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BEST BIBLE STUDY METHODS FOR DISCIPLESHIP FORMATION: HOW BIBLE STUDY AS A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE SHAPES BELIEVERS

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BEST BIBLE STUDY METHODS FOR DISCIPLESHIP FORMATION:
HOW BIBLE STUDY AS A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE SHAPES BELIEVERS

MASTER'S THESIS

PRESENTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
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BY

SANDY CHERY

SUMMER 2023

THESIS COMMITTEE SIGNATURE PAGE

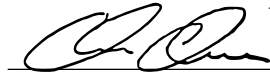
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Under the direction of the candidate's Thesis Committee and approved by all members of the Committee, it has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the Barnett College of Ministry and Theology of Southeastern University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Divinity.

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ABSTRACT

Because the Christian faith depends upon Christ's life, teachings, death, and resurrection, believers should strive to become more like Him daily. In this regard, the late theologian C.S. Lewis would argue that every Christian should become a “little Christ.” According to research conducted by Barna Research Group, four of five Christians list personal spiritual development and having a deep commitment to Christ as a priority. However, only one in five Christians is involved in any spiritual development activities outside of attending church services. Thus, few Christians are actually investing energy into their spiritual growth. Discipleship formation, known interchangeably as spiritual formation, is the process in which followers of Christ embark to become like Him— thus, transformation is the goal. Many spiritual disciplines facilitate the spiritual growth of believers; however, Bible study is fundamental, as it not only helps believers gain insight into God and the Christian faith but also regarding what it means to be Christlike. This thesis aims to demonstrate that Bible study as a spiritual discipline is essential for transformative discipleship formation for believers within the Christian community. Therefore, employing effective Bible study methods during personal Bible study is necessary so that it may shape the lives of those called to follow Christ. In this respect, four Bible study methods will be examined in this thesis paper and promoted for use in personal Bible study for discipleship formation for those in the Christian community.

Dedication

In loving memory of my father, Joseph Chery, who taught me what it means to cherish every moment of life. May you continue to rest peacefully.

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INTRODUCTION

THE THESIS, TASK, AND FLOW

The Thesis and the Task

Many religions exist today; however, Christianity continues to be the largest religious group in the world. According to a report published by the *Pew Research Center*, approximately one-third of the world's population professes to be Christian¹ and comprises individuals within three primary Christian branches: Protestantism, Catholicism, and Eastern Orthodoxy.² Other major religions worldwide include Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism, and though there are key differences among their beliefs, one thing that stands in common is that each religion holds high regard for sacred texts. Considering this, “many faiths have a rich history of revered and honored texts, be they the Word of God as revealed to prophets, oral stories retold by one generation to another over centuries, or the sayings of a Teacher written down eventually into books.”³ It is through the use of these texts that one can actualize the vast history and beliefs of a religious tradition; therefore, in most religions, reading and careful interpretation of these written texts are crucial. Within Christianity, the Bible, also known as the Word of God, is considered the primary sacred text in which believers engage to gain insight into its rich history and common beliefs.

Generally, it is believed that “the Bible holds immense influence as one of history’s most impactful books, permeating our culture. It boasts an astounding record of being translated into thousands of languages, selling billions of copies worldwide, and containing thousands of verses that have inspired countless generations.”⁴ Also, engagement with the Bible is not only

¹ Pew Research Center, “The Changing Global Religious Landscape,” accessed July 29, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/> .

² Trevin Wax, “Quick Guide to Christian Denominations,” accessed July 29, 2023, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/quick-guide-christian-denominations/> .

³ Jody Ondich, *World Religions: The Spirit Searching*, (Pressbooks, 2021), 30.

⁴ Gitnux, “Bible Statistics and Trends in 2023,” accessed July 29, 2023, <https://blog.gitnux.com/bible-statistics/> .

beneficial for providing historical context of the Christian faith and its beliefs, as previously stated, but because Christianity is based on the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it also serves as a guide for believers to be more like Him. C.S. Lewis would suggest that “He came to this world and became a man in order to spread to other men the kind of life He has—by what I call ‘good infection.’ Every Christian is to become a little Christ.”⁵ To be a follower of Christ is to be His disciple.

What does it mean to be a true disciple of Christ and become more like Him? “Given the textual complexity of the Bible, some Christians have attempted to clarify what Jesus taught and how he lived, so that people might truly follow him.”⁶ This clarity often comes as one engages with the Bible using hermeneutical methods for proper interpretation and understanding that will enlighten believers regarding discipleship. If believers within the Christian community are going to continue to grow in their knowledge of Christ so that they might follow and become more like Him, then engagement with the Bible is fundamental. This thesis aims to demonstrate that Bible study as a spiritual discipline is essential for transformative discipleship formation for believers within the Christian community. Therefore, employing effective Bible study methods during personal Bible study is necessary so that it may shape the lives of those called to follow Christ.

Structure and Flow of the Argument

This thesis paper will be presented in three chapters to accomplish this task. In the first chapter, entitled “Spiritual Formation, Discipleship, and How the Bible Shapes Followers of Christ,” I will introduce the topic of spiritual formation and how it relates to discipleship, discuss the state of discipleship in the American Protestant church and why Bible study should be treated as a spiritual discipline, which shapes believers. In the second chapter, entitled “The Best Bible

⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), 177.

⁶ Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions*, (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2014), 303.

Study Methods for Discipleship Formation,” I will discuss the historicity of the Bible, along with the basic beliefs about the Bible within Protestantism, a major branch of Christianity. I will also introduce the topic of hermeneutics and present four Bible Study methods that believers can use to learn more about their faith, which will aid in developing transformational discipleship formation. The methods that will be discussed include inductive, narrative, topical, and character study. In the third chapter, entitled “Practically Employing the Methods,” I will demonstrate how these Bible study methods can be used by believers during personal Bible study, examining several passages from the Bible in light of how one is to correctly use these methods for effective Bible study. Overall, this thesis paper will serve as a launching pad to encourage discipleship formation and increased engagement with the Bible within the Christian community, as they assist believers to grow spiritually and be genuinely transformed by the power of Christ.

CHAPTER ONE

SPIRITUAL FORMATION, DISCIPLESHIP, AND HOW THE BIBLE SHAPES FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST

Introduction

Spiritual growth is something all believers must strive for as they embark on the journey to know, follow, and live for Christ. All believers must ponder whether they are growing in Christ at some point in their faith journey. The reality about growth is that whether an individual chooses to grow spiritually is optional. John Maxwell once stated, “change is inevitable. Growth is optional.”⁷ This was originally stated concerning change management; however, this is also true of spiritual growth. Believers must be eager to display the fruit of their spiritual growth as they follow Christ. Spiritual growth can be compared to physical growth in that “we do not expect to put an infant into its crib at night and in the morning find a child, an adolescent or yet an adult. We expect that infant to grow into maturity according to the processes that God has ordained for physical growth to wholeness.”⁸ This is also true of our spiritual growth.

Scripture reveals that Jesus himself grew both spiritually and physically. Luke 2:52 states, “and Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”⁹ Here, we see that Jesus, while in His youth, began to grow in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and with people. This same growth is also available to believers today; however, they must be willing to participate in processes that promote spiritual growth and yearn to see spiritual growth occur in their lives. As stated by G. Steve Kinnard in his book *The Outward Spiritual Journey*, “God wants us to grow, so he is fully committed to helping us develop into solid, mature

⁷ Maxwell Leadership Team, “The Leading Edge: The Importance of Changing Your Mind,” accessed July 29, 2023, <https://johnmaxwellteam.com/the-leading-edge-importance-of-changing-mind/>.

⁸ M. Robert Mulholland Jr. and Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016) 25.

⁹ Luke 2:52, ESV.

disciples. But too often, we are haphazard about our own spiritual growth. It is hit or miss. We do not have a plan. We each need to formulate an individual plan for spiritual growth and then work the plan.”¹⁰ Considering this, in this chapter, I will introduce the topic of spiritual formation and how it encourages spiritual growth as it relates to forming disciples for Christ. This will be followed by exploring the current state of discipleship within the American Protestant church and why Bible study is considered a spiritual discipline that aids in discipleship formation. And finally, an argument about how the Bible shapes people will be developed.

What is Spiritual Formation?

Within the last two decades, the topic of spiritual formation has gained significant attention within the Protestant Christian church. This increased popularity has created a demand for spiritual formation resources, institutions, teaching, and training. Beyond the sphere of the church, this interest has also reached academia as well. Considering this, it has also called for a greater need to understand and clarify what spiritual formation truly is. Historically, the term spiritual formation is connected to the Roman Catholic church; however, how they define spiritual formation differs from that of the Protestant church. In the Roman Catholic church, spiritual formation explicitly deals with training ministers to do full-time ministry in the academic setting alongside spiritual disciplines such as prayer and fasting.¹¹ In contrast, there has been no uniform way to define spiritual formation in the Protestant church.

However, in his book *Invitation to a Journey*, M. Robert Mulholland Jr. proposes his definition of spiritual formation. He proposes a fourfold definition. First, spiritual formation is a process. Second, it is a process of being formed. Third, believers are formed in the image of

¹⁰ G. Steve Kinnard, *The Outward Spiritual Journey: Relationships, Evangelism, Simplicity, Service, and Daily Discipleship*, (CBDT Press, 2023), chap. 1, Kindle.

¹¹ Wilson Teo, “Christian Spiritual Formation,” *Emerging Leadership Journeys* 10, no. 1, (2017), 139.

Christ. Lastly, spiritual formation is for the sake of others. Ultimately, “it is the experience of being shaped by God towards spiritual wholeness.”¹² To elaborate further, he argues that spiritual formation works directly against our culture, which is deeply ingrained in the search for instant gratification because spiritual growth happens over time, and often, there is no clear way to distinguish any specific growth pattern. Second, in being formed, believers yield control over their formation process to allow God to transform them into his image—believers cannot form themselves. Third, believers are formed in the image of Christ to both love and serve as Christ did. Regarding this, “the image of Christ brings cleansing, healing, restoration, renewal, - transformation and wholeness into the unclean, diseased, broken, imprisoned, dead incompleteness of our lives.”¹³ Lastly, spiritual formation does not only serve believers individually but also corporately, as Christ has called those to follow Him to not only be in a relationship with God but with others as well.

Interestingly, these last two aspects of Mulholland’s definition of spiritual formation, being formed in the image of Christ and building relationships with others, are the theological foundations for spiritual formation.¹⁴ For example, 2 Corinthians 3:18, written by the Apostle Paul, states, “and we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”¹⁵ This “being transformed” into the image of Christ is important in recovering the image of God in humanity. *Imago Dei* is a Latin term that means “image of God”¹⁶ and is first introduced in the book of Genesis. Genesis 1:26-27 states, “then God said,

¹² Mulholland Jr. and Barton, *Invitation to a Journey*, 20.

¹³ Mulholland Jr. and Barton, *Invitation to a Journey*, 42.

¹⁴ Teo, “Christian Spiritual Formation,” 141.

¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 3:18, ESV.

¹⁶ Christianity.com, “What Does ‘Imago Dei’ Mean? The Image of God in the Bible,” accessed July 30, 2023, <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/bible/image-of-god-meaning-imago-dei-in-the-bible.html> .

‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”¹⁷ Due to the Fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, God’s image was “perverted... therefore Jesus Christ came to earth as God’s last sinless Adam and the perfect representative of God’s imago Dei which the first Adam lost... when Jesus Christ came to redeem humanity, he came not only to restore humanity’s relationship with God, he also came to restore God’s original image in humanity as well.”¹⁸ Thus, spiritual formation, as outlined by the Apostle Paul, is a process that transforms believers in the likeness of Christ to restore God’s glory in all of creation¹⁹ and “the contemplation of God’s glory transforms believers into Christlikeness from ‘glory to glory.’”²⁰

What Are Spiritual Disciplines?

The journey to becoming Christ-like progresses as one engages in spiritual disciplines. Historically, the early church “linked the desire for more of God to intentional practices, relationships, and experiences that gave people space in their lives to ‘keep company’ with Jesus. These intentional practices, relationships, and experiences we know as spiritual disciplines.”²¹ For example, in the book of Acts, the church, as a result of developing the spiritual disciplines, began to grow. Acts 2:42 states, “and they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”²² There are four elements to consider, which “characterize the life of the Spirit,”²³ including teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer.

¹⁷ Genesis 1:26-27, ESV.

¹⁸ Teo, “Christian Spiritual Formation,” 141.

¹⁹ Alex Tang, *Till We Are Fully Formed: Christian Spiritual Formation Paradigms in the English-speaking Presbyterian churches in Malaysia*, (Singapore: Armour Publishers, 2014), 79.

²⁰ Mitzi L. Minor, *2 Corinthians*, (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2009), 79.

²¹ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 22.

²² Acts 2:42, ESV.

²³ Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts (Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament)*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 48.

First, regarding the apostles' teaching, John B. Polhill suggests, "just as the apostles had been instructed by Jesus, so they passed along that instruction to the new Christians. This would have included such subjects as his resurrection, the Old Testament Scriptures, the Christian witness, and their own reminiscences of Jesus' earthly ministry and teachings."²⁴ Second, regarding fellowship, the book of Acts "gives a beautiful picture of participation in the life of the believing community at Jerusalem. It portrays a mutual commitment to God that helps one sense the deeper meaning of fellowship."²⁵ Third, the breaking of bread was essential to corporate worship for the early church and emulated the Lord's Supper, which was a "revelatory experience with the Risen Lord."²⁶ Lastly, "this reference to 'the prayers,' more than anything evokes the picture of a more established or regular liturgical practice,"²⁷ though it could also imply spontaneous prayer.

As such, disciplines that promote spiritual growth are both personal and interpersonal.²⁸ Richard J. Foster suggests a threefold framework for spiritual disciplines: inward disciplines, which include meditation, prayer, fasting, and study; outward disciplines, which include simplicity, solitude, submission, and service; and corporate disciplines, which include confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.²⁹ Additionally, Dallas Willard presents another framework in which the disciplines are made up of two classes: disciplines of abstinence, which include solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, and sacrifice, and disciplines of

²⁴ John B. Polhill, *Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2014), 99.

²⁵ Lawrence O. Richards and A. Zondervan, *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words*, (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2015), 372.

²⁶ Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts (Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament)*, 49.

²⁷ James D. G. Dunn and Scot McKnight, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2016), 50.

²⁸ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 5-9.

²⁹ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 82.

engagement, which include study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and submission.³⁰ Spiritual disciplines are tools to facilitate spiritual growth and transformation, and they do not “‘give us brownie points’ or help us ‘work the system’ for a passing grade from God. They simply put us in a place where we can begin to notice God and respond to His word to us,”³¹ and his call to follow.

How Spiritual Formation Relates to Discipleship Formation

Different Christian scholars have defined the term spiritual formation as the “various facets of the spiritual growth journey of believers... Others see spiritual formation as a restoration to the spiritual disciplines and practices of the early church desert fathers... while others have seen it as the discipleship process that believers must be part of as true followers of Christ.”³² The term “discipleship” is often used synonymously with spiritual formation. Regarding how these terms relate, Dallas Willard suggests spiritual formation is a training process in which disciples of Christ embark; therefore, spiritual formation and discipleship develop believers for the life of the Kingdom of God, which comes through Christ—who has risen.³³ Additionally, some advocate that spiritual formation and discipleship hold the same biblical significance, promoting spiritual growth and change.³⁴ Some have also concluded that spiritual formation and discipleship are the same; however, spiritual formation is simply a more modern term for discipleship, as the term discipleship is losing its relevance in the church today.³⁵ In this thesis paper, the terms spiritual formation and discipleship formation will be used interchangeably, with the overall goal of

³⁰ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 82.

³¹ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 24.

³² Teo, “Christian Spiritual Formation,” 138-139.

³³ Alan Andrews, ed., *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, (Colorado, Springs: NavPress, 2010), 55.

³⁴ Katie French, “What is Spiritual Formation—and Why Does it Matter?,” accessed July 30, 2023, <https://www.logos.com/grow/what-is-spiritual-formation-and-why-does-it-matter/#easy-footnote-bottom-1-118924>.

³⁵ Teo, “Christian Spiritual Formation,” 140.

advocating for spiritual growth and transformation within the Christian community.

When considering the mission of the Christian church, Jesus states explicitly that believers are to go and “make disciples of all nations”³⁶ in the Great Commission, as recorded in Matthew’s gospel. Because Jesus commanded disciple-making, it is something that the church must embrace today. The term “disciple” must first be explored to clarify discipleship. Bill Hull, a speaker and author on discipleship, argues that it is imperative to identify what a disciple is, as it should be a top priority within the Christian church. Unfortunately, the word is often thrown around loosely, lacking an accurate definition.³⁷ In defining a disciple, believers must first know that the most common word used for the term disciple in the New Testament is *mathetes*, a Greek term that means “to learn.” Also, the English term for disciple derives from the Latin term *discipulus* and is defined similarly. There are other New Testament Greek words related to the term disciple; for example, the term *mathano* also means to learn, but more specifically, to learn new things. This term is used 25 times in the New Testament, while the term *mathetes* is used over 250 times about leaders such as the twelve disciples, John the Baptist, and the Pharisees.³⁸ Ultimately, “the term used for disciple refers to someone who is a learner or follower who serves as an apprentice under the tutelage of a master,”³⁹ or to learn from and follow Christ through complete obedience—it “demonstrates spiritual formation in terms of character and service.”⁴⁰

Now that the term “disciple” has been defined, the term “discipleship” must also be defined. The term discipleship is not used directly in the Bible; however, the concept is presented throughout scripture, especially in the four gospel accounts. In the Old Testament, two Hebrew

³⁶ Matthew 28:19, ESV.

³⁷ Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor*, (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1988), 54.

³⁸ Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 12.

³⁹ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBook Press, 2021), 17.

⁴⁰ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 14.

words are used for disciples: *talmid* and *limmud*. The term *talmid* “occurs in 1 Chronicles 25:8 and refers to a student or apprentice in musical instruction.”⁴¹ The term *limmud* is used in “Isaiah 8:16 when Isaiah refers to the group gathered around him as ‘my disciples,’ in Isaiah 50:4 where discipleship is characterized by an educational process accentuating speaking and listening,”⁴² and Isaiah 54:13 implies that such a relationship can apply to both a human master or God directly. In the New Testament, this concept is alluded to in the Sermon on the Mount, as historically, it has continued to challenge believers to live according to Christ’s standards—it displays what it means to live morally and what it means to follow Jesus partaking in God’s vision for the Kingdom.⁴³ This concept also arises from the deliberate training process that the twelve disciples underwent while following Jesus. They serve as an example of how believers are to follow Christ today, displaying what it means to obey, as they had given up everything to follow Him despite their fears.⁴⁴

In calling Peter and Andrew, two fishermen, Jesus stated, “‘follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men,’”⁴⁵ and Scripture reveals that these two men immediately followed Him. This statement is significant because Jesus lived in a time when the Jewish culture was prominent, and a tradition of teaching was valued; thus, rabbis were called to both teach and demonstrate what it meant to follow the Scriptures, specifically the Torah. However, a key difference is that Jewish disciples chose their own rabbi, whereas Jesus personally chose his disciples.⁴⁶ Thus, Jesus, being the master of the Christian faith, personally walked with the

⁴¹ Martina Gracin and Ervin Budiselic, “Discipleship in the Context of Judaism in Jesus’ Time Part I,” *Kairos: Evangelical Journal of Theology* 13, no. 2 (2019): 207.

⁴² Gracin and Budiselic, “Discipleship in the Context of Judaism in Jesus’ Time Part I,” 207.

⁴³ Joshua T. Searle, “Is the Sermon on the Mount Too Unrealistic to Serve as a Resource for Christian Discipleship and Spiritual Formation?” *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 9, no. 2 (January 2009): 38.

⁴⁴ Peter Edmonds, “Mark’s Gospel: Discipleship and Formation.” *The Way* 56, no. 1 (January 2017): 17.

⁴⁵ Mark 1:17-18, ESV.

⁴⁶ Joseph Mattera, “Contrasting the Discipleship Methods of Jesus and Jewish Rabbis,” accessed September 9, 2023, <https://josephmattera.org/contrasting-the-discipleship-methods-of-jesus-and-jewish-rabbis/>.

disciples, and they witnessed all that he did during his earthly ministry. Their training was practical in nature, as they experienced hands-on training. But Jesus deliberately took them through a training process for approximately three years because he understood that someday he would not be present with them—he needed to ensure they understood the things of the faith so that while He was gone, they could also train others in the way of faith as well. Jesus did not train them to prepare for an occupation, but rather, a lifestyle that would be centered in Him. Discipleship, therefore, is “becoming a complete and competent follower of Jesus Christ. It is about the intentional training of people who voluntarily submit to the Lordship of Christ and who want to become imitators of Him in every thought, word, and deed.”⁴⁷ Discipleship transforms those called to follow Christ as they learn to imitate Him in all they do.

A common theme within discipleship is the idea that believers must choose to obey Christ. As stated previously, discipleship implies obedience. In his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer outlines what it means to be a disciple of Christ, emphasizing obedience. Bonhoeffer suggests that discipleship begins with a call to follow Christ, which is a direct result of the grace of God. Once this call goes forth, it must be followed by a response—obedience. This example is seen as the twelve disciples are called by Jesus, which then yields a response of obedience to follow Him. Bonhoeffer argues that their obedience to the call is not an act of faith but rather obedience, and the immediate response to follow Him solely rests on the fact that Jesus Himself is calling—he has the ultimate authority to demand obedience and follow Him. Also, discipleship does not merit a predictable journey; it cannot be calculated, but it does call for one to surrender the old life to embrace the new. It calls for an attachment to Christ that is exclusive in nature. Further, to Bonhoeffer, “discipleship means adherence to Christ, and

⁴⁷ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 17-18.

because Christ is the object of that adherence, it must take the form of discipleship... Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship. And Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.”⁴⁸

The State of Discipleship

Leaders within the Christian church admit that they often “contemplated the condition of American Christianity.”⁴⁹ Not only should the church consider its growth corporately, but believers within these churches should also consider their personal growth in Christ—are they truly following, obeying, and becoming more like Christ? This is what spiritual formation and discipleship are all about, as revealed previously—maturity and transformation in Christ. Unfortunately, leaders have often associated spiritual growth within the church by evaluating church attendance, budgets, and the number of programs offered. However, while these are good indicators of a healthy church, these do not reveal whether the believers who attend are actually maturing in Christ. Research conducted by *Barna Research Group* reveals that when believers are asked about personal life goals, they list personal spiritual development as a priority, and four of five states having a deep commitment to Christ is important. However, when asked what their greatest hope in life is without specifying any specific goals, only 20 percent suggest anything related to their spirituality. As such, “most believers say their faith matters, but few are investing much energy in the pursuit of spiritual growth,”⁵⁰ and only one out of five believers are involved in any spiritual development activities outside of attending church services. These statistics are a cause of concern; therefore, Bible study, specifically as a spiritual discipline, is essential for the spiritual growth and transformation that occurs in discipleship and will be discussed in this thesis

⁴⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1995), 59.

⁴⁹ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, xii.

⁵⁰ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 34.

paper.

How the Bible Shapes Us

Research reveals that about 99 percent of Christians in the United States own a Bible, and many own more than one Bible.⁵¹ The *American Bible Society*, in their study, “State of the Bible 2023,” finds that 39 percent of Americans are Bible users; however, they define Bible users as those who use the Bible more than three times per year. This has dropped since 2020, when 50 percent of Americans claimed to be Bible users. But, overall, 24 percent of Americans say they use the Bible on their own at least once a week outside of church services.⁵² Further, when considering the activities in which believers can engage to facilitate spiritual growth, 25 percent of believers express interest in using a sermon outline for further Bible study. Also, 14 percent expressed they would participate in an online chat to discuss Bible principles or a weekly class that focused on Biblical principles. Lastly, 12 percent of believers would be interested in attending seminary-level Bible teaching courses.⁵³ These low numbers are quite alarming and may indicate why leaders are concerned about whether the church is experiencing the level of spiritual transformation it should be. As a spiritual discipline, believers must prioritize Bible study if they truly desire to become more like Christ. The question is why—why do believers need to study the Bible to grow spiritually?

First, the “Bible calls us to, and illustrates the use of, spiritual disciplines as invitations to grace and ways and means of living well in the Kingdom and in the world.”⁵⁴ Second, after Christ had ascended, the early church had developed spiritual disciplines as mentioned previously—they became a church characterized by teaching and learning. Teaching scripture is

⁵¹ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 63.

⁵² Jeffrey Fulks, Randy Petersen, and John Farquhar Plake, *State of the Bible*, (American Bible Society, 2023), 6.

⁵³ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 49.

⁵⁴ Andrews, ed., *The Kingdom Life*, 275.

essential and is pivotal for Christian worship communally; however, learning the truth of scripture is essential for personal transformation.⁵⁵ Regarding this, Jesus states, “if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”⁵⁶ But, most importantly, believers must engage with the Bible because it is the Word of God; therefore, careful study of it is beneficial in many ways. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 sheds some light on its benefits, stating, “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”⁵⁷ To say Scripture is “breathed out” by God is to imply its divine origin and authority; therefore, it has the power to teach, reproof, correct, and train up believers. So, because the Bible is the inspired Word of God, it has the power to shape believers.

The term “shape” means to be given a particular form or to be created. To suggest that the Bible, or the Word of God, shapes believers is to say that it forms us in a particular way. Biblically, when considering what it means to be shaped by God, it is natural to think of passages that speak about God being the potter, as believers are His clay. For example, Isaiah 64:8 states, “but now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.”⁵⁸ Additionally, Jeremiah 18 gives another glimpse of what it means for God to be our potter. The prophet Jeremiah states, “So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do.”⁵⁹ When reflecting on the natural process of creating pottery, the way in which the potter shapes the clay is essential

⁵⁵ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 58.

⁵⁶ John 8:31-32, ESV.

⁵⁷ 1 Timothy 3:16-17, ESV.

⁵⁸ Isaiah 64:8, ESV.

⁵⁹ Jeremiah 18:3-4, ESV.

to the overall process. As a potter places clay on the potter's wheel, they will continue to work and rework the clay until it has been shaped to their liking. As such, "with his hands, the potter molds the clay into the intended shape, but the slightest wrong movement can make it fail, requiring the potter to start again from scratch. The potter is in charge, yet the clay does not always end up as intended."⁶⁰

In context, this passage refers to the nation of Israel, and as God's chosen people, they were "required to be distinctive in their behavior. Yet in Jeremiah's day, they behaved even worse than the others did."⁶¹ Therefore, through the prophetic demonstration of the potter and the wheel, God was warning Israel that He was in charge, and "just as the potter has plans for his clay, so God has plans for the nations, including Israel. However, the behavior of a nation, the 'quality of the clay,' determines what God will do with it."⁶² The spiritual lesson here is rich in that God constantly works to shape believers into what He has envisioned—to be like Christ. However, because believers are not fully committed to allowing Him to shape them, the shaping process is delayed or ceases completely, often having to start the shaping process over again. This is why studying the Bible is crucial; it not only allows believers to understand why God wants to shape us but also how we are to be shaped.

In his book *Shaped by the Word*, M. Robert Mulholland Jr. suggests that discipleship formation aims to "break the crust."⁶³ The crust that is broken in discipleship formation is that of "self." He argues that believers often approach the text of the Bible through the lens and perception of their false self; however, when engaging in spiritual disciplines such as reading and

⁶⁰ Hetty Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 168.

⁶¹ Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 168.

⁶² Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*:168.

⁶³ M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2000), 111.

studying the Bible, one can come to find one's true self in Christ. Therefore, when engaging with the biblical text, believers must embrace a formational approach to reading it instead of an informational approach. The formational approach to engaging with Scripture allows God to speak to one's spiritual self. He states, "instead of the text being an object we control and manipulate according to our own insight and purposes, the text becomes the subject of the reading relationship; we are the object that is shaped by the text... we will willingly stand before the text and await its address."⁶⁴ Further, "the primary work of God's grace in our lives is to liberate us from the destructive bondage to the crust of self in order to shape us into wholeness... This new structure is one of increasing Christlikeness."⁶⁵

Summary

In summary, spiritual growth is something that all believers must strive for as they look to know, follow, and live for Christ. Spiritual growth is optional; it is something believers must choose to do. The choice to follow Christ is one which stems from the understanding that because God has given Christ all authority, he has the authority to call us to total obedience to follow his call. Believers must understand that the call to follow Christ means embracing everything he taught and did during his earthly ministry. Spiritual formation, which aims to form believers in the image of Christ, is synonymous with discipleship, as discipleship formation results from becoming a fully competent follower and imitator of Christ through intentional training and practicing obedience. There are spiritual disciplines that true disciples of Christ will embrace and practice throughout their lives; however, studying Scripture is vital. Scripture outlines what God intends for believers to become and makes room for transformation, as it is God's inscripturated Word to believers—it shapes us. Since engagement with the Bible is crucial for believers, in

⁶⁴ Mulholland Jr., *Shaped by the Word*, 57.

⁶⁵ Mulholland Jr., *Shaped by the Word*, 113.

chapter two, I will discuss the historicity of the Bible and the basic beliefs about the Bible within Protestantism. I will also introduce the topic of hermeneutics and present four Bible Study methods that believers can use during personal Bible study, which will aid in developing transformational discipleship formation.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BEST BIBLE STUDY METHODS FOR DISCIPLESHIP FORMATION

Introduction

The Apostle Paul, after his conversion, embarked on three missionary journeys where he traveled throughout the Roman empire to preach in Jewish synagogues for the sake of the gospel. As a result, some were receptive to his message, while others rejected it. During Paul's second missionary journey, he encountered a group of Bereans who dedicated themselves to the careful study of the Bible. Paul and his ministry companion, Silas, found themselves in the city of Berea following the persecution by the Jews in Thessalonica, who were threatened by the conversions that took place due to Paul's preaching of the Word of God.⁶⁶ Berea, a city about 50 miles away from Thessalonica, was where Paul found himself evangelizing once more to a group of Jews. However, these Jews responded to Paul's preaching differently. Luke, the proposed author of the books of Acts, makes special note that the Jews there "were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so."⁶⁷ Ultimately, many men and women there put their faith in Christ, leading to their conversion.

This passage of Scripture is significant because "Christians have long praised the people in the town of Berea for their study of the Bible."⁶⁸ Not only is their receptive response to the gospel message commendable, but their careful "examination" of the Scripture is also commendable. They "were receptive both spiritually and intellectually."⁶⁹ But Luke also

⁶⁶ Acts 17:1-9, ESV.

⁶⁷ Acts 17:11, ESV.

⁶⁸ Don Thorsen and Keith H. Reeves, *What Christians Believe about the Bible: A Concise Guide for Students*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 3.

⁶⁹ Thorsen and Reeves, *What Christians Believe about the Bible*, 3.

specifies that not only did they examine the Scriptures, but they also did it daily. They “cross-checked”⁷⁰ Paul’s message with the Scriptures, and considering their Jewish background, “Judaism regarded nobly those who checked everything against the Scriptures and diligently listened to teachers.”⁷¹ Therefore, when considering the quality and quantity of their examination of the Scriptures, it should serve as an example to the Christian community today, as seeking God’s truth through consistent engagement with the Scriptures will aid in spiritual growth.

Another example that may encourage believers to engage in the intentional study of the Scriptures is found in 2 Timothy 4:13, which states, “when you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments.”⁷² This is significant because Paul wrote this while in prison, which was the final letter Paul had written before his death. In writing this final chapter of this New Testament letter, he asks Timothy, his son in the faith, to bring his cloak and his books and parchments. Further, it can be said that “the scrolls and parchments Paul requested almost certainly included copies of the Scriptures. In his cold and miserable confinement, the godly apostle asked for two things: a cloak to wear so his body could be warmed and God’s Word to study so his mind and heart could be warmed.”⁷³ This proves that throughout his lifetime, Paul continued to study Scripture—an example believers can follow today.

In chapter one, we learned that many believers are not intentionally growing spiritually; therefore, discipleship formation in the American Protestant church remains a concern, especially for church leaders. Also, one avenue to pursue Christlikeness is through the avenue of

⁷⁰ Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Acts*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2016), 332.

⁷¹ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 374.

⁷² 2 Timothy 4:13, ESV.

⁷³ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 32.

practicing spiritual disciplines, particularly the intentional study of the Bible, which helps shape believers, but many believers do not partake in it. However, the question to consider is why Christians continue to neglect Bible Study. R.C Sproul would suggest, “We fail in our duty to study God’s Word not so much because it is difficult to understand, not so much because it is dull and boring, but because it is work. Our problem is not a lack of intelligence or lack of passion. Our problem is that we are lazy.”⁷⁴ But beyond this, many simply do not study the Bible because they are unsure about where to begin; thus, a “hit-and-miss approach”⁷⁵ to Bible study provides “little spiritual nourishment. Without an ability to understand and apply the truths of Scriptures in a practical and meaningful way, believers miss the benefits of exploring and discovering biblical truths for themselves.”⁷⁶ Rick Warren would also argue that “the claims of discipleship include a call to commitment by men and women who want to follow Jesus. They grow as disciples by getting into the Word as a habit of life and applying it consistently to their daily lives.”⁷⁷ Therefore, in this chapter, I will discuss the basic beliefs Christians hold about the Bible, the role of hermeneutics in Bible study, and suggest the best Bible study methods believers can use to encourage their discipleship journey to Christlikeness, including inductive, narrative, topical, and character Bible study.

Christian Beliefs about the Bible

To begin, the term ‘Bible’ is derived from the Greek term *biblion*, which means “book.” However, printed on most Bibles today, it is entitled the “Holy Bible,” and this is so because the Bible is not treated as an ordinary text. It is believed to be divinely inspired by God; therefore, it

⁷⁴ R. C Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 20.

⁷⁵ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 89.

⁷⁶ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 89.

⁷⁷ Warren, *Rick Warren’s Bible Study Methods*, 10.

is holy, which means to be “set apart.”⁷⁸ The Bible, as known within the Protestant church today, contains 66 books. How the books in the Bible were determined to be considered authoritative for the church came through the process of canonization. The word “canon” in English comes from the Greek word *kanon*, which is defined as a “measuring rod” and “if a book made the final biblical list, then it was considered ‘canonical.’”⁷⁹ Also, “canon, as differentiated from Scripture, relates to the external choice of a religious community regarding what books are deemed in or out of their Holy Writ.”⁸⁰ In this thesis paper, the traditional sense of understanding about canonization will be used,⁸¹ as in the Protestant Bible, there are 66 books within two Testaments, both Old and New.

The starting point of spiritual growth, through discipleship, must begin with one placing their faith in God, which is made possible through Christ, who, through his sacrifice on the cross, made it possible for humanity to be restored back to right relationship with Him. Because Scripture is inspired by God, it is “a gift of the living and speaking God. But this gift is not one that becomes separated from the giver. By the Spirit, God spoke through the prophets and then the apostles. But God continues to speak by the same Spirit through those God-breathed written words.”⁸² Thus believers are to honor and revere the Bible as it exposes the truths about God, the Christian faith, and His expectations for believers. There are differences of opinions relating to the basic beliefs Christians must possess pertaining to the Bible. Further, “a person’s view of the

⁷⁸ Thorsen and Reeves, *What Christians Believe about the Bible*, 20.

⁷⁹ Thorsen and Reeves, *What Christians Believe about the Bible*, 20.

⁸⁰ Mark S. Gignilliat, *Reading Scripture Canonically: Theological Instincts for Old Testament Interpretation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 5.

⁸¹ For the canonization process see the following: Mark S. Gignilliat, *Reading Scripture Canonically: Theological Instincts for Old Testament Interpretation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019); and Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Bible in the Early Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2022).

⁸² Gary W. Deddo, “Scripture: God’s Gift,” accessed on September 9, 2023, <https://learn.gcs.edu/mod/page/view.php?id=4248#:~:text=Scripture%20is%20a%20gift%20of,those%20God%2Dbreathed%20written%20words> .

Bible pretty much determines the rest of his or her faith... it is based on a person's worldview, which itself is grounded in an understanding of what truth is and where it comes from.”⁸³ If one does not hold a high view of Scripture, in that Scripture is the final authority for believers in faith and practice, as it is the Word of God, then their discipleship journey may be flawed; therefore, five basic beliefs about the Bible will be discussed.

First, though over 40 authors wrote the Bible, it is still considered the Word of God, as Paul reveals in 2 Timothy because God is its ultimate author. Inspiration describes how God uses the Holy Spirit to influence human writers of the Bible. Also, inspiration is also “implied in how the Bible treats its various subjects: Rather than representing the perspective of a people, it consistently speaks on behalf of God.”⁸⁴ Second, Scripture acts as a means of special revelation about God, which leads one to Christ. Third, Scripture is truthful in that it is inerrant and infallible. To say that Scripture is inerrant is to suggest the original manuscripts of Scripture are without error of falsehood; however, “it is important to note that claims of inerrancy are directed toward what Scripture affirms and asserts rather than information that is merely accurately reported.”⁸⁵ Also, to say that Scripture is infallible is to suggest it is reliable and absolutely trustworthy. Fourth, Scripture is authoritative, and “because the Bible points beyond itself to God, it has conferred authority. Yet the Bible has a real authority in itself as an authentic embodiment of God's self-disclosure.”⁸⁶ Lastly, Scripture is effective in that it is powerful enough to produce God's desired effect—studying Scripture is not only beneficial for knowledge but also for life transformation, which is the desired end of true discipleship formation. The

⁸³ Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 32.

⁸⁴ Williams C. Williams, ed., *They Spoke from God: A Survey of the Old Testament*, (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2003), 21.

⁸⁵ Assemblies of God, “The Inspiration, Inerrancy, and Authority of Scripture,” accessed September 9, 2023, <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers/Inspiration-Inerrancy-Authority-of-Scripture> .

⁸⁶ Williams, ed., *They Spoke from God*, 41.

author of Hebrews reminds believers that “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”⁸⁷ Ultimately, in this thesis paper, the perspective which I hold about the Bible is that it is the Word of God, it is inerrant, infallible, holds final authority for the Christian community, and is effective for spiritual transformation.

The Necessity of Bible Study

The term *discipline* is defined as “the quality of being able to behave and work in a controlled way which involves obeying particular rules or standards.”⁸⁸ As a disciple of Christ, there are certainly standards to which one must abide. As previously discussed, Bible study is not only critical because it is the Word of God but also because it helps enlighten believers about how they are to conduct themselves as new creations in Christ. Because the Word is God’s special revelation, it is the primary tool that must be used to understand what being Christlike consists of. Bible study does not always seem desirable, but it is necessary, and creating a healthy habit of studying the Bible is recommended. Lack of motivation and laziness can be tackled by growing a heart to study the Word of God. Using Ezra as an example, the Scripture states, “for Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.”⁸⁹ Ezra “set his heart” to study God’s word—he established a discipline of study, not only to apply the principles to his life but also to teach it to others. But for matters concerning the lack of knowledge believers have about how to study the Bible, this chapter aims to address this issue by exemplifying how to utilize each Bible study method—however, the aim of Bible study is not

⁸⁷ Hebrews 4:12, ESV.

⁸⁸ Collins Dictionary, “Discipline,” accessed August 9, 2023, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/english/discipline>.

⁸⁹ Ezra 7:10, ESV.

simply to gain knowledge, but to be transformed and shaped in the image of Christ. Each method will be showcased in a manner that will be suitable for those who are new to Bible study.

The Role of Hermeneutics in Bible Study

Now that the historicity of the Bible has been explored, along with the basic beliefs Christians hold towards the Bible, in the following section of this chapter, I will outline four bible study methods believers can use as they aim to engage with the Scriptures personally, which are beneficial for discipleship formation. The Bible reveals not only who God is but also what He expects of believers. To further develop this point, it is worth noting that “those who devote their lives to the study of the Bible—which, unlike any other work... has the power to transform hearts and lives—will never be the same.”⁹⁰ When considering bible study methods, the area of hermeneutics is also imperative. Because hermeneutics can be defined differently by different groups of people, it can be difficult to carve out a concise definition.

As a starting point, the most basic definition of hermeneutics is the science and art of Bible interpretation.⁹¹ But historically, it is defined as “the study of the locus of meaning and the principles of interpretation. Biblical hermeneutics, then, studies the locus of meaning and principles of biblical interpretation.”⁹² Noticeably, there are two aspects of hermeneutics to consider: as a science and as an art. First, as a science, it provides the interpreter with certain principles that will guide their thinking regarding interpreting the Bible—some may be self-evident, while others require more thought. Second, “as an art or skill, hermeneutics provides the interpreter of Scripture with a methodical process that, with practice, may be applied to the

⁹⁰ Richard Alan Fuhr and Andreas J. Kostenberger, *Inductive Bible Study: Observation, Interpretation, and Application Through the Lens of History, Literature, and Theology*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 2.

⁹¹ Fuhr and Kostenberger, *Inductive Bible Study*, 20.

⁹² W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 1.

biblical text and result in an accurate understanding of the Bible.”⁹³ There are many methodical approaches to studying the Bible; however, the four that will be discussed in this chapter are the inductive, narrative, topical, and character Bible study methods.

Inductive Bible Study

To begin, inductive Bible study was introduced by William Rainey Harper and his associate Wilbert Webster White, founder of The Biblical Seminary in New York. White is known as the “father” of the inductive Bible study method, as he sought to empower the laity to do their own direct study of the Bible and as a response to the rise of a highly deductive Bible study approach by fundamentalists, making the Bible lifeless.⁹⁴ The inductive Bible study method also promoted the direct study of the Bible in one’s vernacular. It paid special attention to both the immediate and broader context of passages, as well as their literary structure. It is worth understanding that the term “induction” is used in both broad and narrow ways. Broadly speaking, 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.”⁹⁵ Inductive Bible study implies exploring the Bible in its final form and only arriving at conclusions after all evidence has been compiled. Inductive Bible study differs from deductive Bible study in that the deductive method is presuppositional. In contrast, an interpreter will begin with conclusions or assumptions about the biblical text and use it only to support those conclusions. Ultimately, despite White’s inductive Bible study methodology, his “vision of the Bible was thoroughly pneumatic”⁹⁶ in that he advocated for the supernatural nature of the Bible made possible by the Holy Spirit, along

⁹³ Fuhr and Kostenberger, *Inductive Bible Study*, 20.

⁹⁴ Cheryl Bridges Johns, *Re-Enchanting the Text: Discovering the Bible as Sacred, Dangerous, and Mysterious*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023), 15.

⁹⁵ David R. Bauer and Robert A. Traina, *Inductive Bible Study: A Comprehensive Guide to the Practice of Hermeneutics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 1.

⁹⁶ Johns, *Re-Enchanting the Text*, 17.

with reason. As a result of White's exploration of the Scriptures in this manner, the inductive Bible study method became popularized worldwide.

There are two essential aspects of inductive Bible study to consider: an inductive spirit and an inductive process. For inductive Bible study to be genuine, both elements must be present; however, the inductive spirit must precede an inductive process. To facilitate an inductive spirit or attitude, it must be marked by "radical openness"⁹⁷ to any conclusion reached after gathering the evidence of a biblical text. One with an inductive spirit is open to challenges and discussions relating to conclusions found and is also open to changing one's mind about conclusions reached. However, a deductive spirit is marked by a closed mind, which does not welcome challenges, discussions, or changing one's mind toward a conclusion. Next, an inductive process tests the inductive spirit of the interpreter. Because the process of conducting an inductive study can vary, the interpreter must implement "whatever is most effective and efficient in determining the meaning of the text and thus effectuating or implementing the inductive attitude."⁹⁸ Whatever process one chooses to implement, ultimately, inductive Bible study will always involve inferential reasoning, where conclusions are drawn from premises about a biblical passage's meaning.

Moreover, the inductive Bible study method has been presented in many different forms over the years; however, the most basic form of the method includes three steps: observation, interpretation, and application. This framework seems simple, but it can still be used for extensive Bible study. Though the general flow of the three steps is linear, interpreters do have the ability to move fluidly between steps as needed. Still, the general flow is from observation to application. In the first step, observation, interpreters develop a foundational understanding of

⁹⁷ Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 18.

⁹⁸ Bauer and Traina, *Inductive Bible Study*, 20.

the text; it is inquisitive and will help develop questions for further interpretation. Observation will begin by looking at the text to pinpoint the “5 W’s and H” questions, which include who, what, where, when, where, why, and how. It also includes examining elements such as comparing translations and looking for key recurring terms, literary features, and structural relationships, as they will help the interpreter extract critical data about a passage. The second step is interpretation, where the interpreter will seek to understand the meaning of the text by answering interpretative questions posed in the observation phase. Interpreters can use the model of the 3 C’s of interpretation to guide them in the interpretative process, including context, correlation, and consultation.⁹⁹ The context will examine the history, literature, and theology of a given passage. Correlation allows the text to act as its own commentary where linguistic, grammatical, literary, and topical parallels will be determined. And consultation involves the use of other Bible study tools and resources. The final step of the inductive Bible study method is application. This step helps determine how a passage is best appropriated to the “here and now” rather than the “then and there.” It seeks to bridge the historical gap of what a passage meant to its original audience versus what it means today for the church and personally and how it correlates with other passages of Scripture.

Narrative Bible Study

Historically, the Bible has always been studied as literature; however, its literary qualities have not always been considered. Therefore, literary criticism, within the realm of hermeneutics, “is something of an innovation, for it involves a self-conscious reading of the Bible in a way that it has not usually been read.”¹⁰⁰ The historical-critical approach to biblical interpretation dominated the world of biblical studies, but soon, many began to realize that it was limiting in many ways.

⁹⁹ Fuhr and Kostenberger, *Inductive Bible Study*, 40.

¹⁰⁰ Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 1.

In 1974, Hans Frei suggested that its major limitation is that it does not take the narrative nature of the Gospels seriously. Critics of the historical-critical method of biblical study argued that the Gospel narratives were to be read from beginning to end, rather than dissecting portions of the passage just to collect data concerning Jesus—the story itself was minimized. Eventually, in 1977, a Bible professor named David Rhoads invited his colleague, Don Michie, to teach his students how to read the Gospel of Mark like a short story. This led to the publication of *Mark As Story* in 1982. These two, along with Jack D. Kingsbury, R. Alan Culpepper, and Robert C. Tannehill, are considered the pioneers of what is considered “narrative criticism.”¹⁰¹

Narrative criticism deals explicitly with the interpretation of narratives or stories. It attempts to draw insights from the biblical narrative in the same way secular literary critics would while emphasizing the implied author and reader of the text. There are many narratives within the Old Testament; however, within the New Testament, the primary texts in which narrative criticism is employed are the Gospels and the Book of Acts. Considering this, “no one will doubt that these books relate stories, but until recently literary-critical insights regarding stories and storytelling were largely ignored by scholars who studied these books.”¹⁰² James L. Resseguie, in his book *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, suggests three strengths and benefits of narrative criticism: it views the text as a whole, examines the complexities of the text through close readings, and emphasizes the effects of the narrative on the reader—specifically the “text allows the reader to see a new self... to become someone else.”¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 6.

¹⁰² Joel B. Green, ed., *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 239.

¹⁰³ James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 40.

In implementing this, interpreters will begin by selecting a narrative within the Bible. A close reading of a narrative will examine several aspects such as rhetoric, setting, events, characters and characterization, point of view, plot, and the implied reader.¹⁰⁴ When studying a biblical passage, each narrative aspect will promote a set of questions the interpreter must consider. For example, when considering rhetoric in a narrative, one might ask questions about whether there are repetitive words, themes, figures of speech, or irony present. Further, when considering the plot of a narrative, one might ask questions about whether there are any dilemmas or conflicts present. Additionally, when considering the events present in a narrative, one might ask questions about what major events are present, how they are compared to one another, and their importance.

Topical Bible Study

The topical Bible study method involves searching the Bible to discover what it teaches regarding various topics. It is believed that “it is perhaps the most fascinating method of Bible study”¹⁰⁵ as it helps yield the largest immediate results regarding any one topic. Once a topic is selected, the topic can be traced throughout the entire Bible, the Old or New Testament, or through a single book, as cross-referencing is important for the topical study of the Bible. Rick Warren suggests the topical Bible study method is important for the following reasons:

1. It enables us to study the Word of God systematically, logically, and orderly.
2. It gives us a proper perspective and balance regarding biblical truth. We get to see the whole of biblical teaching.
3. It allows us to study subjects that are of particular interest to us.

¹⁰⁴ Elements to consider in narrative Bible study: Rhetoric works to persuade and influence readers about what the author says in a story by using rhetorical devices; setting is the background where a story takes place; events are incidents and happenings in a story; characters are those who carry out activities within a story; characterization are those actions or words within a story which helps traits of a character; point of view is the perspective which an author intends the reader to develop as they read a story; the plot is the sequence of events that make up a story; and implied readers are those who actualize the meaning of a text and respond to it in a way that is consistent with the expectation of the implied author.

¹⁰⁵ R.A. Torrey, *How to Study the Bible for Greatest Profit*, (Ireland: CrossReach Publications, 2022), chap. 3, Kindle.

4. It enables us to study the great doctrines of the Bible.
5. It lends itself to good and lively discussions. The results of a topical study are easy to share with others.
6. It allows us variety in our lifetime commitment to personal Bible study. The number of topics in the Bible that we can study is almost limitless.¹⁰⁶

However, believers must be mindful that because topics studied will primarily be topics of interest, this method must be used in addition to other Bible study methods to get a well-rounded understanding of the Bible.

When implementing the topical Bible study method, it begins by selecting a topic of interest. After a topic has been selected, the interpreter should compile a list of all related words to that topic. Next, reference books such as a concordance, encyclopedia, or topical Bible should be gathered to compile a list of all the verses that relate to the topic. After all related verses have been compiled, interpreters should take time to consider each verse and its context to ask questions and gain insight into the topic. While doing this, there may be noticeable patterns between verses that complement each other; it is important to note them and form groupings of them logically. Once this is completed, the study will be concluded by first summarizing all findings related to the selected topic, followed by exploring how it can be practically applied. Overall, when conducting a topical Bible study, it is important to be systemic, thorough, and exact.¹⁰⁷

Character Bible Study

The Bible contains a vast array of characters, over 3,000 men and women, who display their faith journey and personal relationship with God. When reading the Bible, believers are often encouraged by their lives, as their stories are relatable and help bring meaning to their lives.

¹⁰⁶ Rick Warren, *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods: Twelve Ways You Can Unlock God's Word*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2006), 116.

¹⁰⁷ Torrey, *How to Study the Bible for Greatest Profit*, chap. 3, Kindle.

Further, “we can learn both what to do and what to be by looking at the positive attributes of hundreds of people who fill the pages of Scripture. We can also gain vast knowledge and wisdom by observing and avoiding the tremendous failures and negative aspects”¹⁰⁸ of those mentioned in the Bible. The biographical, or character, Bible study method is used to study the life and character of specific persons in the Bible. Through concise study, one is able to draw conclusions about that character’s life, especially paying careful attention to their successes and failures. This study method is critical because people are important to God, as we are made in God’s image, and to fully understand the Bible, one must know and understand the prominent characters mentioned in the Bible.

The process used to conduct a character Bible study begins with choosing a specific biblical character. For beginners, it is suggested to choose a character who does not have many references relating to them in the Bible, as this will allow for a simple study rather than an extensive one such as a study on Moses or Abraham. Next, the interpreter should gather all the text within the Bible in which the person is mentioned so that as much information as possible can be gathered about them. Here, it is also important to study the historical background of that person as well. Next, the interpreter will analyze all the passages relating to the person they are studying to determine first impressions, a chronological outline of their life, insights into who they are, their character qualities, how biblical truths are demonstrated in their life, and consider how their life relates to Jesus. Following this, the next step is to summarize the main lesson that can be learned by studying the person’s life. And finally, the last step is to consider how that lesson can be applied personally.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Warren, *Rick Warren’s Bible Study Methods*, 97.

¹⁰⁹ Warren, *Rick Warren’s Bible Study Methods*, 101-104.

Summary

In summary, I have sought to discuss Christian beliefs about the Bible and how hermeneutics influences Bible study. Additionally, I have presented four Bible study methods that believers can implement during personal Bible study to encourage spiritual growth, including inductive, narrative, topical, and character studies. In chapter three, I will employ each Bible study method by selecting specific Bible passages to serve as an example of how disciples of Christ, seeking to grow spiritually, can use these methods during their personal Bible study time.

CHAPTER THREE

PRACTICALLY EMPLOYING THE METHODS

Introduction

There are several different Bible study methods that believers can use to engage in meaningful Bible study for spiritual transformation through discipleship. It is important to be mindful that each method has its benefits and aims; therefore, it is worthwhile to use various methods regularly to ensure the fullness of the Bible is being explored. It is also critical to consult the use of resources such as Bible dictionaries, commentaries, encyclopedias, study Bibles, and Bible study websites to draw out pertinent information regarding biblical text.¹¹⁰ In this chapter, I will provide examples of utilizing the four methods discussed in chapter two, including the inductive, narrative, topical, and character Bible study methods.

Inductive Bible Study: 1 Timothy 1:15-17

To showcase how an inductive Bible study should be employed, the passage I will explore is 1 Timothy 1:15-17. As previously mentioned, there are three steps in the inductive process: observation, interpretation, and application. To begin this process, after a passage has been selected, it is critical to read the passage of choice several times to gain a basic understanding of what the passage is saying. In this initial reading, choose only one primary Bible translation. There are many Bible translations to consider, and common translations include the King James Version (KJV), New International Version (NIV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), New King James Version (NKJV), English Standard Version (ESV), New Living Translation (NLT), and the Message Bible (MSG). Once the interpreter has chosen a passage to study, the primary

¹¹⁰ See Appendix B.

translation to be used, and familiarized themselves with the passage, it is time to move on to the first step in the inductive process: observation.

To begin, the primary translation I have chosen for this study on 1 Timothy 1:15-17 is the English Standard Version (ESV). To begin making observations about this passage, I chose to compare this passage with two other translations, the New International Version (NIV) and the New Living Translation (NLT), as presented below.

ESV: The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.¹¹¹

NIV: Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason, I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who believe in him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.¹¹²

NLT: This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”—and I am the worst of them all. But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then, others will realize that they can believe in him and receive eternal life. All honor and glory to God forever and ever! He is the eternal King, the unseen one who never dies; he alone is God. Amen.¹¹³

Now that translations of comparison have been chosen, it is worthwhile to read each translation and look for keywords, phrases, and punctuation that differ between them. In this step, interpreters can mark up key elements of the text, using a color chart, for example, to distinguish different text elements.¹¹⁴ For example, some notable terms and phrases to consider in this passage are “trustworthy saying”, “deserves,” “acceptance,” “to save sinners,” “mercy,” “whom I

¹¹¹ 1 Timothy 1:15-17, ESV.

¹¹² 1 Timothy 1:15-17, NIV.

¹¹³ 1 Timothy 1:15-17, NLT.

¹¹⁴ See Appendix A.

am foremost,” and “perfect patience.” Also, in the ESV and NIV translations, the statement “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” does not have quotations, but there are quotations surrounding this statement in the NLT translation. The quotation makes a difference wherein it suggests it is a teaching that can be found in another work; however, without the use of quotation marks, it suggests the author directly proposes this thought.¹¹⁵

Moreover, the next step in the observation stage is to ask interpretive questions. These interpretive questions include questions of content, relationship, intention, and implication.¹¹⁶

Examples of these questions are:

1. Questions of Content
 - a. Who is the author of this passage?
 - b. Who was the author writing to?
 - c. What message is the author trying to convey?
 - d. Where was this passage written?
 - e. When was this passage written?
2. Questions of Relationship
 - a. Is this passage a part of a larger literary work?
 - b. What precedes and follows this passage?
 - c. If this passage is part of a larger literary work, how does the surrounding content add meaning to the passage being studied?
3. Questions of Intention
 - a. Why did the author mention a “trustworthy” saying?
 - b. Who are sinners?
 - c. What makes the author the “worst of all” sinners?
 - d. Why should the author be used as an “example”?
4. Questions of Implication
 - a. How does Christ save sinners?
 - b. How does God extend mercy?
 - c. What does it mean for God to be eternal, immortal, and invisible?
 - d. Can this passage be applied universally or to a specific group of people?

This list of questions is not comprehensive; however, it should provide a good starting point for interpreting the text. The next step is considering literary features such as conjunctions,

¹¹⁵ Fuhr and Kostenberger, *Inductive Bible Study*, 54.

¹¹⁶ Fuhr and Kostenberger, *Inductive Bible Study*, 77.

repetition, and illustrations. For example, in 1 Timothy 1:15-17, in the ESV version, the word “foremost” is repeated, and the conjunction “but” is used to connect verses 15 and 16 together.

The next stage of the inductive process is interpretation. Here, the questions formulated in the observation stage will be considered as the text is further examined. There are three elements to consider: context, correlation, and consultation. Exploring the context of a passage will involve looking for its historical, literary, and theological boundaries. Interpretation will also require the comparison of Scripture with Scripture—this means that other passages throughout the Bible that relate to the passage being studied will also be considered in correlation. And consultation will involve the use of Bible commentaries, dictionaries, and concordances to fully grasp the interpretation of the passage. In what follows, I will do a verse-by-verse study of 1 Timothy 1:15-17, bearing in mind the interpretative questions asked during the observation stage and context of the passage, finding biblical correlations throughout other portions in the Bible, and the use of Bible study tools.

For background context, “since the mid-1700s and the beginning of the modern critical study of the New Testament, the letters of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus have been grouped together and referred to as the ‘Pastoral Epistles.’”¹¹⁷ They are grouped together in this way because these letters are addressed to individuals who served as oversight to specific churches. The authorship of the Pastoral Epistles is usually attributed to the Apostle Paul, who authored a total of 13 letters in the New Testament. However, some dispute his authorship of the Pastoral Epistles.¹¹⁸ Regarding the date 1 Timothy was specifically written, those who attribute Paul as the author of this letter suggest he wrote this letter prior to his final imprisonment in Rome in approximately

¹¹⁷ W. Hulitt Gloer, *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Timothy-Titus*, (Macon, GA: Smyth and Hewlly Publishing, 2010), 1.

¹¹⁸ Charles B. Cousar, *The Letters of Paul*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 165.

A.D. 64. And 2 Timothy and Titus were written following 1 Timothy, while Paul was imprisoned, shortly before his execution.

Further, the purpose of Paul's writing 1 Timothy was to address Timothy, whom Paul left to oversee the church in Ephesus, and encourage him to stop the influence of false teaching that was infiltrating the church while he was on his way to Macedonia. Timothy was Paul's companion who worked beside him during his missionary journeys in Asia, Achaia, and Macedonia. Paul refers to Timothy as his "true child in the faith."¹¹⁹ He addresses him as a spiritual son in other passages such as 1 Corinthians 4:17 and Philippians 2:22.¹²⁰ In other letters written by Paul to other churches, he primarily addressed false teaching relating to circumcision, but in 1 Timothy, the promotion of false teaching "combined Hellenistic Judaism with its allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament and other forms of Hellenistic religious syncretism, including emperor worship. In contrast to the religious, social, and political life of the culture of Ephesus, Timothy is commanded to set forth a divinely organized pattern of life."¹²¹ Emperor worship was common in Roman imperial religion, and the emperor was identified as a savior; however, Timothy had the task of dispelling this false teaching with the truth that God is our savior. Godliness, displayed both in the church and personally, is also a major theme in 1 Timothy, which opposes the false teachings that were prevalent in Ephesus—right living (orthopraxy) was directly related to right doctrine or teaching (orthodoxy).¹²² Church order is also another major theme present in 1 Timothy.

¹¹⁹ 1 Timothy 1:2, ESV.

¹²⁰ Gloer, *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary*, 103.

¹²¹ Paul M. Zehr, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus: Believers Church Bible Commentary*, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2010), 20.

¹²² Zehr, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 30.

To begin, verse 15 states, “the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.” First, Paul suggests that Christ coming into the world to save sinners is a “trustworthy” saying, which literally translates as “the word is faithful.” Here, the formula precedes the saying, but that is not always the case in other instances in the New Testament. Also, this formula is found 3 times in 1 Timothy and two other times in 2 Timothy and Titus but does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament, though Paul uses a similar formula, “faithful is God,” in his other letters. The emphasis is placed on the trustworthiness of the saying, and because it is trustworthy, Paul suggests it is “deserving of full acceptance,” which can imply it should have universal acceptance.¹²³ Also, it is “deserving of recognition because of merit, value, or worth.”¹²⁴

Further, the trustworthy saying is that Christ came to save sinners. This saying implies two things: the incarnation of Christ and redemption that comes through Christ—or salvation. Regarding the incarnation, Jesus’ mission emphasized in John’s Gospel suggests that Christ “came into the world,” as seen in John 6:14, 9:39, 11:27, 16:28, and 18:37.¹²⁵ However, Paul’s emphasis is on salvation. When Paul refers to “sinners,” he is referring to a word that was common in Judaism and was used to describe those who did not keep the Law; however, the term used here is more universal in nature and refers to both Jews and Gentiles, whom Christ came to save. The Greek word used for “save” is *sozo* and is defined as “material and temporal deliverance from danger... spiritual and eternal salvation granted immediately by God to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ... or the present experiences of God’s power to deliver

¹²³ Gordon D. Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1988), 52.

¹²⁴ Gloer, *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary*, 124.

¹²⁵ Raymond F. Collins, *I & II Timothy and Titus: A Commentary*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 40.

from the bondage of sin.”¹²⁶ Paul makes this statement personal as he identifies himself as the “foremost” of sinners in the ESV translation and as the “worst” in the NIV and NLT translations. The term used in Greek, however, is *protos* which means “first,” but not in a chronological sense but in seriousness. This is not a hyperbole; rather, Paul recognizes the grace and mercy God extended to him despite his persecution of the church before his conversion. The story of Paul’s conversion can be directly found in Acts 9.

Next, verse 16 states, “but I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.”¹²⁷ Here, Paul again emphasizes that he is the “foremost” of sinners who received God’s mercy. This verse directly contrasts 1 Timothy 1:13, which states, “though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent... I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief...”¹²⁸ Therefore, if God can save Paul, He can save any and all sinners by extending his mercy. Paul now serves as an example of God’s “perfect patience.” The term used for “patience” here in Greek is *makrothymia* and “includes both the notion of never giving despite in spite of innumerable odds and the more positive notion of continuous and determined effort to achieve a prescribed goal.”¹²⁹ And the term used for “perfect” is *hapasan* in Greek, which denotes the idea of being all-encompassing or inexhaustible. Paul is an “example” of this, and the Greek term used is *hypotyposin*, which refers to “the line drawings or sketches of an artist.”¹³⁰ Paul suggests that if others see how merciful God has been towards him, they can also receive this same mercy, which will lead them to believe in Christ.

¹²⁶ W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 547.

¹²⁷ 1 Timothy 1:16, ESV.

¹²⁸ 1 Timothy 1:13, ESV.

¹²⁹ Gloer, *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary*, 126.

¹³⁰ Gloer, *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary*, 127.

Finally, verse 17 states, “to the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”¹³¹ Leading to this closing verse, Paul utilizes the “trustworthy saying” to speak of his own experience of God’s salvation and grace towards him. What began as thanksgiving in verse 12, which states, “I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service,”¹³² now concludes with a doxology in verse 17. This section, 1 Timothy 1:12-17, flows from Paul expressing thanksgiving, then sharing his powerful testimony, to ending with a hymn of praise.¹³³ The doxology found in verse 17 resembles other doxologies throughout the New Testament. For example, Romans 16:27 states, “to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.”¹³⁴ There are four elements present in doxologies: the object of praise, an expression of praise, an indication of time, and a confirmatory response.¹³⁵ The object of praise is God, “the King of the Ages,” who will receive praise through “honor and glory.” Also, these two terms are often used synonymously in the New Testament, but ‘honor’ refers to showing reverential respect for God, and ‘glory’ refers to praise, for example, declaring how great God is.¹³⁶

Now that an overall examination of this passage has been completed, the final stage of inductive study is application. Here, the passage will be assessed to determine its applicability for today—the “here and now.” Application “involves entering the theo-drama of the script, stepping onstage, and acting out the word of God”¹³⁷ as a means of participation in His overall

¹³¹ 1 Timothy 1:17, ESV.

¹³² 1 Timothy 1:12, ESV.

¹³³ Zehr, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 46.

¹³⁴ Romans 16:27, ESV.

¹³⁵ Gloer, *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary*, 127.

¹³⁶ Gloer, *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary*, 128.

¹³⁷ Robbie F. Castleman, *Interpreting the God-Breathed Word: How to Read and Study the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 79.

mission. And as an additional step, the passage must also be appropriated with the help of the Holy Spirit for personal transformation. But in general, when considering the selected passage for this study and the preceding verses, 1-14, Paul is boldly declaring the gospel message with an emphasis on God's grace and mercy towards sinners, which saves them through Christ—more specifically, the Law is not sufficient to save sinners. Paul expresses his gratitude towards God because he was a sinner, but God still extended his mercy towards him. And through mercy, Paul is enabled to serve as an example of God's patience towards sinners, which will encourage others to also put their faith in Christ. The applicability of this message is one that the church should embrace. When we think about how God has extended his grace and mercy toward us, though we continually sin against Him, a well of thanksgiving should bubble up within us. Christ came wrapped in humanity, though still divine, in order to take on the punishment of sin in our place—this God, our Savior, deserves all praise, honor, and glory. This passage should also remind us of how important personal testimonies are; they not only encourage us personally but also those we come in contact with. Practically, believers should always express gratitude toward the finished work of Christ on the cross and should always be ready to serve as an example to unbelievers.

Narrative Bible Study: Luke 8:43-48

To exemplify the narrative method of Bible study, I will examine the story of the woman with the issue of blood found in Luke 8:43-48. This passage states,

And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately, her discharge of blood ceased. And Jesus said, "Who was it that touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!" But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me." And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had

been immediately healed. And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.”¹³⁸

Though there are many elements of narratives to consider, such as rhetoric, point of view, and characterization, in this thesis paper, I will explore three elements according to Mark Alan Powell’s framework for studying narratives: setting, characters, and events. Powell argues that narrative criticism focuses on the Gospels as entire books; however, for practical use in preaching, teaching, and personal study, it is expected to pinpoint single passages or pericopes within entire narratives. Studying these pericopes can be done by asking and answering questions surrounding the setting, events, and characters within that pericope.¹³⁹

For background context, the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts are a two-volume written work. The Gospel of Luke is considered a synoptic gospel alongside Matthew and Mark because they contain many of the same stories. Though Luke does not explicitly name himself as the author of the Gospel of Luke, the early church fathers suggest Luke is the author based on the external and internal scriptural witness. Also, it is said that “Luke takes the Gospel genre to a new level, applying his literary skill to the narration of Jesus’ life and teaching, and weds it to the genre of historiography.”¹⁴⁰ Further, the passage chosen for this study, Luke 8:43-48, is mentioned in a broader pericope of narratives in Luke’s gospel. This section expands from Luke 4:14 to Luke 9:50, describing Jesus’ ministry in Galilee. Luke 7-8 specifically “exhibits an increase of local color, vaguely suggestive of a travel diary, including place names... personal

¹³⁸ Luke 8:43-48, ESV.

¹³⁹ Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 103.

¹⁴⁰ David A. DeSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament; Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 245.

names... and unnamed but unforgettable characters... it is characterized by dramatic encounters that result in trust and transformation by Jesus.”¹⁴¹

The setting of a story is the background in which the story takes place and gives context for the characters’ actions. Settings can be spatial, temporal, social, religious, or symbolic.¹⁴² It may also be geographical, topographical, or architectural.¹⁴³ In the story of the woman with the issue of blood, a careful reading will highlight that the setting seems to be within a “crowd,” which is stated in Luke 8:45. But it can also be implied that this occurred in Galilee, as this story is found within the confounds of the greater narrative of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee. As a geographical location, Galilee was a part of the Roman Empire and is where Jesus spent most of his life and ministry. In this story, we are not told in what region of Galilee it takes place; however, known named cities mentioned throughout Jesus’ ministry include Nazareth, Capernaum, Nain, Magdala, and Tiberias.¹⁴⁴

The characters in a story are the “*dramatis personae* or the persons in the story... they reveal themselves in their speech, in their actions, by their clothing, in their gestures and posture.”¹⁴⁵ They are also known by what others say about them, their societal position, or their environment. Regarding social position, it is worth noting that many biblical characters “are either at the margins of society or at the centers of power and influence.”¹⁴⁶ Also, characters can either be round or flat. Round characters are three-dimensional, have complex traits, and cannot be summed up in one single phrase, while flat characters are two-dimensional, have a single

¹⁴¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015), 68.

¹⁴² Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 70.

¹⁴³ Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 87.

¹⁴⁴ F. Scott Spencer, *The Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 122.

¹⁴⁵ Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 121.

¹⁴⁶ Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 122.

quality, and can be summed up in one idea.¹⁴⁷ In the story of the woman with the issue of blood, there are four characters: the woman, Jesus, Peter, and the crowd. The woman is considered a round character, and because she is a woman, she would have been marginalized during that point in history as well. The story reveals many qualities about her; for example, verses 43-44 reveal that this woman, who remains nameless, had been bleeding for 12 years, she spent all of her money on physicians who could not heal her, and as she touched Jesus' garment, she was immediately healed. Verse 48 then reveals it was her faith that brought healing. However, Jesus, Peter, and the crowd are flat characters, as the story does not reveal much information about them.

The events of a story are “the incidents or happenings that occur within a story, and a story cannot exist without them... these include physical action, speech, thoughts, or even feelings and perceptions.”¹⁴⁸ The events present in the story presented in Luke 8:43-48 include:

1. The woman touched the fringe of Jesus' garment (v. 44).
2. The woman's discharge “ceased” (v. 44).
3. Jesus said, “Who was it that touched me?” (v. 45).
4. Peter said, “Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!” (v. 45).
5. Jesus responded, “Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me” (v. 46).
6. The woman “came trembling, falling down before him and declared” (v. 47) to the crowd the reason why she had touched Jesus' garment.
7. Jesus responded to the woman, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace” (v. 48).

Further, this story is significant because the crowd would have considered the Levitical restrictions against women during menstruation. Though scripture does not reveal the exact issue the woman faced, the fact that she bled continually would have societal and cultural implications. Leviticus 15:25 states, “If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, not at the time of

¹⁴⁷ Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament*, 123.

¹⁴⁸ Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?*, 35.

her menstrual impurity, or if she has a discharge beyond the time of her impurity, all the days of the discharge she shall continue in uncleanness. As in the days of her impurity, she shall be unclean.”¹⁴⁹ However, a close reading of Leviticus and Luke’s gospel would reveal that touching Jesus’ garment would not have caused contamination, so when reading this passage, it is imperative not to assume the main theme is that of a reversal of Jewish purity codes, but rather that Jesus miraculously healed the woman.¹⁵⁰

When Scripture reveals power went out from Jesus, it “indicates the healing has exacted a personal cost to himself.”¹⁵¹ As the power went out from Jesus for healing, it also indicates his spiritual authority, as Luke uses the Greek word used for “power,” *dynamis*, to highlight Jesus’ authority. Further, Jesus’s power not only heals the woman physically but also serves as a meeting to know Jesus personally and displays a creative act of God. Regarding this, Jesus’ power separates the woman from the crowd and her infirmity, restoring her as a unique and whole person.”¹⁵² This is unique because women were marginalized in Jesus’ day, and to “be marginal is to be excluded from the center,”¹⁵³ yet bring the marginalized to the very center of God’s love and grace is essential to the gospel message. She had only hoped to be healed from her illness, but due to her faith, she was also saved—she received spiritual healing. Additionally, this story is significant because “Jesus addressed her tenderly as daughter, the only woman he is recorded as having addressed in this way.”¹⁵⁴ In Jesus’ day, it would have been custom to refer to her formally using the term “woman,” but “He called her by a term of familial endearment,

¹⁴⁹ Leviticus 15:25, ESV.

¹⁵⁰ Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke (Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament)*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 141-142.

¹⁵¹ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 128.

¹⁵² Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 128.

¹⁵³ Justo L. Gonzalez, *Santa Biblia: The Bible Through Hispanic Eyes*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 33.

¹⁵⁴ Leon L. Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, (Nottingham, England: IVP Academic, 2008), 179.

despite the fact He may have been younger than she.”¹⁵⁵ Therefore, salvation also restored her identity in God and the faith community. Ultimately, readers of this story will be encouraged by the faith of this woman, who knew she could rely on Jesus to heal her in her time of desperation. But God, in his sovereignty and goodness, took it a step further; Jesus not only healed her physically but being impressed with her faith, also provided her with salvific wholeness.

Topical Bible Study: Eternal Life

Third, the topic that will be explored using the topical Bible study method is “eternal life,” based upon John 3:14-15, which states, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”¹⁵⁶ The term used for “eternal” in Greek is *aiōnios* and is used in Scripture 42 times in the New Testament, and is also translated as “everlasting.” This term “describes duration, either undefined but not endless... or undefined because endless.”¹⁵⁷ The term used for “life” in Greek is *zoe* and is used 133 times in the New Testament. The term describes “life as a principle or in an absolute sense... Eternal life is the present actual possession of the believer because of his relationship with Christ.”¹⁵⁸ After selecting a topic of interest, the next step is to compile a list of all Scripture references related to that topic. There are many references regarding eternal life in the Bible, which will be listed below and further examined to gain an overall picture of what the Bible says about it. Scripture references about “eternal life” in the New Testament include:

1. Matthew 19:16, 29 – “And behold, a man came up to him, saying, ‘Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?’ ... And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.”
2. Matthew 25:46 – “And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

¹⁵⁵ Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2017), 235.

¹⁵⁶ John 3:14-15, ESV.

¹⁵⁷ Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 207.

¹⁵⁸ Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 367.

3. John 3:16, 36 – “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life... Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”
4. John 4:14 – “but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”
5. John 5:24, 39 – “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life... You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me...”
6. John 6:27, 68 - Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal... Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life...”
7. John 10:28 – “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”
8. John 12:25 – “Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”
9. John 17: 3 – “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”
10. Acts 13:46 – “And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, ‘It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.’”
11. Romans 2:7 – “...to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life...”
12. Romans 5:21 – “...so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”
13. Romans 6:22-23 – “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
14. Galatians 6:8 – “For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”
15. 1 Timothy 6:12 – “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”
16. Titus 1:2 – “...in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began...”
17. Titus 3:7 – “...so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”
18. 1 John 2:25 – “And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.”
19. 1 John 5:11, 13 - And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son... I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.”

20. Jude 1:21 – “...keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.”¹⁵⁹

This list is not exhaustive; however, it gives a broad perspective of what the New Testament has to say about eternal life.

Examining each passage will be critical when conducting a topical Bible study. Because each passage of Scripture will reveal something about eternal life, utilizing resources such as Bible dictionaries, commentaries, encyclopedias, and study Bibles will be beneficial to gain a full scope of what Scripture has to say about it. Though each passage will not be discussed in this paper, John 3:36 will be examined to serve as an example in displaying how each passage could be examined during one’s personal study time. John 3:16 states, “for God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”¹⁶⁰ For background context, this verse occurs in chapter three of John’s gospel, wherein Jesus has a dialogue with a Pharisee named Nicodemus, who was also a member of the Sanhedrin. Nicodemus was curious about who Jesus was and approached him to learn about how one could be “born again.”¹⁶¹ In his response, Jesus stressed the importance of belief in Him and how it brought about eternal life.

In continuation of Jesus’s dialogue with Nicodemus and his first mention of eternal life in verse 15, He now “reveals the ‘unseen’ motivation behind all of God’s actions: love”¹⁶² in verse 16. And God’s love is “made manifest in what and who he gave to the world.”¹⁶³ Because God

¹⁵⁹ List of Scripture references compiled from Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Topical Analysis of the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 500-503 and George V. Wigram, *The Englishman’s Greek Concordance of the New Testament*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson’s Publishing Marketing, 2017), 20. This list of references is not exhaustive and is listed using the ESV translation.

¹⁶⁰ John 3:16, ESV.

¹⁶¹ John 3:3-4, ESV.

¹⁶² Edward W. Klink and Clinton E. Arnold, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: John*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2016), 205.

¹⁶³ Klink and Arnold, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: John*, 206.

gave Christ to the world, whoever believes in him will have eternal life, and “‘trusting’ or ‘believing’ is the single major subjective response sought in human beings by the Jesus of John’s gospel for acquiring of life... the verb *pisteuein* (trust or believe) ‘is the most repeated term in the Nicodemus discourse’”¹⁶⁴ occurring eight times. Also, the phrase “eternal life” is a signature phrase in John’s gospel and occurs 17 times, and in John’s gospel or letters “there is no passage where ‘life’ with or without the adjective ‘eternal’ does not primarily signify a present state rather than a future immortal bliss... ‘life’ is regarded in John as a present reality.”¹⁶⁵ Thus, eternal life is granted to those who place their faith in Christ and is rooted in God’s love for humanity.

In the next step, each Scripture will be accounted for as a condensed outline is formulated from connecting themes regarding eternal life. Using this information, here is an example of a condensed outline regarding this topic:

1. God promises eternal life to believers; it is a gift.
 - a. John 17:3
 - b. Romans 6:23
 - c. 1 John 2:25
2. Eternal life is granted when one places their faith in Christ.
 - a. Matthew 19: 16, 29
 - b. John 3:16, 36
 - c. John 5:24, 39
 - d. John 10:28
 - e. 1 Timothy 6:12
 - f. 1 John 5:11-13
3. Those who seek righteousness will have eternal life.
 - a. Matthew 25:46
 - b. Romans 2:7
 - c. Romans 5:21
 - d. Romans 6:22
 - e. Galatians 6:8
4. Eternal life gives believers hope.
 - a. Titus 1:2

¹⁶⁴ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), ebook chapter 3.

¹⁶⁵ Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, ebook chapter 3.

- b. Titus 3:7
- 5. God's Word, who is Jesus, and the living water, the Spirit, sustain us and brings eternal life.
 - a. John 4:14
 - b. John 5:39
 - c. John 6:27, 68
- 6. We must sacrifice our lives to experience eternal life.
 - a. John 12:25
 - b. Acts 13:46

The final step is to summarize findings and describe how the knowledge learned can be used practically, either individually or corporately, as the church. In summary, eternal life is a gift God grants to those who put their faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. Eternal life, as described in the New Testament, refers to the duration of life and “the quality or character of that life.”¹⁶⁶ The consequence of sin leads to death; however, those forgiven by God's grace are granted eternal life as they are made new in Him. Living a life of righteousness will require sacrifice, but eternal life gives believers hope for what will come as they endure and persevere daily. Practically, this study about eternal life serves as a reminder that though everyone experiences physical death, spiritual death can be avoided if we are willing to lay down our lives of sin to embrace the life of righteousness that comes through believing and following Christ. Those who confess Christ as Lord and Savior will live with Him forever.

Character Bible Study: Noah

Lastly, a character, or biographical, study will be conducted on the life of Noah as described in Scripture. The first step involves gathering all Scripture references relating to Noah. Noah is first introduced in the Book of Genesis of the Old Testament but is also mentioned in the New Testament as well. He is mentioned in the following passages:

- 1. Genesis 5:21-10:1
- 2. Isaiah 54:7-10

¹⁶⁶ Lawrence O. Richards, *The New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 544.

3. Ezekiel 14:12-14
4. Matthew 24:37-39
5. Luke 17:26-27
6. 1 Peter 3:20
7. 2 Peter 2:5
8. Hebrews 11:7¹⁶⁷

After an examination of these passages, several observations and insights can be gained about the life and character of Noah. First, in Genesis 5:28-29, we learn that Lamech was Noah's father, and the Hebrew word for Noah is defined as "rest." Genesis 5:32 also reveals Noah fathered three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. In Genesis 6:1-8, Scripture reveals that "the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth,"¹⁶⁸ so he decided to "blot out" all of creation from the earth through a flood. Considering this, "as part of the sin and corruption that led to the Noahic flood, Genesis 6:14 refers to the marriages between sons of God and the daughters of men. It is clear these relationships were displeasing to the Lord."¹⁶⁹ However, Scripture states that "Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord... Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God."¹⁷⁰

Moreover, because Noah found favor with God, God made a covenant with Noah to spare him and his family's lives, along with pairs of every type of animal, from the coming flood that would wipe out the land. After God had given him instructions on how the ark would be built, in Genesis 6:13-21, we find that Noah "did all that God had commanded him."¹⁷¹ Further, in Genesis 7:6-12, we find that Noah was 600 years old when the flood came, and it had rained for forty days and forty nights. The earth continued to flood for forty days, destroying every living thing except Noah and those on the ark with him. After 150 days, Scripture reveals that "God

¹⁶⁷ Alan B. Stringfellow, *Great Characters of the Bible*, (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2014), 22.

¹⁶⁸ Genesis 6:5, ESV.

¹⁶⁹ Herbert Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1991), 115.

¹⁷⁰ Genesis 6:8-9, ESV.

¹⁷¹ Genesis 6:22, ESV.

remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided.”¹⁷² After some time, Noah removed the ark’s covering to see that the earth was dry, and Noah and those on the ark with him were able to exit. Then, “Noah built an altar to the Lord... And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart I will never again curse the ground of man... Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.”¹⁷³ This was the covenant God made with Noah, and He stated whenever a bow was set in the cloud, it would be a sign of the covenant he made with Noah to not flood the earth again. Thus, “the scope then of this promise is not limited to Noah and his seed but is universal.”¹⁷⁴

Following this, Scripture reveals that Noah and his sons went out from the ark, bore children, and their offspring dispersed throughout the land. Noah then planted a vineyard where he “drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent.”¹⁷⁵ The planting of the vineyard is a retraction by God of the curse placed on the ground”¹⁷⁶ as evidenced in Genesis 8:21. However, Ham “saw the nakedness of his father”¹⁷⁷ and then told his brothers, Shem and Japheth, about what had occurred, and they went into Noah’s tent to cover up his nakedness. The Hebrew word used for “saw” is *ra’ a* and “means ‘to look at searchingly,’ not a harmless or accidental seeing. Rabbinical sources think either he castrated his father or he committed sodomy.”¹⁷⁸ But “probably just Ham’s ‘prurient voyeurism’ is meant,”¹⁷⁹ in which one’s dignity is violated and is robbed of their desire for privacy. When Noah recognized what Ham had done,

¹⁷² Genesis 8:1, ESV.

¹⁷³ Genesis 8:20-21, ESV.

¹⁷⁴ William A. Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 117.

¹⁷⁵ Genesis 9:21, ESV.

¹⁷⁶ Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook of the Pentateuch*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 68.

¹⁷⁷ Genesis 9:22, ESV.

¹⁷⁸ Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 149.

¹⁷⁹ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 149.

the father of Canaan, he cursed Canaan but blessed Shem and Japheth. So, though God had made a covenant with Noah, it is apparent that the flood had not cleansed the world of sin as Noah and his sons were still caught up in its effects.¹⁸⁰ Ultimately, Noah lived another 350 years after the flood and died at 950 years old.¹⁸¹

Further, there are other passages in the Old Testament which refer to Noah. For example, in Isaiah 54:7-10, God reminds the people of Israel of the time he sent them to Babylonian exile and “deserted”¹⁸² them due to his anger towards them for their disobedience. However, in his compassion and love, “‘just as’ god swore a promise to Noah that he would never destroy the earth through another flood... ‘so’ now God has sworn that there will come a time when he will not be angry or rebuke them ever again.”¹⁸³ Also, Ezekiel 14:12-14 outlines the prophecy, spoken by Ezekiel, regarding the famine that would occur in Jerusalem. God warns that “the famine would be so serious that its effect would not be averted through righteous men of the quality of Noah, Job, and Daniel... Noah was the only righteous man of his day, but he could not avert the judgment of the flood upon the rest of humanity.”¹⁸⁴

The New Testament passages that refer to Noah reveal that Jesus compares his second coming to the “days of Noah,”¹⁸⁵ where the people were unaware that a flood would come, except Noah and those God advised to go with him on the ark. There was no time to prepare for the flood, as it was unexpected, and as a result, many were swept away; this will be the case with the second coming of Christ as well—this is reflected in both Matthew’s and Luke’s Gospel.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁰ Terrence E. Fretheim, *The Pentateuch*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 84.

¹⁸¹ Genesis 9:28, ESV.

¹⁸² Isaiah 54:7, ESV.

¹⁸³ Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 53.

¹⁸⁴ LaMar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1994), 137.

¹⁸⁵ Matthew 24:37, ESV.

¹⁸⁶ Matthew 24:37-39 and Luke 17:26-27.

Also, Hebrews 11 affirms that “by faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this, he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.”¹⁸⁷

Additionally, in addressing his audience, Peter in 1 Peter 3:20 states that in Noah’s day, “eight persons were brought safely through water,”¹⁸⁸ as “in both cases, the wickedness of the day was being encountered and in the former, it was dealt with by means of the flood, while the ark allowed for safe passage.”¹⁸⁹ The ark was their means of salvation in Noah’s day; however, for Peter’s audience, he suggests their salvation comes by means of Christ’s resurrection, and baptism is integral to one’s salvation. Baptism “has certain qualifiers attached to it. It is not the removal of dirt from the flesh; rather, it is found in both ‘the pledge to God from a good conscience and a ‘pledge to God to maintain a good conscience.’”¹⁹⁰ Therefore, baptism signifies the immersion of pledging one’s life to God, which is made possible by the resurrection of Christ. Lastly, in 2 Peter 2:5, Peter states that “Noah was a preacher or ‘herald of righteousness’... that righteous or just conduct that conforms to the will of God... In Genesis 6:9, Noah is recognized as a ‘just man’, yet nowhere in the OT is he described as a preacher or herald of the message of justice.”¹⁹¹ Thus, being a “herald of righteousness” refers to Noah’s preaching to the sinners of his day.

In gathering this information about the life and character of Noah, these are some general insights to consider including:

1. Noah’s father was Lamech.
2. Noah lived 950 years.

¹⁸⁷ Hebrews 11:7, ESV.

¹⁸⁸ 1 Peter 3:20, ESV.

¹⁸⁹ Peter R. Rodgers, ed., *1 Peter: A Collaborative Commentary*, (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2017), 110.

¹⁹⁰ Rodgers, ed., *1 Peter: A Collaborative Commentary*, 111.

¹⁹¹ Gene L. Green, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Jude and 2 Peter*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 253-254.

3. Noah had three sons: Ham, Shem, and Japheth.
4. Noah is characterized as “righteous” and “blameless.” He “found favor” and “walked” with God.
5. Noah is also referred to as a “herald of righteousness.”
6. He was chosen by God to build an ark that would save his family, and those God called to board the ark with him from the flood.
7. Noah was one of eight persons who received salvation by way of the ark.
8. When God instructed him to build the ark, “he did all the Lord commanded him.”
9. Noah built an altar to God after the flood had subsided, and God made a covenant with him to never flood the earth again.
10. Though Noah was righteous and blameless, he was found drunk in his tent—he also made mistakes.
11. Though Noah was righteous, not even his righteousness could save avert the wickedness in his day.
12. The New Testament compares Noah’s flood with the second coming of Christ—it will happen when least expected.
13. Because Noah had faith, he saved his household and became an heir of Christ. Those who sinned in his day were condemned.
14. Just as God promised Noah that he would not flood the earth again as a form of judgment, he also promises that there will come a time when he will no longer be angry with the people of Israel.

To conclude this study, there are some key theological insights that can be gained from Noah’s life. First, God judges those who sin against him, but those who choose to live a life of faith, displaying righteousness, will be blessed and receive salvation. Yet, no man can save humanity, no matter how righteous they may be—salvation only comes by placing one’s faith in Christ. Secondly, the second coming of Christ, or the Parousia, will occur unexpectedly; therefore, believers should continue to live according to the will of God, knowing that he can return at any moment. Also, just as Noah was obedient to the command of God, so shall we remain obedient to God’s call for us as His disciples. Practically, believers can learn from Noah the importance of having faith and obeying God. When God spoke to Noah regarding the ark, Noah did not question God; simply, he “did all that God commanded him.” This is the exact posture believers are to have today when God gives us an assignment. And amidst a crooked generation, Noah

remained faithful to God, was blameless, and served as a “herald of righteousness,” though he also had flaws.

Summary

In summary, believers can use many Bible study methods for effective Bible study, and each method presents its own benefits for believers who seek to grow spiritually. Engaging in personal Bible study is critical for believers because discipleship calls for full obedience and commitment to Christ as exemplified through His Word. This chapter served to present an example of how the four Bible study methods identified in chapter two could be applied practically using select passages of scripture. Ultimately, it is important to understand that Bible study is not about simply gaining knowledge but moving beyond that to allow the Word of God to shape believers for a total transformation in Christ.

CONCLUSION

THE WAY FORWARD

The purpose of this thesis was to demonstrate that Bible study as a spiritual discipline is essential for transformative discipleship formation for believers within the Christian community.

Therefore, employing effective bible study methods during personal Bible study is necessary so that it may shape the lives of those called to follow Christ. To reiterate, in the first chapter, entitled “Spiritual Formation, Discipleship, and How the Bible Shapes Followers of Christ,” I introduced the topic of spiritual formation and how it relates to discipleship, discussed the state of discipleship in the American Protestant church and why Bible study should be treated as a spiritual discipline. In the second chapter, entitled “The Best Bible Study Methods for Discipleship Formation,” I discussed the basic beliefs about the Bible within Protestantism. I also introduced the topic of hermeneutics and presented four Bible Study methods that believers can use to facilitate transformational discipleship formation. Though there are many different Bible study methods believers can employ, in this thesis paper, I suggest the best methods to utilize during personal Bible study are the inductive, narrative, topical, and character Bible study methods. And in the third chapter, entitled “Practically Employing the Methods,” I demonstrated how these Bible study methods could be utilized, examining several passages from the Bible. First, using the inductive method, 1 Timothy 1:15-17 was explored. Second, using the narrative method, the story of the woman with the issue of blood in Luke 8:43-48 was explored. Third, using the topical method, the topic of eternal was explored. And finally, using the character method, the life of Noah was explored.

Ultimately, this thesis paper aims to encourage believers to invest in their spiritual growth; thus, discipleship formation is a concept that must be emphasized in the Christian

community. And because many believers express that they do not know how to study the Bible, church and lay ministry leaders must also invest time and resources into teaching those in the faith how to properly study the Bible. This thesis paper only focuses on four Bible study methods, but believers can use many other interpretative processes and methods to further engage with the Scriptures. For this reason, a continuation of this thesis can examine other Bible study methods and the best way to teach these methods to believers within churches and parachurch ministries. Further, because this thesis paper primarily focused on the methods used to study the Bible, it would be worthwhile to extend this study to explore the role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretative process. The Bible cannot be interpreted like any other work of literature because it is not like any other book;¹⁹² thus, the Holy Spirit must actively participate in the interpretative journey. Considering this, the way forward in promoting Bible study for discipleship formation involves exploring other Bible study methods, expanding how believers are taught Bible study principles, and exploring the role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretative process.

¹⁹² R.W.L Moberly, *The Bible in a Disenchanted Age: The Enduring Possibility of Christian Faith*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 19.




APPENDIX A

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY MARKUP EXAMPLE

ESV: The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.¹⁹³

NIV: Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.¹⁹⁴

NLT: This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”—and I am the worst of them all. But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life. All honor and glory to God forever and ever! He is the eternal King, the unseen one who never dies; he alone is God. Amen.¹⁹⁵

Text Markup Color Chart	
Keywords	
Phrases	
Punctuation	

¹⁹³ 1 Timothy 1:15-17, ESV.

¹⁹⁴ 1 Timothy 1:15-17, NIV.

¹⁹⁵ 1 Timothy 1:15-17, NLT.

APPENDIX B

RESOURCES AND TOOLS FOR BIBLE STUDY

Bible Dictionaries

1. Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words
2. Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary
3. Baker Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words
4. Lexham Bible Dictionary
5. Tyndale Bible Dictionary

Bible Concordance

1. Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible
2. The Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament
3. Nave's Topical Bible Concordance

Bible Commentaries

1. Understanding the Bible Commentary Series
2. The IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old and New Testament)
3. Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary Series
4. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching Series
5. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
6. Expositor's Bible Commentary
7. Life Application New Testament Commentary Series
8. Tyndale Commentary Series
9. Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament Series
10. Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible

11. Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary Series

12. Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Series

Bible Encyclopedias

1. Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible
2. Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible
3. New International Encyclopedia of Bible Characters
4. The New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words
5. International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

Study Bibles

1. ESV Study Bible
2. The Life Application Study Bible
3. Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible
4. The Open Bible
5. The Thompson Chain Reference Bible
6. Faithlife Study Bible

Bible Study Websites and Tools

1. BlueLetterBible.org
2. BibleGateway.com
3. BibleHub.com
4. GotQuestions.org
5. YouVersion Bible App
6. Logos Bible Software
7. Olive Tree Bible Software

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