relies on the idea of reading the text through a critical lens to uncover the truth that lies below the surface. "In the broader sense, it involves a commitment to move from the evidence of the text and the realities that surround the text to possible conclusions (or inferences) regarding the meaning of the text" (Bauer and Traina Kindle location 214). Instead of the reader entering the text with a preconceived notion of what God is saying through the text, the reader relies on personal intellect and the Holy Spirit to uncover conclusions that were perhaps previously undiscovered. This practice also allows the Holy Spirit to speak through the situation of the text to provide the reader with conclusions that are applicable to his or her life.

Definition of Key Terms

Inductive Bible Study – Inductive questions find probable conclusions while deductive questions find certain conclusions. Inductive Bible studies look at the premises around the event being inquired about and seek to discover probable solutions to the inquiries based on as many aspects about the context of the event as possible, including, but not limited to, the socio-historic setting and the religious influences. The inductive process also considers the aspects of the pericope's written characteristics, for instance, the location of the passage in relation to the chapter, book, and Bible.

Properly applying inductive reasoning to one's reading of the Bible requires a high level of observation and educated assumption. This type of reasoning often is paired with deductive reasoning. However, "[T]he premises of deductive reasoning are presuppositional and absolute; whereas, those of inductive reasoning are evidential and conditional. Accordingly, what is always constant is that deductive inferences, like their premises, are certain and absolute; whereas, the inferences in inductive reasoning are probable or hypothetical and open to correction as necessary" (Bauer and Traina chp 1).

Delimitations

The study included people age 18 and older from the worshiping community of Wesley Way United Methodist Church. The church is located in a suburban area of McDonough, Georgia, and the majority of participants live in the neighborhoods within five miles of the church building. Most of the participants have participated in a Bible study previously, but none have participated in an inductive Bible study.

The limitations that excluded participants were few. Since the Bible study was advertised only within in the confines of the worshiping congregation, it was assumed that the participants were members of the worshiping congregation. Another limitation is the basic ability to read and process the material in the Bible study. One of the goals of the study is to determine if an inductive method of studying the Bible is beneficial for the participants. If they are unable to process the information, the study is flawed from the start.

Review of Relevant Literature

Chapter two addresses the concept of interpreting God's word. This chapter does so by exploring selected instances in the Old and New Testaments pertaining to God's

instruction, looking at theological implications of interpreting God's word, examining how various learning styles impact interpretation, and considering the views of interpretation in the Wesleyan tradition by researching denominational writings and John Wesley's sermons.

This chapter inspects three Old Testament passages and two New Testament passages. The first is Genesis 12: 1-3 when God gives Abram the initial imperative and promise and in Exodus 19-24 when God gives Moses the initial covenant. The second is a passage known as The Shema that is located in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 which details the importance of God's word. The first of the New Testament passages is found in Luke 24:13-25 as the post-Resurrection Jesus gives two of his followers a lesson in Old Testament Midrash. The second is located in 1 Timothy 3:16-17 and is Paul's instructions to Timothy about the importance of Scripture.

Research Methodology

The research utilized a ministry intervention methodology to address the following research questions:

RQ1: *What were the scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits among persons in the worshiping community of Wesley Way United Methodist Church who attended the six-week study prior to the study?*

RQ2: *What were the scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits among persons in the worshiping community of Wesley Way United Methodist Church who attended the six-week study after the study?*

RQ3: *Over a post-study four-week period, what sustainable changes occurred and what aspects of the six-week study had the greatest impact on the observed changes in the scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits among the participants?*

The research project included a six-week inductive Bible study, a Pre-Bible Study Questionnaire, a Post-Bible Study Questionnaire, and a Post-Bible Study Focus Group. Each supportive instrument applied both qualitative and quantitative questions.

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the changes in scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits among persons in the worshipping community of Wesley Way United Methodist Church as the result of their participating in a six-week introductory level inductive Bible study dealing with the Gospel of John. In order to discover the changes listed, the Pre-Bible Study Questionnaire was utilized to discover a base level for the participants concerning their attitude, knowledge, and reading habits prior to their exposure to the inductive style of studying the Bible. The pre-Bible study questionnaire consisted of 24 questions. There were eight questions covering each of the three topics: attitude, knowledge, and Scripture reading habits. The questions were general in scope in order to ascertain a breadth of information.

The post-Bible study questionnaire was completed at the end of the last weekly gathering. The participants remained after the conclusion of the final class. The post-Bible study questionnaire included the same questions as the pre-Bible study questionnaire in order to discover the changes, if any, in the group's attitude, knowledge, and reading habits of Scripture after having completed the inductive Bible study. The

data was collected and analyzed. The results of the data analysis are provided in chapter four.

The focus group occurred four weeks after the completion of the Bible study. The small group coordinator asked at least five participants to volunteer to participate in the focus group. The small group coordinator kept the list of volunteers and contacted them one week prior to the focus group as a reminder. The focus group was a group interview format. The focus group interview took place in the same room as the Bible study. The researcher conducted the interview, and two audio recording devices recorded the dialogue. The purpose of the focus group was to provide further information on the sustainability of the inductive Bible study's effects on their attitude, knowledge, and reading habits of Scripture four weeks after the completion of the study.

Type of Research

This type of research performed for the purposes of this dissertation is an intervention study. A pre-Bible study test, post-Bible study test, and post Bible study focus group were conducted to determine if the inductive Bible study changed the participants' knowledge, attitude, and habits in relation to inductive Bible study and personal Bible reading.

Participants

The participating adults were selected on a voluntary basis. Four weeks prior to the beginning of the Bible study, verbal announcements were given prior to each worship service on Sunday morning and a written blurb ran in the weekly bulletin describing the purpose and overview of the Bible study on the Gospel of John. It was assumed that all of the participants would be members of the worshiping community of Wesley Way UMC

because all of the advertisement happened in house and each participant volunteered for the study based on the marketing information previously described.

There were two criteria for participation: a minimum age requirement of at least 18 years of age, and possessing the general ability to read and comprehend the information associated with the study. The participants were informed that one purpose of the Bible study was to fulfill one of the requirements of the senior pastor's dissertation and were given a detailed consent form informing them of various aspects of their role in the research project, an overview of the study, and their ability to decline at any time without any negative consequences.

Instrumentation

The instruments utilized for this study were a Pre-Bible Study Questionnaire, Post-Bible Study Questionnaire, and Post Bible Study Focus Group. The Pre-Bible Study Questionnaire determined the base level of the participants' knowledge, attitude, and habits concerning inductive Bible studies prior to completing the six-week introductory level inductive Bible study. The Post-Bible Study Questionnaire determined any changes in the participants' knowledge, attitude, and habits concerning inductive Bible studies. The Post Bible Study Focus Group sought to determine any changes in the participants' independent Bible reading habits.

Data Collection

The researcher designed the inductive Bible study, Pre-Bible Study Questionnaire, Post-Bible Study Questionnaire, and Post Bible Study Focus Group interview prior to advertising the Bible study to the worshiping community at Wesley Way United Methodist Church. During the first gathering of the group, the researcher

distributed the Pre-Bible Study Questionnaire and asked each participant to complete the questionnaire. The researcher gave them the amount of time necessary to complete the questionnaire without feeling rushed. The same thing happened at the conclusion of the last Bible study gathering as the researcher distributed the Post-Bible Study Questionnaires to the participants and allowed them enough time to complete the questionnaire. Four weeks after the completion of the six-week Bible study a sample of the participants participated in the Post Bible Study Focus Group interview.

Data Analysis

The data consists of both qualitative and quantitative data that was collected utilizing three primary sources. The pre and post Bible study questionnaires are hard copies that were completed by all of the participants. The focus group consisted of a sample of the original project participation group. The Small Groups Coordinator who was assisting the researcher input the answers on the hard copy questionnaires into Word documents for easier analysis. The transcripts of the focus group were also saved on a Word document. Both the questionnaires and the focus group data contained qualitative and quantitative data. The researcher utilized content analysis to analyze the qualitative portion of the data and descriptive analysis to analyze the quantitative data.

To analyze the qualitative data, the researcher copied the answers from the questionnaires onto a separate Word document and arranged the answers based on the research question to which they pertained. The researcher then printed the documents, underlining and circling the key words, thoughts, and themes for each question. The illuminated words, thoughts, etc. were written beside each answer for ease of visual comparison between the same questions for the pre and post questionnaire for each

participant and between members of the cumulative group. Eight questions require qualitative data on the pre and post questionnaire, but all twelve of the focus group questions are qualitative in nature. Therefore, the same procedure was conducted for the focus group answers in order to discover the common themes. Since there was only one focus group, the answers were analyzed not only in relation to the question being answered but also as it pertained to the three research questions.

To analyze the quantitative data, the researcher conducted a similar organizational method that was used for the qualitative data by pasting the answers onto a separate document sorted by the questions on the questionnaire and the research questions to which they pertained. The letters were equated to numbers (a = 1, b = 2, c = 3, etc.) and the numbers were calculated to find the standard deviation for each answer for the individual participant and the group as a whole.

Generalizability

This project was limited to only one group of adults who worship at Wesley Way United Methodist Church and volunteered to participate in the inductive Bible study. The project was also limited to the inductive Bible study that the researcher designed. The project did not seek to inform the group of participants or the individual participants about the findings of the project. This project will be helpful to church leaders, both lay and clergy, who are seeking ways to help their congregations learn more about the Bible and read the Bible more often. This project will also provide possible outcomes for church leaders who wish to introduce the inductive method of Bible study to their congregation.

Project Overview

Chapter 2 reviews literature discussing inductive research, theological foundations for studying the Bible and the importance of applying it to one's life, and various learning styles. Chapter 3 deals with the research method, the design of the ministry intervention project, the instrumentation utilized for data collection and data analysis. Chapter 4 explains the findings from a detailed analysis of the data collected from the project. Chapter 5 provides a summary of the three major findings of the project, any ministry implementation possibilities, and the unexpected observations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

A quick glance at a bookstore shelf or an online list of bibles will display a wide variety of options concerning the language of translation, the vernacular, the target demographic, and the amount of assistance (i.e. footnotes, study questions, commentary, etc.) to list a few. Reading the Bible from a hard copy is no longer the only way. Multitudes of websites provide the Holy Scriptures. Some of the websites provide commentary and reading assistance. Computer software like LOGOS[®] and Bibleworks[®] provide a great deal of information for the person who desires a detailed understanding of the Bible. Bible apps for cell phones and tablets like the YouVersion Bible app, which is a free resource from the church LifeChurch.tv, are available. Their senior pastor, Craig Groeschel, has said on multiple occasions that this app has been downloaded more than 310,000,000 times. In addition to all the reading options, the Bible is also available on various audio resources including CDs, mp3s, and audible apps.

With over 5 billion copies sold, and countless more copies downloaded and available online, the Bible remains the most-purchased book in the history of the world. However, most Christians in America do not read the Bible. Barna research group states that since 1991 the number of American adults reading their Bible has remained around 46 percent. Barna also states that since 2009, “one-third of all American adults report reading the Bible once a week or more. The percentage is highest among Elders (49%) and lowest among Millennials (24%)” (Barna). This project addresses the reality that statistically few Christians have a working knowledge of the Bible because they are not

reading the Bible. This study utilizes an inductive Bible study method designed to teach participants reading practices that will hopefully prove insightful, thus fostering a desire to read their Bible more frequently, a higher level of comfort, and a greater scriptural knowledge base.

For various reasons, people's prior knowledge about the Bible is either so minimal that there is a lack of foundational knowledge to build upon, which causes confusion or is tainted with negative experiences and thus causes disinterest. Both factors create discomfort and can cause Christians to avoid reading the Bible. It is assumed by the researcher that biblical interpretation factors greatly into this equation. Anytime someone reads someone else's words, interpretation is involved. Bums, Roe and Ross state that readers approach written material with huge individual differences in knowledge and experiences related to their personal lives (qtd. in Little and Box 25). The previous statement is the basis of schema theory, which argues that what we know influences the way we process information. Since the natural tendency is for readers to interpret the text through the filter of their worldview, this tendency can create a disconnect between the reader and the text because no two persons' worldviews are exactly alike. One of the researcher's assumption is that Christians are not able to advance beyond the disconnect of the unfamiliar context of the Bible and their own context to properly interpret the truths lying within.

In the instance of nonfiction such as biographies, histories and scientific writings, the difference in worldview between the author and reader can create an interpretational barrier, but this barrier is probably minor and non-obtrusive due to the nature of the information presented. In the arena of fiction, the disconnect can be a hindrance in the

reader's interpretation of the story, especially if the author is presenting an allegory. The Bible seems to be in an arena of its own because it contains many different genres: fiction, nonfiction, history, biography, and allegory, to name a few. In addition to the content structure, every word for the modern reader is a translation or transliteration of the original text. To complicate the issue further, the average readers apply not only their personal worldviews into the scriptural interpretation but also their opinions of validity, historicity, structural design, authority, etc. The primary change agent in the biblical text is the truth that lies within, the truth that is directly applicable to the reader's life. When readers have a structural foundation to properly interpret Scripture, they uncover such truth, and the transforming power of the Holy Scripture comes to life.

This chapter considers the current knowledge base regarding inductive Bible study, which is this dissertation's ministry intervention project. The biblical foundations section looks at what the Old and New Testaments say about biblical interpretation. The following two sections address the theological backing and what the Wesleyan Tradition says about reading and studying the Bible for the purpose of life application. The next section considers a selection of research styles that are applicable to biblical research while the final section addresses various criticisms and learning theories that speak to the purpose of this Bible study, which is to study the attitude, reading habits, and scriptural knowledge of adults after participating in an introductory level inductive Bible study covering the Gospel of John.

Biblical Foundations

The Bible contains examples of people learning and obeying God's instructions. Within the Old Testament, the Mosaic Law is the foundation of those instructions. The

law is a document, per se, of a legal agreement between the nation of Israel and God. The people were encouraged to learn and understand this document in order to live according to its precepts and statutes. King David writes of his love and appreciation for God's law in Psalm 119. He begins his written celebration with "Blessed are those whose walk is blameless, who live according to the law of the LORD" (Psalm 119 NIV). As David states, living according to "the law of the LORD" is the reason for a blessed life. One must know the law to live according to the law.

By the time the New Testament authors write their gospels and letters, the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, is the foundation of God's instruction. The Torah contains two important pieces: the stories of God's interaction with the people chosen to be the headwaters of our Christian faith and the record of the Mosaic Law. Both of these elements are crucial to understanding God's desires for salvation. In his second letter to the young pastor named Timothy, Paul writes:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

In this passage, Paul highlights the value of knowing and utilizing Scripture to guide Timothy's life because God is its source. The Scripture Paul is referring to is the Torah; however, this letter from Paul, as well as the twenty-six other New Testament entries, has been canonized. Therefore, Paul's words now apply not only to the Torah but also to the rest of the Old Testament and to his own words written to Timothy along with the rest of the New Testament.

This section looks at four biblical instances detailing the necessity of interpretation while reading God's words of instruction. The first two instances are located in the Old Testament: Moses' installment and the Israelites' agreement of the law and the Shema. The next two instances are found in the New Testament: Jesus interpreting Scripture on a walk to Emmaus and Paul instructing Timothy of the proper use of Scripture.

Old Testament

The story of the Israelites best describes the importance of learning and living according to God's words. The nation of Israel came into existence when one man, Abram, heard and obeyed God's first word to him: "Go." Immediately after this imperative, God promised Abram blessings for his future that were contingent on his obedience to the first instruction (Genesis 12:1-3). The first word from God is an imperative, a word of command (Wolff 138). At this point, God's imperative applies to a specific individual. Thus, it contains information that is particular to only that person. The Genesis story does not suggest or describe any interpretation on Abram's part in order to understand God's imperative; per verse 4, he merely obeys. Although the command to depart his people, his land, and his father's house is clear, the destination and the promises that follow are not. Abram is not told where to go, and he is promised many offspring, but he and his wife are beyond the years of childbearing. For Abram, God's word must be acted upon in order to receive the interpretation.

Many generations later, after God saved the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt, God expanded his instruction for the Israelites to include the Ten Commandments and the following commands found in Exodus chapters 20 through 23. Moses presented

God's instructions to the Israelites after God had already saved them from Egypt because God "heard their groaning and he remembered his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Exodus 2:24). When the Israelites agreed to follow God's instructions, a covenant was created between the Israelites and God (Exodus 24:3). Their agreement to the covenant was in response to God's acts of salvation, not as a requirement for God to save them (Mosbarger 87). At this point, their obedience "speaks more of personal commitment to God himself than to particular commandments" (Fretheim 211). As with Abram, God's instructions were specific to a certain group of people.

Per the Genesis narrative, Abram did not have a relationship with God prior to receiving God's word, but the Israelites did have a relationship prior to receiving their instructions. In both instances though, the content was relatively succinct and quite pertinent to their specific situations, so no interpretation was needed. However, through Moses, God's instruction expanded greatly, and those instructions not only governed their actions but created their identity during their travels in the wilderness and in the years following their settlement of the Promised Land. Nevertheless, over approximately 1000 years and the course of many generations, the nation of Israel forgot their covenant with God through the Mosaic Law. As presented in the book of Nehemiah, the law was read again to the Israelites for the first time in several generations. Interpretation was required because not only had they forgotten it, but also it was less specific to their daily lives because the audience's living situations had changed significantly (Nehemiah 8:1-8). Today, like the Israelites during Nehemiah's time, God's word—as presented in the Old and New Testaments—requires a great deal of interpretation because the modern reader's culture is different from that of even the latest authors who contributed to the

Bible roughly 2000 years ago. The following Old Testament examples detail the importance of interpretation in order to understand God's word and allow it to shape the way one lives.

Moses Receives and Delivers God's Covenant, Exodus 19-24

Three months after the Israelites departed Egypt they arrived at the Desert of Sinai. After the Israelites settled, they received a word from God at the Mount of Sinai, being the Ten Commandments and the Mosaic Law. These commandments from God are instrumental in defining the identity of the people of Israel (Durham, *Understanding the Basic Themes of Exodus* 1990; Newsome 1998; Houtman, *Exodus: Historical Commentary on the Old Testament* 2000). Prior to Moses' receiving the Ten Commandments and the Book of the Covenant from God, he received information from God that is widely understood as a prelude to those commands located in Exodus 19:3b-6 (Durham, *Exodus - Vol. 3 (Word biblical Commentary)* 1987; Gowan 1994; Houtman, *Exodus - Vol. 2 (Historical Commentary on the Old Testament)* 1996; Wells 2000).

This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites. (Exodus 19:3b-6)

This prelude establishes God's authority over the Israelites' future with five details of the exodus: who their deliver is (v 4a), how the deliverance happened (v 4b), the desirable place to be (v 4c), the conditional statement (v. 5a), and the reward if the conditions are met (vv 5b-6a). God concludes this introduction by reiterating to Moses the importance and urgency of delivering this message to Israel (v 6b).

God gives the rules of the covenant to only one person. That person, Moses, tells the elders of the people that which God told him. It is understood, per Scripture, that Moses presents God's message verbatim. This message from God is conditional ("...if you obey me fully and keep my command..." v.5) and requires an initial agreement and further obedience. The elders are the ones who agreed to this initial prelude.¹ Prior to the conditional portion of the prelude, God provides three initiatives that God has taken with Israel, all of which are located in v.4. These initiatives describe the "foundation of grace" that God sets to establish in the relationship between God and Israel (Zyl 1992; Mosbarger 2013). The three initiatives contained within the prelude to the Ten Commandments describe what happened, how it happened, and why it happened. The first initiative of grace was to rescue Israel from Egypt, the second was to carry Israel on eagle's wings, and the third was to bring Israel to God (Mosbarger).

Most of the people receiving this word had experienced the exodus first hand. However, it is not to be assumed that every individual knew all the details of their deliverance from Egypt. One can justifiably assume that there were some Israelites who were mindlessly performing their daily duties. While the activities between Moses and Pharaoh surely spread quickly among the Israelites, not all the people who departed were Israelites. Certainly, there were non-Israelites assimilated into the fold evidenced in the instructions about how to relate with them found in such verses as Exodus 20:10; 22:21; 23:9.² God, who initiated the deliverance, clarifies the prompting of the deliverance and

¹ Although there is some ambiguity at times in the text as to which "people" (the nation or the elders) are responding, or whom Moses is talking to, one scholar solves this issue by stating that there is a seamless transition in the text when moving from referring only to the elders then referring to all of Israel (Houtman, *Exodus - Vol. 2 (Historical Commentary on the Old Testament)* 448).

² The Hebrew word in the listed verses that denotes non-Israelite people is גֵּר (pronounced "ger"). It describes a person, or persons, who depart their village and tribe due to war, famine, or pestilence and seek shelter in a land where their right to marry, own property, and to participate in the administration of

the goal of the deliverance. This information is for those individuals who did not experience the plagues or the departure from Egypt and as a reminder for all those Israelites who did. God also provides this introduction as a filter through which to interpret the following commandments.

God realizes that the people are prone to doubt, so God creates a plan that will encourage the nation of Israel to put their trust in Moses. Exodus 19:9-25 describes God's plan and execution. Moses calls the people to the foot of Mount Sinai and instructs that they be consecrated. Save only Aaron, who goes to the top with Moses, no person nor animal is to approach the mountain beyond the established boundary on penalty of death. God will envelope Moses on top of the mountain with a cloud and with smoke. There will be a loud trumpet sound with lightning and thunder. When God answers Moses, it will be with thunder. When the conversation is complete, Moses will interpret God's words to the nation of Israel.

Two important events happen during this conversation. The first is that the people witness God talking to Moses so there would be no question of Moses' authority and source of instruction. The second is the people's immediate need for interpretation. It is important to note that every word the Israelites receive from God is interpreted by Moses. The Israelites not only have to interpret the commands based on their understanding of what they mean and how they must be applied but also must trust that Moses is interpreting the thunderous, otherwise incomprehensible, sound of God's voice. After Moses receives the full measure of God's initial instructions found in chapters 20 through 23, Moses tells the people all of God's words and laws, and "the people responded with

justice, in the cult, and in war are curtailed (Holladay). This can rightly be translated as stranger, sojourner, immigrant, alien.

one voice, ‘Everything the LORD has said we will do’” (24:3). The “words” that Moses is referring to is the Ten Commandments found in 20:1-17, and the “laws” he is referring to is the Book of the Covenant found in 20:22–23:33 (Osborn and Hatton). The text goes on to describe Moses’ creating an altar, offering the proper sacrifice for a fellowship offering, then reading the Book of the Covenant to the people once again. This time, the people added “we will obey” to their verbal agreement of doing “everything the Lord has said” (24:7).

Beginning with the prelude and continuing with the Ten Commandments and the Book of the Covenant, the importance of interpretation is essential to the truths and expectations being delivered and received properly. Through the Israelites’ journey in the wilderness to the Promised Land, Moses is God’s conduit to the Israelites. Moses interprets God’s words into a language the Israelites can understand, and the Israelites interpret Moses’ words into action. This is the process of interpretation and response that is intended to occur throughout Israel’s wilderness journey.

The Shema: Importance of shaping one’s life around proper interpretation of God’s Word, Deuteronomy 6:4-9

One of the most influential passages in the Torah is found following Deuteronomy’s proclamation of the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5:6-12). The passage is called the Shema. The name comes from the Hebrew pronunciation of the word translated “hear,” which is the first word in the passage.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your

foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

The importance of the content of this passage cannot be overstated: “There is hardly another passage in the Bible that can be considered stronger proof of the steadfast faith of Israel in the one true God and in the essence of monotheism than Deut 6:4” (Langer 215). It begins by calling all of Israel’s attention to the statement “the Lord is One,” which is “probably the most significant and revolutionary phrase in the entire lexicon of Jewish thought” (Lamm 31). Abram was called out of a pagan culture and the Israelites are currently living in a similar pagan culture when they receive this bold statement that exists in opposition of their socio-religious beliefs: there is one God, not many gods. The opening claim and the following imperatives define God’s people by their belief in God (singular, not many gods) and their obedience of God’s commands.

The nation of Israel was deeply impacted by the Shema’s imperative as this defines their identity in the oneness of God (Moberly 1999; Tan 1999; Krouse 2010). Located in the book of Deuteronomy, the timing of this imperative must be noted. Deuteronomy details the events of the Israelites as they were preparing to enter the long-awaited Promised Land. Forty years prior, they were passive recipients of God’s grace-filled initiative to save them from enslavement in Egypt so they could realize the promise that God gave Abram centuries earlier. After three months in the wilderness, the Israelites were presented with their own promise (Exodus 19:3b-6) as discussed in the above section. They were delivered by a God they did not know and with whom they could not communicate; they agreed to obey this God’s commands and adhere to the conditions; and they lost a generation in the wilderness and lost trust in God’s appointed leader. Deuteronomy is the powerful build up to the crescendo of God’s people finally realizing

their promise. The strength of Deuteronomy is found in not only the frenzy of anticipation but in Moses' awareness to remind the Israelites of who God is and of the conditions to which they agreed. This space between not realizing and realizing God's promise is where we find the Shema.

The Shema is a Jewish prayer of utmost importance. As Elbogen states, "The whole of life was held and enclosed by the Shema (Deut. 6:4-9). It began and ended each day" (qtd. in Nagel 294). Each time the Israelite speaks the words of this prayer, whether in the wilderness, in the Promised Land, or in exile, he is renewing his identity in God and speaking words of commitment and hope that God's promises will come to fruition. N.T. Wright states that

To pray the Shema was to embrace the yoke of God's kingdom, to commit oneself to God's purposes on earth as in heaven, whatever it might cost. It was to invoke and declare one's loyalty to the One God who had revealed himself in action at the Exodus and was now giving his people their inheritance. (Wright 22)

When the Jew reads and proclaims the Shema, "it serves as a paradigm of the creative encounter of spirituality and law in Judaism; and that understanding the Shema in and of itself will make its recitation more meaningful to those who read it as well as to those who stand outside the tradition but wish to understand its central role in Jewish life and thought" (Lamm 9). It is not only the content of the Shema but the placement that proves its importance to the nation of Israel. Declaring one God defines their theology and the Shema following the Deuteronomistic Ten Commandments details the desired response to the commandments. Through the Shema, the Israelite knew his God and knew how to live.

The Shema's impact resides deeply within the Jewish tradition, but the importance of the Shema greatly impacts the Christian tradition as well. Though it may not be the first passage a Christian recites when asked to give the most important passage in the Bible, Jesus named it as the most important commandment when he was asked a similar question (Yoder 1). As recounted in Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30, and Luke 10:27, Jesus quotes the Shema when asked to define the most important commandment. Based on Jesus' declaring the opening statement of the Shema as the greatest commandment, one can arguably deduce the prevalence of this passage of Scripture.

Another example of the Shema's impact on Christianity is the suggestion that it is the model of Christian worship. As Krouse details, the model is located within the three phrases that constitute the first two sentences. "Hear, O Israel" symbolizes God's presence and a call to worship. "The LORD our God, the LORD is one" is the proclamation. "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" is the response (Krouse 483). Call to worship in God's presence. Proclaim God's truth. Respond accordingly. These three practices are the basic structure of worship gatherings found in local churches across modern Christendom.

There exists a vast amount of scholarly discussion on the proper translation of the four Hebrew words יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד (from right to left: LORD God LORD one) that constitute Deuteronomy 6:4b. S. Dean McBride Jr. writes, "...no statement in the Hebrew Bible has provoked more discussion with less agreement than this one" (McBride 291). The four words of Deuteronomy 6:4b are grouped into four standard solutions, some imaginative solutions, and one poetic solution based on the translator's understanding of

the Hebrew syntax.³ While the exact translation may be argued, their interpretation was clear based on the Israelites' understanding of the monotheistic God.

It is one thing to learn and recite the Shema, but the value of this passage resides in the impact one allows it to have on one's life. The greater impact of the Shema not only is within the passage itself but is contained within the larger context of the commandments that the Shema refers. Verse five provides the gamut through which one is to love God. Immediately following God's imperative in verse five, the means through which the evidence of the love is presented: "These commandments." The Shema follows Moses' second proclamation of the Ten Commandments. This passage is at the beginning of Moses' explanation of why the nation of Israel must obey not only the Ten Commandments but also the following commandments that he delivers to them. The theme of love as the reason to obey the commandments is consistent throughout Moses' explanation. A prominent example of love being the reason to obey the commandments is Deuteronomy 30:16:

If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. (NRSV)

In this verse, "one little word—"by" makes all the difference. According to [this] verse, one obeys God's commands *by* loving God and walking in God's ways...also *by* observing God's commands, decrees, and ordinances" (Wyse 40). Obeying the

³ The four standard solutions are as follows: (i) "YHWH is our God, YHWH alone", (ii) "YHWH is our God; YHWH is one", (iii) "YHWH our God, YHWH is one", (iv) "YHWH our God is one YHWH" (Kraut 584). For further reading concerning the translations of Deuteronomy 6:4b, see the essay *Deciphering the Shema: Staircase Parallelism and the Syntax of Deuteronomy 6:4* by Judah Kraut found in *Vetus Testamentum*, 61 no. 4 2011, pp. 582-602.

commandments that God has provided is the act of love. Loving God, through obeying the commandments, is rewarded per the blessings throughout Deuteronomy. The opposite is true; not loving God by not obeying the commandments is punished per the curses listed in Deuteronomy. The commandments that God initiated with Israel were a suzerain-vassal agreement that was common in the ancient near east.

The suzerain (the greater, more powerful) and the vassal (the weaker, less powerful) agreements in ancient near east often included blessing and curses, which were meant to encourage both sides to keep the treaty. “Within suzerain-vassal treaties, the vassals often agreed to ‘love’ their suzerains. This love was interpreted as loyalty, and loyalty demanded obedience to the treaty’s stipulations. If the stipulations were broken, then loyalty (love) was severed, and the treaty was no longer binding” (Wyse 44). Obedience was intrinsic in the idea of “love” as it pertains to such agreements. Obedience to the stipulations in the covenant is not suggested but required. The Israelites receiving the commands and hearing the Shema associated with the commandments most likely would have understood the suzerain-vassal agreement and the ramifications of disobeying the commandments.

The importance of the Israelites’ understanding and interpreting God’s commandments properly is so they would live according to the stipulations every day. Simply learning the words for the sake of properly reciting was never the goal of God’s presenting them with the commandments.

New Testament

When reading an ancient anthology with the intent of discovering truths and life practices found in the text to impact the reader’s life, the reader must consider the cultural

circumstances surrounding those truths and life practices. The New Testament was written about events that happened nearly 2,000 years ago in a culture that no longer exists. It offers a unique perspective on the need for interpretation. Not only are the primary texts themselves interpretations (because Jesus spoke Aramaic and the New Testament was written in Greek), but it consists of multiple styles of writing including narrative, apocalyptic prophecy, and epistles written by multiple authors. When trying to read and interpret the New Testament, the reader is given the task of discerning the truth from multiple perspectives.

Along with the various styles of writing, the New Testament authors attach new interpretations of Old Testament literature based on words and/or events surrounding Jesus. This interpretation is in the field of the practice of midrash, which is finding new meanings to words and events of the Old Testament. Many of the New Testament authors provide midrashic interpretations to point to Jesus. This Christian perspective affords current era readers of the Bible the opportunity to interpret the Old Testament prophecies and historical accounts in light of Jesus' being the coming Messiah. The ability to interpret the Bible is both a blessing and a curse because it allows the Holy Spirit to interact with individuals on a personal basis, but it is also one of the primary reasons for the divisions found within Christendom since before the Bible was canonized.

Burning Hearts: Jesus opens the Scriptures on the road to Emmaus, Luke 24:13-35

One of the best examples of the Old Testament being redefined is the Lukan account of Jesus walking with two companions to Emmaus after Jesus' resurrection. Luke states that, upon rehashing the events, the companions lamented their not recognizing Jesus because their "hearts were burning" within them as Jesus "opened the

Scriptures” to them (Luke 24:32). The situation that prompted Jesus’ opening the Scriptures is that the two travelers had just witnessed the empty tomb but were downtrodden because their hopes that Jesus would be the one to redeem Israel were dashed. Their abandoned hope frustrated Jesus and he chided, “How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken” (24:25 NIV). He followed by confirming their knowledge that “the Messiah had to suffer these things and then enter into his glory” (Luke 24:25-26). Jesus’ frustration seems to come from their having read the Scriptures but not understanding them. “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (24:27). The way Jesus asks the question proves his assumption that they should have known the answer: “Did not the Messiah have to suffer. . . .” By asking in the negative, the assumed answer is “yes.”

As Jesus’ walking companions discovered, “‘reading’ is always a matter of interpreting a text, of putting it to appropriate use” (Lash 40). Their understanding of the Scripture that they were all too familiar with was incorrect, so their lives were not altered to see Jesus for who he really was before his death on the cross. Luke states that they were “prevented” from recognizing Jesus after having witnessed the empty tomb and having him walking beside them. Scholars can only speculate as to why the men could not recognize Jesus in the flesh; however, the general consensus excuses Satan from being the culprit but puts the onus on their spiritual blindness (Brock 1910; Marshall 893). “The fact that they couldn’t recognize Jesus at first seems to have gone with the fact that they couldn’t recognize the events that had just happened as the story of God’s redemption. Perhaps Luke is saying that we can only now know Jesus, can only recognize

him in any sense, when we learn to see him within the true story of God, Israel and the world” (Wright, *Luke for Everyone* 295).

The importance of reading and understanding the Bible in its entirety is essential to understanding the full scope and meaning that is being presented. For instance, it is natural to assume Jesus picked selected passages from the Hebrew Scriptures to properly interpret as pointing to Jesus; however, Luke is not suggesting “. . . .that Jesus collected a few, or even a few dozen, isolated texts, verses chose at random. He means [the] whole story.” (Wright, *Luke for Everyone* 294). Jesus utilizes Moses’ words and the Prophets’ words to describe himself (v27). This situation would clearly be extraordinary for the modern reader, but it was equally uncommon for Jesus’ disciples because instead of being familiar with the correct meaning of the passages, it can be assumed that they had only a superficial understanding.

Perhaps this interaction, found in only Luke’s gospel, is the perfect example of why proper interpretation must accompany sufficient reading of scripture. The disciples, all of them, not only the two in the Lukan passage, miss the ramifications of Jesus’ teachings and actions throughout his life. Even after the Resurrection, Jesus continued explaining the Kingdom of God to his disciples (see Acts 1:3).

Scripture is God-breathed and useful, 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Paul’s second letter to Timothy implores Timothy to remain steadfast in the proper understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ—hope in and through the Resurrection—for the sake of Timothy’s life and the sake of his teaching, even with the threat of suffering and death. Paul includes in his letter that Timothy has known the Scriptures from his youth and that “all Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching,

rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be equipped for every good work” (vv. 16-17). Through this letter from Paul, and specifically verses fourteen and fifteen, one can surmise that Timothy knows and has a proper interpretation of Scripture as exemplified through the way he lives his life. This surely would come as a high compliment for Timothy because, per Paul, Paul was the premier Pharisee and was rigid in his application of Scriptures (see Acts 22:3 and Philippians 3:3-6). Here, the emphasis of not only reading the full breadth of Scripture but applying the right interpretations of that Scripture to one’s life is championed.

Paul follows this compliment and imperative to Timothy with the passage that is possibly the single most referenced verse when justifying a fundamental understanding of the Bible and an argument for the authority of Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:16. In his statement, Paul uses a word that is found only one time in the biblical canon, θεόπνευστος (pronounced *theopneustos*), which means “God-breathed.” Often this word is translated into a much more palatable “God inspired.” Either way, this passage from Paul gives way to much discussion about exactly which part of Scripture is “God-breathed.” Is this word referencing the Old Testament or just the Torah? Is it the Old and New Testament or just the New Testament? Or is Paul referring to every word, grammar structure, and syllable, or is he simply referring to certain words, ideas, and stories? What does “God-breathed” mean? Perhaps the Bible is without error in its entirety including historicity, chronology, and ancestry? Or maybe Paul is simply arguing that God breathed out the whole of Scripture, thus the overall point of the Bible is perfect and without flaws. Gloer simplifies the question of how θεόπνευστος applies to Scripture by distilling the

possibilities to either passive or active. The active states all Scripture is inspiring and the passive states that all Scripture comes from God (Gloer 289).

Long details this dilemma of θεόπνευστος richly, then poignantly concludes that “Paul is not arguing that the Scripture is inspired; he’s assuming it and is moving on to the real point, which is not what Scripture *is* but instead how Scripture should be *used*—‘for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness’” (Long 233). The inerrancy or infallibility of Scripture is not the point of Paul’s mentioning the source of its inspiration. The point of Paul’s mentioning the efficacy of Scripture is to make sure Timothy is properly interpreting it so that he, “the servant of God, may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (3:17). Rightly interpreting Scripture, according to this letter from Paul to Timothy, immediately becomes action, an action that is meant for good.

Theological Foundations

There are areas of the globe where Christianity is spreading quickly and effectively. Jenkins reports that by 2025, based on the current Christian populations and the rate of growth, Latin America will have 640 million, Africa will have 633 million, and Asia will have 460 million Christians (Jenkins 3). However, today “an increasing number of theologians believe that the Western world has moved from a Christendom era to a post-Christendom era” (Nikolajsen 462).⁴ The term post-Christendom has been defined as “the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence” (Murray 9). Theologians can offer an assortment of reasons for the decline. It is the assumption of this

⁴ Nikolajsen defines “Western world” as Europe and North America.

researcher that part of the reason is the change in the cultural perception of the Bible.

This section will discuss three factors that contribute to one's perception of the Bible: biblical interpretation and authority, the purpose of the Bible, and the intended distribution and use of the Bible.

Biblical Interpretation and Authority

The notion that the Bible is the Word of God and is esteemed as an authoritative book is widely accepted in Christendom. "Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox traditions have all agreed on the central premise that Scripture is the primary source and guideline for Christian teaching..." (Oden 336). However, within the Protestant tradition grows a divide separating those who believe the Bible remains the ultimate authority providing direction of how people should live and those who believe the Bible offers guidance while running alongside culture.

Some of those understandings suggest that for the Bible to have authority, it must be one hundred percent chronologically, scientifically, and historically correct. This view is considered an extreme stance of fundamentalism and inerrancy. These are two stances that commonly undergird the discussions pertaining to the understanding of biblical authority: fundamentalism and liberalism.

Elements of fundamentalism can be heard in most theological conversations in the Bible belt.⁵ Although fundamentalism is prevalent, it is not the original understanding of the Bible. Instead, the original audience of the components that now make up the Catholic and Protestant Bibles understood the components for what they are: letters,

⁵ The term Bible belt refers to the American states that have a long history of Christianity permeating most aspect of the culture. There is no official definition of the Bible belt states. However, it is widely understood that Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas, and much of Texas, Kentucky, and Virginia constitute the Bible belt.

poems, biographies, songs, proverbs, etc. It can be argued that none of the authors of these components expected their work to be of absolute fidelity, being without a hint of error. Witherington cleverly states, “the Bible. . . has always been seen as the word of God in the words of human beings, and the contribution of the latter has normally been recognized to be considerable” (Witherington III *xiv*). The original audience recognized that there is a greater point, but they did not expect every source to be historically and chronologically without error. The fundamental viewpoint has its roots in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when Western cultures were moving away from the longstanding teachings found in the Bible. The conservative response was to tighten their grip on the words of the Bible; thus, removing any space for variance in the meaning of the Bible. The rigidity drew clearer lines between right and wrong, holy and evil. Fundamentalism continues to exist for much the same reasons. Within the understanding of fundamentalism is the thought that the Bible is inerrant, the belief that the Bible is literally accurate. “An emphasis on the literal accuracy of the Bible and a frequent use of the word ‘inerrant’ are characteristic of many who want to affirm the authority of the Bible. ‘The Bible is either totally without any sort of error or it has no authority,’ they claim” (McKnight 7). While it would be difficult for anyone to prove that the Bible is without error historically, scientifically, grammatically, and chronologically, the modern understanding of the term inerrant is different from its previous meaning. The current thought puts emphasis on the original manuscripts, saying that the original manuscripts are without error and any errors or inconsistencies found in the Bible are the responsibility of the translators. The modern interpretation claims that “. . . . the Bible *in use* contains information not precisely in conformity with whatever standards of

perfection they are using but that some original form of the Bible (no longer available) was as perfect as God is perfect” (McKnight 8). This definition seems to sit better with many people who subscribe to the inerrant notion.

A term that is closely associated with inerrant is infallible. It is widely understood that the modern understanding of the term infallible suggests the Bible can be without error. The idea supporting the infallible philosophy is that spiritual truths located in the Bible are reliable and without error, but, in the case that errors are found, they would not minimize the reliability and the inerrancy of the spiritual truths. Those who subscribe to the modern view of infallibility of Scripture could be categorized as having a moderate interpretation of the Bible. It is important to note that one’s understanding of the term moderate is largely defined by the greater tradition one is in. For instance, if a person in a fundamental tradition, professing to be a moderate loosens his or her stance on a few issues but not on others; someone in that same fundamental tradition might view that person as liberal. On the flip side, the same moderate may discuss his or her views with someone from a liberal tradition, and the liberal person may not think the moderate has loosened enough and thus still consider that person fundamental.

Another way to interpret the Bible is gaining ground in today’s post-Christian Western culture: that way is called progressivism. A progressive reading of the Bible can be “characterized by a tendency to reexamine, rephrase, or adapt the truths and answers of the past in order to make them relevant to present problems” (Di Lella 139). This practice has been met with opposition by fundamentalists because they argue that reducing the longstanding truths in the Bible to mere cultural solutions forfeits any future reliability the Bible could have had because the very basis of its reliability—durable

truths that have withstood changing cultures—is now deemed obsolete. The critique of this view is that the truth of the Bible is whatever the person reading it wants it to be based on the cultural concern being address. As Robertson McQuilkin simply states, “‘Culture’ is the way a group of people views things or does things” (McQuilkin 52).

One of the stalwart characteristics of a progressive interpretation of the Bible is its cultural relativistic nature: “Cultural relativism holds that the value or truth of any idea depends on the culture in which it is found” (McQuilkin 52). Those who stand for this view would argue culture permeates the very core of the Bible. God first spoke to a sematic man living in a Mesopotamian culture (Abram from Ur) and told that man to do something that was perfectly countercultural (leave his father and tribe) in order to start a something countercultural (create a new tribe that was outwardly focused). The cultural relativist argument continues that the biblical narrative that follows happens within the strict confines of the culture defined by the Mosaic law; this narrative is in both the Old and New Testaments. The New Testament, in particular, is written while the Jews were experiencing the juxtaposition of two cultures: their ideal culture (defined by the Mosaic law) and the unwanted Hellenistic culture of the Greeks. In fact, culture is the impetus that forces Paul to write many of his letters because the new Christians were hesitant to depart from the culture they were raised in prior to entering the Christian culture. Thus, the cultural relativist would argue that Jesus’ greater principles and truths can be applied within the modern reader’s culture instead of having to go against the modern reader’s culture.

A biblical interpretation that addresses the theological differences in the Old and New Testaments is called progressive revelation. This interpretation suggests that God’s

full identity is revealed to humanity slowly over the course of history. Progressive revelation emphasizes “the historical integrity and coherence of the Bible. Differences between the Old and New Testaments, or within the Testaments and among various other books, can often be explained in terms of development over time. Revelation progresses as God gives it throughout the biblical history” (Treier 111). Another way to understand progressive revelation is to “remember that the Scripture was written over a period of at least twelve hundred years. During those centuries and many preceding ones described in the Bible, God patiently taught people of Himself, of His ways, and of how they might live with Him by faith. Pacing Himself partly by His creatures’ ability to understand the truth and partly by His agenda for their instruction, God nurtured them as a father would a child....” (Thompson 54).

A biblical interpretive theology that subscribes to progressive revelation is a sound approach because, in the most basic sense, the Old Testament does not contain the person of Jesus and the New Testament does. On a deeper level, beginning with God’s calling of Abram, through the exodus, and in the history books along with the prophets, the people in the Bible (thus, the modern readers) are learning more about God and God’s intention for humanity. The New Testament begins with the person of Jesus by telling the collective story of his life with an emphasis on his three years of ministry. Although the gospels contain Jesus’ description of his divinity, it is not until the letters from Paul that the modern reader understands the full implication of the salvation humanity receives by God’s grace through our faith. The concluding book, Revelation, gives an apocalyptic prophecy of the end times and a prophetic glimpse of eternity in the presence of God. Structurally speaking, although the books are not chronologically arranged, the books of

the Bible reveal greater information about God as they advance toward the end of the Bible. The following section on criticisms will provide more detail about interpretations, but let it suffice here that there are two common leanings toward biblical interpretation, fundamental and progressive, that are symptoms of one's view on scriptural authority.

No matter the leaning of a person's biblical interpretation—far left, far right, or somewhere in between—where that person stands is largely defined that person's understanding of biblical authority. The idea of biblical authority has a long history that begins with the Ten Commandments where Moses descends from Mt. Sinai with tablets in his hands laden with the words written by the very hand of God. These commands, and the following commands that comprise the Mosaic Law, were not to be questioned but to be trusted as true. Throughout the generations, as the Jewish nation formed into a civilized culture, the Mosaic law remained authoritative, but fewer and fewer Jews abided by it. This phenomenon of giving lip service to Holy Scripture's authority but living counter to its principles was evident during the New Testament era but gained steam as the Church moved West. Today, the Western Church is in the early stages of death while the Church is growing in Africa and the global South. Some credit the decline on the anemic state of the Western Church's view of biblical authority.

While the world debates absolute truth and relative truth, objective truth and subjective truth, ultimate truth and situational truth, universal truth and cultural truth, for the sake of its own renewal and for the sake of the world the church must boldly proclaim the transcendent truth of Sacred Scripture. We do so not simply to argue for it as one among many understandings of the truth, but in word and deed we regard it as the norm above all other norms for all matters of life and faith, believing it, confessing it, and living it. It is our only hope for '*semper reformanda*.' (Bradosky 359)

Others view our collective state as a refreshing understanding of how the Bible was intended to be viewed. Rob Bell, in his book *What Is the Bible? How an Ancient Library of Poems, Letters, and Stories Can Transform the Way You Think and Feel About Everything*, presents the argument that, first, in order to be understood even on the most elementary level, the Bible must be interpreted, and everyone interprets the Bible in a particular way. An individual's interpretation most likely comes from someone they have given authority to, whether a priest, pastor, youth leader, or whoever. Second, Bell argues that authority is a relational reality because interpretation is exemplified through obedience, belief, and submission; in general, doing what the Bible says. When people live according to their interpretation of the Bible, they are giving the Bible authority over them. Bell makes this assertion for the conclusive point that we can "give weight and power and influence to this ancient library of books with our minds and hearts fully awake and engaged" (Bell chp. 37).

While Bradosky argues the importance of keeping the Bible's truths paramount in our modern culture, he seems to do so with a "don't question, just obey" philosophy.⁶ Bell seems to also view the Bible as authoritative but gives the reader permission to question and dig into that which makes the Bible authoritative in order to make it more relational, thus more prone to obedience.

Intended Distribution and Ideal Use of the Bible

John Wycliffe (1330-1384) was the first person to translate the entire Bible into English. "His conviction was that all people, clergy or not, should be able to study the gospel in their own language. He declared that the Scriptures were the only law of the church and that church authority was not centered in the Pope and the cardinals"

⁶ That is solely my interpretation, those words are not found in Bradosky's article.

(McKnight 93). Wycliffe translated the Bible from the Latin Vulgate as opposed to the original languages, Hebrew, Greek, and minimal Aramaic. Within a seventeen-year span, two translations were created. They were delivered by “poor priests” who walked the land two by two (93). All copies of these Bible translations were painstakingly created by hand.

The most important innovation in the advancement of communication occurred around 1450 with the invention of the movable type printing press. Soon after the turn of the century, William Tyndale orchestrated the translation of the Bible from the original languages and, using the printing press, copies were replicated and distributed quickly and in bulk. In 1536, Tyndale was convicted of heresy and paid for his advancement of the Bible with his life. Even after his death, his translation of the Bible and the frequency of its distribution made him a leader in the Protestant Reformation. Though others before him sought the venture of translating the Bible into English, Tyndale’s translation had the highest distribution of that time and, thus, made one of the greatest impacts on the Protestant Reformation. Putting a Bible in the hands of laity was the natural second step to Luther’s notion of priesthood of all believers. Tyndale’s desire to put the Bible in the hands of the commoners is a central focus in the Protestant tradition as pastors encourage all believers to own and read their Bible so that they will grow in their relationship with God. Bradosky adds, “While clergy play an important role in providing the clear proclamation of the Scripture as they engage in Word and Sacrament ministry and in catechesis—faithfully teaching the truth contained in the Scripture—the power of this new or continuing reformation will be the role of the laity. . .” (Bradosky 357). The core strength of the Protestant movement is the availability of the Bible.

The availability of the Bible has both unified and divided the body of believers. There is unity through a common reading of Scripture, but that common reading is the source of the existence of so many Protestant denominations. It seems no two people have matching theologies. While there are foundational agreements on orthodoxy, once we get to secondary or peripheral views of theology, people are less likely to be in sync. The availability of the Bible demands the discussion on the purpose of the Bible because if so many people have one, they need to know how to use it.

The immense distribution of the Bible creates a need for readers to understand and practice an ideal use of the Bible. There are countless ideal uses of the Bible; the following two will be discussed briefly: understanding the metanarrative and interpreting properly. The Bible is presented in the form of a story. This story covers the beginning of time to the end of time and several events in between. While the outer edges lack precise details, there are plenty of historical facts contained within the eternity bookends.⁷ The problem with the Bible's being a story is that few people put forth the effort to study it in its entirety. It seems people—Christians and non-Christians—have a tendency to cherry pick the verses and stories they like best and use them to defend their habits and beliefs. This habit of proof texting (choosing a passage that supports one's argument while ignoring the context of a passage) does a disservice for the individuals practicing it and those on the receiving end of the individuals using this method to explain the Bible. Ben Witherington has a catchy statement he often says about the woes of proof texting. He states, "a text without a context is just a pretext for what we want it to mean." In volume one of his *New Testament Theology and Ethics*, Witherington elaborates on his statement

⁷ The first two chapters of Genesis are poems describing the creative movements of God, and the book of Revelation is a vision that utilizes imagery to present the destiny of creation.

by adding, “thus the New Testament text must be read in its historical, rhetorical, literary, social, and religious contexts” (41). Since the Bible is presented in story form, it seems best to read it as such. In their book, *The Drama of Scripture*, Bartholomew and Goheen argue for a proper reading of the Bible that consists of respecting the metanarrative:

. . . the Bible provides us with the basic story that we need in order to understand our world and to live in it as God’s people. We know that it is one thing to confess the Bible to be the Word of God, but often quite another thing to know how to read the Bible in a way that lets it influence the whole of our lives. There can easily be a gap between what we say we believe and how we live. If God has deliberately given us the Bible in the shape of a story, then only as we attend to it as story and actively appropriate it as our story will we feel the full impact of its authority and illumination in our lives. (21-22)

In order to fully receive the benefits of the narrative of Scripture, one needs to understand the greater purpose of the biblical narrative. Wright concisely states this purpose: “. . . the whole point of Christianity is that it offers a story which is the story of the whole world” (N. T. Wright 41-42). Without a grasp of the grand narrative of Scripture, readers could easily misconstrue the Bible to promote an individualistic faith and therefore miss the communal intent that the biblical narrative promotes.

Proper interpretation is another element of utilizing the Bible ideally. There are probably as many views on biblical interpretation as there are people. To have a fighting chance of understanding ideal interpretation, we must ask those who paved the way for laity to interpret the Bible, including Martin Luther (1483-1546).

Luther’s high view and authoritative understanding of the Scripture was matched by the careful way he engaged in the process of interpretation. He believed there were at least five important principles in that process.

1. The literal sense of Scripture is identical with its historical content. There is no going behind the text in order to discover a different event than the event reported. Begin with the words in the text and let them speak.

2. Discern both law and gospel in the text. Does it point to our sin and our need for grace, or does it provide the clear remedy through the gospel of Jesus.

3. The Scriptures always point us to Jesus.

4. The Scriptures interpret themselves. Read the entire Word of God in order to understand and interpret the individual parts.

5. The Bible has a universal and immediate sense, granted by the Holy Spirit and recognized by the eyes of faith, that transcends historical conditions and events, and must be interpreted in the public reading and study by faithful people. (Bradosky 356)

Luther's views on scriptural interpretation are summarized in five points. Each one offers a way to understand the Bible in its fuller context in order to gain a broader understanding, which leads to specific applications in one's life. The fifth view of learning the truths of Scripture (the first part of proper interpretation) in Christian community and applying the truths of Scripture to one's life (the second part of proper interpretation) is in line with Scripture's communal emphasis. We find instances of communal reading of Scripture in the Old and New Testaments (Deuteronomy 5, 2 Kings 23:1-3, 1 Timothy 4:13, Luke 4:16-17 to list a few). Luther as the frontrunner of empowering the laity, which is one of the primary effects of the Reformation, understood that instructions on interpretation would be necessary. Luther, being formally educated in, and a professor of, theology, understood the value of proper interpretation based on an educated approach to Scripture. Thus, Luther publicized his views of proper interpretation.

The value of proper interpretation is found not only in orthodox belief but also in orthodox practice. Without proper action fueled by sound scriptural interpretation, orthodox beliefs are moot and therefore deemed hardly useful at best. In the following

section, views of sound interpretation through the lens of the Wesleyan tradition will be added to the discussion.

Wesleyan Tradition

John Wesley was a bible scholar. His practice of learning and applying the truth of Scripture was uncanny. The sheer volume of biblical references in his sermons is evidence that Wesley was proficient in God's Word and the various ways he applied Scripture to contemporary issues was also evidence that it permeated all aspects of his life. He did not compartmentalize Scripture in his life; instead, Scripture was the filter through which everything else was processed. Wesley believed that the Holy Spirit speaks through the Scriptures as he stated in his Explanatory Notes on 2 Timothy 3:16:

All scripture is inspired of God - The Spirit of God not only once inspired those who wrote it, but continually inspires, supernaturally assists, those that read it with earnest prayer. Hence *it is so profitable for doctrine*, for instruction of the ignorant, *for the reproof* or conviction of them that are in error or sin, *for the correction* or amendment of whatever is amiss, and for instructing or training up the children of God *in all righteousness*.
(Wesley)

While Wesley's appreciation for Scripture was unrivaled, his respect for other sources to aid his understanding and application for Scripture was a close second: "To aid his study of the Bible and deepen his understanding of faith, Wesley drew on Christian tradition, in particular the Patristic writings, the ecumenical creeds, the teachings of the Reformers, and the literature of contemporary spirituality" (Book of Discipline 81). Along with the Bible, Wesley drew his scriptural interpretation from other sources that God utilized to spread his truths. As Randy Maddox states, "After encouraging his readers to pray for help and stressing the need to compare scripture with scripture, Wesley continues, 'If any doubt still remains, I consult those who are experienced in the things of God, and then the

writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak”” (Maddox). Maddox goes on to highlight that, not only does Wesley consult the wisdom of other biblical readers, he consults other books as well. The Wesleyan perspectives of studying the Bible and applying the interpretations are rooted in the belief that God utilizes Scripture primarily to relay his plan to redeem creation, but also that non-canonical sources can also be God’s voice speaking to God’s plan of redemption.

In the context of the United Methodist denomination, there is a rich understanding and full interpretation of God’s Word as a result of the Wesleyan tradition’s urging to seek the voice of God from sources other than the Bible. Though the Bible is primary as stated above, God’s Word can certainly be found in sources beyond the Bible. Even within the United Methodist denomination this allowance can cause confusion stemming from proper location and translation of God’s Word beyond the Bible. How can we be sure that God is speaking through *this* source? Is *this* source really God’s voice or is it simply the person manipulating the situation to serve his or her purpose? Mark Reid offers clarification on the topic of discerning God’s Word in secular sources. Reid states, “In the Old Testament the Word of God is shown to be creative (among other things). *It brings about that which it says*. ‘And God said ...’ is a phrase found throughout Genesis 1 to illustrate that by God’s Word creation occurred. God’s Word is thus all-powerful: ‘For he spoke and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth’ (Ps. 33:9)” (Reid 10). To assume God’s creative force only resides within the binding of the Bible is to minimize God’s creative force.

God’s Word is creative, and God has provided a portion of that creative force in human’s words as well. The impact of words is not confined in the letters of the word.

The impact is in the meaning, and the meaning is dynamic. Reid speaks to the dynamic nature of God's Words living beyond the confines of the Bible's binding.

How do we summarize the dynamics of [God's] Word? We must always *remember that it cannot be defined, that it is a living event*. The Word is God's act; it creates history (Barth 163). In John's thought, the Word is none other than Jesus Christ himself. This should place the Bible as such in proper perspective. Although the Bible reveals God's Word it is not an object of faith (Brunner 23). The Word occurs. . . not only through scripture, but also through secular media. (Reid 13)

God created humanity in the image of God. Any time a person creates, that person harkens the creative force that is found in the image of God. Those of us living after the canon was sealed still have the ability to reveal God's Word through various means.

To curtail any misunderstandings in the search for God's Word, through the study of John Wesley's published work, Wesleyan scholar Albert Outler distilled Wesley's practice of scriptural interpretation into four key parts known as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. The Quadrilateral has become the filter through which United Methodists discern God's voice. This idea argues that Wesley, and those who are Methodists, found theological conclusions based on Scripture, tradition, reason, and Christian experience. So as not to cause confusion, *The Book of Discipline* states, "Scripture is primary, revealing the Word of God 'so far as it is necessary for our salvation'" (80). Although Wesley never coined the term *quadrilateral*, his theological stance on scriptural authority produced the four-part filter for interpreting the Bible. As Don Thorsen describes, Wesley was influenced by the Enlightenment era's academic push and his Anglican traditions of interpreting the Bible. Thorsen states,

John Wesley lived two centuries after the Protestant Reformation. The religious wars between Protestant reformers and Roman Catholics in Continental Europe had ended. However, the issue of religious authority still caused religious debate in light of the emergent Enlightenment

principles of Western Europe. Wesley inherited a distinctive approach to religious authority from the Anglican tradition (Church of England). Anglican leaders promoted reason as the *via media* ("middle way") between the primacy of scriptural authority, reflective of Continental Protestantism, and church tradition, reflective of Roman Catholicism. Wesley affirmed Scripture, tradition, and reason as religious authorities. To them he added experience as a religious authority to which he appealed in matters of Christian belief, value, and practice.

Wesley did not intend to do anything innovative in terms of theological method; he affirmed historic, biblical Christianity. However, he saw no contradiction in appealing to experience along with church tradition and critical thinking as genuine, albeit secondary[,] religious authorities. In so doing, Wesley made a decisive contribution to Christian understanding and praxis, applying experience methodologically in his ministry as well as in his theology and writings. The dynamic interplay between Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience came to be known as the "Wesleyan quadrilateral," although Wesley did not coin the term. Nevertheless, the quadrilateral has come to summarize Wesley's theological contribution to Christian thought and ministry. (Thorsen 7-8)

Although Wesley included the importance of Christian experience, he believed this attribute did not distract from the value of reason, Church tradition, and Scripture itself.

Research Methods

Communication seems like a thoughtless venture that happens without error when two or more people are reading or listening to the same language. However, "whenever we listen to someone speak or when we read what someone has written, we automatically (but unconsciously) apply interpretive principles to try to understand what he or she means" (Virkler 19). The reality is that people rely on interpretive skills to understand that which is being communicated every time they are receiving information. While communication breakdowns often occur when all participants share the same language, the likelihood of breakdowns dramatically increases when differing cultures overlap in the attempt to communicate. This is the case every time someone reads the Bible; cultures overlap, and interpretive principles must be applied to discover the author's true

intent. “Hermeneutics is the identification of the principles used to properly interpret someone else’s communication” (Virkler 19). In context of interpreting Scripture, hermeneutical practices include intentional effort to learn the author’s culture, including such aspects of language, religion, ethnic history, outside influences, and his or her possible presumptions, to list a few.

The Scripture reader must learn the author’s culture because the author’s culture is different from the reader’s. The existing differences that create barriers to understanding communication are known as the hermeneutical problem. Every time someone reads the Bible, that person applies his or her presumptions based on theological, cultural, educational, and situational influences. Even when a person digs deeper into Scripture to research the meaning through its context, the reader must be intentional about putting aside his or her preconceived notions to discover the author’s original intent. When the reader is not careful, the habit of “reading into” the text occurs. This habit is known as eisegesis (*eis* – into, *hegeisthai* – to guide). The common mistake for Bible readers is to impose their theologies onto the text; thus, rendering the Bible a tool to support their presuppositions (i.e. proof texting). In contrast, the act of researching the biblical text to discover its meaning is known as exegesis (*ex* – out of, *hegeisthai* – to guide). This section discusses the exegetical process of solving the hermeneutical problem by defining, comparing, and contrasting the two most common methods of studying the Bible: inductive and deductive.

To begin, deductive research methods seek conclusive answers that are truthfully based on the truth of the circumstances surrounding the item being researched, and inductive research methods settle on inconclusive answers that are probabilities based on

the conclusions of the circumstances surrounding the item being researched. In their comprehensive volume on the method of inductive Bible study, Bauer and Traina state,

The test of the inductive spirit is whether one's approach is characterized by *radical openness* to any conclusion required by the biblical evidence. This attitude is the inner dimension of the inductive approach, while any specific process that might be considered inductive is its outer expression and implementation.

The deductive spirit and the inductive spirit are mutually exclusive. The deductive spirit is dogmatic and authoritarian, absolute and categorical, characterized by a closed mind. It amounts to hermeneutical absolutism. (Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics*. chp 1)

It is true that not everyone is receptive to the inductive process; some personalities simply do not work well with the mental requirements needed to successfully journey in this process.

While these methods are the two that are most common, the deductive method is the more popular of the two. A quick survey of Bible studies on the market would illuminate the fact that most curriculum that is called *Bible study* do not actually study the Bible. There are many theme-based books that reference places in the Bible where that theme is addressed or just alluded to. Many of those Bible studies are little more than open-book quizzes that are not graded; they consist of brief questions that provide the chapter-verse reference that contains the answer that the study's author wants the participants to find. While this approach has merit and introduces participants to a shallow awareness of some of the information in the Bible, it typically does not allow for an in-depth interpretation of Scripture based on a broad understanding of the theme being addressed.

In David Thompson's brief but highly practical and insightful volume, *Bible Study That Works*, he describes inductive Bible study practices.⁸ The inductive process of studying Scripture begins with the premise that two fundamental questions must be answered. The first question is, "*What, as a matter of fact, did the author intend to say to his first readers?*" (Thompson 21). Intrinsic in the answer to this question is the consideration of the historical setting in which the author of the book, letter, etc. resides. Taking into consideration that the Holy Spirit can generalize the particular situation where and when the author is located, the modern reader must acknowledge that the biblical author was not writing to him or her. Therefore, strong consideration must be taken to understand the context of the passage being researched and the author's reason for writing it. The question also addresses the objective nature of the Bible by recognizing that it exists independent of the modern reader. This collection of poems, letters, and stories that we call the Bible is God's Word whether or not anyone reads it. Therefore, it is imperative to understand where the passage sits in light of the chapter, book, Bible, etc. before the modern reader interprets the passage or applies it to his or her life. The first question also considers the biblical authority of Scripture: "It recalls that the Bible with its message stands independent of me, my tradition, and my preferences. The question cautions one that great care must continually be exercised not to confuse the writers' thoughts with my own" (Thompson 22). The second question that must be asked before taking on the inductive endeavor is "*What, if anything, does that have to do with us and our world?*" (Thompson 24). This question addresses two notions: different parts of

⁸ Unless otherwise stated, the description of the inductive process is resourced from Thompson's book.

the Bible relate to individuals differently, and the Bible moves the reader from an academic understanding to one of life application.

After the reader reckons with those two questions, the process of the inductive study begins. One of the key differences concerning deductive and inductive study is the amount of reading that the reader engages in prior to addressing the passage being researched. Often, deductive studies pose questions that require the reader to find the passage containing the answer with little or no periphery reading required. Inductive studies, on the other hand, expect the reader to consider the literary environment in which the passage being researched resides. This consideration occurs by respecting the book as a complete entity within itself. Addressing the book's placement in the Bible can be considered later, but the reader is encouraged to honor the author's work as a completed piece. By narrowing the scope, the reader is able to economize his or her efforts. The reader then surveys the unit in which the passage is found. This survey happens when the reader gives a quick read of the book. In the unit survey, the passage is seen in its regional setting. Once the unit has its parameters, the reader reads the unit multiple times in order to note the sections that may exist within the unit and titles the sections. The reader also notes the literary style and the amount of space the author allotted to make the point. The reader can also draw a chart that visualizes the beginning and end of each section. This process is achieved through multiple readings of the unit.

After the initial observation process is complete, the reader slows each reading to a more observant speed. At this point, the reader looks for the relationships within the text by discovering instances of cause-effect relationships, climax, comparison, contrast, cruciality, generalization/particularization, introduction, question-answer, and recurrence.

Reading with an awareness of structure and analyzing the relationships gives the reader a better sense of the author's intentions.

While both deductive and inductive research are question-driven, the conclusions drawn from inductive research are enhanced when the reader pelts the passage with a barrage of questions that stem from the barely pertinent to the bullseye. Deductive Bible studies are also reliant on multiple questions, but the primary difference is witnessed in the volume and the range of questions asked. Deductive questions tend to circle close to the wagons while inductive will venture into the horizon. The number of questions in the inductive approach allows the reader to discern the major and minor matters by answering "who? what? when? where? why? and how?" Using these questions is a simple but effective approach to drilling down to find the valuable nugget. The questions, though many, have purpose and are effective only if they are relevant. Therefore, the questions are quickly weeded out if they do not uncover reasons, implications, and definitions that are pertinent to the passage. The value of the question is determined by how well it reveals the major theme and the main point of the passage.

As stated above, the inductive conclusions are not ironclad; they are possibilities. The answers will begin with words like *probably* and *perhaps*. These conclusions are sufficient for an inductive study but insufficient for a deductive study. In both instances, however, the conclusions must be double checked by discerning whether the passage's context and unit support the conclusion from which it is derived. Thompson lists seven check points that readers should consider when determining the dependability of the inductive conclusion: word form and meaning, context, author's intent, historical setting, spiritual discernment, common sense, and experience.

The end goals of both types of research methods are similar and different. The deductive approach is often designed to add to the knowledge base either for the reader or for the world. Deductive discoveries rightly contribute to the base of scriptural facts that give basis for researchers to reveal more truths through which the Holy Spirit can speak to humanity. Deductive conclusions also reveal scriptural truths that are beneficial to the reader and can be transformative in his or her life. While inductive conclusions can certainly inspire more scriptural research for the masses, those conclusions alone are not sufficient. Thompson states that an inductive conclusion's accuracy is dependent on its alignment with "the standard of Jesus' life and words." This rightly puts Jesus at the pinnacle of scriptural prophecy and revelation. Even though discovering the true nature of Jesus' life and words is a noble pursuit, it should not be the end goal of Bible study. Thompson states that "Good Bible study is much more than an academic pursuit. Its goal is human transformation by the power of the Word and God's inspiring Spirit" (Thompson 59). All the inductive effort, if done properly, leads to life transformation.

Learning Theory and Adult Learning

The research project associated with the current dissertation is a six-week introductory level Bible study covering the gospel of John. Due to limitations in the research process, the study will be available only to adults eighteen years of age and older. Each participant will receive a hard copy of the Bible study and be expected to read the instructions, sectional explanations, questions, etc. from the Bible study booklet and write his or her answer in the booklet beside the corresponding questions. As chapter three will discuss in detail, the meetings will take place in the participants' church building in one of the classrooms. Likely, all of the participants will sit around tables that

are positioned to allow everyone to face the center of the group. While the research project is very important, the paramount goal of the Bible study is for the participants to increase in their biblical literacy and grow in their relationship with God. In order for the participants to increase in their biblical literacy, pedagogical and learning theories must be considered.

To become more biblically literate, what criterion must one meet? Scriptural knowledge is more than simply recalling what the words on the pages are; it must also implement interpretation, which includes life application. For definition purposes, the current dissertation utilizes the seven educational objectives presented in the appendix of *Taxonomy of Education Objectives: Book 1*. The following is the list of the objectives accompanied by a portion of the author's explanation.

Knowledge “involves the recall of specifics and universals, the recall of methods and processes, or the recall of a pattern, structure, or setting. For measurement purposes, the recall situation requires little more than bringing to mind the appropriate material.”

Comprehension “refers to a type of understanding or apprehension such that the individual knows what is being communicated and can make use of the material or idea being communicated without necessarily relating it to other material or seeing its fullest implications.”

Application is the “use of abstractions in particular and concrete situations. The abstractions may be in the form of general ideas, rules of procedures, or generalized methods [sic], : technical principles, ideas, and theories which must be remembered and applied.”

Analysis is the “breakdown of a communication into its constituent elements or parts such that the relative hierarchy of ideas is made clear and/or the relations between ideas expressed are made explicit.”

Synthesis is the “putting together of elements and parts so as to form a whole.”

Evaluation is making “judgments about the value of material and methods for

given purposes” (Bloom 201-207).

Todd Leach’s criteria in his study that also incorporates biblical literacy states, “The first three levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy – knowledge, comprehension, and application – are particularly important benchmarks in determining whether or not a student of Scripture can be considered biblically literate” (Leach 85). On a base level, for a person to be considered biblically literate, that person must possess the ability to recall foundational elements of the Bible. Does the person know who Adam and Eve are? Abraham and Sarah? King David? Peter and Paul? Can the person provide basic details concerning the story of the fall, the exodus story, or the birth narrative? Does the person know the relevance of Jerusalem, Nazareth, and Galilee in the biblical story? Is the person aware of the basic structure of the Old and New Testaments? Can the person provide details about the Passion week? These are rudimentary elements of the biblical narrative that a person must be able to discuss either in detail or in general to be considered biblically literate. The goal of biblical literacy is not to end at simple recollection of facts within the biblical story. Data recall is simply the ground level of biblical literacy.

Per Bloom’s taxonomy, the second criterion is comprehension. In this level, the picture that the puzzle pieces of the knowledge level is beginning to be recognizable. Here, among others, the question “*Why?*” is answered. Why is it significant that Abraham and Sarah were unable to conceive? Why did God choose those particular plagues? Why does it matter that King David was the youngest from a meager family and was guilty of repugnant sin but was still utilized greatly by God? Why was Jesus born of humble means in a town of no significance beyond Old Testament prophecy? Why is it

important that Jesus actually died and received a physical resurrection? These are just a few questions that a person should be able to answer if he or she comprehends the story of Scripture.

The first two criteria are important building blocks to reach the goal of biblical literacy. However, they create a launching pad for the third criterion, which is application. The ultimate goal of biblical literacy is to be transformed by the biblical story as evidenced through one's words and actions. If the person's crowning achievement is to recall and recite all of the stories in the Bible and provide an orthodox explanation but the person is unchanged, that person has not reached the level of biblical literacy that is desirable and available for Bible readers. Although there are three other criteria to achieve Bloom's Taxonomy educational objectives, the Bible reader who displays competency in the levels of knowledge, comprehension, and application can certainly be considered biblically literate.

In her book *Making Sense of Adult Learning*, Dorothy MacKeracher provides a list of assumptions on the topic of adult learning. These assumptions take into account the fact that their age necessitates experience and that they contain self-awareness that younger learners, perhaps, would not possess. One of the assumptions is that "Adults change over time" (MacKeracher chp 2). When discussing the issues of biblical literacy, this assumption is desired if the adult learned about the Bible at a young age. The Bible is taught differently to children than to adults. The children's stories are grossly generalized to make God sound as likeable as possible so the children will not run from God. The reality is that many Christian adults change physically and psychologically but do not

change in their understanding of God. They experience complex problems and attempt to answer them with “child-like” faith.

MacKeracher also assumes that “[a]dults accumulate experiences and prior learning over their lifetime; the older they grow, the more past experiences and prior learning they bring to bear on current learning” (MacKeracher chp 2). She elaborates by stating, “The meanings developed from past experiences are part of the individual’s personal model of reality. This model includes both meanings and values (construct or concepts) that help to make sense of past experience, impute sense to current experience, and predict future experience” (MacKeracher chp 2). She goes on to state that each person’s model of reality is dynamic. Thus, one’s understanding of reality is susceptible to changing. The evidence supporting this assumption is often the impetus for a great deal of discussion in Bible studies because adults have an established understanding of reality, and when they hear new concepts supported by the Bible that do not fit within their view of reality, typically discussion ensues. If their adult’s view of reality is different from an orthodox biblical view, then the adult’s reality (knowledge, comprehension, application of Scripture) can change.

Importance of Biblical Literacy

Thomas Edison is credited with saying, “There is no substitute for hard work.” This, of course, suggests that if a person wishes to increase his or her proficiency in an area or complete a task, that person must invest the time and labor to do so. Edison’s quotation assumes that the old adage “nothing comes easy” aptly describes the effort needed to invest to achieve something worthwhile. While there are many areas in life where hard work is required to complete a goal, the field of education and the quest for

knowledge-gained is no longer one of them. YouTube, Wikipedia, and the mighty Google have revolutionized how people learn and the time and effort in which they expect to do so. Gone are the days when one had to rely on searching through the wooden drawers of a card catalogue in the local library, then walking the aisles and searching the shelves to find the pertinent books on a given topic only to have to read through the pages to glean the data. Now, we simply “Google it,” and, depending on the internet bandwidth speed, an overflow of information is available in the blink of an eye.

The availability of technology has greatly lessened one’s expected wait time to retrieve information and the expected effort put forth to learn. This phenomenon has impacted the Bible’s availability as well. The digital availability of the Bible rivals the Reformers’ impact on the distribution of the Bible and surpasses their efforts in providing people the opportunity to discover its contents. Websites and apps for digital devices allow a person to read the Bible in its entirety on their device or to quickly retrieve the desired passage with extreme accuracy. If there is confusion about where the passage is located, search features allow the person to locate the passage by knowing only one or two words in, or just the topic of, the passage. The digital search features are simply the next logical step after concordances to assist Bible readers in finding their desired passage without having to familiarize themselves with the entire Bible. These features are very helpful; however, like the concordances before them, they provide shortcuts to learning the Bible and reliance upon the feature for biblical information.⁹

The benefits of Bible apps are too numerous to list. However, it is the author’s opinion that there are two concerns of which Bible app users need to be aware: the

⁹ This is not an indictment on search features or concordances; the author uses them often. This statement is simply an objective commentary on the human tendency to utilize a shortcut; and thus, miss an opportunity to gain greater knowledge.

tendency to view the Bible as a textbook where *information* is stored and the tendency to avoid familiarizing oneself with the entirety of Scripture. When a person's primary use of the Bible consists of quick searches to settle an argument, enhance a written assignment, or answer a Bible study question, the Bible is reduced to a source of information. While the Bible certainly is a source of information, the point of biblical information is formation and transformation. A person's likelihood of being impacted by the message of the Bible is reduced when that person does not receive the message in its entirety. Piecemealing scriptural data only increases biblical illiteracy rates because the reader likely misses the context of the passage and the context of the biblical story. Thus, the reader misses the opportunity to be transformed by the biblical narrative of salvation.

The availability of Bible apps can also create a dependence on the app to supply scriptural content and inspiration. It seems this area is where Edison's quotation is most applicable. Familiarity comes with repetition and observation. The practice of reading the Bible in its entirety is not just learning what the biblical authors wrote but allowing the biblical story to settle into one's heart and transform that person. The reality is that, at least in the current age, the reliability of technology is not perfected, so if a person is solely reliant upon the app, there will be times it is not available. The same is true for hard copy Bibles; they will not always be on a person. Therefore, understanding the divine nature of the biblical story and familiarizing oneself with the biblical story in its entirety is an effective practice of increasing biblical literacy so the divine efficacy can be fully realized in every Bible reader.

Research Design Literature

The research project for the current dissertation was an introductory level inductive Bible study offered to the adults of the worshiping community of Wesley Way United Methodist Church. The Bible study was designed by the researcher, and the weekly meetings were facilitated by the researcher, who is also the church's senior pastor. The six-week study met on Sunday evenings and Tuesday mornings to provide as much availability as reasonably possible. The first week's gathering consisted of the researcher's introducing the study, then the church's small group coordinator facilitating the participants' voluntary completion of the consent form and the pre-Bible study questionnaire. On the final gathering of the study, after the completion of the final session, the small group coordinator facilitated the participants' completion of the post-Bible study questionnaire. Four weeks after the completion of the Bible study, some of the Bible study participants participated in a focus group to determine the sustainability of any changes in their scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits that may have occurred as a result of the study. The researcher facilitated the focus group.

The facilitating of the weekly Bible studies and the focus group was aligned with the guidance offered in Tim Sensing's book, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*. Sensing's book also created an awareness of the Hawthorne Effect, which is "a theory that questions research dependability due to cases when subjects know they are being studied" (Sensing chp 4). In as much as possible, the participants were encouraged to answer honestly and participate freely because the paramount goal of their participation in the Bible study was to grow in their relationship with God through their study of Scripture. The obvious fact that they were participating in a study was addressed, but that did not seem to faze them.

Summary of Literature

People have been interpreting God's Word since God first spoke to Abram and called him to "Go."¹⁰ Abram had to interpret God's instructions and promises because they were counter to the cultural expectations in which he lived. Moses had the privilege of speaking face to face with God and, as a prophet, was God's mouthpiece. However, Moses had to interpret the heart of God's message to the Israelites on several occasions so that they would no longer go astray. In both of these instances, proper interpretation of God's words directly equaled a change in those persons' inward beliefs but more importantly, a change in those persons' outward expression of their new inward beliefs. Sound interpretation equaled a new way of living.

This expectation continues into the New Testament as Jesus unabashedly instructs the Jews to change their belief structure about God's relationship with humanity and humanity's relationship with each other. Jesus's instructions never veered away from a holistic approach to right interpretation of Scripture: sound understanding equals sound words and deeds. Paul, in his letter to a pastor named Timothy, reminds him that Scripture is inspired by God; thus, giving it authority over all things and instructs him to utilize Scripture to guide people into right living that is exemplified through their good deeds.

Throughout the ages of Church history, Christians have wrestled with sound interpretation of God's Word. From the earliest voices that shaped what is now termed

¹⁰ There are instances in the Old Testament that detail God's communicating with humanity found in the first eleven chapters of Genesis, but the author subscribes to the scholarship that supports the content within those chapters being God-inspired poems and narratives that accurately present the spirit of the relationship that God has with humanity and the human condition that Jesus came to redeem. Therefore, the author chose to begin the God-human dialogue with the conversation that God initiated with Abram found in Genesis 12.

orthodox, to the Reformers who put the Bible in the hands of laity, to the Revivalist, John Wesley, who ended up exemplifying a life permeated by Scripture, and to the modern-day voices who continue as God's creative Word testifying to sound biblical interpretation demonstrated through belief and deed, Christians in the Western world stand on the shoulder of men and women who honored God by learning the heart of Scripture and living accordingly. Yet, the belief in Christianity has declined to the point that the West is post-Christian, and the percentage of those who claim faith in Christ has a biblical illiteracy rate on the rise.

The evidence supports a need for a new approach to scriptural interpretation. Thus, this evidences the reason for the inductive Bible study offered in the current research. The inductive approach is familiar enough in structure to not be offsetting to seasoned Bible study participants but different enough to present the biblical story through a fresh lens that can enhance participants' scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter includes a description of the nature and purpose of the project by describing the project and restating its purpose. The section addressing the research questions details the methodology for determining the answers to the research questions. A following section describes the ministry context in which this project occurred. This section addresses the ministry context's demographical, locative, and historical considerations that are pertinent to the study. The subsequent sections describe the participants' demographics and the selection process, and the amount of instrumentation along with their implementation process. The remaining sections provide extensive detail of the data collection process and the analysis of the data.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

The nature of this project revolved around an introductory level Bible study that utilizes the inductive style of reading and learning from Scripture. Persons were selected from the worshipping community of Wesley Way United Methodist Church to participate in the six-week study. In order to establish the participants' starting point concerning their scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits, the participants completed the Pre-Bible Study Questionnaire. After they completed the Bible study, each participant completed the Post-Bible Study Questionnaire to discover any variation in their scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits. Six persons from within the base of participants who completed the Bible study were selected to participate in the Post Bible Study Focus Group. The Focus Group occurred four weeks after the conclusion of the Bible study in

order to determine if the participants' scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits varied after having allowed more time for the effects of the exposure to an inductive style of reading the Bible to occur.

The efficacy of an inductive Bible study largely relies upon the reader's willingness to giving oneself to the discipline of reading the Bible as a story and asking the story questions to allow the story to reveal the answer. After reading the book *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics*, one will rightly glean that an inductive study of the Bible can be very time consuming and tedious. However, the design of the current Bible study introduces participants to the inductive method without immersing them in the massive amount of research and reasoning required for an exhaustive inductive study. Thus, the Bible study utilized for the purposes of this dissertation provides a completed sample session to ease the participants' anxiety and to aid their understanding, so they are most receptive to receiving the benefits of the method of study. The Bible study has John's gospel divided into sections, provides an explanation for the parameters of each section, includes questions asked of the text for the participants to answer based on information provided by the text, and offers participants an opportunity to provide their own questions and answers from the text.

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the changes in scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits among persons in the worshipping community of Wesley Way United Methodist Church as the result of participating in a six-week introductory level inductive Bible study dealing with the Gospel of John.

Research Questions

RQ #1. What were the scriptural knowledge of the Gospel of John, attitude, and reading habits among persons in the worshiping community of Wesley Way United Methodist Church who attended the six-week study prior to the study?

A Pre-Bible Study Questionnaire (Appendix B) was utilized to discover the scriptural knowledge of the Gospel of John, attitude toward Scripture, and reading habits of the Bible for the participants prior to their participating in the six-week introductory level inductive Bible study of the Gospel of John. Three sets of questions are divided throughout the Pre-Bible Study Questionnaire that focus on each of the research questions. Questions 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, and 22 addressed the reading habits; questions 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, and 23 addressed attitude; and questions 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21, and 24 addressed the scriptural knowledge.

RQ #2. What were the scriptural knowledge of the Gospel of John, attitude, and reading habits among persons in the worshiping community of Wesley Way United Methodist Church who attended the six-week study after the study?

A Post-Bible Study Questionnaire (Appendix C) was utilized to discover the scriptural knowledge of the Gospel of John, attitude toward Scripture, and reading habits of the Bible for the participants prior to their participating in the six-week introductory level inductive Bible study of the Gospel of John. Three sets of questions are divided throughout the Post-Bible Study Questionnaire that focus on each of the research questions. Questions 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, and 22 addressed the reading habits; questions 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, and 23 addressed attitude; and questions 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21, and 24 addressed the scriptural knowledge.

RQ #3. Over a post-study four-week period, what sustainable changes occurred and what aspects of the six-week study had the greatest impact on the observed changes in the scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits among the participants?

A focus group utilizing the Post-Bible Study Focus Group interview (Appendix D) was conducted four weeks after the completion of the six-week Bible study. The focus group consisted of a sample of group participants who were randomly selected and who agreed to participate in the focus group. Questions 1 and 2 specifically deal with scriptural knowledge gained, questions 3 and 4 deal with changes in the participants' attitude about Scripture, and questions 5 and 6 discuss the reading habits after the conclusion of the study. The following questions, 7 through 12, are questions about the structure of the study and what aspects of the study were most beneficial.

Ministry Context

My tenure at Wesley Way United Methodist Church began June 25, 2015 when I was appointed as senior pastor. During my transition into this appointment, I learned the congregation was experiencing financial troubles. I did not realize the extent of the concerns until shortly after I arrived. The congregation is proud and resilient and has a strong history of overcoming adversity. However, I found the congregation to be tired physically, financially, and spiritually. Here is a brief summary of the events that led up to its current state.

The first worship service for Wesley Way UMC was June 24, 2001. The congregation was chartered December 16, 2001, and the current sanctuary was consecrated February 2, 2003. The majority of the congregation have been involved with Wesley Way UMC since the early years. Many of the people consider the earliest years

of the church as the most dynamic years. They have this perception for good reason because the average attendance of 2001 was 170 people. The average attendance steadily grew to 306 people at year-end of 2007. In the first six years, Wesley Way UMC saw a great deal of numerical growth and a positive spirit within the congregation.

Even though Wesley Way UMC's early years were filled with growth, the congregation was born of strife. In the early 1990's McDonough First United Methodist Church (McDonough First UMC) was growing but landlocked in the town square. The congregation decided to relocate the church and, after much due diligence, acquired a ten-acre parcel of land surrounded on three sides by neighborhoods. The congregation conducted a ten-year capital campaign that raised over \$600,000. They constructed plans to relocate, and everyone was on board until the time came to act. For reasons that seem still to be unclear, suddenly a small contingency of the congregants decided to remain in their current location. This caused immense dissension and division between the people who wanted to relocate and those who did not until finally the district superintendent and the bishop decided to plant a new church with the group that wanted to relocate. In 2001, roughly twenty people departed McDonough First UMC and planted a new congregation on the donated land utilizing most of the money donated in the capital campaign.

At the end of the sixth year, things started to take a downturn. The planting pastor was appointed elsewhere and, soon after, the nation entered an economic recession. The average worship attendance started a steady decline from 306 at the end of 2007 to 222 at the end of 2015. The recession affected Wesley Way United Methodist Church especially hard because the congregation consisted primarily of educators and retirees. They recognized the ensuing financial strains but continued to press on without making any

substantial cuts to their yearly budget, which included an aggressive attempt to pay off their current building. The economic condition hit them harder than they anticipated. By 2012 some in the congregation were frustrated that they had not started phase II of their building plans and that they were depleting their financial reserves due to the lack of weekly income. They were realizing that their current reality was not what they expected, and they were forced to make tough financial decisions. They determined to stop paying apportionments, exist on a bare bones budget, and cease all raises in staff salaries.

When I arrived in 2015, the congregation's average worship attendance had noticeably diminished, especially for the longtime congregants, the financial state had weakened after seven years of reduced giving, and the overall morale was low. The congregation was tired physically, mentally, and financially but ready for a change for the better.

Participants

Criteria for Selection

The recruitment for the study began July 2, 2017 in Wesley Way UMC's weekly email that goes to 233 email accounts. The study was also publicized in the weekly Sunday morning bulletin for four weeks beginning July 2, 2017. The Bible study was offered on Sunday evenings and Tuesday mornings each week, for six weeks. The Sunday evening class time was from 5:00PM to 6:30PM, and the Tuesday morning class time was from 10:00AM to 11:30AM. Both groups met in the library room of Wesley Way UMC, which is where most non-Sunday morning Bible studies occur. The study was not limited to adults; however, the youth ministry also meets during this same time slot so offering the study simultaneously almost guaranteed no youth would attend the

study. There were no requirements to meet in order to participate in the study other than the participant's personal interest in studying the Gospel of John. I notified each participant that the study was a part of the senior pastor's dissertation project; and all were informed about the Pre-Bible Study Questionnaire, the Post-Bible Study Questionnaire, and the possibility of being asked to participate in a Post Bible Study Focus Group.

Description of Participants

All of the participants were Caucasian except for one Islander. The participants' age ranged from forty-five to eighty years of age and were members of the worshipping community of Wesley Way United Methodist Church. Each person had participated in at least one Bible study prior to participating in this study. The participants live within a two-mile radius of the Wesley Way United Methodist Church building, which is located in a suburban area.

Ethical Considerations

Steps were taken to insure the protection of the participants of the study. All personal information obtained was held in strict confidentiality and kept in a locked file by the researcher for three years. After three years the personal information was destroyed. I informed each participant of my goal for the study as well as of the data collecting process, stating that the information received would be utilized in my dissertation. The names of the participants were withheld, and each participant utilized a numerical code for the purposes of data collection and referencing. The participants provided consent for the study by signing the Research Consent Form. Each participant heard about the process of the study.

Instrumentation

Three instruments were utilized to determine the effects that the introductory level Bible study of the Gospel of John had on the participant's scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits. The Pre-Bible Study Questionnaire, Post-Bible Study Questionnaire, and Post-Bible Study Focus Group Instrument were all researcher designed.

The Pre-Bible Study Questionnaire contains two sections. The first section is a questionnaire about the participant's demographics, and the second section is a questionnaire consisting of twenty-four questions covering the participant's knowledge of John's gospel, attitude about the Bible, and reading habits of the Bible. The Pre-Bible Study Questionnaire was designed by the researcher to establish a base line for each participant concerning the three categories of the research questions prior to participating in the research project.

The Post-Bible Study Questionnaire contains the same twenty-four questions as the Pre-Bible Study Questionnaire but excludes the demographical questionnaire. The purpose of this Post-Bible Study Questionnaire having the same questions is to measure as accurately as possible the impact that the research project had on each participant's scriptural knowledge of the Gospel of John, attitude, and reading habits of the Bible.

The Post-Bible Study Focus Group Instrument is a list of eight questions designed to create discussion within the group. The questions were designed to discover the knowledge, attitude, and reading habits of the participants after four weeks had passed. The participants were asked a series of questions concerning whether or not changes occurred to their knowledge, attitude, and reading habits while participating in the Bible

study, what brought about the changes, and if the changes were sustained over a four-week period immediately after the conclusion of the study.

Data Collection

Once the IRB application was approved, the researcher scheduled seven weeks on the church calendar for the Bible study, beginning Sunday, July 30, 2017 and Tuesday, August 1, 2017. The weekly gatherings met in the church's library, which is the common place for Bible studies to meet, and the duration was 5:00 to 6:30 PM on Sundays and 10:00 to 11:30 AM on Tuesdays. Although the Bible study is only six weeks, an introductory week was added at the beginning, so the researcher could conduct simple introductions for the group, distribute and describe the structure of the Bible study, then explain the details of the consent form and provide time for the participants to complete it, if willing.

After the dates were confirmed on the church calendar, the researcher began the process of printing the Bible study from his computer and binding enough Bible studies to accommodate the anticipated number of participants in the group. The researcher assumed 30 adults would participate so he made ten extra, totaling 40 copies. After enough copies of the Bible study were produced, the researcher crafted a written announcement that would advertise the Bible study via the weekly church email that goes to church members and others in close association with Wesley Way United Methodist Church, the Sunday bulletin, and verbal announcements on Sunday mornings before both of the worship services and during the announcement time of Wednesday Night Suppers. Since the introductory week of the Bible study occurred during the last week of the public school's summer vacation, the announcement was placed in the bulletin the second

week of June to allow the congregation plenty of weeks to receive the information. That same week, the small groups coordinator created a registration sheet and placed it on the information table in the lobby where other such registration sheets are located.

On the Sunday of the first gathering, prior to the start of the Bible study, the researcher placed blank pieces of white card stock paper and a handful of colored markers on the table along with the hard copies of the Bible study. As participants arrived, the researcher welcomed them and asked them to make a name tent with the paper and marker. Utilizing the registration sheet from the lobby, the small group coordinator created an attendance sheet to track everyone's attendance. Tracking attendance not only provided data for the researcher's project, but the denomination requires local churches to report all Bible study attendance.

Utilizing the attendance sheet, the researcher knew when all of the registered participants were in attendance. Once the entire group was present, the researcher thanked everyone for their willingness to participate and their daringness to try a new type of Bible study that they might not be familiar with. The researcher announced the general guidelines that applied to this Bible study, and all other Bible studies he conducts: keep all conversations within the group confidential in order to give everyone a chance to share freely; acknowledge the diversity in religious backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences so the participants can learn from each other's insight; engage in the study in order to add substance to the discussion of the weekly gathering.

After the introductions and guidelines were provided, the researcher distributed the copies of the Bible study and explained its structure and the difference between inductive and deductive Bible studies. Once this discussion was complete and any

questions from the participants were addressed, the researcher explained that this Bible study was a ministry intervention project that meets requirements for the researcher's dissertation. The researcher explained the process of the instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. Participants were given a chance to ask questions and all the questions were sufficiently addressed. The researcher introduced the Small Groups Coordinator who had been in the room from the start of the meeting and explained that she would facilitate the remaining portion of the meeting. The researcher then departed the room to minimize any pressure the participants may feel to sign the consent form and to reduce any self-implied expectation to complete the questionnaire correctly. The Small Group Coordinator distributed the consent forms and the Pre-Bible Study Questionnaire and assigned the numerical codes for each participant. After all of the consent forms and questionnaires were completed, the Small Groups Coordinator collected them into a folder and delivered the folder to the researcher who placed the folder in a locking file cabinet. This process occurred for the Sunday and Tuesday meetings. The folder was not opened until the completion of the Post-Bible Study Focus Group.

The researcher facilitated the Bible study in the same fashion that he conducts all other Bible studies. Upon the completion of the Bible study portion of the final meeting, the Small Groups Coordinator entered the room. The researcher explained that she would facilitate the conclusion of the meeting time by distributing the post-Bible study questionnaires and collecting them once all were completed. The researcher thanked everyone for their participation, provided a concluding prayer, and departed the room. The Small Groups Coordinator distributed the Post-Bible Study Questionnaire, provided the proper numerical codes to the individuals, and provided instructions for completing

the questionnaire. After all the questionnaires were completed, the Small Groups Coordinator collected them into a folder and delivered the folder to the researcher who placed it into a locking filing cabinet. This process occurred for the Sunday and Tuesday meetings.

The Post-Bible Study Focus Group was conducted in the same room as the Bible study four weeks after the completion of the Bible study. The focus group questions are primarily qualitative. However, a small portion of the questions pertained to the number of days the participant reads the Bible; those questions were quantitative. The Small Groups Coordinator planned to facilitate the focus group but the forecasted severely inclement weather prevented her from driving to the church so the researcher facilitated the dialogue. The entire focus group was recorded with two digital audio recording devices: Samsung Note 5 and Kindle Fire HD. Both of the audio files were uploaded onto the researcher's computer that is password protected. Once the audio files were confirmed to be in proper working order on the computer, the original files were permanently deleted from both of the recording devices.

The Small Groups Coordinator transferred the hard copy answers of the all the questionnaires into Microsoft Word documents, making sure to match the participant codes with their answers. The researcher uploaded the audio file to www.TranscribeMe.com and received the completed transcript four days later. Once the transcripts were collected, all of the electronic data was gathered and analyzed by the researcher qualitatively and quantitatively. After all of the duties of the Small Groups Coordinator were complete, the researcher mailed her a gift card to a local restaurant as a show of appreciation. There were no gifts presented to the Bible study participants.

Data Analysis

The data consists of both qualitative and quantitative data. All of the data that was analyzed came from the pre and post Bible study questionnaires and the transcripts from the post Bible study focus group. All of the participants completed both the pre and post questionnaires and the focus group consisted of nine people who participated in the Bible study. The focus group contained people from both the Tuesday and Sunday classes. The Small Groups Coordinator assisted the researcher by inputting the questionnaire answers into Word documents for easier analysis. The transcripts of the focus group were saved on a Word document. Both the questionnaires and the focus group data contained qualitative and quantitative data. The researcher utilized content analysis to analyze the qualitative portion of the data and descriptive analysis to analyze the quantitative data.

To analyze the qualitative data, the researcher copied the answers from the questionnaires onto a separate Word document and arranged the answers based on the research questions to which they pertained. The researcher printed the documents, then underlined and circled the key words, thoughts, and themes for each question. The illuminated words, thoughts, etc. were written beside each answer for ease of visual comparison. The answers from the post questionnaire were compared to the coinciding answers from the pre-questionnaire. The answers were compared between each person's questionnaires and compared to the group's collective answers. Eight questions from the pre and post questionnaires require qualitative data, the other sixteen questions require quantitative data. All twelve of the focus group questions are qualitative in nature. Therefore, the same analysis procedure was conducted for the focus group answers to discover and compare the common themes.

To analyze the quantitative data, the researcher conducted a similar organization method as the qualitative data by pasting the answers onto a separate document then grouping the answers by the questions on the questionnaire to which they pertained. The quantitative questions that provide multiple choice were based on alphabetical sorting. When analyzing the data, the letters were equated to numbers (a = 1, b = 2, c = 3, etc.) and the numbers were calculated to find the standard deviation for each answer for the individual participant and the group as a whole.

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

After fifteen years in the vocation of ministry, my experience supports the studies that show a declining state of scriptural knowledge within the Christian community. It is the assumption of the researcher that the collective decline in scriptural knowledge is partly due to Christians not reading their Bibles. In an effort to counteract the decline, the researcher created and facilitated an introductory level inductive Bible study as a ministry intervention project. The purpose of this project was to evaluate the changes in scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits among persons in the worshiping community of Wesley Way United Methodist Church as the result of participating in a six-week introductory level inductive Bible study dealing with the Gospel of John. This chapter will present the analyzed data from the participants of the Bible study.

Participants

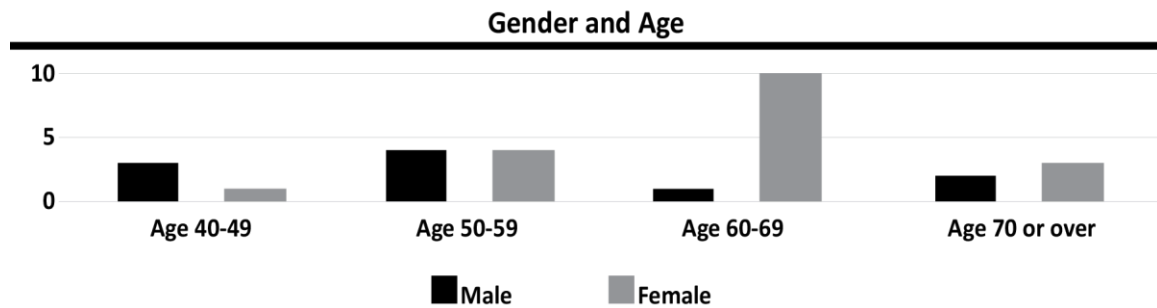
The way people registered to participate in the Bible study was to sign their name on the hard copy form that offered the day and time they wished to participate. More people registered for the study than participated, and more people started the study than completed it. A total of sixteen people completed the study from the Sunday evening time slot, and seven people completed the study from the Tuesday morning time slot. This totaled twenty-three people completing the study.¹¹ All of the participants who did not complete the Bible study informed the researcher of their plans to discontinue their participation in the study. Each person shared his or her reason for discontinuing, and only one person cited the difficulty of the study as the reason. For the purposes of data

¹¹ No participant totals include the researcher's participation.

analysis, this chapter includes only the participants who completed the post-Bible study questionnaire.

The following chart provides the gender and age trend of the participants (see figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1

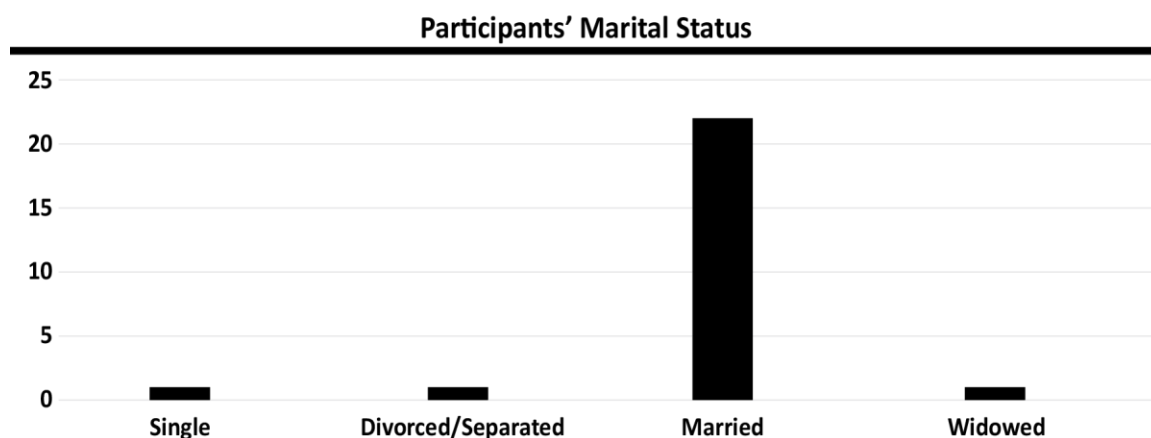


A total of sixteen females (69.6 percent) and seven males (30.4 percent) completed the Bible study. No one was under forty years of age. The greatest number of women participants were in the age range of sixty to sixty-nine (eleven). This number was more than double the next highest age range. The next highest number of women (four) was in the age range of fifty to fifty-nine. The number of women in this range was only half of the highest age range of women. The next highest number of women (three) was in the highest age range of seventy or over, with the one remaining woman in the forty to forty-nine age range.

The highest number of men (four) was in the age range of fifty to fifty-nine, and the lowest number of men (one) was in the age range of sixty to sixty-nine. There were three men in the age range of forty to forty-nine and two men in the age range of seventy or over.

The second chart provides the participants' marital status trend (see figure 4.2).

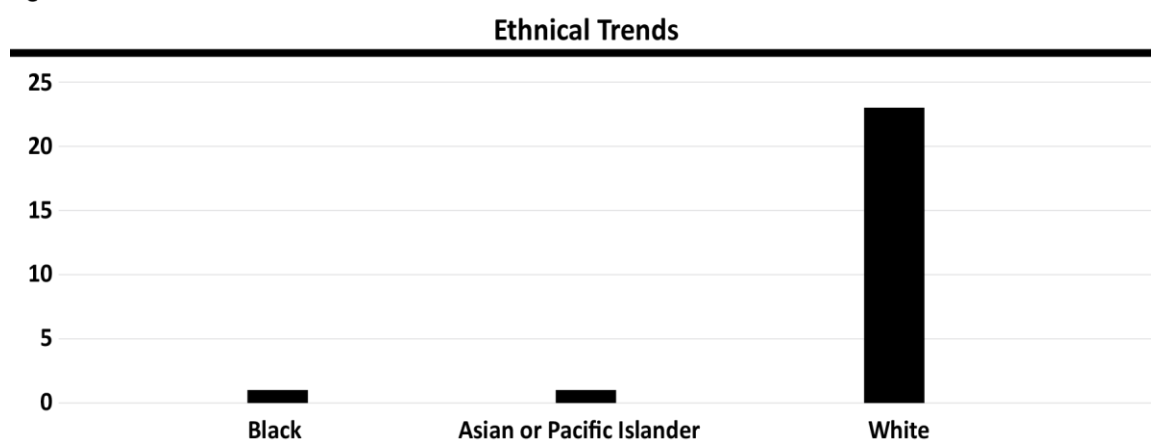
Figure 4.2



Most of the participants were married. One participant was single. One participant was widowed. One participant was divorced or separated, and nineteen participants were married.

The third chart provides the participants' racial trends (see figure 4.3).

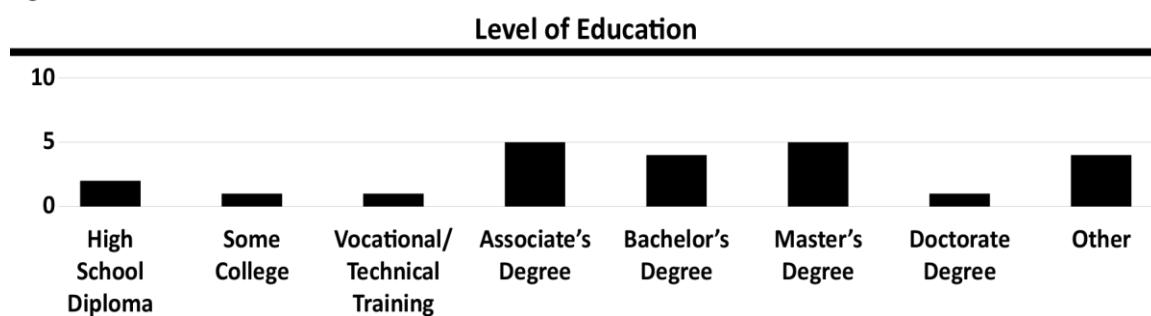
Figure 4.3



Most of the participants were white (22). One participant was black. One participant was of Asian or Pacific Islander ethnicity.

The following chart provides the participants' educational trends (see figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4



The education question of the demographic section includes three options that are not listed in Figure 4. Those options are “none,” “some elementary school,” and “some high school.” No participants selected these options; thus, all the participants earned at least a high school diploma. The highest number of degrees was divided equally between an associate degree (five) and a master’s degree (five). Four people completed a bachelor’s degree. Two people completed high school but did not complete any college education. Three levels of education were divided equally with one person experiencing some college, one person earning a vocational degree/technical training, and one person earning a doctoral degree. Four people stated other levels of education not listed in the chart. Of those participants who selected “other,” three earned their Education Specialist degree, and one completed the coursework in a doctoral degree but did not complete the dissertation.

Of the twenty-three participants who completed the Bible study, 82.6 percent (nineteen) completed higher education degrees, 21.7 percent (five) completed graduate degrees, and 17.4 percent (four) completed post-graduate degrees.

In comparison to the demographics of Wesley Way United Methodist Church, the Bible study participants provided a representative sampling of the congregation. An average of two hundred people worship in the congregation each Sunday morning. The

Bible study participants represent 11.5 percent of the worshipping congregation. The Bible study was open only to people over the age of eighteen, so youth and children did not participate. Even though the Bible study contained roughly only ten percent of the worshipping congregation, this is a representative sample because the congregation is primarily white, married people, and many are current or retired educators (a profession which requires at least a bachelor's degree).

Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

What were the scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits among persons in the worshipping community of Wesley Way United Methodist Church who attended the six-week study prior to the study?

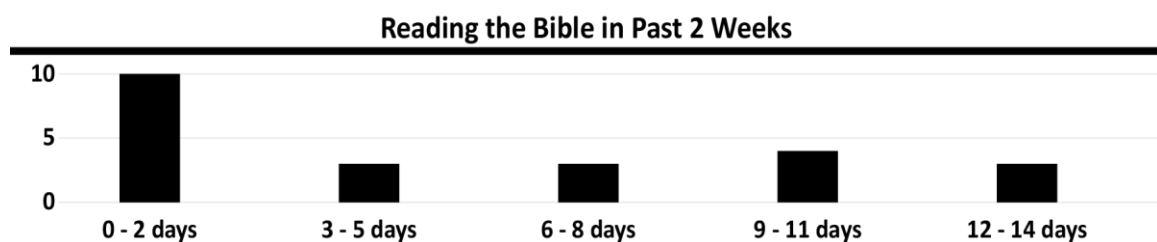
The purpose of this question is to create a base level for the purposes of this research project. This question includes three aspects that define one's relationship with the Bible: knowledge of the Bible, attitude toward the Bible, and reading habits of the Bible. For most people, scriptural knowledge can be gained only by reading the Bible. While the questionnaire and focus group instruments are not exhaustive enough to discover the vastness of one's relationship with the Bible, the questions are general enough to discern some of the attributes that define the participants' relationship with the Bible. The questions pertaining to each of the three aspects are both qualitative and quantitative.

The questions about scriptural reading habits seek to find the participants' past reading frequency, future reading intentions, and aspects of their reading. Some of these questions are quantitative in form as they ask for numerical frequencies pertaining to their scriptural reading habits, and some are qualitative as they seek the reasons for their

reading habits. The questions also seek to discover the amount of the Bible they have read and the reason for that amount. Questions one, four, seven, ten, thirteen, sixteen, nineteen, and twenty-two on the questionnaires address the participants' scriptural reading habits.

The following chart provides a visual of the number of days the participants read or listened to the Bible in the previous two weeks (see figure 4.5).

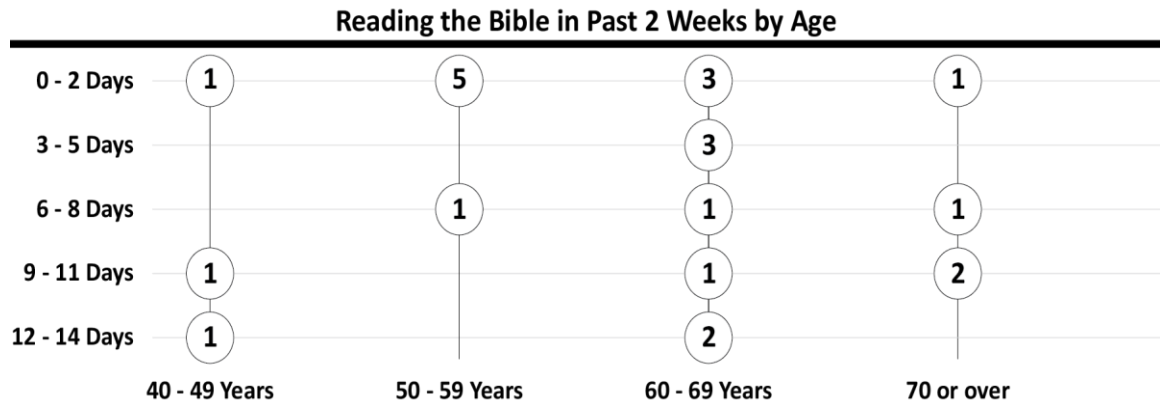
Figure 4.5



Almost half of the participants (ten) read the Bible zero to two days in the previous two weeks leading into the Bible study. The remaining day ranges were almost even as three participants read the Bible *3-5 days*, *6-8 days*, and *12-14 days* respectively. Four participants read the Bible *9-11 days*. Not represented in the chart above are gender divisions, but proportionally, the gender divisions are close to accurately represented in the ranges of *12-14 days* (one man, two women), *9-11 days* (one man, three women), *6-8 days* (two men, one woman), and *0-2 days* (three men, seven women) since the men constitute one-third of the total attendees. However, the *9-11 days* range constitutes three women and no men.

The following chart provides the reading frequency based on age (see figure 4.6).

Figure 4.6



The numbers in the circles represent the number of participants in the age range that coincides with the column. Except for the *70 or older* age range, the greatest number of participants of each group read the Bible *0 - 2 days* in the previous two weeks.

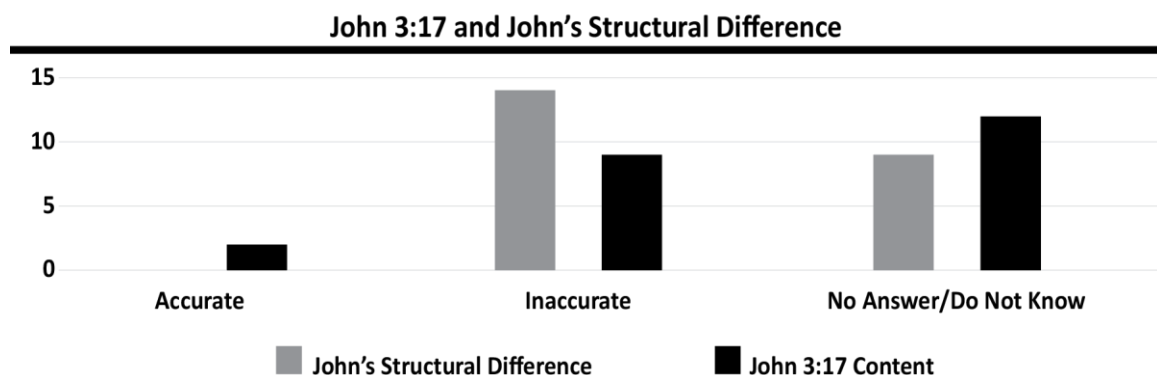
The following table lists all the questions pertaining to scriptural reading habits and the participants' answer based on an average of the group's answers (see table 4.1). The multiple-choice answers were given a numerical value and averaged to find the group's collective answer.

Table 4.1

Reading Habits: Pre-Bible Study Questions and Answers	
Questions	Answers
In the previous two weeks, how many days included your reading or listening to any portion of the Bible?	3 – 8 days
Have you ever read the Bible in its entirety?	Yes (9), No (14)
Within the next 6 months, what is the likelihood you will start reading the Bible with the intention of reading it in its entirety?	Likely
Within the next 12 months, what is the likelihood you will start reading the Bible with the intention of reading it in its entirety?	Likely
When I read the Bible, I am able to stay focused on the text the majority of the time that I am reading.	Often
Having a greater understanding of the Bible would increase my likelihood of reading the Bible more than I currently do.	Strongly agree
I prefer my preacher to be the primary source of my Scriptural information.	Disagree
There is no need for formal Bible studies because the Holy Spirit tells people what they need to know every time they read the Bible.	Disagree

The questions about scriptural knowledge range between the micro, by asking the participant to state the content of a verse, and the macro, by asking the difference between the synoptic gospels and John's gospel. Questions three, six, nine, twelve, fifteen, eighteen, twenty-one, and twenty-four in the questionnaires address one's scriptural knowledge. When discerning the participants' knowledge of the Bible, the researcher presented questions whose answers are either accurate or inaccurate. The researcher did not require verbatim reciting of the verse reference in question six or a seminary textbook answer for the broader questions, but the researcher did look for a high level of accuracy when discerning the correctness of the answer. The following chart presents the answer trend for two questions: provide the content of John 3:17 and list structural differences between John and the other gospels (see figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7

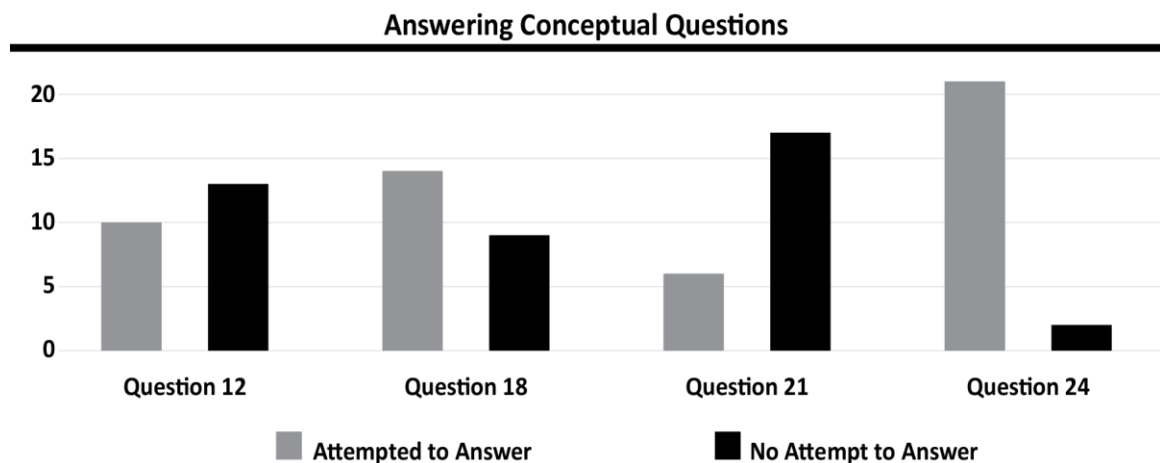


There were no accurate answers concerning John's structural difference, and two participants stated John 3:17 accurately. There were fourteen participants who provided an inaccurate answer pertaining to the structural differences, and nine participants inaccurately stated John 3:17. With the exception of one, all of the inaccurate answers that were attempting to recite John 3:17 recited John 3:16. Nine participants either did not provide an answer or stated they did not know the structural difference between John and

the other gospels, and twelve participants either provided no answer or stated they did not know the content of John 3:17. Five more participants attempted to answer the question about structure than did not attempt an answer.

The study also attempted to collect data on the participants' conceptual knowledge about the Bible. There are four questions designed to discover the participants' conceptual knowledge of the Bible; these are questions twelve, eighteen, twenty-one, and twenty-four. The following chart displays the number of attempts for each question designed to discover the participants' conceptual knowledge of Scripture (see figure 4.8).

Figure 4.8

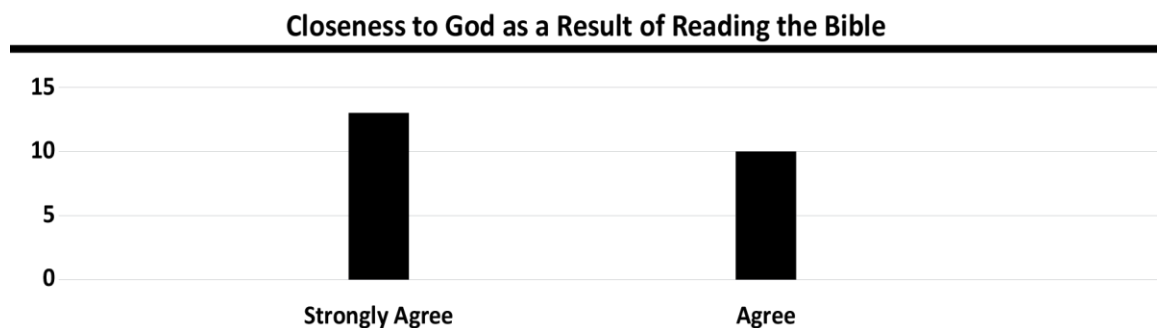


Questions twelve and eighteen had the least variance in the number of participants that attempted to answer compared to those who did not attempt to answer. Question twelve had ten attempts and thirteen no attempts, and question eighteen had fourteen attempts and nine no attempts. Questions twenty-one and twenty-four had the greatest variance in attempts versus no attempts. Question twenty-one had six attempts and seventeen no attempts, and question twenty-four had twenty-one attempts and two no attempts.

As previously stated, this study attempted to track only general trends in the participants' attitude toward Scripture. Questions two, five, eight, eleven, fourteen, seventeen, twenty, and twenty-three seek to discover the participants' attitude toward Scripture. These questions cover a range of attitudinal topics from sharing why the participant did or did not read the Bible to which section of the Bible the participant relates to the most. The remainder of this section will address the participants' answers to questions two, eight, eleven, fourteen, and twenty-three.

The following chart presents the participants' answers to question eight, which seeks to determine if reading the Bible makes them feel closer to God (see figure 4.9). The question provides a range of strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. The participants were asked to select the one that best applies to the statement: Reading the Bible makes me feel closer to God.

Figure 4.9

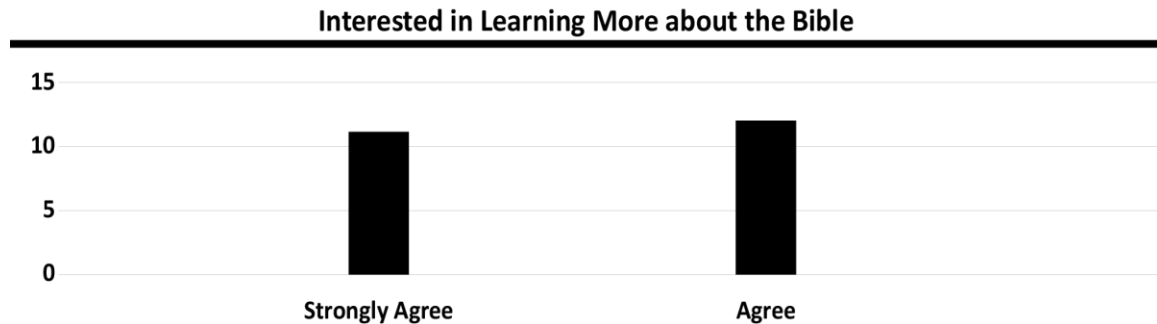


All the participants answered the question with thirteen strongly agreeing and ten agreeing. None of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Question eleven seeks to determine the participants' interest in learning more about the Bible prior to engaging in the inductive Bible study. The following chart provides the participants' level of interest in learning more about the Bible. The

participants were asked to select the response that best applies regarding the statement: I am interested in learning more about the Bible (see figure 4.10).

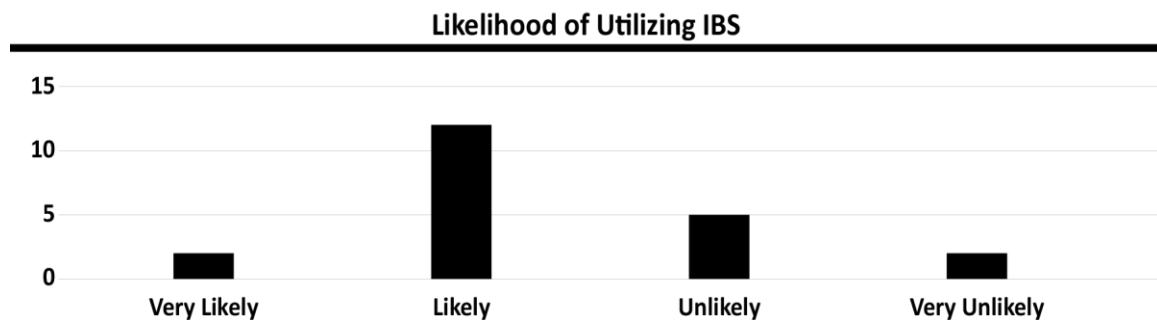
Figure 4.10



All the participants answered this question with eleven strongly agreeing and twelve agreeing to the statement.

Question fourteen addresses the participants' likelihood of utilizing an inductive Bible study in the future when reading the Bible. The following chart presents the participants answers to the question: How likely are you to utilize an inductive Bible study when you read the Bible? (see figure 4.11).

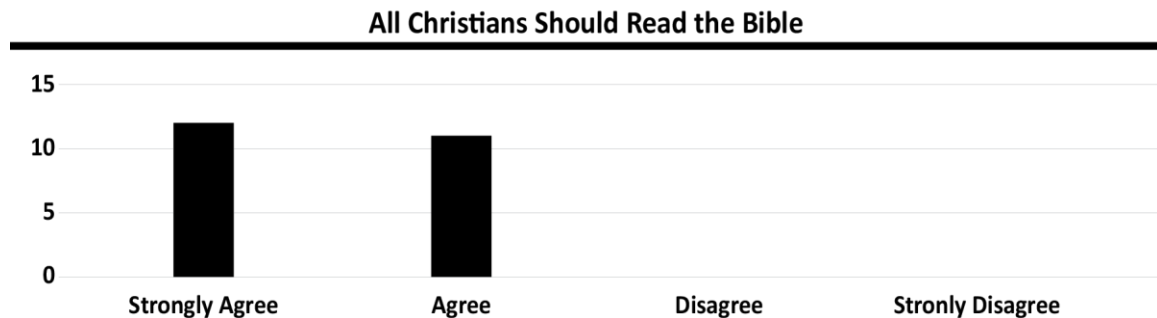
Figure 4.11



Two participants answered *very likely* and two answered *very unlikely*. The greatest number of participants stated they are *likely* to utilize an inductive Bible study when reading the Bible (twelve), and the next greatest number is *unlikely* (five). Two participants abstained from answering this question.

Question twenty-three seeks to discover the participants' viewpoint of the importance of reading the Bible. The participants were asked to select the answer that best applies to their opinion of the statement: I think all Christians should read the Bible. The following chart presents their answers (see figure 4.12).

Figure 4.12



Twelve participants *strongly agree*, and eleven *agree* with the statement in question twenty-three. All the participants answered the question. Zero *disagreed* or *strongly disagreed* with the statement.

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

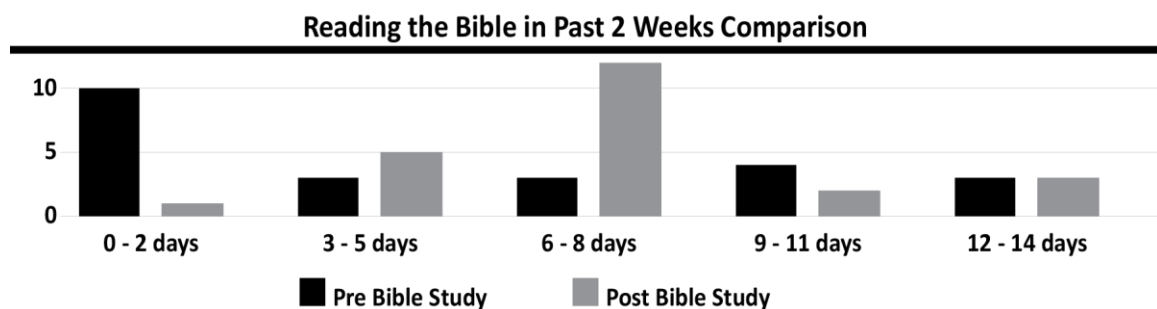
What were the scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits among persons in the worshiping community of Wesley Way United Methodist Church who attended the six-week study after the study?

The purpose of this research question is to discover any changes that occurred to the participants' scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits after completing the Bible study. The data to determine the answer to this question was collected by comparing the participants' answers on the post-Bible study questionnaire to their answers on the pre-Bible study questionnaire. For the questions that contained multiple-choice answers, the answers were converted into a numerical value by following this pattern: a = 1, b = 2, c = 3, etc. A non-parametric Wilcoxon rank sum test was conducted

to analyze the data and to assess differences between the pre-Bible study and post-Bible study groups. When addressing the mean of the collective group for each question, the results from each Wilcoxon test did not demonstrate statistical significance except for questions one and nineteen. This section will address the changes in questions one and nineteen first, and the remaining data analysis will address frequency variances focused on individual participants as opposed to the variances of the collective group.

Question one is grouped with the questions that address the participants' reading habits of the Bible. A previous chart presents the mean of each of the questions pertaining to reading frequency (see table 4.1). The only change that would be found in the chart presenting the post-Bible study answers would be the days having read the Bible in the past two weeks. The pre-Bible study has a frequency of 3.57, which equals a combination of the *3–5 days* range and the *6–8 days* range. The post-Bible study frequency of question one is 2.95, which represents the *6–8 days* range solely. The following chart provides a visual of the number of days the participants read the Bible in the previous two weeks at the conclusion of the study compared to the same time frame prior to the study (see figure 4.13).

Figure 4.13



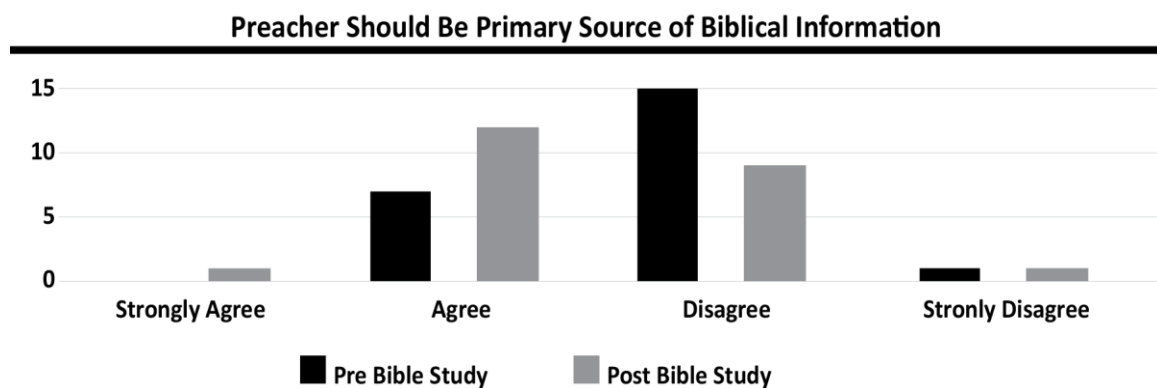
Two ranges share the greatest variance, the *0-2 days* and the *6-8 days* ranges. The *0-2 days* range changed from ten participants to one, and the *6-8 days* range changed

from three participants to twelve. Both have a variance of nine. The other ranges have minimal variance, if any.

There are 82.6 percent (nineteen) of the participants who changed their Bible reading habits. Of those who changed their reading habits, 78.9 percent (fifteen) increased their reading frequency, and twenty-one percent (four) decreased their reading frequency. Three increased from the *9–11 days* range to the *12–14 days* range, one increased from the *6–8 days* range to the *9–11 days* range, two increased from the *3–5 days* range to the *6–8 days* range, and five increased from the *0–2 days* range to the *6–8 days* range. Four participants increased from the *0–2 days* range to the *3–5 days* range. Of the four participants who decreased in their reading frequency, one decreased from the *12–14 days* range to the *9–11 days*, two decreased from the *12–14 days* range to the *6–8 days* range, and one decreased from the *9–11 days* range to *6–8 days* range.

Question nineteen asked whether the participants preferred the preacher to be their primary source of biblical information. The following chart presents the participants' pre-Bible study and post-Bible study answers (see figure 4.14).

Figure 4.14

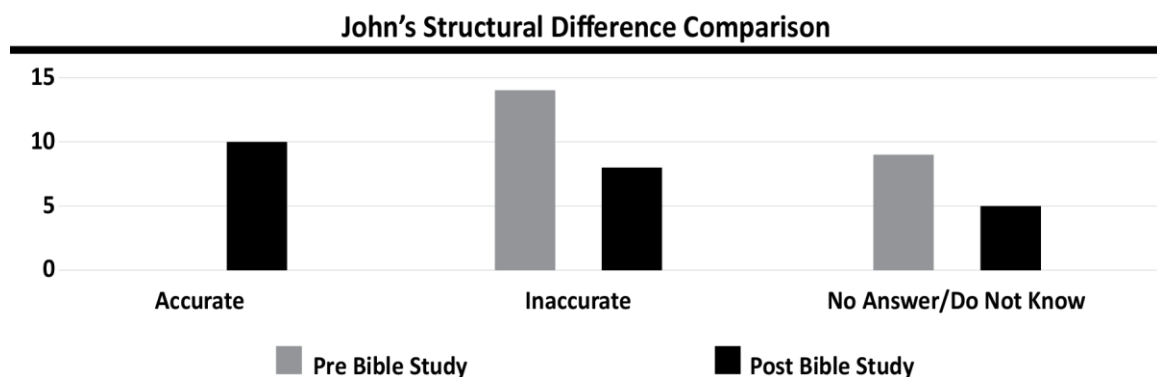


The pre-Bible study average for question nineteen is 2.71 and the post-Bible study mean is 2.43. The greatest difference occurs in the *agree* and *disagree* options. The

pre-Bible study agree number is seven, and the pre-Bible study *disagree* is fifteen. The post-Bible study *agree* number is twelve, and the post-Bible study *disagree* is nine. There are seven participants who changed their answer from the pre-Bible study questionnaire to the post-Bible study questionnaire. Six of those participants changed their answer from *disagree* to *agree*, and one changed his or her answer from *agree* to *strongly agree*.

One of the aspects measured within the grouping of scriptural knowledge is the structural understanding of John's gospel as compared with that of the other three gospels. Those trends were previously charted (see figure 4.7). The following chart provides the variances between the pre-Bible study answers and the post-Bible study answers to question three on the questionnaire, which asks the participants to state the structural differences that set John apart from the other three gospels (see figure 4.15).

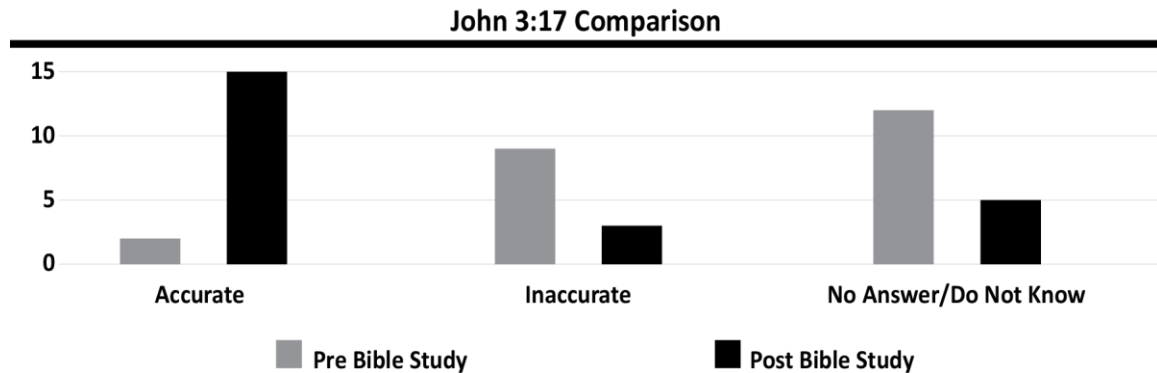
Figure 4.15



The greatest variance in the pre-Bible study and post-Bible study answers is the number of accurate answers. There were zero accurate answers prior to the study and ten accurate answers after the study. The inaccurate answers went from fourteen to eight, and those who did not know or attempt to answer went from nine to five. Of the accurate answers, three did not attempt to answer in the pre-Bible study questionnaire, and, of the inaccurate answers, two previously did not attempt to answer.

The following chart presents the comparison of the participants' attempts to answer question six, which is to state John 3:17 (see figure 4.16).

Figure 4.16



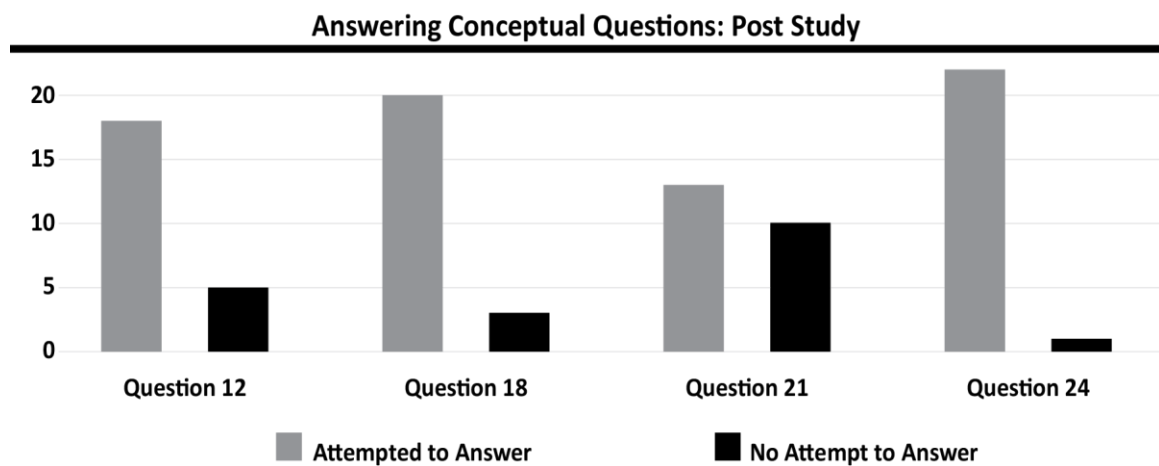
The greatest variance is found in the number of accurate answers. There are two accurate answers on the pre-Bible study questionnaire for question six and fifteen accurate answers on the post-Bible study questionnaire. This variance presents a 650 percent increase in accurate answers. The inaccurate attempts decreased by 66.7 percent, going from nine to three. Those participants who stated they did not know the answer reduced from twelve to five, a 58.3 percent decrease. Not shown in the chart is that nine participants attempted to state John 3:17 after the study who did not attempt prior to the study. Of those nine participants, eight accurately stated John 3:17 and one stated it inaccurately. Those numbers mean 34.7 percent of the participants answered this question after the study than before, and 88.8 percent of those attempts are accurate.

Questions twelve, eighteen, twenty-one, and twenty-four seek to determine the participants' conceptual knowledge of elements of the Bible. Conceptual knowledge is largely subjective, so this researcher decided to focus on whether the participants attempted to answer the question. As previously presented, prior to the Bible study, question twelve had ten attempts and thirteen no attempts, question eighteen had fourteen

attempts and nine no attempts, question twenty-one had six attempts and seventeen no attempts, and question twenty-four had twenty-one attempts and two no attempts (see figure 4.8).

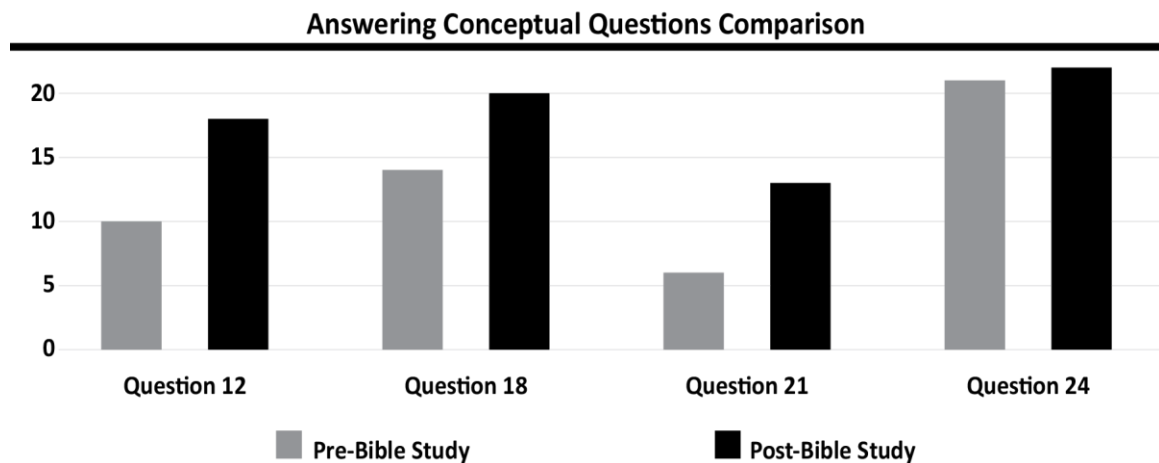
All of these questions saw an increase in attempts. The following chart presents the number of participants who attempted to answer questions twelve, eighteen, twenty-one, and twenty-four after completing the Bible study (see figure 4.17).

Figure 4.17



The following chart is a pre-Bible study and post-Bible study comparison of the number of participants who attempted to answer the same questions in the above chart (see figure 4.18).

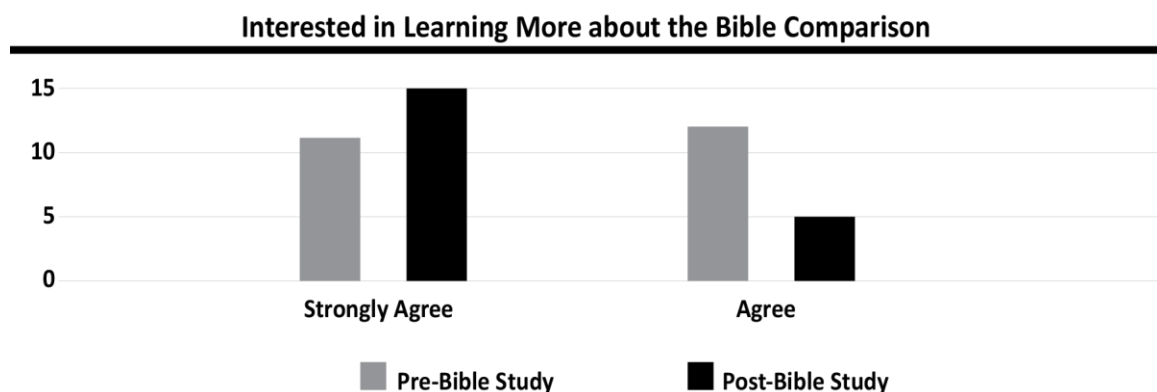
Figure 4.18



Eighteen participants attempted to answer question twelve, and five did not. There is an increase of eight in attempts and a decrease of eight in no attempts compared to the pre-Bible study questionnaire. Twenty participants attempted to answer question eighteen, and three did not. There is an increase of six in the attempts and a decrease of six in the no attempts compared to the pre-Bible study questionnaire. Question twenty-one had thirteen participants attempt to answer and ten who did not. There is an increase of seven in the attempts and a decrease of seven in the no attempts compared to the pre-Bible study questionnaire. Question twenty-four had twenty-two participants attempt to answer and one who did not. There is an increase of one in the attempts and a decrease of one in the no attempts compared to the pre-Bible study questionnaire.

The following chart presents a comparison in the variance of the participants' answers concerning their interest in learning more about the Bible (see figure 4.19). The chart addresses question eleven, which asks the participants to select the answer that most applies to them concerning the statement: I am interested in learning more about the Bible.

Figure 4.19

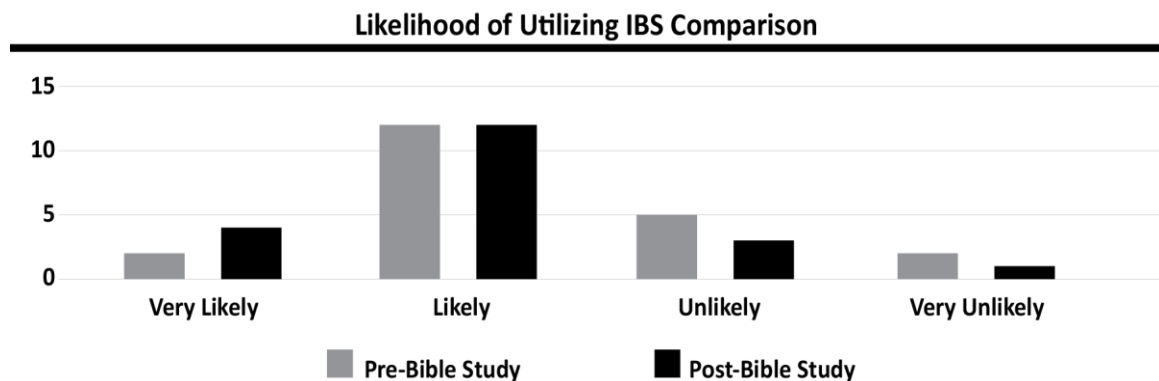


Eleven participants *strongly agree* with the statement before completing the Bible study and fifteen after they completed the study. Twelve participants *agree* prior to

completing the Bible study and five after they completed the study. Eleven participants changed their answer from before the study to after they completed the study. Within those eleven participants who changed their answer, three participants answered this question on the pre-Bible study questionnaire but did not answer after they completed the study. One participant's answer changed from *strongly agree* to *agree*, and seven participants changed their answer from *agree* to *strongly agree*.

Question fourteen addresses the likelihood of the participants' utilizing an inductive Bible study when reading the Bible. The following chart presents the variances in the participants' pre-Bible study and post-Bible study answers (see figure 4.20).

Figure 4.20

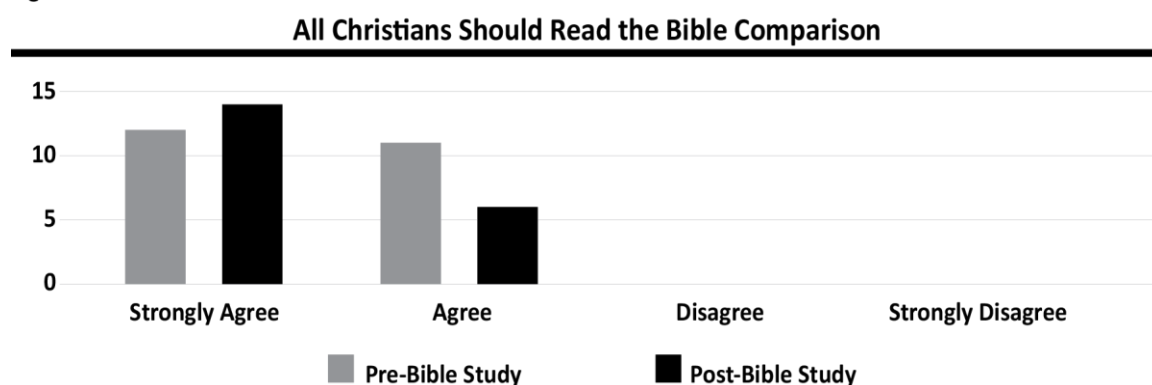


Two participants answered *very likely* before completing the Bible study and four after completing the study. The same number (twelve) of *likely* answers were given before and after the Bible study. Five participants answered *unlikely* before the Bible study and three after. Two participants answered *very unlikely* before completing the Bible study and one after completing the study. Seventeen participants changed their answers from the pre-Bible study questionnaire to the post-Bible study questionnaire; three of those changed answers are no responses on the post-Bible study questionnaire. Eight participants were *more likely* and four were *less likely*. Four participants shifted

from *unlikely* to *likely*. Two participants shifted from *likely* to *very likely*. One participant shifted from *unlikely* to *very likely*, and one from *very unlikely* to *likely*. Three participants shifted from *likely* to *unlikely*, and one from *likely* to *very unlikely*.

Question twenty-three addresses the importance of Christians' reading the Bible. The following chart presents the participants' opinions on this topic before and after they completed the Bible study (see figure 4.21).

Figure 4.21



Twelve participants selected *strongly agree* that all Christians should read the Bible before completing the Bible study and fourteen after completing the study. Eleven participants *agree* with the statement before completing the Bible study, and six selected *agree* after the study. Eleven participants gave different answers on the post-Bible study questionnaire than what they gave on the pre-Bible study questionnaire to the: five shifted from *agree* to *strongly agree*, three shifted from *strongly agree* to *agree*, three answered this question before the study but did not answer it after completing the study. No participants answered *disagree* or *strongly disagree*.

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

Over a post-study four-week period, what sustainable changes occurred and what aspects of the six-week study had the greatest impact on the observed changes in the scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits among the participants?

In order to find the answer to this question, a focus group was held four weeks after the conclusion of the Bible study. Participants from the group volunteered to meet for no more than forty-five minutes to informally answer twelve questions that the researcher created. Of the twenty-three participants who completed the Bible study, six participants partook in the focus group experience. One participant was admittedly less vocal because the conversation was being recorded, though this participant did speak a few times. The other five participants were comfortable with the recording process and seemed to have no reservations about answering the questions. A complete list of the focus group questions can be found in Appendix D.

When asked if the group's knowledge of John's gospel expanded because of the inductive Bible study, the group's consensus was that it had. Several of the participants simply affirmed with a single "yes," and one elaborated by saying that his expanded knowledge is due to the "different perspective" of the inductive Bible study. The different perspective of the gospel comes from discovering "the finer points probably that [the participant] missed in the other Bible studies." The "repetitiveness" in the reading was credited as one of the reasons for the "different perspectives" that expanded their knowledge of John's gospel.

When asked if their attitude about the Bible changed as a result of the inductive Bible study, the group did not immediately grasp the connotation of the word attitude as it applies to one's relationship with Scripture. One participant interpreted the word

attitude to mean appreciation. To describe how the inductive Bible study was beneficial, this participant said, “I have a better appreciation for Scripture in that there’s a lot of things you can [do to] gain more knowledge from doing the inductive study, being able to kind of dig and delve into some of those things. . . . A lot of times we just read Scripture and you read it for what it is, and it’s like, ‘Okay,’ versus, ‘Why was that important?’” This participant concluded by stating, “I admire the way the Bible is put together a little bit more. . . .” Another participant opined that inductive Bible study “causes us to look at what our interpretation was for ourselves, where before we might have paid more attention to someone else’s interpretation and commentary. . . .”

When asked what changes occurred in their personal reading habits, the participants agreed that they have a stronger focus on the context of the situation about which they are reading. One participant shared that the schedule he was utilizing to read through the Bible in a year has Old Testament and New Testament daily readings. Since his participation in the study, he has abandoned the intertestamental schedule and adopted a plan that completes a book at a time. This participant stated the importance of “compartmentalizing” the Old and New Testaments into “two separate things” instead of “trying to mix them together” in order to respect the context of each Testament.

The aspect of the study that helped the group respect the context of the biblical stories more is the repetitive reading. There was a consensus that the re-reading of the sections and the theme-finding were helpful practices in gaining a better understanding of the possible point that the biblical author is trying to convey. The freedom that an inductive Bible study allows its participants received mixed reviews from the group. One participant cited the portion of the Bible study that encouraged the participants to find a

situation in the section and produce their own inductive conclusion as his favorite part of the study. He stated, “[The inductive process] helps me grow in my faith; that it is something I believe, and I don’t believe it just because it’s written down or someone told me.” While this process was his favorite part, he recognized—and other participants agreed—that the process of searching and drawing one’s own conclusion can be “dangerous” for some people. Another participant agreed with this concern as she stated her discomfort with that section. She was “raised not to question [the Bible]. It just is, was, if you had faith.” Another participant acknowledged that participants finding their own inductive conclusions “makes many people uncomfortable because. . .you’ve got a simple answer and you think that’s the whole answer.” His point was that many people prefer to be told the interpretation and receive it as unquestionable.

The participants of the focus group were asked to describe how they would explain the inductive Bible study method to someone unfamiliar with the process. This question was asked to discover if they fully grasped the concept of the inductive study method. The participants who answered seemed to have a grasp of the method. One stated, “. . .it’s a study that’s not so explicit that the answers are just right there for you to grasp.” He continued, “this is something you’re going to have to really think through, and work through, and challenge yourself, and push yourself beyond what you would normally do in a Bible study. It’s going to push your limits.” Another added that, “as much as you have to use your critical thinking, you have to use your creative thinking, too. . . . But the critical part of it is trying to look at it from a standpoint of just what does the text say without knowing everything historically and all of the other stuff going on.”

A different participant added that he would tell the person, “You’re going to be prepared to, perhaps, question something that you know.”

Summary of Major Findings

The study produced four major findings.

1. In this group of educated, adult Christians, there is a tendency to expect the preacher to be the sole provider of biblical information.
2. The participants showed a level of discomfort in discerning their own interpretation of Scripture.
3. There is a tendency to avoid an understanding of the Bible conceptually.
4. After completing the inductive Bible study, participants had a greater appreciation for the structure of the biblical books.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The Bible has had a difficult journey to reach its current state of availability. Many people have sacrificed great lengths—up to and including death—so that individuals can have Bibles in their hands that are translated into their own language. Their sacrifices were not in vain, because the Bible has the highest publication of any book. However, large distribution numbers do not translate to large Christian percentages. In a post-Christian era where the older generations are steadily becoming the only generations that are Christian, there is a tendency for Christians to fight this trend with dogged adherence to the Bible. This trend leads to fundamentalism, which has a history of pushing people away from God. The other tendency is to loosen the binds to the Bible. This trend leads to pluralism, which has a history of rendering the Bible useless. Along with this dichotomy of biblical leanings is the trend of biblical illiteracy. In a 2009 article, The Barna Research Group states, “Biblical literacy is neither a current reality nor a goal in the U.S. Barna’s findings related to Bible knowledge and application indicate that little progress, if any, is being made toward assisting people to become more biblically literate.” The article continues by stating, “There is shockingly little growth evident in people’s understanding of the fundamental themes of the scriptures and amazingly little interest in deepening their knowledge and application of biblical principles” (Barna Group).

This researcher created a Bible study in hopes of combating the trends that The Barna Research Groups reports. This researcher believes that applying an inductive

method of reading the Bible into one's Bible reading practice heightens the likelihood of the reader's gaining a fuller breadth of scriptural themes, concepts, and principles, thus creating a richer interpretation and application of Scripture. The purpose of this project was to evaluate the changes in scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits among persons in the worshiping community of Wesley Way United Methodist Church as the result of participating in a six-week introductory level inductive Bible study dealing with the Gospel of John.

Major Findings

Source of Biblical information

Educated, adult Christians tend to expect the preacher to be the sole provider of biblical information.

The number of Bible studies offered at Wesley Way is par in comparison to the other churches that I have served. Another similar aspect is that it tends to be the same core group of people who participate in the studies. Of course, there could be any number of reasons for this, but it is my assumption that the people participating in the Bible studies desire to learn more about the Bible than just what the preacher can provide in a twenty to thirty-minute sermon each Sunday. Upon introductions, it was apparent that a few of the participants were new to Bible studies, but most of the participants were comfortable in the Bible study environment. Even so, most of the seasoned participants accepted my thoughts on a scriptural topic as true, my being the senior pastor. I am drawing this conclusion based on the lack of participant input after my input and the tendency to ask me questions of clarification. I was very cognizant about the timing of my input and the type of input I offered. For instance, for the sake of discussion and

trying to be true to the heart of the inductive study, I often presented open-ended comments that were drawn from the text with the purpose of offering ideas to the participants that they possibly had not considered. Each aspect either pointed directly to the text or could be induced from peripheral circumstances pertinent to the text. This is not to say that every person simply accepted my answers as gospel without question. Each meeting included rich discussion about the week's assignment.

There are certainly many factors that can contribute to this major finding; however, there is one factor that I believe is prominent over the rest. The Bible study format was very similar to the learning environments to which all the participants are accustomed: one teacher with multiple students. The Western culture is built on a teaching structure where one person imparts information on multiple people per sitting. Even though I tried to become as neutral as possible, the participants knew that I wrote the Bible study, I was the only one in the room with formal theological education, and I was the one facilitating the study. Therefore, they directed most of their questions to me.

This major finding is not surprising, primarily because it makes sense for educated adults to respect a person's input on a topic when that person has been formally educated in that topic. Specifically pertaining to pastors, inserting the element of being divinely called into the role, it is natural for educated adult Christians—or any Christian—to rely on the senior pastor for the proper input on a scriptural topic. Literature on this topic supports this finding. In their book, *The Vital Church*, Williamson and Allen state that “Every pastor is given and called to be a teacher of the Christian faith to the community of faith” (56). Marian Plant strengthens the importance of the pastor's input by claiming, “pastors and professional church educators need to recognize the sheer

amount and type of knowledge about the Bible they possess that the general congregants do not” (Plant 75). Todd Leach summarizes his research on this topic by stating,

Whatever else may be said, it seems clear that pastors must be at the forefront of this call. Within the Church many can contribute to the effort, but only pastors are truly uniquely situated to lead their congregations into deep study of the Scriptures and to encourage biblical literacy so that God’s people will truly be Story-formed people – people who truly represent Jesus Christ well because they know, understand, and apply God’s Word to their lives and to their world. (Leach 95)

N.T. Wright discusses the value of biblical literacy at length and the imperative for the Church to allow the scriptures to impact its life. The following quotation stresses this importance and puts a large part of the onus on the preachers and teachers.

The various crises in the Western church of our day – decline in numbers and resources, moral dilemmas, internal division, failure to present the gospel coherently to a new generation – all these and more should drive us to pray for scripture to be given its head once more; for teachers and preachers who can open the Bible in the power of the Spirit, to give the church the energy and direction it needs for mission and renew it in its love for God; and, above all, for God’s word to do its work in the world, as, in Isaiah’s vision, it brings about nothing short of new creation – the new world in which the grim entail of sin has at last been done away. . . (N.T. Wright, *The Last Word* 141)

The literature on this major finding argues that pastors need to understand and respect their role in the transference of biblical information because the congregations are relying on them to be their primary source and supply.

The scriptural narrative is filled with groups of people reliant upon individuals who are the sole distributor of divine instruction. From the time God spoke to Moses through the burning bush, found in Exodus 3:1 – 4:17, throughout the deliverance narrative, Moses is the mouthpiece for God, and he alone is the one whom the Israelites seek for divine revelation (Ex. 20:19). Moses provides judgment for the people’s disputes (Ex. 18:13), and, as found in Deuteronomy, Moses is the one who dispenses the final

guidance to the nation of Israel by reciting the Mosaic law prior to the Israelites entering the Promised Land. Whether it is priests or prophets, the consistent practice found in the remainder of the Old Testament is one person instructing the people.

That theme carries over into the New Testament with the practice of the Pharisees instructing the Jews on proper living and rabbis teaching their disciples. The gospels provide many accounts of Jesus teaching crowds of people and, specifically, his twelve disciples. The Apostle Paul continues this practice by teaching groups of people in synagogues in each town he enters (Acts 17:2), and he instructs groups of people via letter writing as nine of this thirteen letters found in the New Testament are directed to groups of people (Romans through Colossians). Of the remaining six, five are written to individuals in charge of instructing groups of people (I Thessalonians through Titus). The letter to the Hebrews, and the letters from James, Peter, John (including Revelation), and Jude are written to groups of people for instruction and inspiration. Each of these examples, and others not listed, present the biblical precedence of groups of people seeking guidance from singular individuals concerning scriptural information and interpretation.

Personal Interpretation of Scripture

Congregational members in this demographic show a level of discomfort discerning their own interpretation of Scripture.

The final step of each weekly session includes an opportunity for the participant to create his or her own inductive conclusion by conducting a simple, well-instructed process. The Bible study provides an example in the instructions. Although the final step was discussed in the introduction week, I did not expect anyone to try this step on his or

her own. My suspicions were accurate. I did not anticipate the low number of participants that either attempted their own inductive research or offered their attempts to the group. Only two participants attempted and shared the final step; only one of which was personally rewarded by it and attempted it each week. During the focus group, several of the participants cited their upbringing as the reason they did not feel comfortable drawing their own conclusions from the Bible. One of the participants made a remark that, growing up, there was a clear understanding that the preacher told them what to believe about the Bible, so now it is uncomfortable for her to veer from her passive role of the one who receives scriptural interpretation and take the active role of the one who determines it.

Literature on the topic of scriptural interpretation—whether found in scholarly academic settings or on the run-of-the-mill blog—usually addresses the topic of hermeneutics either by name or by concept. The importance of understanding the biblical author’s intent by first understanding the meaning of words and phrases in the author’s context is widely agreed upon. It has been stated that “We are learners who need to develop interpretive skills to be able to handle the variety of biblical texts with which we find ourselves confronted in Scripture. Perhaps more importantly, we are called upon to develop interpretive virtues, a set of qualities developed over time that will assist us in becoming increasingly competent biblical interpreters” (Köstenberger 11).

Developing these “interpretive virtues” can be frightening because, for those Christians interested enough in the Bible to study it, there can be a substantial intimidation factor when approaching biblical interpretation. For the most part, even the most novice adult Christian understands the Bible was not written in English, nor in the

Western culture. Most Bible readers know “the Bible was originally written to someone else who: 1. lived a long time ago, 2. in another part of the world, 3. where they spoke a different language, 4. and had different cultural values” (“Bible Interpretation: 4 Challenges and How to Overcome Them”). These differences create a barrier that is often a hindrance to reading and interpreting the Bible. The article adds to this point by stating “A word that captures one of the greatest challenges and frustrations in Bible interpretation is distance. There are four aspects to this distance: time, geography, language, and cultural values. Being aware of these is a critical step toward interpreting the Bible correctly.” Considering the otherness of the Bible and the weight it carries in the Christian religion, it is understandable why laity would be hesitant to interpret Scripture apart from the guidance of their pastor.

Throughout the history of our Christian faith, in its Hebraic foundations and in the early Church, scriptural interpretation permeated one’s life. It was belief and action. In today’s Western church, we tend to promote personal relationships with Jesus that often translate into a faith that is evidenced only through belief and rarely evidenced through action. This individualistic concept would have been foreign to the Hebrews and early Church. Scriptural interpretation was revealed in community (i.e. King Josiah’s public reading of Scripture, Paul going to the synagogues in each city he entered, Jesus interpreting the Isaiah scroll in the synagogue) and applied to one’s actions.

Each time the word *interpretation* is mentioned in the Old Testament, it is in context of interpreting a dream. Joseph interprets Pharaoh’s dream and Daniel interprets the king’s dream. The New Testament’s use of the word *interpretation* describes people’s understanding of future events based on current situations (Mt 16:3, Lk 12:56) and in

context of understanding what someone is saying when he or she is speaking in tongues (1 Cor 12:30, 14:13, 14:27). In each of the three instances, changing one's actions was expected as a result of a change in their understanding of the dream, of the future, and/or of what is being said.

Proper interpretation of Scripture seems to have a history of illusiveness throughout the ages. The Old Testament prophets tirelessly corrected the people of God concerning their behavior in respect to the Mosaic law. In the New Testament, Jesus' ministry largely consisted of correcting people's understanding and actions in relation to their Scriptures. Interpretation of Scripture was not, and is not, simply proper belief, but equally proper actions. In the book of Revelation, John quotes Jesus in saying, "Look, I am coming soon! Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy written in this scroll" (22:7 NIV). Then Jesus proclaims, "Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done" (22:12 NIV). According to this account, people are blessed because they follow God's words through their actions.

Conceptual Understanding of Scripture

Congregational members in this demographic show a tendency to avoid an understanding of the Bible conceptually.

The term conceptual refers to the truths found in Scripture that are discovered after assimilating and analyzing pertinent information surrounding the topic at hand to garner a greater understanding that is not apparent upon a superficial reading. The questionnaire includes four questions that are designed to determine if the participant understands conceptual ideas about certain situations regarding Jesus. Many participants

did not attempt to answer those conceptually based questions (see figure 4.9). Of the answers attempted, few were accurate on a conceptual scale. I found that during the discussions in the Bible study meetings, many of the participants were receptive to conceptual ideas when I proposed them. The post-Bible study questionnaire shows a greater number of attempts to answer the conceptual questions (see figure 4.19). This change is likely due to the participants' being exposed to and participating in conceptual thought.

In the Bible belt, where the project for this dissertation occurred, the underlying tendency to read the Bible fundamentally is prevalent. Although the number of Christian congregations that subscribe to a progressive understanding of the Bible is growing, a conservative theological stance remains dominant in the Southeastern states. This conservative theology stems from a surface level reading of the Bible, in which the reader takes the words at face value. This often leads to the “*God said it, I believe it, that settles it*” theology. The shortcoming of this approach is that it only “settles” the things that the reader agrees with because it rarely takes into consideration that we approach the Bible with our own set of assumptions, experiences, and circumstances that shape our initial understanding of the Bible. Searching the Bible for the meanings below the words is often received with skepticism by the laity because they fear it gives way to forcing agendas and lessens the authority of the Bible because it becomes submissive to human interpretation.

The irony with the reluctance to any non-literal biblical interpretation is that the people who often argue against it have a theology that is structured upon the foundational belief in God that cannot be found using a literal approach: God's triune nature. The

Trinity was first presented by Origen of Alexandria (184 – 253), who is also known for promoting an allegorical reading of Scripture. In view of the Book of Revelation, “He lays down the principle that the true meaning of prophecy is to be found only by going beyond the literal and historical sense to the spiritual; and he says specifically of the Apocalypse that the mysteries hidden in it can be understood only in this way. His whole interpretation of the book is therefore spiritual rather than literal” (Beckwith 323).

Although an allegorical reading of Scriptures was not championed by the Reformers Martin Luther (1483–1546) or John Calvin (1509–1564), they were not fully devoted to an absolute literal reading of the Scriptures as seen in the following quotation. “Calvin insisted that the scripture should be read in its historical and literal sense. What was sought was the plain sense or author’s intended meaning. Nevertheless, while this was the case, the reformers still read and interpreted the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament, according to a [C]hristological hermeneutic in which the Old Testament was to be understood as a witness to Jesus Christ” (Palmer 11). Even if a person is determined to read the Bible through a literalist lens, that person applies his or her biases and worldviews into the reading.

Throughout the ages, scores of apologists presented biblical interpretation based on a non-literal reading of the Bible, and their influence greatly shaped Christian theology even to this day. When laity read the Bible and draw conclusions that are found beyond a superficial reading, even if to a small degree, they are utilizing such methods as typology, reader-response criticism, and even form-criticism. When readers apply knowledge gained from disciplines such as sociology, history, geography, and anthropology, they are—even if unwittingly—incorporating practices that allow scholars

to glean conceptual biblical interpretations that are found below a literal reading of the text. Even John Wesley, who called himself *homo unius libri* (man of one book), is known for being an avid reader of books beyond the Bible, and he often incorporated knowledge gained from fields such as medicine, politics, and Christian history into his sermons and writings to support his scriptural interpretations.

Though they are similar, there is a difference between interpreting the Bible and understanding the Bible conceptually. Having a grasp of the greater truths of the Bible is essentially obtaining a three-thousand-foot view perspective. This perspective gives the reader a better understanding of the full scope and tenor of Scripture, which leads to sound interpretation. Jesus certainly understood the Scriptures conceptually, and his words and deeds were driven by his sound interpretation. Jesus corrected the Pharisees for their lack of conceptual understanding of their Scriptures. As found in Matthew 23, Jesus informs the crowds that the Pharisees have authority, so they must obey the Pharisees' words; then he instructs the crowds, "But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach" (Matthew 23:3 NIV). The Pharisees knew the words of the Mosaic law well enough to inform their fellow Jews when they were not abiding by them; however, they did not grasp the greater concepts as Jesus did. Jesus understood that one's interpretation of Scripture is exemplified in that person's actions, and one's interpretation of Scripture is driven by that person's conceptual knowledge of Scripture. Therefore, the Pharisees' actions proved their conceptual knowledge of Scripture was inaccurate or incomplete. As a result of the Pharisees' improper actions, Jesus notifies the Pharisees that their religious practices are not aligned with a proper conceptual understanding of the Scriptures. This notification from Jesus is known as the seven woes.

It is likely that the modern reader could view Jesus' indictment of the Pharisees to be applicable only to the Pharisees. However, a fuller understanding of the situation surrounding Jesus' comments would suggest otherwise. Jesus is speaking to the religious people who studied the Scriptures and were expected to teach others the truth of Scriptures and how to live accordingly. The seven woes can be distilled into accusations of 1) hindering people from entering into a right relationship with God due to their improper actions, 2) teaching people their improper habits and interpretations, 3) attempting to diminish God's authority via misdirected trust, 4) not practicing justice, mercy, or faithfulness, 5) being greedy, 6) being hypocritical, and 7) practicing the same destructive behavior as their ancestors. By understanding the context of this passage, one can interpret it conceptually. A conceptual interpretation of this passage could point to a similar indictment on modern Christians, because we too are expected to teach others the truth of Scripture and how to live accordingly, but we are guilty of practicing the listed woeful habits. Here, possessing a conceptual understanding of Scripture helps the reader to understand the importance of Jesus' relationship with the Pharisees, the value of what Jesus is talking about, and the awareness that Jesus' frustrations can probably be applied to the reader. Thus, a conceptual understanding of the passage fosters a sound interpretation that can lead to improving one's living habits.

Appreciation of Biblical Structure

After completing the inductive Bible study, participants had a greater appreciation for the structure of the biblical books.

One of my goals as the facilitator of this Bible study was to expose the participants to the reality that the biblical authors were intentional about how they structured their work. I understood that buying into this notion means departing from the belief that the information within the Gospels is chronologically accurate. Therefore, some participants may conclude that chronological inaccuracy equates to biblical inaccuracy, which can be very troubling for some people. Throughout the six weeks, the participants became more familiar with the practice of sectioning a book of the Bible because the Bible study was based on six sections of John's gospel. Along with teaching participants more about John's gospel, the Bible study was structured to teach the participants about inductive Bible study. Therefore, each week's lesson provides information as to why the researcher believes that section exists in John's gospel. Intrinsic in the sectional information is the notion that the biblical author was intentional about sectioning his gospel for editorial purposes. The possibility of the author's intentionality was also discussed occasionally during the weekly discussions.

After the first couple of weeks, the participants grew more familiar with the concept of the sections. By the end of the six weeks, most of the participants understood and agreed, at least to some degree, that the author of the Fourth Gospel, and probably the authors of the biblical books, were intentional about the structuring of their work.

Addressing the structure of John's gospel, or any other book in the Bible, challenges the general assumption that the authors simply recorded the words and events of their books in chronological order. This challenge places the reader in an analytical reading of the Bible. One characteristic of a traditionalist and fundamentalist stance of scriptural interpretation is the application of composition criticism. Though most who fall

into these categories probably would not be able to articulate the scholarly term, as Randall Tan clarifies, “composition criticism is primarily a synchronic method (i.e. it focuses on the final text rather than its prehistory)” (Tan 611). Assuming the person is reading the entire book as opposed to a piecemealed approach, superficial readings of the Bible take the books at face value and ascertain theological points from the entirety of the book. Conversely, assuming there is something more to the book than presenting chronological and historical information for the reader to glean a theological point brings the reader into other types of literary criticisms.

When considering the intentional structuring of the books of the Bible, redaction criticism must enter the conversation. “While both redaction criticism and composition criticism seek the theology of the evangelists, there is a fundamental difference in perspective over the extent and nature of their redactional work. Composition criticism's focus on the Gospels as wholes and search for patterns and emphases without discrimination presupposes a Gospel that has been so thoroughly reshaped by the evangelist that the final product reflects the literary and theological accomplishment of an individual” (Telford 80-81). Lawson Stone defines redaction criticism as “the exegetical method that assesses *conceptual unity* in texts thought to possess *original diversity* (Stone 112). Redaction criticism focuses on the theological assertion of a text. Specifically considering redaction's impact on the Old Testament, Stone's words universally describe the method's purpose, when he states, “The manner in which the materials were arranged, the ways in which they appeared to have been altered to fit their new context, their obvious pertinence to the needs of various stages of Israel's history, all pointed to serious theological intention on the part of the compilers and editors” (111). Redaction criticism

assumes the text under consideration is compiled from parts of differing origins; thus, it looks at the editing and intentionality of the message that is presented in the final work.

Admittedly, digging deeper into literary criticisms can, for some people, muddy the waters and create unnecessary work when reading the Bible. However, it is through these practices that orthodox theology formed. Rob Bell argues that we should read the Bible not literally, but *literately*. He argues that we should “read [the Bible] according to the kind of literature that it is” (Bell chp 10). He contends that a literate reading of the Bible honors and respects the books and the genres in which they are written. This practice helps the reader avoid misunderstanding the intention of the written work by not putting improper expectations on it. Bell supports his point by suggesting we do not take song lyrics as literal accounts of various situations, but instead, we enjoy songs because we understand what they are, a song written for people’s enjoyment. In comparison, Bible readers should address the biblical book’s genre and read it accordingly; thus, opening the door for more learning from and enjoyment of the Bible.

The Bible is a collection of books, letters, poems, and proverbs written by actual people living in actual places during actual time periods being influenced by actual cultures. The authors are intentional about providing information that can be read and understood by their contemporary audience.¹² They gather, edit, (sometimes refer to) and present information that supports the point they are making. The authors of 1 and 2 Kings refer to further information on the current topic about which they are writing being found

¹² The Bible is considered God’s living word because, although contemporary issues spurred the authors to write, the Bible is filled with universal truths that transcend cultures and time.

in the “book of annals of the kings of Israel” (NIV).¹³ Another example is Luke’s gospel, which begins with the author stating that,

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4 NIV)

Here, the author has acknowledged that others have collected information and passed down that information to others, and the author has also collected information and presents it to a person named Theophilus in what we now know as the Gospel of Luke.

The issue of redaction that was closest to home for the participants of the Bible study is the eighth chapter of John’s gospel. This chapter begins with a very popular story of an encounter that Jesus has with an adulterous woman whom Jesus famously does not condemn. Some publishers include a bracketed statement prior to the beginning of the account that acknowledges that the following story is not found in the earliest manuscripts.¹⁴ The week in which chapter eight was discussed, the story’s authorship, authenticity, and authority were discussed. The consensus of the participants is that the story is in line with Jesus’ actions found elsewhere, so the story is suitable for the Bible. Realizing it or not, their actions that support their decision to approve the story’s presence in the canon were inductive and, in a very indirect way, participated in the decision-making process that led to the structure of John’s gospel.

¹³ See 1 Kings 14:19; 15:31, 16:14, 16:20; 2 Kings 1:18, 14:28, 15:21, 15:31.

¹⁴ Zondervan’s 1996 printing of the thinline NIV states, “The earliest manuscripts and many other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53–8:11.”

Ministry Implications of the Findings

Studies show the declining frequency of scriptural reading among Christian adults is leading to their collective ignorance of the Bible. Based on the findings of this study, just under half of the participants have read the Bible in its entirety; however, they possess a tendency for the pastor to be the sole provider of biblical information, a level of discomfort in discerning their own interpretations of Scripture. In response to these findings, two ministry implications arise from this project.

First, if the congregants expect their senior pastor to provide the lion's share of scriptural interpretation, then the senior pastor must have a sound theology through which to interpret. Therefore, it is imperative for pastors to obtain formal theological education to adequately fulfill their roles of biblical interpreters. Pastors must proclaim sermons that are theologically sound and must have a working knowledge of Scripture that is readily available in all pastoral needs.

Second, pastors have the responsibility of teaching their laity the tools to read Scripture theologically, empowering their laity with the confidence to interpret Scripture, and providing their laity with an outlet to hone their interpretations. The research from this project suggests that an inductive Bible study taught within a group of interested learners is a beneficial format to provide laity with the tools—inductive study methods—to read the Bible through a theological and interpretive lens while also providing them with the opportunity to discuss their findings in the safety of their peers. Individuals must possess scriptural knowledge and wisdom that comes from sound reading and interpretation because the Holy Spirit speaks through Scripture into situations in their

lives that pastors could never know. Therefore, it is beneficial for all believers to read and interpret the Bible so that their lives can benefit from a sound understanding of God.

If a senior pastor desires the adults in his or her congregation to possess a working knowledge of the Bible and a desire to learn more about the Bible, this inductive Bible study proved to be an adequate starting point. This ministry intervention project exposed adult Christians to the richness of Scripture and the greater breadth of the impact that it can have on their lives. The data analysis strongly suggests participants having a new appreciation for the Bible as a result of completing the Bible study. Applying inductive Bible studies into churches' Christian education efforts could enhance the congregation's scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits. Thus, the rate of decline in biblical literacy across Western Christendom could decrease. While that is a lofty claim, the researcher is convinced that church leaders must recognize their responsibility to inspire Christians to study and interpret the Bible, so they possess a sound theology exemplified through belief and deed.

Limitations of the Study

While the findings of this study can benefit most churches to some degree, limitations must be noted. First, the lack of diversity possibly limited the scope of the collective perspective. Although there were a small number of other races, the clear majority of participants were white adults over the age of forty. Universal cultural perceptions exist within each race and the responses to the questions in the Bible study workbook, the weekly discussions, and the questionnaires could have been answered through the lens of each respective culture represented.

Second, the size of the participant group was only twenty-three people. Although that is over ten percent of the worshipping congregation at Wesley Way United Methodist Church, the number is still quite small in comparison to the number of people who could have participated from the church and provided their perspective for data analysis. In addition to the small sample size, the group did not have perfect attendance each week. Various participants missed weeks, some more than others; therefore, those participants missed the discussions, which were crucial to the participants in experiencing and familiarizing themselves with the inductive Bible study method. Thus, when they completed the final questionnaire, they were doing so without the benefit of the full six week's exposure.

Fourth, the instruments could have been stronger. After completing the Bible study and relating the questionnaire answers back to the research questions, it became apparent that the questions could have been more directly related to the research questions. Also, due to the weather effects of Hurricane Irma in my community, the small group coordinator who was going to lead the focus group was not able to drive to the church to facilitate the discussion. As a result, I lead the discussion. There is a possibility that the focus group participants would have provided different answers had I not been facilitating the discussion.

Fifth, the Bible study was only six weeks in length and the focus group was only four weeks after the completion of the study. Also, only a small sample of those who completed the Bible study participated in the focus group. The short time frame and the small number of participants in the focus group proved only a small amount of time and people to show any substantive changes in the reading habits. Also, the answers

regarding the participants' Scripture reading habits could be affected by the challenge that I put forth in January to read through the Bible in the calendar year. The challenge was presented to Wesley Way United Methodist Church's congregation, so each of the participants would have received that challenge. The instruments did not directly address the whether or not the participants accepted the challenge; thus, their Scripture reading habits could have been more frequent as compared to their not having accepted the challenge to read the entire Bible in one calendar year.

Unexpected Observations

It was surprising that almost half of the participants had read through the Bible in its entirety. The fact that almost fifty percent of the participants (9 out of 23) had taken the time to read the entire Bible certainly did not fit within the national averages. There were various reasons for accomplishing this task: some were as a result of a Bible study, some out of scriptural curiosity, while others did so because they deemed it their duty as a Christian to read the entire Bible.

It was rewarding to experience participants wrestling with, and learning from, the Bible study because they ultimately saw the Bible in a new light. One of my desires for this Bible study is to teach the participants a better way to read the Bible than they are currently practicing. Although she does not use the term inductive, Judith Stack-Nelson wrote an article that wonderfully describes the ideal reader of the Bible as a result of applying the inductive study method. She calls them "readerly readers." These readers assume a posture of humility when reading the Bible because their "sensibilities toward the Bible are shaped by approaches that are applicable to and used with the study of other

literary texts” (Stack-Nelson 295). They are open to what the text is telling them, they listen to the text, they are attentive to what the text is telling them, and they are honest with the preconceptions they bring to the biblical text. She states that the readerly readers know *about* the text, but also are better readers *of* the text (293). My goal was for the participants to learn more about the text and become better readers of the text.

Some of the participants in the Bible study ended the six weeks closer to being readerly readers. Through the weekly process of reading the Bible, answering the questions, and participating in the discussions, the participants began to hear the Bible speak to them unlike previous readings. The proverbial lightbulbs would go off in their minds, and they said things like, “I’ve never thought about it this way” and “I’ve been a Methodist all my life and I’ve never read the Bible like this before.” It was satisfying for me to see participants being rewarded by their efforts and responding with excitement. Only time will tell whether these people apply these new interpretations in their lives and if they continue to read the Bible in an inductive manner, but the good news is that they received the benefits of an inductive reading at least once.

Recommendations

The importance of Christians’ possessing a sound theology stemming from a committed practice of reading the Bible cannot be overstated. In this binary climate that currently exists in America within political, racial, economic, and of course, religious beliefs, it is important that Christians understand the full intent of the Bible and apply it to their lives accordingly. With this imperative, here are four recommendations stemming from the ministry implications of this study.

First, if the questions on the questionnaires and focus group were more accurately worded to discover the three aspects of the research questions—scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits—there could have been more precise data to analyze. The questions in the questionnaires are intentionally arranged as to not have questions beside one another that address the same aspect¹⁵ and there is the same amount of questions related to each aspect (8). If time allowed and participants allowed, the focus group would have included all the participants and occurred at least six weeks after the study's conclusion. Also, the questions in the focus group would have consisted of a written portion that included some of the same questions from the questionnaires concerning reading frequency, knowledge, and attitude. A qualitative verbal portion would also be included in the focus group, so the participants could elaborate on the three aspects conversationally.

Second, churches would do well for their congregations if they encourage them to read the Bible. It is my experience, after forty-five years of worshiping in the United Methodist denomination, preachers do not encourage their congregation to read the Bible enough, or at all. Typically, preachers will insert their Bible verse into the sermon, or have it read prior to the sermon, and provide no encouragement for their congregation to read the context of the passage or maybe the book in which the passage resides. Preachers tend to assume their congregation is reading the Bible instead of directly addressing the issue head on. Instead of assuming, pastors should implement creative ways to encourage and assist their congregation to possess a habit of reading the Bible. This can happen through Bible studies such as this one, testimonies from people who are in a habit of

¹⁵ For instance, if A = knowledge, B = attitude, and C = reading habits, the questions were arranged as follows: question 1 addressed A, question 2 addressed B, question 3 addressed C, question 4 addressed A, question 5 addressed B, question 6 addressed C, etc.

reading the Bible, sermon anecdotes, and advertisement. Another option is to provide books that take the reader through the grand narrative of the Bible in easily understandable ways such as Sean Gladding's *The Story of God, The Story of Us*, and Ellsworth Kalas' *A Hop, Skip, and a Jump through the Bible*. Churches would help their congregation if they remove the intimidation factor from the Bible so that people are more comfortable in their attempts to read it.

Third, if church leadership is going to encourage the congregation to read the Bible, they must be reading it themselves. There is the obvious reason of leading by example, but equally important is the need for church leadership to possess a working knowledge and have a motivated attitude toward the Bible. One of the findings in this study is that the adults who participated in this study, most of whom earned a bachelor's degree or beyond, expect their preacher to provide the scriptural interpretation. Other studies have drawn similar conclusions such as Leach's dissertation research about biblical literacy in the local church, which includes a major finding that "lead pastors are viewed as highly influential in promoting and encouraging" (Leach 149). The ones promoting must also be participating or the promotional efforts will likely be fruitless.

Fourth, the pastors must have a strong amount of biblical knowledge and wisdom to transfer sound scriptural interpretations to their congregants. The level of education does not seem to be a factor in the congregant's desire to receive biblical interpretation from his or her senior pastor. Considering this responsibility, it is imperative that senior pastors practice a habit of reading and studying the Bible. Continuing education courses, earning more advanced degrees, listening to sermons by respected preachers, and reading

commentaries and journals are good options for staying sharp in their understanding of Scripture.

Postscript

I entered the process of writing this dissertation with the assumption that the general laity had an elementary understanding of the Bible and that the majority had not read it in its entirety. There are two primary reasons for this assumption. One of the reasons is, as my introduction states, “church folk are peculiar folk.” My encounters with the various congregations that I have had the honor of pastoring prove this statement to be true. There were certainly exceptions to this statement, but the majority of the teens and adults I encountered respected the Bible but had a rudimentary understanding of the Bible, and rarely—if ever—read the Bible. The other reason is perhaps more influential: I was one of those “church folk.” My description of my congregations described me until I was thirty-five years of age and in seminary. I was raised in a Christian family and went to church almost every Sunday. However, my knowledge of the Bible was limited at best and my reading habits were even worse. I respected the Bible, but not for all the reasons I should have. In fact, I respected the Bible in an unhealthy manner because I viewed it as an unapproachable emerald from God that no one could really understand. Our only hope for gaining wisdom from it was through bits and pieces.

My attitude, reading habits, and knowledge about the Bible encountered a complete overhaul the first time I read the Bible in its entirety coupled with my theological studies in seminary. The walls around the Bible fell as my understanding of it grew. I now have a deep appreciation for the product that God deemed best to

communicate the divine history of salvation. The collection of books that is called the Bible is alive because the story it tells is eternal. I miss the Bible when I am not in a habit of reading it because I have been changed by the truth that lies within.

My desire for the inductive Bible study that I wrote, and my desire for this dissertation, is to create a passion in all persons to study the Bible, to be fulfilled intellectually and spiritually when reading the Bible, and, most importantly, to grow in unity with the Triune God and all of humanity.

The completion of this degree is a springboard that will propel me into areas of life and ministry that I previously did not have the confidence or the credentials to enter. The resources invested in my earning a Doctor of Ministry degree from Asbury Theological Seminary will pay dividends through my future plans to spread the Good News of the grace and forgiveness found in Jesus Christ to people who, as of yet, have not realized the Good News in their life.

I do not take this degree lightly.

APPENDIXES

- A. Research Participation Consent Form
- B. Pre-Bible Study Questionnaire
- C. Post-Bible Study Questionnaire
- D. Post-Bible Study Focus Group Instrument
- E. Gospel of John Bible Study

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH PARTICIPATION CONSENT FORM

A BIBLE STUDY ABOUT STUDYING THE BIBLE: AN INTRODUCTION TO INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to participate, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Researcher

The researcher for this research project is Kevin Bryan Barnes, Senior Pastor of Wesley Way United Methodist Church, McDonough, Georgia, and a student at the Beeson International Center at Asbury Theological Seminary. The faculty supervisor for this research study is Dr. Milton Lowe at the Beeson International Center of Asbury Theological Seminary.

Purpose of the Research

This research project is designed to study the experiences of participants in an introductory level inductive Bible study of the Gospel of John. Information will aid in the completion of a Ministry Transformation Project in accordance with the requirements of a Doctor of Ministry degree.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a six week inductive Bible study of the Gospel of John. The Bible study will consist of one group meeting per week for six weeks, not including an introductory meeting one week before the study begins. The introductory meeting will consist of an overview of the structure of the Bible study, a Pre-Bible Study Questionnaire completed by the participants, and **Cparticipants** the signing the consent form **BY THE PARTICIPANTS**.

The participants are asked to put forth equal effort in this inductive Bible study as they would any other Bible study in which they have participated. The inductive Bible study contains four steps within each week's session. During the weekly gatherings, the participants will primarily discuss their responses to each of the sessions that they completed prior to the gathering. The weekly gatherings will be on Sunday evenings from 5:00pm to 6:30pm and Tuesday mornings from 10:00am to 11:30am.

At the end of the six-week study, participants will be asked to complete a Post-Bible Study Questionnaire which is designed to compare **THEIR** your scriptural knowledge, attitude, and reading habits **C**from before participating in the inductive Bible study. A **FEW** sample of **THEM** will be asked to participate in a focus group four weeks after the completion of the Bible study **THAT WILL CONSIST** consisting of conversations about **THEIR** your experience in the Bible study.

Potential Risks or Discomforts

There is minimal risk associated with this study.

Potential Benefit of the Research

By participating in this research study, participants learn and practice a Bible study tool that could expand their knowledge and understanding of the Bible. This tool could also inspire the participants into??? a regular reading schedule of the Bible that proves to be applicable to everyday occurrences in their lives.

Confidentiality and Data Storage

All personal information obtained will be held in strict confidentiality. All hardware and hard copies will be kept in a locked file, and all electronic data will be stored in password protected personal computers by the individuals approved to assist with this project. Upon the completion of the dissertation, all raw electronic data will be permanently deleted. Three years after the completion of the dissertation all remaining raw data saved on hardware or hard copies will be shredded by the researcher.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. As a research subject you may refuse to participate at any time. To withdraw from the study, indicate so to the principal investigator (Kevin Barnes).

Questions about Research

If you have any questions about the research project, please speak with the principal investigator, Kevin Barnes, or Dr. Milton Lowe, as advisor to the research project. You may contact Kevin Barnes at **404-630-5906** or **kevin.barnes@ngumc.net**. You may contact Dr. Lowe at **Milton.Lowe@asburyseminary.edu** or **859-858-3581**.

Reason for Exclusion from this Study

All persons who can perform the basic abilities necessary to complete this study are welcome to participate.

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

Your Signature _____

Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX B**PRE-BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE****PARTICIPANT CODE #**_____

Demographical Information:

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Marital Status: ☐ Single ☐ Divorced/Separated
 ☐ Married ☐ Widowed
3. Ethnicity: ☐ White, non-Hispanic ☐ Hispanic
 ☐ Black, non-Hispanic ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander
 ☐ Other: _____
4. Prior education:

<input type="checkbox"/> None	<input type="checkbox"/> Some elementary school
<input type="checkbox"/> Some high school	<input type="checkbox"/> Completed high school
<input type="checkbox"/> Some college	<input type="checkbox"/> Technical School
<input type="checkbox"/> Associate's degree	<input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor's degree
<input type="checkbox"/> Master's degree	<input type="checkbox"/> Doctorate
<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	
5. Age:

<input type="checkbox"/> 21-24	<input type="checkbox"/> 25-29	<input type="checkbox"/> 30-34	<input type="checkbox"/> 35-39
<input type="checkbox"/> 40-49	<input type="checkbox"/> 50-59	<input type="checkbox"/> 60-69	<input type="checkbox"/> 70 or over

1. In the previous two weeks, how many days included you reading or listening to any portion of the Bible?
 - a. 12 – 14 days
 - b. 9 – 11 days
 - c. 6 – 8 days
 - d. 3 – 5 days
 - e. 0 – 2 days
2. If you read or listened to the Bible over the previous two weeks, what reason best describes why you did so?
 - a. To learn Christian history
 - b. To learn about Jesus
 - c. To support my understanding of Christianity
 - d. To apply it to my life
 - e. To strengthen my faith
 - f. As a Christian, I am supposed to read the Bible
 - g. To know what Jesus would do
 - h. Other: _____
3. What are some structural differences that set John's gospel apart from the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke?

4. Have you ever read the Bible in its entirety?
 - a. Yes.
 - i. What was your impetus?
 - ii. How long did it take?
 - b. No.
 - i. Why not?
 - ii. Does that reason still apply?
5. If you DID NOT read or listen to the Bible in the previous two weeks, what reason best describes why you DID NOT do so?
 - a. The Bible does not interest me
 - b. It is too confusing
 - c. I tried to read the Bible in its entirety but gave out
 - d. The names for the people and the places are too difficult to pronounce
 - e. It is too daunting
 - f. The Bible should be read and explained by clergy
 - g. I do not have time in my schedule
 - h. Other: _____
6. What does John 3:17 say?

7. Within the next 6 months, what is the likelihood you will start reading the Bible with the intention of reading it in its entirety?
- a. Very Likely
 - b. Likely
 - c. Unlikely
 - d. Very unlikely
8. Reading the Bible makes me feel closer to God.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly Disagree
9. It is widely understood that the Gospel of John is based off a collection of memoirs, or journal entries, written by a close friend of Jesus.
- a. True
 - b. False
10. Within the next 12 months, what is the likelihood you will start reading the Bible with the intention of reading it in its entirety?
- a. Very Likely
 - b. Likely
 - c. Unlikely
 - d. Very unlikely

11. I am interested in learning more about the Bible.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly Disagree

12. John 5:1-15 tells of Jesus' healing a man who has been physically disabled for 38 years. How is this story a microcosm of the Jews' receptivity to Jesus?

13. When I read the Bible, I am able to stay focused on the text the majority of the time that I am reading.

- a. Always
- b. Often
- c. Occasionally
- d. Never

14. How likely are you to utilize an inductive Bible study when you read the Bible?

- a. Very Likely
- b. Likely
- c. Unlikely
- d. Very unlikely

15. All of the stories in the Bible are historically and chronologically accurate.

- a. True
- b. False

16. Having a greater understanding of the Bible would increase my likelihood of reading the Bible more than I currently do.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly Disagree

17. Which portion of the Bible do you most relate to?

- a. Old Testament
- b. New Testament
- c. Prophets
- d. History
- e. Law
- f. Gospels
- g. New Testament Letters
- h. Psalms/Proverbs
- i. Torah

18. In John's gospel, what are the two common elements of physical nourishment to which Jesus metaphorically equates himself?

19. I prefer my preacher to be the primary source of my scriptural information.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly Disagree

20. I can relate to the Bible because aspects of the personalities and human situations found within permeate all cultures and generations.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly Disagree

21. John's gospel utilizes contrasts to help him tell his story about Jesus. What are some examples of contrasts that the author utilizes?

22. There is no need for formal Bible studies because the Holy Spirit tells people what they need to know every time they read the Bible.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly Disagree

23. I think all Christians should read the Bible.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly Disagree

24. For the salvation of humanity through Jesus Christ to be available, why is it imperative that Jesus actually die on the cross as opposed to just having survived the cross?

APPENDIX C

POST-BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE

PARTICIPANT CODE #_____

1. In the previous two weeks, how many days included you reading or listening to any portion of the Bible?
 - a. 12 – 14 days
 - b. 9 – 11 days
 - c. 6 – 8 days
 - d. 3 – 5 days
 - e. 0 – 2 days
2. If you read or listened to the Bible over the previous two weeks, what reason best describes why you did so?
 - a. To learn Christian history
 - b. To learn about Jesus
 - c. To support my understanding of Christianity
 - d. To apply it to my life
 - e. To strengthen my faith
 - f. As a Christian, I am supposed to read the Bible
 - g. To know what Jesus would do
 - h. Other: _____
3. What are some structural differences that set John's gospel apart from the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke?

4. Have you ever read the Bible in its entirety?
 - a. Yes.
 - i. What was your impetus?
 - ii. How long did it take?
 - b. No.
 - i. Why not?
 - ii. Does that reason still apply?
5. If you DID NOT read or listen to the Bible in the previous two weeks, what reason best describes why you DID NOT do so?
 - a. The Bible does not interest me
 - b. It is too confusing
 - c. I tried to read the Bible in its entirety but gave out
 - d. The names for the people and the places are too difficult to pronounce
 - e. It is too daunting
 - f. The Bible should be read and explained by clergy
 - g. I do not have time in my schedule
 - h. Other: _____
6. What does John 3:17 say?

7. Within the next 6 months, what is the likelihood you will start reading the Bible with the intention of reading it in its entirety?
- a. Very Likely
 - b. Likely
 - c. Unlikely
 - d. Very unlikely
8. Reading the Bible makes me feel closer to God.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Strongly Disagree
9. It is widely understood that the Gospel of John is based off a collection of memoirs, or journal entries, written by a close friend of Jesus.
- a. True
 - b. False
10. Within the next 12 months, what is the likelihood you will start reading the Bible with the intention of reading it in its entirety?
- a. Very Likely
 - b. Likely
 - c. Unlikely
 - d. Very unlikely

11. I am interested in learning more about the Bible.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly Disagree

12. John 5:1-15 tells of Jesus' healing a man who has been physically disabled for 38 years. How is this story a microcosm of the Jews' receptivity to Jesus?

13. When I read the Bible, I am able to stay focused on the text the majority of the time that I am reading.

- a. Always
- b. Often
- c. Occasionally
- d. Never

14. How likely are you to utilize an inductive Bible study when you read the Bible?

- a. Very Likely
- b. Likely
- c. Unlikely
- d. Very unlikely

15. All of the stories in the Bible are historically and chronologically accurate.

- a. True
- b. False

16. Having a greater understanding of the Bible would increase my likelihood of reading the Bible more than I currently do.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly Disagree

17. Which portion of the Bible do you most relate to?

- a. Old Testament
- b. New Testament
- c. Prophets
- d. History
- e. Law
- f. Gospels
- g. New Testament Letters
- h. Psalms/Proverbs
- i. Torah

18. In John's gospel, what are the two common elements of physical nourishment to which Jesus metaphorically equates himself?

19. I prefer my preacher to be the primary source of my scriptural information.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly Disagree

20. I can relate to the Bible because aspects of the personalities and human situations found within permeate all cultures and generations.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly Disagree

21. John's gospel utilizes contrasts to help him tell his story about Jesus. What are some examples of contrasts that the author utilizes?

22. There is no need for formal Bible studies because the Holy Spirit tells people what they need to know every time they read the Bible.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly Disagree

23. I think all Christians should read the Bible.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly Disagree

24. For the salvation of humanity through Jesus Christ to be available, why is it imperative that Jesus actually die on the cross as opposed to just having survived the cross?

APPENDIX D

POST BIBLE STUDY FOCUS GROUP INSTRUMENT

1. Did your knowledge of the Gospel of John expand as a result of your utilization of the inductive Bible study as opposed to other Bible study methods? If so, briefly describe what you learned.
2. If not, briefly describe why you think you did not learn anything new about the Gospel of John because of your utilization of the inductive Bible study method as opposed to other Bible study methods.
3. Did your attitude about the Bible change as a result of your utilization of the inductive Bible study as opposed to other Bible study methods? If so, did your attitude get better or worse?
4. Did the style or content of the inductive Bible study contribute to your change of attitude? If so, explain.
5. Since the completion of your participation in the inductive Bible study of the Gospel of John, what changes, if any, occurred in your personal Bible reading habits?
6. If you are reading the Bible more, or applying an inductive research method to your Bible reading as a result of your participation in the inductive Bible study, what happened in the study that sustained your changed habits?
7. Thinking in general terms, what aspect of the Bible study benefited you most? Please explain.
8. Thinking in general terms, what aspect of the Bible study did you least like? Please explain?
9. What do you wish was included in the Bible study that was not?
10. What do you wish was not included in the Bible study that was?
11. How would you describe the inductive style of studying the Bible to a friend?
12. Do you have any questions concerning this research project?

APPENDIX E

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN BIBLE STUDY

The following is an outline of the first week's session of the Bible study. This is a six-week study covering the entire Gospel of John. The gospel is divided into six sections and each week's lesson is subdivided into four steps.

Step 1 describes the section's theme and provides background information such as historical, theological, and socio-economical. In Step 2 participants conduct a quick reading of the section, listing any repetitions, common themes, etc. that extend throughout the section. Step 3 is the most in depth portion of the study. Here, participants conduct a slow and careful reading of the text and answer the provided questions. The first two steps prepare the participant for this step. The participants utilize the information provided in Step 1 and the overview and thematic aspects of Step 2, then provide the best possible answers to each of the questions in Step 3.

After Step 3 is complete and the participants discover truths of the Bible that are provided through a deeper reading, Step 4 offers them a chance to apply the knowledge to their life in tangible ways and gives them the opportunity to develop their own inductive research focused on a topic that attracted them in the text.

Session 1

Grand Entrance: Introducing God on Earth

Text: John 1.1 – 4.54

Step 1 (*Read this overview of the section.*)

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are written to people who know Jewish history. The authors anticipate their readers' understanding of the importance of genealogy as it pertains to a person's status in their culture, and especially as it pertains to a coming Messiah. Those three gospels are very similar in content, meaning they share many of the same stories, sentence structure, language, order, etc. This is why Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the "Synoptic Gospels". Synoptic comes from the Greek words *syn*, meaning "together", "same" and *optic*, meaning "seen". So, woodenly the word synoptic means "seen the same," but in general it refers to all the aspects of the Gospels having a common source, that being Mark. It's widely understood that Matthew and Luke were referencing Mark's Gospel when writing theirs, thus the strong commonality.

John's gospel, on the other hand, marches to the beat of a different drummer. There is no concern about explaining Jesus' messianic authenticity by listing his ancestry as do Matthew and Luke. It has very few direct references to Old Testament Scripture, and there are no parables (although Jesus does utilize metaphors and figures of speech). John's Gospel is also known for being more emotive than the other three. This gospel seems to have a stronger emotive undercurrent than the other three Gospels; this undercurrent helps the reader understand Jesus' humanity as opposed to beliefs that suggest Jesus was not fully human but mostly spirit.

It's widely agreed that John's Gospel was written in or around 100 A.D. This Gospel has been likened to a collection of journal entries by one of Jesus' close friends who decided to piece them together into a memoir in order to tell the world about his beloved friend. In John's Gospel, we find Jesus weeping, partying, seeking alone-time, passionately praying for his followers, fussing at his followers, laying low as to avoid torture, and having friends among other common attributes and tendencies of everyday people. The other three Gospels describe Jesus similarly, but John's Gospel seems to present Jesus with a little more rawness and vulnerability.

This first section focuses on stories that introduce Jesus to an audience who is unfamiliar with him. If you had time to effectively introduce one of your good friends to someone, you would probably include stories that exemplify the type of person he is by describing different types of situations. This is exactly what John does in the first part of his Gospel. He describes Jesus interacting with all types of people so the reader can get a good idea of his personality.

Step 2 *(In order to become more familiar with this section, quickly read the first four chapters. Notice any details you see that may be the author's attempt to introduce various attributes and characteristics of Jesus. Jot them in the space provided for each chapter.)*

Note: *This study is subjective. There are no expected or predetermined answers. The beauty of this study is that the Holy Spirit illuminates different things for different*

people while they are reading Scripture, and when individuals bring this into a group discussion, the entire group is strengthened!

Chapter 1:

Chapter 2:

Chapter 3:

Chapter 4:

Step 3 (*Reread John 1-4. This time try to slow down and do as close a reading as possible. Build on the observations you made in Step 2.*)

Note: The following questions should be answered as a guide. Participants should not become overburdened by answering every question if they are not able. These questions are designed to illuminate aspects of Scripture the participants may not have noticed. This illumination should cause them not only to have a deeper understanding of God's Word but also to wrestle with various topics of Christianity and the ways they apply to their lives. This study is subjective. There are no expected or predetermined answers. The inductive questions are in bold. Some have statements providing supporting information for the questions.

Do you see common themes in the author's introduction (John 1:1 - 4:54) of Jesus? Explain.

When asking questions it's always a good idea to ask Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? It's also a good habit to list any references you may recognize from another part of the Bible. **For instance, does John 1:1-4 sound like another passage from Scripture?**

Why might the author begin his story similarly to the way the Bible begins?

God called someone to introduce Jesus to the Jewish community. His name is John. Over time John was remembered for baptizing many people so he is fondly called John the Baptist. **What are some key things John says about Jesus?**

What are some comments in John the Baptist's introduction of Jesus (John 1:19 - 36) that are helpful for the reader to get to know Jesus better?

There are few better ways to get to know someone than by spending time with that person. In the ancient Jewish culture, hospitality was greatly esteemed. A person's reputation largely revolved around his or her willingness and ability to be hospitable to others. **When John the Baptist's disciples see Jesus and ask where he's staying, how does Jesus respond? How would you respond in that situation? Would you invite a stranger into your home for a few days?**

What does Jesus' response say about him and his desire and ability to build relationships with people?

Now let's look at the story of Jesus gathering his first disciples found in John 1:43-51. Look at the conversations and interactions each disciple has with Jesus, or with the person who leads him to Jesus. **Which disciple do you most relate to? Why?**

The second chapter of John's Gospel contains two of the stories that are not found in the other three gospels. The story about Jesus participating in a wedding ceremony and after party is quite revealing of his personality and his level of interaction with his peers. **Read John 2:1 - 12 and list some characteristics about Jesus revealed in the story.**

What do we learn about his disciples as a response to the water changing to wine? What can we assume about Jesus based on the disciples' response?

Why do you think Jesus changed the water to wine?

The next story in the second chapter is one of the most discussed concerning Jesus. Many people have wrestled with the ways that the story of Jesus cleansing the Temple should be applied to the local church. **Were Jesus' actions justified? Why?**

Do you think something from this story should be applied to the local church? Explain.

What can we learn about Jesus from his actions?

John's third chapter contains, by far, the most popular verse in the Bible; John 3:16. (This verse's popularity has an interesting story. It would be good to look it up and learn how God can work through anybody!) But that single verse is entrenched in a very powerful and revealing story that gives us insight to why Jesus came to earth. **Briefly summarize John 3:1-21.**

What can we learn about Nicodemus based on his interaction with Jesus? (For example, why does he come to Jesus? Why does he come to him at night?)

The Pharisees were very knowledgeable of Jewish religious rules and were known for opposing Jesus. **Nicodemus was a Pharisee; does he initially acknowledge Jesus with respect?**

What can we learn about Jesus based on his interaction with Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee?

Does Jesus answer Nicodemus' questions directly?

What seems to be Jesus' tone while talking with the Pharisee?

What does Jesus claim about himself in this conversation?

How can we apply what we learned about Jesus through his interaction with Nicodemus to our daily lives?

The fourth chapter of John's Gospel cuts to the chase concerning who Jesus is and why he is here. The reader learns these facts about Jesus in a quite peculiar way, through a conversation with someone he shouldn't be talking to in a city in which he shouldn't be. Read John 4:1-45 and list some facts you observe. Here are some questions to get you started. **Why is he in Samaria? Why is he alone with a woman? How does Jesus respond when her past is revealed? What is the woman's response when she realizes Jesus is a prophet?**

What can the reader learn about Jesus based on his interaction with the Samaritan woman? (A Jew would never talk with a Samaritan, much less a Jewish man talk with a Samaritan woman.)

Immediately following this story about Jesus breaking all kinds of cultural rules, John places a miracle story about Jesus where he talks with a Gentile (non-Jewish person) and heals his little boy from a distance. The fourth chapter includes Jesus interacting with people that good, law-abiding Jews should not. **Why do you think these two stories are side by side?**

How do Jesus and the Gentile official relate to each to one another?

What might the author be conveying to the readers about Jesus?

Step 4 *(Use this space to describe how you've grown in your understanding of the Bible and/or Jesus as a result of your study of this section.)*

After reading this introductory section of John's Gospel, do you know Jesus better—or differently—than you did prior to this study? Explain.

How can you apply what you've learned to your daily life?

Use this space to list possibilities to help settle on a conclusion for a situation in the text in order to understand it better.

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