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DEVELOPING A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL CURRICULUM
FOR EVANGELISM TRAINING AT RIVER
VALLEY COMMUNITY CHURCH IN
FORT SMITH, ARKANSAS

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
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May 2021

APPROVAL SHEET

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FOR EVANGELISM TRAINING AT RIVER
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To my loving wife, Kacee, who allowed me to pursue my education for the glory of God.

To the people of River Valley Community Church for their support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
PREFACE	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Context	1
Rationale	4
Purpose	6
Goals	6
Research Methodology	7
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations	9
Conclusion	10
2. BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE USE OF THE BIBLE’S OVERARCHING STORYLINE IN THE USE OF EVANGELISM	11
Romans 10:1-17	12
Luke 24:13-35	16
Acts 2:14-41	23
Acts 17:22-34	32
Conclusion	40
3. BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND ITS ABILITY TO PROVIDE AN EFFECTIVE BASIS FOR EVANGELISM	42
Biblical Theology	43

Chapter	Page
Modern Development and Use of Biblical Theology	49
The Bible’s Story in Evangelism	54
Conclusion.	60
4. DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENTATION OF USING GOD’S STORY IN EVANGELISM CURRICULUM	61
Development Stage	61
Implementation Stage	64
Evaluation Stage	65
5. EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT	68
Evaluation of the Purpose	68
Evaluation of the Goals	70
Strengths of the Project	82
Weaknesses of the Project	84
What Should Be Done Differently	85
Theological Reflection	86
Personal Reflection	88
Conclusion	90
 Appendix	
1. EVANGELISM PRACTICES AND BIBLICAL KNOWLEDGE SURVEY	92
2. CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC	96
3. EVANGELISM PRACTICE EVALUATION	98
BIBLIOGRAPHY	100

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. How long members have been a Christian	71
2. Age of congregation members	72
3. Length of membership	72
4. Frequency of evangelism of members	73
5. Average response for evangelism survey	76
6. Average response for biblical knowledge survey	79

PREFACE

This project would not have been possible without the support and love of the River Valley Community Church. Thank you to the elders who supported me in pursuing this goal, and to the whole congregation who helped me achieve the completion of the project. The congregation is always gracious to me and it has been my joy to serve them these last several years. This project was for the edification and discipleship of the whole congregation, may God use it to produce fruit.

Thank you to my supervisor, Dr. Stephen J. Wellum, for helping guide the direction of this project. Dr. Wellum's help gave me the needed direction for getting my thoughts and conclusions onto paper in a way that is understandable to others.

The support of my wife, Kacee, and our children, during the work of this project was vital. I could not have done it without them. Thank you for allowing me to pursue this degree program as well as being part of the process.

Finally, this project was an act of devotion and service to God. God's story has captured my life and I wish to help all who call upon the name of Jesus know how to communicate this amazing story to all who would hear.

Adam Kareus

Fort Smith, Arkansas

May 2021

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The mission of River Valley Community Church is to lead people to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. This mission encompasses many different emphases and all of the ministries at River Valley Community Church are designed with this mission in mind. This mission is carried out in various ways within the church, but one emphasis seems to lag behind the others, that emphasis is evangelism. As River Valley Community Church seeks to lead people to follow Jesus Christ, one of the first steps is for people who do not know Christ to hear about him and come to know him. River Valley Community Church is an inviting church that make it a point to invite people to come and see Jesus within the context of a church service or event, but there is a need for congregation members to be involved in personal evangelism.

Context

Several families of various backgrounds founded River Valley Community Church in a growing part of Fort Smith, Arkansas. Because the founding members came from different backgrounds, the church did not draw from one source or tradition. An eclectic assortment of resources was used for the formation of the church. In addition, the leadership brought in many different viewpoints and traditions. The members' variety of church background and influences translates into them having different training and experiences with church and evangelism.

The eclectic foundation of the church is revealed through the mixed levels of the congregation's understanding of the Bible and evangelism practices. While there are many mature believers within the congregation, there is also a large population that is not well versed in knowledge of the Scriptures. This lack of knowledge of the Bible results in

all sermons requiring time spent developing context as well as discipleship programs needing to include basic biblical theological knowledge. The lack of basic biblical knowledge within a large portion of the congregation holds the congregation back from evangelism. The lack of understanding Scripture's overarching storyline leaves people feeling unequipped and unprepared for evangelism.

River Valley Community Church's mission statement—to lead people to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ—is a mission statement used by many churches. The church also adopted the language and practices of Saddleback Church in its use of purposes to organize the church as well as a class system to encourage growth of the congregation. In recent years this class system has become less of an emphasis but are still present and influence the ministry. The use of many models has resulted in inconsistency, resulting in ineffective training and equipping, particularly in understanding the story of the Bible as a whole and how to use that story in evangelism.

Many sources influenced River Valley Community Church's structure and leadership. Thus, there exists no single cohesive model or tradition from which it has consistently pulled for training the congregation in how to understand the Bible or evangelism. Other than Sunday morning preaching, some small group discussions, and an occasional Bible study, there has been no other training in Scripture's overarching storyline. Neither the preaching ministry nor the small group ministry alone provides sufficient means for the effective teaching of biblical theology to inform evangelism. While River Valley Community Church has implemented a rather robust twenty-five-week discipleship program where groups of people go through the book *Discipleship Essentials* by Greg Ogden, the book's focus is more systematic and thus does not cover biblical theology and how the storyline of Scripture can be used in evangelism.¹

This weakness in evangelism extends to the community at large. Even though

¹ Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building your life in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Connect, 2018).

River Valley Community Church encourages evangelism, with sermons that stress the need and motivation when the text of Scripture calls for it, members still hesitate to share their faith due to feeling unequipped or unprepared. A congregation who feels unequipped results in a church not engaging in evangelism.

The most common encouragement or training related to evangelism that takes place is to ask the congregation to invite their friends, family, and co-workers to come and visit the church. Asking people to church is presented as the easiest form of evangelism. The church has cards to promote the church and invite, and are given to congregation as tools. These cards were designed to make inviting easy and straightforward. While the congregation needs to invite others in such a manner, this simple invite to church using cards might present a minimalistic view of evangelism that has allowed the congregation to be under-equipped and underprepared.

River Valley Community Church conducts a series of classes to help grow the congregation with the fourth and final class aimed at sharing a personal testimony and evangelism. These classes are for all members of the church to help them grow in their faith. This class is a useful tool for the development and writing of a testimony but does not produce active evangelism. The missing element seems to be how their testimony connects to the story of the Bible as a whole and the universal truths of the gospel. Any effort in evangelism needs to meld together personal testimony and universal truth of the gospel. The congregation's struggle connecting their story with the Bible's story flows from a lack of basic biblical theology knowledge.

Other training in evangelism is offered on occasion. One of the offered trainings, "One-Verse Evangelism," uses Romans 6:23 to present the gospel visually. While this method can be used with great success, the congregation does not put it into practice. Evangelism tracks from various sources have been offered as well throughout the years, but no real training accompanied the tracts. This inconsistent training resulted in a congregation not equipped for evangelism.

It is a major concern that there is a lack of evangelism at River Valley Community Church. Teaching in sermons, small groups, and discipleship all emphasize evangelism when appropriate, but members still feel unequipped. The deficit of biblical theology produces an unequipped congregation with stunted evangelism. This stunted evangelism stagnates due to the low bar for evangelism the church has accepted, as well as a lack of effective training.

Rationale

God called the church to reach people with the gospel for his glory. When Jesus gave his command to the disciples in Matthew 28, he was also giving a commission to the believers who would follow. This commission was to make disciples of all the nations. The making of disciples included two parts: (1) proclaiming the gospel so that the people may believe, and (2) the teaching for the purpose of helping new believers grow in understanding their faith. The church baptizes people in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, which means that the church proclaims the gospel of who Jesus is as the Son of God and what he did to save his people across the globe. Those who respond in faith to such a proclamation should then be baptized as believers in Christ and become part of the church of Christ. This proclamation, which aims to fulfill Christ's commission, stands as the primary task of evangelism. The church also teaches those who respond so that they can grow in their faith. These two elements are what it means to make disciples.

Churches need both elements. Evangelism grows the church as people are called from darkness to light. The power of the gospel, as Paul says in Romans 1:16, is that it saves people who believe. Proclaiming the faith needs to be a part of every church and a part of every Christian's life. As Christians believe the truth of Ephesians 2—that all were once dead in trespasses but that God made them alive through Christ by grace and through faith—they will be emboldened to speak this truth to others who need to hear it.

This emboldening can only take place as Christians learn more about the faith. The second element found within the commission of Matthew 28 is teaching. The church

teaches people all that Christ commanded, which can be summarized as Christ's life, mission, and ministry. The church needs to fulfill both of aspects of the commission, evangelism and teaching.

First Peter 3:15 encourages believers to be engaged in the endeavor of evangelism. Christians are encouraged to honor Christ as holy in their hearts which is done by being ready to explain why Christians have hope. Explaining a Christian's hope is evangelism, which is to be done with gentleness and respect. Many verses speak about proclaiming the gospel and the Christian's responsibility to engage in this task, and many of these passages and verses give the guidelines that evangelism should always be done with gentleness and respect. Ephesians 4:15 gives the similar guideline of speaking the truth in love.

Speaking the truth with love and sharing the gospel with gentleness and respect can be hard when it comes to something as important as the Christian faith. Christians can be overly concerned with their presentation to the point where they lose sight of the person to whom they are speaking. One of the most engaging ways in which someone can share and speak important truths without becoming combative is by telling a story, because stories draw people in as well as share important truths. Moreover, the Bible's story serves as a framework within which life and this world can make sense. The Bible's storyline helps serve as a way to understand who God is, who humans are, what is wrong with the world, and how God is fixing it. The Bible's story helps Christians present the gospel in a way people can understand. In 2 Samuel 12, Nathan uses a story to reveal the heinous nature of David's sin. Jesus spoke in stories and parables, which helped reveal the truth to those who would receive it. The whole of the Bible is a story that needs to be shared with those who do not know Christ.

In Luke 24:13-35 is the account of Cleopas and another disciple traveling to the village of Emmaus. They meet Jesus but do not recognize him. Through the course of conversation Jesus asks why they are sad, and the disciples explain the recent events of

Jesus' death, stating that they thought he might be the one to redeem Israel. Jesus' response is to call them foolish and slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken. Verses 26-27 say, "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." This remarkable passage shows that all of Scripture speaks to Jesus' identity and what he achieved for his people. The passage does not say how Jesus shared this truth with the disciples. It could have been any number of ways, but knowing how Jesus taught so often using stories it is not farfetched to think that Jesus told the story of the whole Bible with himself as the point and center.

All people need to know the story of the Bible because they find themselves within it. The Bible's storyline also makes sense of the overall message of the gospel. Looking at the Bible storyline can be called *biblical theology*. Michael Lawrence writes, "As we've seen, biblical theology, in both senses of the word, not only gives you the story of the Bible, but it places your story in the context of God's story."² Biblical theology can be used to help people see the whole story of the Bible as well as where they belong and fit within that narrative. Biblical theology is what Jesus was doing on the road to Emmaus and it is what Christians can do with those with whom they seek to share the truth of the gospel.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train the congregation in biblical theology for the purpose of evangelism at River Valley Community Church in Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Goals

Five goals reflect the necessary steps needed to accomplish the purpose of this

² Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide to Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 215.

project. The first goal assessed where the congregation stood in their practices of evangelism and their frequency of engaging in this endeavor. The second goal assessed the congregation's knowledge of Scripture's storyline. The third goal looked toward the development of the process and the material through which the congregation were trained and equipped. The fourth goal aimed to grow the congregation's knowledge of biblical theology. The fifth goal proposed to implement the curriculum to equip the congregation in evangelism.

1. The first goal was to assess the current evangelism practices and frequency among the congregation of River Valley Community Church.
2. The second goal was to assess the congregation's knowledge of Scripture's overarching storyline.
3. The third goal was to develop a curriculum to equip the congregation in the use Scripture's storyline for the purpose of evangelism.
4. The fourth goal was to increase the knowledge of Scripture's overarching storyline among River Valley Community Church members.
5. The fifth goal was to equip members of the congregation at River Valley Community Church to engage in evangelism informed by Scripture's overarching storyline.

These five goals were measured to ensure that they accomplished their aims.

The research methodology and instruments used to measure the success of each goal are detailed in the following section.

Research Methodology

Five goals measured the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was to assess the current evangelism practices and frequency of the members of River Valley Community Church. This goal was measured by a survey where the congregation listed the frequency in which they practice evangelism as well as how equipped they feel in evangelism.³ This survey was provided in an electronic format and also physical paper copies were handed out at the start of the implementation period for the project.

³ See appendix 1. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use.

Participants were asked to provide their names so that the survey could be used as the pre-test for goals 4 and 5. The goal was considered successfully met when 30 percent of the congregation completed the survey and the information on evangelism were compiled. The survey was given at the start of the project with 2 weeks allowed for responses before the curriculum was developed.

The second goal was to assess the congregations' knowledge of Scripture's overarching storyline. This goal was measured by administering a survey where the general knowledge of biblical theology of the congregation could be determined. This survey was combined with the evangelism survey and was provided at the same time and in the same format. The goal was considered successfully met when 30 percent of the congregation completed the survey and it had been analyzed, yielding a clearer picture of the current knowledge of biblical theology. The survey was given at the start of the project and before the curriculum was developed.

The third goal was to develop a curriculum to equip the congregation in the use of Scripture's storyline for the purposes of evangelism. This eight-lesson curriculum sought to develop the congregation's knowledge of the biblical story, which can support confidence in evangelism as well be used when speaking with non-believers. The goal was measured by a panel of pastors to judge its faithfulness to the Bible's storyline and the applicability of the curriculum. The goal was considered successful when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, then the material was revised until it met the standard.⁴

The fourth goal was to increase the knowledge of Scripture's overarching storyline among River Valley Community Church members. This goal was measured by administering a pre- and post-survey that was used to measure the change in biblical theology knowledge. The post-survey was administered a week after the last lesson of the

⁴ See appendix 2.

curriculum. This goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

The fifth goal was to equip members of the congregation at River Valley Community Church to engage in evangelism informed by biblical theology. The equipping was done through the implementation of the eight-lesson curriculum that was developed. This goal was measured by a pre- and post-survey which tested the congregation's ability to share the biblical storyline, as well as their willingness to share it for evangelism purposes. The post-survey was administered a week after the last lesson of the curriculum. In addition, the congregation had practice sessions where their sharing was observed and evaluated. This goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant change between the pre- and post-survey samples and 80 percent of the congregation's practice sessions were evaluated as sufficient or better according to the evaluation rubric.⁵

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

Biblical theology. Michael Lawrence defines *biblical theology* as “the attempt to tell the whole story of the whole Bible as Christian Scripture. It’s a story, therefore, that has an authoritative and normative claim on our lives, because it’s the story of God’s glory in salvation through judgment.”⁶ Brian Rosner defines *biblical theology* as the discipline that “proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyze and synthesize the Bible’s teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible’s overarching narrative and Christocentric focus.”⁷ While

⁵ See appendix 3.

⁶ Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*, 89.

⁷ Brian S. Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 10.

there are many definitions one may use for biblical theology, such as Gregg Allison's—“The discipline that describes the progressive revelation found in Scripture by examining the theology of its various groupings”⁸—the idea of God's story and the whole story of the Bible taken from the whole of the Scriptures is used for this project.

Two limitations applied to this project. The first limitation was the participants' willingness to use the information given to them in the purpose of evangelism. To mitigate this limitation, participants were given opportunities to put into practice the use of their new knowledge. Second, the effectiveness of the curriculum was limited by participants' consistent attendance. If the participants did not attend every class, then determining curriculum effectiveness would become increasingly difficult. To mitigate this limitation, each curriculum session was offered at multiple times.

Two delimitations were placed on the project. First, the curriculum and instruction were limited to eight lessons plus some practical application experiences. Eight lessons are adequate to teach the classes and conduct the post-survey after sessions were completed. Second, this project was limited to twenty-one weeks of surveying, developing curriculum, conducting classes, and follow-up.

Conclusion

God has given all Christians the command to evangelize and make disciples. Knowing the storyline of the Bible can be a key tool in helping Christians feel equipped to carry out this mission. The following chapters will show how biblical theology can be incorporated within evangelism. Chapter 2 presents the biblical and theological basis for Christians to be active in evangelism using biblical theology, and chapter 3 focuses on theoretical support for practicing evangelism.

⁸ Gregg R. Allison, *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 23.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE USE OF THE
BIBLE'S OVERARCHING STORYLINE
IN THE USE OF EVANGELISM

Scripture's overarching storyline gives the biblical-theological framework to understand the plan of God and the gospel. A lack of knowledge truncates one's understanding of the gospel, which leads to a misunderstanding of God's plan, truth, and the gospel itself. Evangelism should tie into the Bible's story and be true to the Bible's story, all Scripture points to and finds fulfillment in Christ, and the rehearsal of God's saving work throughout history gives the content of the gospel as well as serves as a powerful pattern for evangelism. While evangelism can be effectively used by God when not tied to the story of the Bible, the story gives the Gospel context to be understood. Gospel proclamation demands that the content of the gospel is true to the Bible's overarching storyline and message. In Scripture are many examples of how the Bible's storyline is used in the preaching and proclamation of the gospel. By studying these examples, one learns how to do evangelism in a way that is faithful to the entirety of Scripture.

The foundation of using the biblical story for evangelism is that a fundamental core of knowledge must be proclaimed for the gospel to be clear. A guiding paradigm directs this truth and that is what the triune God has revealed and done for humanity in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ provides the Christian a framework for the biblical storyline in evangelism because he is at the center of the story. Not having a knowledge of Jesus Christ and his gospel empties the message of the Bible. Christians who do not understand how Jesus Christ is at the center of the storyline of the Bible have a truncated gospel, which may still save but is not as robust and rich as it should be.

While the whole Bible points to Christ as the center of the biblical story, there are several passages which help one see the importance of the understanding the overarching storyline. Romans 10:1-17 shows that a knowledge of the righteousness of God is necessary for understanding the gospel. Luke 24:13-35 reveals that all of the Old Testament points to Christ and finds its fulfillment in Christ, showing that Christ is at the center of the story. Acts 2:14-41 reveals how Peter rehearsing God's saving work throughout history serves as a powerful pattern for proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. Acts 17:22-34 reveals how larger picture of the overarching storyline of the Bible serves as a powerful and concise pattern for proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. These passages will serve as the guide to seeing the truth that the whole Bible points to Christ and this gives the Christian a powerful tool in proclaiming the Gospel.

Jesus Christ is at the center of all of Scripture. While the whole of the redemption plan is Triune in nature, with all three persons of the Trinity involved, the culmination of God's revelation is found in Jesus Christ. This Christ centered understanding is Jesus' self-testimony and the testimony of the whole Bible. Jesus Christ provided this framework to his followers for their benefit at understanding the gospel. Peter and Paul both used this framework in presenting the gospel to those who both knew the storyline of Scripture and those who did not. The model presented within the New Testament shows how the overarching storyline of Scripture can be a powerful tool in evangelism.

Romans 10:1-17

An exegesis of Romans 10:1-17 reveals that a knowledge of the righteousness of God is necessary for understanding the gospel. In this passage Paul is addressing the Jewish people who, while having a tremendous passion to follow God, do not have the correct knowledge or understanding to grasp the gospel. This passage demonstrates that Jesus Christ is the key to understanding the biblical story and how God relates to those who believe in him. Jesus being the key to Bible interpretation means that Jesus Christ is

the center piece of a true understanding of God's plan to save his people.

Romans 10 uses the Jewish people as a negative example of those who should know the truth and yet do not. Paul points out that these people have a perceived zeal for God, but that this zeal was not true faith in God because of their rejection of Jesus Christ. To reject Jesus Christ is to reject God as Jesus made clear in the gospel accounts, such as in John 5:23. Zeal is a praiseworthy attribute and a positive description of the Jewish people. The Jewish people had a praiseworthy devotion to God. Douglas Moo points out that this zeal was not enough: "The problem with Israel and the reason why Paul must continue to pray for their salvation is that, like the pre-Christian Paul, their zeal is not driven by 'knowledge.'"¹ The Jewish people lacked the knowledge of Jesus Christ being the Messiah and the turning point of all of Scripture. The Jewish people also did not see a need for Jesus to be their Savior, thinking that the law would save them. They did not grasp that the law was never meant to save but rather point to their need for a savior. William Hendriksen states, "This zeal for God, this enthusiasm about him, this strong and deep seated urge to live in accordance with God's will, was not based on proper understanding! It was not in harmony with God's revelation concerning the way of salvation."² Paul recognized his countrymen's passion and admits they would wear themselves out to follow God, but they did so without true knowledge of God's plan. They were still blinded by sin to their own inability to be right with God through the law. Moo states, "What is involved is a discernment of the plan of God that enables one to recognize what God is doing in the world and to respond accordingly."³ Paul's argument is that the Jewish people lacked understanding on how God had been true to the covenant and how the promise of Jesus in renewing the covenant bringing Gentiles into

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 632.

² William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 342.

³ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 632.

membership was part of God's plan.⁴ Only through having knowledge of Jesus Christ as the center point of the story of Scripture can one recognize God's plan.

The Jewish people failed to grasp that it was through Jesus Christ that the righteousness of God could be granted. They believed that following the law would grant them righteousness. The Jewish people knew that God was a righteous God, but they did not believe that this righteousness could be theirs through Jesus. Moo writes, "The Jews' ignorance, therefore, involves their failing to understand that God has fulfilled his promise to reveal his saving activity in Jesus Christ."⁵ The Jews did not see a need for Jesus since they thought the law would save them. This also meant that they could not understand how Jesus was the key to grasping the full meaning of all of Scripture.

Paul makes the argument that Jesus Christ is the end or culmination of the law.⁶ This argument can be understood several ways, and commentators have taken different positions. The two main ways of interpreting what Paul means by Christ being the end of the law have been either temporal or teleological. The temporal understanding is that Christ fulfills the Mosaic covenant and so the authority of the law of Moses is at an end. The teleological understanding is that Christ is the goal or result of the law-covenant, meaning that in some sense the law pointed to Christ.⁷ Maybe the best way to see Paul's statement is including both of these aspects: it is true that with Christ the authority of the law of Moses is at an end, and it is also true that there is a teleological nuance present.⁸ This teleological sense helps one understand that Jesus Christ stands at the center point of

⁴ N. T. Wright, *The Letter to the Romans*, The New Interpreter's Bible, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 653.

⁵ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 633.

⁶ The law is referring to the law-covenant of the Mosaic law.

⁷ Moo points out that there is ambiguity in the word *end* used here. *End* "does end mean (1) termination, as in the sentence 'the end of the class finally came!' or (2) goal, as in the sentence, 'the end of government is the welfare of the people'; or (3) result, as in the sentence, 'she did not foresee the end of her actions.'" Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 638.

⁸ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 641.

Scripture. Jesus fulfills the law as Matthew 5:17 says and is presented as the culmination of the Old Testament. Jesus is not only the fulfillment of the Law, but also the fulfillment of the promise given in Genesis 3:15, which is unfolded in the Bible's storyline through the progression of the covenants.⁹

The knowledge that Paul is speaking about is knowing how Christ Jesus brings the righteousness of God to his people. Hendriksen states, "It was Christ, he alone, who by his life and death completely fulfilled the demands of the law, and thereby secured for himself the Father's approval and the place at the latter's right hand and for his followers everlasting life."¹⁰ In addition, this knowledge has to be shared and proclaimed for the gospel to be heard, which is the point of Romans 10:14-17. The gospel has to be known and understood, and the only way that can occur is that the knowledge is shared. This shared knowledge is more than intellectual assent, but trust in what is conveyed. Moo states, "hearing, the kind of hearing that can lead to faith, can only happen if there is a definite salvific word from God that is proclaimed."¹¹ Paul asks four questions and gives a quotation, which serves to transition the reader from looking at the greatness that all sorts of people are coming into the covenant by faith to the necessity of the apostolic mission.¹² Knowledge must be transmitted for the gospel to have been proclaimed. Truths need to be shared for someone to understand how God saves through Jesus Christ. Paul uses the shorthand "the word of Christ" to denote the gospel message. This is described by Moo as "the message whose content is the lordship and resurrection of Christ."¹³ Christ Jesus provides the key to understanding God's redemption plan that is conveyed

⁹ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 685.

¹⁰ Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, 343.

¹¹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 666.

¹² Wright, *The Letter to the Romans*, 667.

¹³ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 666.

through Scripture. Jesus is at the center of the biblical storyline, which means that any person who does not acknowledge Jesus will have a fundamental misunderstanding of God. The Jewish people rejected Jesus and in doing so rejected God, believing that being under the old covenant was enough to secure their place with God. Believing Jesus is the center point of all of God's revelation involves acknowledging everyone's need for Jesus to save them.

Luke 24:13-35

An exegesis of Luke 24:13-35 reveals that all of the Old Testament points to Christ and finds its fulfillment in Christ. Jesus Christ presents this principle of Bible interpretation to two disciples on the road to the town of Emmaus. Jesus' teaching takes place after the resurrection and serves to help validate how the Messiah would die on the cross and still be the Savior the disciples were expecting. The teaching in Luke 24 is the culmination of a theme found throughout the gospel of Luke. As Darrell Bock states, "Luke sees continuity in God's plan—not surprise or parenthesis."¹⁴

This principle taught by Christ in Luke 24 is the concept that Jesus Christ is the center point of the Old Testament. All of the Old Testament finds its true understanding in who Jesus is and what Jesus did. Joshua Chatraw states, "Jesus does not contradict the Old Testament's story, but brings it to its intended goal."¹⁵ If Jesus is the intended goal of the Old Testament Scripture then it can be said that all of the Old Testament points to Jesus as the key to understanding God's plan of salvation, which is worked out through the Triune work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This also means that to understand the storyline of the Bible one has to understand Jesus and his mission.

The account of Luke 24:13-35 starts out with two disciples traveling from

¹⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1918.

¹⁵ Joshua D. Chatraw and Mark D. Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross: An Introduction for Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 40.

Jerusalem to Emmaus. They are discouraged about how Jesus was crucified and do not understand how the Messiah could be killed. At this point it seems that the disciples still did not grasp the redemption work Jesus accomplished on the cross and they were still operating under an understanding of the Messiah being a conquering king. A crucified king did not fit into their concept of how God was going to work through his messiah. Jesus enters into conversation with these two disciples and, hearing their lack of understanding, rebukes them. This rebuke expresses great disappointment, and their failure is one of foolishness.¹⁶ It is described as foolishness because they do not understand how the Old Testament pointed to the necessity of these events. The gospel of Luke uses phrases such as “all that the prophets have declared” and “all the prophets,” which continues a pattern for the gospel.¹⁷ This pattern of using all points to the theme of all of Scripture speaking and pointing to Jesus.

Jesus’ response is a rhetorical question. This rhetorical question is formed in such a way as to expect a positive reply.¹⁸ Bock states, “Jesus states what the travelers should have known from the prophets: that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and come into his glory. Jesus has pushed the prophetic description of his travelers into messianic categories.”¹⁹ The disciples’ lack of understanding was following the consensus of first-century Judaism which did not anticipate a suffering Messiah. Hendriksen summarizes, “The trouble with the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus’ day was that, on the whole, in reading the Old Testament they saw only the glory and victory of the Messiah, not the fact that the path to these blessings was one of suffering.”²⁰ Jesus’ disappointment

¹⁶ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1916.

¹⁷ R. Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke*, *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 9 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 478.

¹⁸ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1916.

¹⁹ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1916.

²⁰ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 1064.

is that the disciples have not seen the truth found in the Old Testament and are instead following the predominant view of their day that saw no need for their sins to be atoned for by a suffering Messiah. Jesus says that the Old Testament prophets knew that the Messiah would suffer and that this was the path to glory. This glory is a newly emphasized element in Jesus' response and refers to, as Bock writes, "the splendor of being in God's presence or, in Jesus' case, at God's side."²¹ Jesus points in this response to the fact that he has emerged from his suffering and has entered into the glory, being raised to reign at the right of the Father. This development is not new but is the goal and fulfillment of all Scripture. Alan Culpepper states, "The Christological interpretation of the Old Testament, as practiced by the early church, therefore, is authorized by the risen Lord himself. Those that do not accept the proclamation of the gospel, consequently, are foolish and slow at heart to believe. Christ is the fulfillment to which all Scripture points."²² The teaching of Luke 24 of Jesus Christ sets the standard for the early church and Christians today of believing that all of the Old Testament finds its fulfillment in Christ.

Jesus' main statement about how Scripture points to and finds its fulfillment in him comes in verse 27. This statement is comprehensive in nature, meaning that one needs to read all of Scripture in light of Christ. The use of the word *all* for both the prophets and the Scriptures, which in this verse refer to the Old Testament, displays comprehensiveness. This use of the word *all*, combined with the use of Moses and all the prophets, stresses the comprehensiveness. Bock says, "This figure (called zeugma) describes the discussion's scope: he went through the entire Scripture, front to back."²³ Jesus uses a traditional phrase to encompass the whole of the Old Testament and points to himself as the fulfillment of all of Scripture. Thabiti Anyabwile writes, "This means we don't properly read our Bibles

²¹ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1917.

²² Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke*, 479.

²³ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1917.

until we see how it connects to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection."²⁴ Jesus seeks to stress the whole of the Old Testament speaking to who he is and what he came to do. Speaking of Moses has been seen as either a reference to the very beginning in Genesis since Moses is thought to be the writer of the Pentateuch, or could be a reference to Deuteronomy 18:15 where Moses refers to a coming prophet like him. However, it does not have to be an either/or, and is most likely a reference to the entirety of the Pentateuch. The emphasis of Jesus' statement is that all of the Old Testament points to him and finds its fulfillment in him.

How the Old Testament points forward to and finds its fulfillment in Jesus is a question on which scholars can disagree. Bock points out two types of fulfillment to which Jesus could be referring: direct prophetic fulfillment and typico-prophetic fulfillment. Direct prophetic fulfillment are passages that only apply to Jesus and point to prophecies the Messiah was expected to fulfill and Jesus did. One such prophecy would be being born in Bethlehem, which is found in Micah 5:2 and cited in Matthew 2:6. Typico-prophetic fulfillment refers to texts that reflect patterns that point to Jesus. Jesus either reenacts or usually escalates these patterns at a new level to show their fulfillment or eschatological significance.²⁵ One pattern would be the promised son. Isaac, who was the promised son to Abraham, established a pattern that Jesus, the ultimate promised son whom would save his people, escalates to salvific significance. Another pattern would be the concept of sacrifice, which Jesus becomes the ultimate once and all sacrifice for his people. The combination of these two fulfillments help bring the whole of the Bible under the interpretative framework of Jesus and his mission. Understanding these two types of fulfillment can also explain why some texts have been fulfilled by Jesus during his life and others will be fulfilled when he comes again.

²⁴ Thabiti Anyabwile, *Exalting Jesus in Luke*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: Holman, 2018), 356.

²⁵ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1918.

Another way of seeing how Christ Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament is the promise-fulfillment theme and typology. Hendriksen states, “It is reasonable to believe that our Lord, in interpreting in the Scriptures the things concerning himself, showed how the entire Old Testament, in various ways, pointed to himself.”²⁶ Jesus’ pointing to himself as the fulfillment of the Old Testament helps explain how even those parts of Scripture that do not seem to be connected to Jesus still point to him at some level.²⁷ Trent Hunter and Stephen Wellum state, “The Bible moves from promise to fulfillment in Christ through the biblical covenants.”²⁸ Jesus fulfilling the biblical covenants means that readers see how Jesus Christ fulfills the promises made throughout the Bible. Typology notes thematic patterns within the Scriptures, which is built on the belief that God is revealing his purposes progressively through history.²⁹ Hunter and Wellum state,

Biblical authors note that in God’s plan, he has established the story and unveiled its significance through various patterns. These patterns are not accidental but intended to point forward and reveal his glorious plan of redemption. Since our triune God is the Lord of History and the single author of Scripture, through various types he prepares us for the fulfillment of his plan in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.³⁰

This progressive revealing can be an important point because the Old Testament picture of the Messiah is not just confined to a specific number of passages that mention the Messiah. Lines of thought and themes run throughout the Scriptures, and following these

²⁶ Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, 1065.

²⁷ Jesus may have interpreted such passages as Gen 3:15, that he was the promised offspring of Eve who would crush the serpent’s head. He could have referred to Gen 12:3 and how it is through Jesus that all of the families of the earth will be blessed. It could have included Isa 53 with Jesus being the suffering servant. He could have referred to Zech 3:8 and the servant, the Branch. This is just to name a few of the passages that might have been referenced.

²⁸ Trent Hunter and Stephen Wellum, *Christ from Beginning to End: How the Full Story of Scripture Reveals the Full Glory of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 64.

²⁹ Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 67.

³⁰ Hunter and Wellum, *Christ from Beginning to End*, 65.

leads the reader back to Christ.³¹

The disciples have a reaction to this teaching from Jesus. After Jesus reveals himself to them through the breaking of the bread, they confer with one another about how they felt when Christ was teaching them. Hendriksen states,

Their exclamation is understandable. They reflect on the manner in which their hearts had been warmed, their spirits illumined, their hope revived when the man who was now no longer a stranger had explained to them that which before they had never understood. Also, now they know that the women had been right after all. Far from talking nonsense, they had spoken truth. And how kind, how absolutely wonderful was it that the Christ has singled them out for receiving the privilege of having the Scriptures opened to them, so that they now understood as they has never understood before.³²

The disciples' reaction is described as their hearts were burning within them as Jesus spoke. This reaction is not a small or insignificant. They had felt something when Jesus was explaining and opening up the Scriptures, but now after realizing who it was their response begins to make sense to them. Jesus' teaching of himself throughout Scripture gave them intense emotion and excitement. Bock states, "They sensed that something special was happening, but only after their eyes were opened could they see why this man had opened up the Scriptures so clearly to them. They had been treated to a rare tour of the Old Testament and received insight into God's plan as a result."³³ The disciples' reaction points to a new understanding of Scripture itself. They were pointed to not only the truth that the Old Testament confirms the Messiah would suffer, but also that the whole of the Old Testament pointed to Christ and finds its fulfillment in him. The disciples respond with excitement to the almost overwhelming truth that the overarching storyline of Scripture finds its meaning and purpose in Jesus Christ.

³¹ T. Desmond Alexander provides several of these lines of thought that can be traced through the Bible to Christ. One can trace the idea of a temple, a place where God dwells with his people, from the Garden of Eden to the tabernacle, then temple and then to Jesus Christ. The kingdom is another idea that can be traced from the garden where God was the Creator King with Adam and Eve as viceroys to the kingdom of Israel and then the church and the kingdom of God. T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008).

³² Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, 1066.

³³ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1921.

This response naturally leads to action as the disciples hurry back to Jerusalem. There is ambiguity in the time of their return since the phrase “at that hour” is a general marker that means “fairly soon after.”³⁴ Many believe that they returned the same evening, while others argue that the time of day and distance would have prohibited them traveling the same night. Whichever interpretation one takes, the emphasis is that they did it quickly after their encounter with Jesus.

The action of the disciples to undertake the journey to Jerusalem again shows their excitement and conviction—they needed to let other followers of Jesus know. The teaching of Jesus and the fact that Jesus was resurrected from the dead was astonishing and they wished to share this information with their fellow followers of Christ. Hendriksen describes their excitement: “So filled are these two men with joy that they must tell others. Have they already walked seven miles? Then seven more miles. Was it dark and dangerous? All means nothing now. This news is so electrifying and reassuring that the other disciples must know about it. Not tomorrow but tonight.”³⁵ Jesus’ appearance and teaching moved the two disciples to share what they knew.

The two disciples’ report is interrupted by the revealing that Jesus had also appeared to Simon Peter. Jesus’ appearance to Simon Peter confirms their account as well as the women’s account from earlier on, how the grave was empty. There is a high level of drama within the scene. The narrative is following the two disciples having made a seven-mile trek to report their encounter with Jesus. Some commentators place them arriving in the evening, maybe even around 9 o’clock.³⁶ These excited by undoubtedly tired disciples are cut off by Simon Peter’s account of encountering the Lord. Some argue that this was inserted on Luke’s part rather than being part of the original story. Bock says,

³⁴ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1921.

³⁵ Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, 1066.

³⁶ Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, 1067.

But the interruption of this additional sighting is a clever, appropriate literary twist. The report shows that Jesus is really among them, no matter where they are. It shows the surprising, comprehensive way in which the appearances came. Not only did Jesus provide evidence for his resurrection on the road; he did it in Jerusalem too. The excitement is so great that one report is interrupted by another.³⁷

The two disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus, then, have a chance after the report about Simon Peter to share. It is interesting that the text states they shared more than just that they saw Jesus, but they share the full story of what happened on the road. The reality of how Jesus fulfills all of Scripture was no doubt a part of that story since it was the central part the teaching Jesus shared on the road.

Luke 24:13-37 provides a clear teaching that the whole of the Old Testament finds its fulfillment in Christ as well as points to Christ. Jesus Christ is the goal and guiding principle for the story of the Bible, and one cannot truly understand Scriptures' meaning and purpose without knowing Jesus Christ. While the disciples' excitement was centered on the appearance of Jesus after his crucifixion as a validation of his ministry and their belief, it can be assumed that their new found interpretative method given to them by Jesus would have also been a cause for excitement and part of what they communicated to the eleven and their fellow believers. Knowing that all of the Old Testament points to and finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ changes how one sees the story of the Bible.

Acts 2:14-41

The book of Acts documents the spread of early Christianity and the preaching of the gospel message. It describes how the Apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ explained Jesus being the fulfillment and culmination of the Old Testament promises and God's plan for the salvation of his people. In many of the teachings found within the book of Acts a pattern of using the Old Testament to explain Jesus as the fulfillment of God's plan and the continuation of the Bible's overarching storyline is demonstrated. This is true for Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. An exegesis of Acts 2:14-41 reveals how the rehearsal of God's saving work throughout history serves as a powerful

³⁷ Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, 1922.

pattern for proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Peter's speech in Acts 2 serves as an explanation for how Jesus Christ is linked to the promise of God and how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament. David Peterson writes, "The sermon is an opportunity to explain the significance of Jesus in the plan of God for his people. Instead of focusing on the Spirit the preacher directs the attention of his audience to the glorified Messiah."³⁸ Peter demonstrates that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise by having three Old Testament citations and alluding to a fourth passage. These passages represent how Jesus is God's plan for the salvation of his people. Bock states, "All the passages cited in the speech combine to explain God's plan."³⁹ Some consider Peter's use of the Old Testament to be in line with Jewish midrash, or commentary on Scripture.⁴⁰ However, what Peter is doing is different from midrash in that he is showing how Jesus provides the key to correctly understand the Old Testament. Peter is setting a standard that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament and so uses passages to prove his point. In recording Peter's speech, Luke is demonstrating how the Christian's belief is based on the Old Testament and a continuation of God's revelation. Peterson explains, "Luke wants to establish a theology of the gospel as 'the word of God,' and part of his concern is to explain how the gospel was preached to bring conviction to various audiences."⁴¹ Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32 to frame the speech as one of fulfilling the promise given to Israel. The quote from Joel frames the whole speech around the concept that Jesus is fulfilling God's plan. Peter uses Psalm 16:8-11 to show how the resurrection of Jesus was prophesied and Psalm 110:1 to show that Jesus now sits at the

³⁸ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 138.

³⁹ Darrel L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 108.

⁴⁰ Robert W. Wall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The New Interpreter's Bible, vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 62.

⁴¹ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 139.

Father's right hand. The allusion to Psalm 132:11 connects the promise made to David about a descendant of his sitting on the throne forever with the Messianic promise. Linking Peter's usage of these four texts in the Old Testament demonstrates how God's saving work throughout history, finding its culmination in Jesus Christ, can serve as a powerful pattern for presenting the gospel.

Joel 2:28-32

Peter starts the scriptural defense of who Jesus is by quoting from the prophet Joel. The prophets, including Joel, were men raised up by God for the purpose of calling to attention how the people of God had failed to keep the covenant and how God was going to bring a new covenant. Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum state, "Because the people had broken and violated the Israelite covenant, the prophets announced that God would put in place a new covenant in which not only he would be faithful but his people would be faithful too."⁴² Peter uses Joel 2 to point to the meaning of the events of Pentecost. Peter is using an Old Testament prophet to explain the events unfolding before the eyes of the crowd to whom he is speaking. Peter makes it clear that the Spirit of prophecy is the power by which Jesus, the Messiah, fulfills the promise of salvation.

Peterson states,

Visions and dreams such as OT prophets enjoyed gave insight into the heavenly world, so that God's character and will could be proclaimed. However, in Acts, the knowledge of God which the Spirit kindles in believers comes from the glorified Christ through the preaching of the gospel. This knowledge of God then becomes the basis of ministry to others through the gospel and the operation of the Spirit.⁴³

This connection expresses Peter's belief that these events unfolding at Pentecost can be explained through Jesus fulfilling Scripture. John Stott writes, "It is the unanimous conviction of the New Testament authors that Jesus inaugurated the last days or Messianic age, and that the final proof of this was the outpouring of the Spirit, since this was the

⁴² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 488.

⁴³ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 142.

Old Testament promise of promises for the end-time.”⁴⁴

Peter cites Joel in his speech, making a few additions to the text of Joel. The first addition Peter makes is that these events happen in the “last days.” This addition serves to set the eschatological and fulfillment framework of Pentecost. The most common way to understand this reference to the last days is to see Peter preaching these events as part of God’s promise of a new covenant hope. The Jews had been long awaiting this hope. This promise of the Spirit pouring out is not limited to the prophet cited, it was in fact a fulfillment of a reoccurring wish for God to put the Spirit in all of his people, which is expressed in Numbers 11:29 and addresses the Spirit being in the community of God.⁴⁵ This pouring out of the Spirit is the fulfillment of a theme threaded throughout the Old Testament.

The promise in Joel anticipates a day where the Spirit will be universally distributed to the new covenant people of God, which is in contrast with how the Spirit was distributed to a few people on certain occasions for special purposes under the old covenant. Peter sees this outpouring to refer to all the Jews, but as the story of Acts progresses he would come to realize it includes Gentiles as well. Peterson states, “In due course, Luke shows how believing Samaritans and Gentiles came to share in the blessings as well.”⁴⁶ The citation of Joel makes it clear that people from every gender, age, and class are included, which anticipates that the entire covenant people will be empowered by the Spirit. Hunter and Wellum write, “The glory of the promise is that those who call on the Lord’s name will come from every tribe, nation, people, and tongue.”⁴⁷ This promise also sets the stage for the Spirit to be given to Gentiles as the church spreads from Jerusalem

⁴⁴ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 73.

⁴⁵ Bock, *Acts*, 112.

⁴⁶ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 141.

⁴⁷ Hunter and Wellum, *Christ from Beginning to End*, 189.

to Judea to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Peter also presents a high Christology with this citation. While the reference to calling on the name of the Lord would have been understood as a reference to Yahweh in the Old Testament, Peter is laying the ground work that will identify Jesus into the unique identity of Yahweh. Bock says, “But one of the functions of the entire speech is to show that Jesus is Lord, a key title applied to Yahweh. Peter will give Jesus a place alongside Yahweh as carrying out the plan and will make clear that the name one is to call on belongs to Jesus.”⁴⁸ Identifying the name of the Lord with Jesus sets up Peter’s point that the only way to be saved and delivered from the day of the Lord is to call upon Jesus. Peterson explains, “The rest of Peter’s sermon is then designed to show that Jesus is the Lord on whom they are to call in the messianic era.”⁴⁹ This testimony of the whole book of Acts is to the name of Jesus and the salvation available through him.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Peter’s use of the prophet Joel demonstrates that what the prophets anticipated, a new covenant age, is found in Jesus Christ. This means that Jesus Christ ushers in the new covenant the prophets anticipated and Jesus fulfills God’s promises. Gentry and Wellum state, “But what is crucial to note is that this coming of God’s kingdom will occur only through the inauguration of the new covenant by the work of the Messiah, who is closely identified with Yahweh, thus bringing to fulfillment all God’s promises as revealed through the covenants.”⁵¹ Peter quotes Joel to make the point that Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension have brought about the anticipated pouring out of the Holy Spirit and the new covenant of which the prophets spoke. Peter moves from Joel to Jesus, making clear that the best way to understand what was just witnessed with the disciples at Pentecost is best understood not just as an Old Testament prediction but through Jesus fulfilling that

⁴⁸ Bock, *Acts*, 118.

⁴⁹ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 144.

⁵⁰ See Acts 3:6, 16; 4:7, 10, 12, 17, 18, 30; 5:28, 40.

⁵¹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 654.

prediction.⁵²

Psalm 16:8-11

After stating the recent events of Jesus being delivered up and killed by the Jewish authorities, Peter moves to his second text of the Old Testament, Psalm 16. In quoting from Psalms Peter highlights the fact that the Psalms point to the hope of the one promised by God. That one Peter says is none other than Jesus Christ. Stephen Dempster states, “The psalter keeps hope alive by indicating that Israel is still expecting an all-conquering hero who will be anointed by Yahweh to rule the world.”⁵³ This all-conquering hero of the Psalms is revealed to be a descendant of David, which Peter says is Jesus Christ. Dempster makes the point that the whole structure of the psalter develops the prophetic theme of a renewed creation under the rule of a son of David.⁵⁴

Psalm 16 is used by Peter to prove that the resurrection of Jesus has always been part of the Lord’s plan and supports the resurrection. Psalm 16 is also referred to by Paul in Acts 13:34-37 in connection to Jesus’ resurrection. This psalm is one of confidence that Peter links to David being the author. Peter’s use of this psalm, which many scholars argue was not originally seen as a Messianic psalm, shows a unique understanding.

One of the unique factors of Peter’s use of this psalm is how it impacts the Jews’ understanding of the resurrection. The Jews generally held to a bodily resurrection at the end of time that included both the righteous and the wicked. Peter’s argument is that Scripture predicted this resurrection of Jesus and all should be able to see the truth of it now.⁵⁵ It is only through the resurrection that David’s words in the psalm could be true of one of his descendants. Peterson states, “Peter’s point is that only through resurrection

⁵² Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 75.

⁵³ Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 195.

⁵⁴ Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 202.

⁵⁵ Bock, *Acts*, 125.

from the dead could a son of David rule forever over God's people."⁵⁶ The resurrection of Jesus then demonstrates that Jesus is the Messiah and so fulfills the promise of God. Peter sees the language within the psalm about trust and confidence in God's deliverance as supporting the resurrection.

Peter alludes to Psalm 132:11 as supporting how David would have understood Psalm 16. Peter calls David a prophet, which is a unique expression linking the understanding that the psalmist and other writers of Scripture are portrayed as prophets speaking through the Spirit.⁵⁷ Peter then alludes to Psalm 132 which itself describes the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7:12-13. The promise of this covenant is that God would set a descendant of David on his throne. Peter points to Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of this promise. Luke set up this fulfillment in Luke 1:32 where the child Jesus is said to be given the throne of David and the kingdom will last forever. While this fulfillment can look forward to how Jesus rules over all in his ascension and in particular in his second coming, the emphasis of the context is that Jesus has already fulfilled this promise by pouring out the Spirit on the people. Bock states, "Peter's point is that the exercise of messianic authority is on display now in the Spirit's present distribution."⁵⁸ Bock's point is supported by the fact that every other text cited is fulfilled at least initially by what Jesus has done and so the allusion to this psalm should operate in the same way. Peter's use of the Psalms shows how they too point forward and are fulfilled in Christ. W. S. Plummer writes, "The great key to the interpretation of the Psalms respecting David and Solomon is found in 2 Samuel vii where God gives a clear promise that the seed of David should reign forever. In no sense can that promise be made good except in Christ Jesus."⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 149.

⁵⁷ L. T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 5 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 51.

⁵⁸ Bock, *Acts*, 128.

⁵⁹ W. S. Plummer, *Psalms*, Geneva Series of Commentaries (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2016), 17.

Psalm 110:1

Peter also uses Psalm 110:1, which is an important text throughout the New Testament. C. H. Dodd sees this as “fundamental” text of the early church’s preaching.⁶⁰ The point of the citation of Psalm 110 is that Jesus is the one seated at God’s side and at the Father’s right hand. From this place of honor and glory Jesus pours out the Spirit and provides for the salvation of all who call upon his name. Bock states, “From this place of honor and unique glory, Jesus mediates the blessing of the Spirit and salvation in accord with the promise of God’s plan. This reveals who Jesus is. It is Christology of the highest level, tightly associating Jesus with God’s unique glory.”⁶¹ Just as with the other Old Testament citations used by Peter in his speech, the point is that Jesus pouring out the blessings of God is already being realized.

This citation is used by Peter to declare that Jesus is Lord. While some argue that such Christology was a late emergence in the early church, everything needed to make this conclusion was in place as a result of the resurrection. Bruce writes, “This exaltation of Jesus, in accordance with Ps. 110:1, is an integral part of the primitive apostolic message, as it remains an integral part of the historic Christian creeds.”⁶² Peter’s use of the Old Testament helps make this point. The resurrection recasts the verses and passages in a new light that points to Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of God’s plan and the Bible’s storyline.

Peter’s Conclusion

Peter concludes after combining these quotations and explaining his understanding of how Jesus fulfills them. Peter has made his case and assures his hearers that Jesus Christ was established by God as both Lord and Christ. The order of the titles

⁶⁰ C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (New York: Scribner, 1953), 35.

⁶¹ Bock, *Acts*, 134.

⁶² F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 67.

is important because Lord is in the forward and emphatic position. This title connects to both the citations of Joel 2 and Psalm 110.⁶³ The Lord the people are to call upon to be saved is none other than Jesus Christ, the one they crucified. Christ, the other title, is one of the key titles used by Luke throughout the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. The person the Jews crucified is the very one anointed by God and placed at God's side. The focus on the title and who Jesus is forces the Jews to see their guilt and the need to repent. C. K. Barrett states, "The crucifixion of one who shares the throne of God is a sin against God."⁶⁴ Peter's speech proclaims that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament and is both the Lord and Christ mediating God's blessings to his people. A true understanding of Jesus comes from understanding what God has done throughout history and what Scripture reveals.

The crowd responds to Peter's speech by asking what they should do. Peter presents the core of the gospel message: repent and be baptized in Jesus' name for the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter's call to repent echoes the message of John the Baptist as seen in Luke 3:3 and Matthew 3:2, as well as the message of Jesus in Luke 5:2 and Matthew 4:17. In Acts, the call to repentance is demanded on the basis of what is proclaimed about Jesus Christ (2:26-27; 3:17-21; 17:30-31; 20:21; 26:20). This repentance involves a change of mind about who Jesus is and what his role is in God's kingdom.⁶⁵ This response and the understanding of the gospel comes after Peter outlines how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament. The command of Peter to the crowd to repent and be baptized would not have been fully understood without first the explanation of who Jesus is and how he connects to the Old Testament promises of God. The command to be baptized "in the name of Jesus Christ" is connected to the language of Peter's speech

⁶³ Bock, *Acts*, 136.

⁶⁴ C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 1:152.

⁶⁵ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 154.

“calling on the name of the Lord to be saved.”⁶⁶ Peter’s remarks to the crowd on what their response should be draws on their understanding of the rest of his speech. The connection of Peter’s call of response is further connected to his speech by the idea of those who are baptized receiving the Holy Spirit. Peter’s speech used the prophet Joel to show how Jesus fulfilled the promise that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on people without discrimination. Peter now connects that promise to all who call upon the name of Jesus for deliverance.

Peter’s speech and his call for response demonstrate a pattern of using the overarching storyline of Scripture and specific Old Testament promises to point to Christ. F. F. Bruce sees Peter’s speech as being consistent with early apostolic preaching that contains four elements: (1) an announcement that the age of fulfillment has come; (2) an account of the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus; (3) a citation of the Old Testament being fulfilled by Jesus; and (4) a call to repent and trust in Jesus.⁶⁷ Peter walked the crowd of Jews through particular Old Testament passages to show how Jesus was indeed who he claimed to be: the Christ and Son of God. This explanation provides a model that can be used by those seeking to show how Christ is the culmination of God’s plan. Peter provides a model of how a Christian can make use of the understanding that all of the Scripture points to and finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. All of Scripture can be used in evangelism and used to make the case that Jesus is the Savior.

Acts 17:22-34

Acts 17 shows Paul addressing a pagan culture with the truth of the Christian faith. An exegesis of Acts 17:22-34 reveals how the overarching storyline of the Bible serves as a powerful and concise pattern for proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul seeks to move his listeners from what they know to seeing how God’s plan explains what

⁶⁶ Bock, *Acts*, 143.

⁶⁷ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 63.

they know. Paul provides an example on how a Christian can engage with someone who does not believe and presents the Bible's overarching story in a way they can understand.

Acts 17:22-34 is usually seen to have a rhetorical structure, but there is debate on how to outline the structure.⁶⁸ What is clear is that Paul is communicating the gospel purposefully, and in a way that can be received by the Athenians. Paul is building an argument for the existence of God and that God being the God of the Bible. Paul seeks to make God known to his listeners through relating how God can explain what they have been seeking through their worship to the "unknown God." Some commentators see Paul as starting with natural theology, or revealed theology, before moving on to the revelation of God's plan.⁶⁹ Peterson sees the progression as a reflection on the opening chapters of Genesis that moves to a proclamation of the one true Creator, to an assertion of this Creator's purpose for humanity, which then concludes with humanity's universal accountability before God as judge.⁷⁰ Paul starts with what can be known by all men—that there is a God and humanity can see this God's power revealed in creation. God being known to humanity is further expanded by Paul in Romans 1. Paul laying the groundwork of what all humanity knows of God can be further cultivated to see how Paul develops a biblical worldview on which the presentation of Jesus Christ would make sense.⁷¹ Paul is setting up a framework of introducing what humanity knows of God. Paul starts with connecting the Athenians and their own worship to the what they know of God but then moves on to set up the understanding of the biblical God.

The context of Paul's speech in Acts 17 is his visit to the city of Athens. This city was the capital of ancient Attica and was located in the Roman province of Achaia.

⁶⁸ Bock, *Acts*, 558.

⁶⁹ D. J. Williams, *Acts*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 301.

⁷⁰ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 493.

⁷¹ D. A. Carson, "Athens Revisited," in *Telling the Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 394.

Athens was also full of idols, which caused Paul to be provoked or angered. Paul continues his usual custom of sharing the gospel message at the synagogues and then the marketplace (Acts 13:5, 13:14, 14:1, 17:2, 17:17). Paul is speaking to two different groups and uses two different ways to communicate the gospel. When meeting in the synagogues, Paul was speaking to a biblically literate group and so quoted the Old Testament, showing how Jesus is the fulfillment of God's redemption plan (Acts 13:33, 13:34, 13:35, 13:47). The second group was people who have no connection to the Bible and are biblically illiterate. It was in the marketplace that local philosophers heard him and took him to the Areopagus. The Areopagus was used by the Athenians as a meeting place to discuss ideas and other various matters.⁷² Paul was invited to speak on what he was teaching in the marketplace, which the Athenians mockingly considered "babble" (Acts 17:18). Paul's teaching was presenting a new sort of philosophy that was in conflict with the main ways of thinking present in Athens. Philosophy in the first century referred to an entire way of life based on an intellectual system of thinking, close to what is termed a *worldview*, today.⁷³

Paul starts his speech with what seems a compliment but there is debate on whether it was a true compliment or had a double meaning. The fact that the reader knows Paul's reaction to the city's idolatry in verse 16 suggests that Paul's comments are given in an ironic sense.⁷⁴ Whether Paul was stating a respect for the Athenians for looking for God or expressing irony, the effect is the same—he was making it clear that they are doing so in ignorance. Paul sees in their idols a sincere search for God, or as Bock puts it, "an attempt to grope after God."⁷⁵ Paul seizes upon this search for God to start the discussion of the true God. The point is not that the unknown God is the same God of the Bible, but

⁷² Bock, *Acts*, 563.

⁷³ Carson, "Athens Revisited," 389.

⁷⁴ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 494.

⁷⁵ Bock, *Acts*, 564.

rather, Paul is using the idol as a way to start the conversation of who the true God is. Paul made the bold claim that he was going to enlighten their ignorance and in so doing, Stott writes, “insisting thereby that special revelation must control and correct whatever general revelation seems to disclose.”⁷⁶ Even in the midst of a polytheistic culture, Paul gently confronts the people’s understanding of God by leading the conversation in a monotheistic direction.⁷⁷

Paul segues from complimenting the Athenians for their search for God to describing the true God. This true God not held or contained in an idol made by humans. This God is the creator of all. While there might be some common aspects with Greek thought, such as the idea that God cannot be contained in a temple,⁷⁸ Paul is describing the true God of the Bible who is Sustainer and Creator of everything and who does not need humans, which is drastically different from what most Greeks believed. The Epicureans believed the gods were removed from human life.⁷⁹ The Stoics conceived god in a pantheistic sense. Paul’s presentation of God would have clashed greatly with both of these views. Paul put forth the biblical God who is actively involved in the world, personal, distinct from the creation, and the final judge.

Paul then moves on to describe God as the Creator of nations through one man, Adam. God sets the times and limits of humans on the earth. The point with this statement is that God is sovereignly in control of humanity and this world. Paul uses Adam to show that all humans have their beginning in God. This idea was counter to the Greek conception that they were a superior race and all others were barbarians.⁸⁰ In referring back to Adam,

⁷⁶ Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 285.

⁷⁷ C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 2:838.

⁷⁸ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 336.

⁷⁹ Carson, “Athens Revisited,” 39

⁸⁰ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 496.

Paul sets a common connection for all humans. In effect, Paul is saying that the story of God includes all of humanity because all humans find their beginning in God, and God has control over all humanity. Because all humanity has their root in God, they can seek him and might find him. The two verbs used, *groped* and *find*, are optative, which express a possibility of finding God.⁸¹ It seems that Paul is saying that the Greeks efforts to find God will not be successful until they understand who God has revealed himself to be. Wall summarizes, “In setting forth this theological claim, Paul prepares the audience for his ultimate move to Christian proclamation, where he will proclaim that the Creator God makes just such as world to deliver them all from divine judgment.”⁸² God is near to humanity and so provides a way in which humanity can be reconciled to him.

Paul moves from God the Creator to looking for God’s will and plan. While humanity can know some aspects of who God is through nature, nature alone will not give humanity the full picture. Romans 1:18-32 communicates the same concept that creation reveals God’s power and glory but cannot reveal the gospel or God’s plan for humanity. Bock writes, “Paul will turn to understanding the plan now revealed to all as the way to come to an understanding of what God asks of those he creates. God is near to all those he has created, and has acted on their behalf. Without an appreciation of God’s plan and action, God will not be found, according to Paul in this speech.”⁸³ Paul highlights the individual’s response since God is not far from anyone. Bock continues, “To miss this point about how revelation completes understanding is to miss the key, final point of the entire speech.”⁸⁴

Paul uses pagan ideas to help express the truth that God is not far off. The text of living, moving, and having one’s being in the Deity appears to be a reference toward a

⁸¹ Bock, *Acts*, 566.

⁸² Wall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 247.

⁸³ Bock, *Acts*, 567.

⁸⁴ Bock, *Acts*, 568.

widespread belief rather than a specific passage quoted of Epimenides.⁸⁵ There was a widespread belief that people were created by God and so God was not far off. The comment of “we are his offspring” is also a quote by a pagan poet Aratus.⁸⁶ By using these quotations and concepts, Paul works with ideas that are familiar to his audience. What is different in Paul’s speech here is that he does not quote Scripture like he would have done when proclaiming in the synagogues. Paul’s use of Aratus makes the point that humans are God’s creation and so humans cannot worship God through making idols.⁸⁷ In essence, Paul is using the Greeks’ own ideas as a way to point to God as the Creator who made humanity in his image. Bock states, “Paul contextualizes the citation and presents it in a fresh light, setting up his critique. He takes a Greek idea of the ‘spark of the divine being’ in us tied to Zeus and speaks of being made as God’s children by the Creator, alluding to our being made in God’s image.”⁸⁸ Because humans are made in the image of this Creator, it makes sense the Creator is not to be thought of as crafted from gold, silver, or stone by humanity. This critique of idol worship is rooted in biblical theology and thought. Paul encourages the Athenians to not think of God in this way.

Paul now turns to what the response should be. While formerly there were times of ignorance, God is calling for all people to repent. The idea of times of ignorance might be why Paul was not as condemning as he could have been with the Athenians’ idol worship. The idea of times of ignorance also points to the fact that the Athenians’ view of God or the divine is not according to knowledge. This critique links back to how Paul started his speech when pointing out the unknown god. Ignorance is not an excuse

⁸⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 384.

⁸⁶ I. H. Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 289.

⁸⁷ Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 530.

⁸⁸ Bock, *Acts*, 568.

because God has now commanded all to repent.

Paul alludes to Jesus as the man through whom God judges and who is righteous. While Paul does name Jesus back in verse 18, he only alludes to him at this point in his argument. Paul puts forth two Christological elements: judgment and the resurrection. The concept that Jesus will judge all of humanity is found throughout the Bible, such as in Acts 10:40-42 and John 5:27. The concept might find its basis in the Son of Man who receives judgment and dominion in Daniel 7.⁸⁹ The second Christological element is the resurrection. The resurrection is God's affirming of Jesus to the whole world. Bock states, "The resurrection was a universal demonstration and proof of God's call to Jesus to be judge."⁹⁰ Paul presents Jesus as the fulfillment of God's plan. As such, repenting and turning to Jesus are presented as the way in which humanity can know God and His plan for humanity.

Paul's speech receives mixed response as some people mock the idea of the resurrection and some are willing to hear Paul speak again. Paul presenting the resurrection comes into direct conflict with the majority view of the Greeks, which was that there could be no return from the dead.⁹¹ Besides those who mocked Paul's appeal to Jesus and those who seemed interested, a third group believed what Paul presented. Those individuals who believed are named. Paul's speech resulted in a full range of responses. Noting this range of responses can be comforting for those who engage in evangelism.

Paul's engagement with the Athenians can be an encouraging model for modern day evangelism. Paul sought to engage the current culture by challenging its views but also offered hope. Bock states, "His message stresses the gospel as an invitation into a

⁸⁹ Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 386.

⁹⁰ Bock, *Acts*, 570.

⁹¹ J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Anchor Bible, vol 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 612.

new life and seeks points of contact with such desires as already exist in the culture.”⁹² Paul knows to whom he is speaking and so tailors his presentation accordingly. He knows that he first has to establish a biblical worldview before proclaiming the truth of Jesus. Without a biblical worldview, the proclamation of the gospel will not make sense. Carson explains, “But what Paul provides is the biblical metanarrative. This is the big story of the Bible that frames and explains all the little stories. Without this big story, the accounts of Jesus will not make any sense- and Paul knows it.”⁹³ Paul builds a biblical view of the world by first presenting God as the creator of everything, then states that this God cannot be confined within any temple. Furthermore, this God does not need anything from humanity; this God exists within himself. Humans are dependent on this God such that he “gives all men life and breath and everything else” (Acts 17:25). Only after presenting this God does Paul move on to humanity, which is descended from one man. Paul speaks of God being near and that humanity should know God, but there is an assumption that humanity does not know God. Paul urges correct belief in this God, not the idol worship in which the Athenians engage. Paul finished the framework on which the gospel can be proclaimed by establishing a linear concept of how God has acted.⁹⁴ This presents the storyline of the Bible since this is where the Bible starts as well. It allows humanity to be placed within the framework of the Bible’s storyline so people can come to know God for who he is and humanity according to the Bible. The overarching narrative of the Bible also provides the fundamental foundation on which Jesus Christ can make sense and be received. Stott makes the point that many people reject the gospel not because they believe it to be false, but because they believe it to be trivial.⁹⁵ Paul’s outlining of history and creation under God makes it clear that the gospel is not trivial but

⁹² Bock, *Acts*, 573.

⁹³ Carson, “Athens Revisited,” 395.

⁹⁴ Carson, “Athens Revisited,” 394.

⁹⁵ Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 290.

the only way to make sense of existence.

It is striking that there is little of what many might consider to be the gospel message contained in Paul's address. Carson writes that this address by Paul was most likely a "condensed report of a much longer speech."⁹⁶ Reading Paul's epistles can be a way to gain an idea of how this condensed report would be further explained and detailed. Paul is also cut off when he speaks about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul might have been stopped from proclaiming a complete gospel presentation, but he was successful in establishing the foundation on which it can be proclaimed. Several men also followed him, and after following him they believed. Carson says, "Following Paul's address, no one became a Christian on the spot. But some did become followers of Paul. In consequence, in due course they grasped the gospel and believed; they became Christians."⁹⁷ Paul's speech demonstrates how laying the ground work on which the gospel can be built is as important as sharing the truth of who Jesus is. This groundwork prepares a person to hear and understand the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The passages discussed in this chapter reveal that Scripture's overarching storyline gives the theological framework to understand the plan of God and the gospel. If there is indeed a lack of knowledge of Scripture's storyline, then one's grasp of the gospel would be truncated and one would be prone to misunderstand God's plan, truth, and the gospel itself. For this reason, evangelism must unpack the Bible's message by appealing to the Bible's entire story. When presenting the gospel, Christians need to make sense of the gospel by placing it within the Bible's entire teaching, starting in the Old Testament and reaching its fulfillment in Christ. This alone will explain the gospel message and allow people to understand how to make sense of all of life and this world from the

⁹⁶ Carson, "Athens Revisited," 391.

⁹⁷ Carson, "Athens Revisited," 397.

entirety of God's revelation. Through presenting this story Christians can help people see how God's plan makes sense for their life and how they fit into the Bible's storyline.

Because all Scripture points to and finds fulfillment in Christ, Christians can be confident in using the Bible to point to Christ. Christians should be trained in how Bible passages fit into the framework of the Bible's storyline so they can be more confident in sharing with those who do not believe. The passages presented in this chapter help establish the basis for using the Bible's storyline in evangelism.

CHAPTER 3
BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND ITS ABILITY TO
PROVIDE AN EFFECTIVE BASIS
FOR EVANGELISM

Evangelism should be grounded in a robust biblical theology that produces greater understanding of Scripture’s story and produces effective evangelistic practice. Biblical theology helps provide a deeper and more in-depth understanding of how God’s revelation unfolds progressively. This deeper understanding supports a person’s comprehension in the overarching storyline of the Bible, which will give greater confidence in articulating God’s redemptive story, the gospel.

Evangelism not grounded in the plot of the Bible lacks a connectedness to the whole of God’s redemptive plan. While the Holy Spirit can still use such evangelism, grounding sharing the gospel within the storyline of the Bible creates a robust presentation that helps the hearer understand his need for a savior and how the gospel makes sense within the greater story of God’s plan. When evangelism is connected to the biblical story through biblical theology, the story of the Savior is rooted in the history of the world and how God has revealed himself. The biblical narrative provides a foundation on which the gospel can make sense and be connected with the rest of the Bible.

The biblical storyline provides an effective tool for evangelism because it helps hearers grasp the metanarrative of the Bible.¹ Grasping the overarching story of the Bible

¹ There is disagreement on whether or not the word *metanarrative* should be used in referring to the Bible’s storyline. Michael Horton points out that *metanarrative* was really a postmodern term used to discredit overarching stories that sought to portray the meaning behind life. While the Bible is a mega narrative, meaning it is a big story presenting a worldview of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 16-17. Other writers take metanarrative as an interchangeable term for big story or grand narrative, which controls how one views life. Jared Wilson says, “Until we understand the big, overarching story—what literary scholars call “the metanarrative”—of the universe, we will only be throwing our best personal narratives into the forgettable dustbin of history.” Jared C. Wilson, *The Story of Everything*

provides a framework and basis for understanding all that God has communicated to his people. The metanarrative of the Bible also provides the true story of the universe into which everyone's personal story fits. Eugene Peterson says, "The biblical story invites us in as participants in something larger than our sin-defined needs, into something truer than our culture-stunted ambitions. We enter these stories and recognize ourselves as participants, whether willing or unwilling, in the life of God."² The storyline of the Bible not only provides understanding for the biblical narrative but also understanding for all of humanity's existence. Evangelism which is connected to the biblical story helps hearers find how their life has meaning within the overarching narrative of the Bible.

Biblical Theology

A robust biblical theology produces a greater understanding of the gospel as part of Scripture's overarching plotline of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. There are many definitions for *biblical theology*. One such definition is given by Brian Rosner. He says that *biblical theology* is the discipline that "proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyze and synthesize the Bible's teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible's overarching narrative and Christocentric focus."³ Another way of understanding *biblical theology* according to Eugene Peterson is "a way of reading the Bible as one story by one divine author that culminates in who Jesus Christ is and what he has done, so that every part of Scripture is understood in relation to him."⁴ Biblical theology is interpreting each passage of the Bible within the context of the whole of Scripture, acknowledging that God's

(Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 29. For the purposes of this project, *metanarrative* is used in the same way as the Bible's storyline.

² Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 41.

³ Brian S. Rosner, "Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 10.

⁴ Nick Roark and Robert Cline, *Biblical Theology: How the Church Faithfully Teaches the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 26.

revelation is progressive and each passage's meaning is found within its placement within the entirety of the canon of Scripture. In reference to the books of the Bible, T. Desmond Alexander states, "There is not a book within the whole collection that can be interpreted satisfactorily in isolation from the rest. Each book contributes something special to the meta-story and, in turn, the meta-story offers a framework within which each book may be best interpreted."⁵ Biblical theology as the discipline of understanding the whole of the biblical story helps a reader understand each section in light of the whole canon.

Biblical theology is built on the belief that there is a unity of the message of the Bible.⁶ The unity of the Bible comes from having God as its ultimate author. While God used many humans at many different times to write the Bible, God is the ultimate author who ensured its words and message. While there is an overall unity to the Bible, God's revelation is progressive, and everyone must account for this in any interpretation of it. Michael Lawrence says, "The Bible was written over two millennia, as God progressively revealed more and more of himself and his story."⁷ The Bible is also historical in nature. The events that are told are a story "enacted and then explained by God about God."⁸ The revelation can be called redemptive history because it is an account of God's redemptive plan that takes place in history. There is unity within the Bible because God prepares all things for his eternal plan. Even though God's revelation is progressive, which means it is worked out over time, there is unity while his redemptive story unfolds in history.

⁵ T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 10.

⁶ Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 20.

⁷ Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 27.

⁸ Lawrence, *Biblical Theology*, 27.

Biblical theology is also built on the belief that the Bible is best understood as God having a unified plan in which everything is part of that plan. While the Bible is composed of many different genres, such as law, poetry, and letters, to name a few, these different parts are part of God's plan. Since all of the Bible is communicating God's plan, it can be understood as having an overarching storyline. In the broadest of terms, this story can be summed up, according to Michael Lawrence, as "a story about a King, a kingdom, and the King's relationship with his subjects."⁹ While this summation leaves many details and themes out, this is one attempt to explain the story of God's plan in a simple manner. This narrative of the Bible encompasses the whole of history, starting at the beginning of creation, to the end history, and on through to eternity. The narrative of the Bible is not just a thing of the past because it communicates God's plan that includes all of the present and future. While the Bible does not give details about present times, it does reveal God's plan, which provides a framework to understand present times. This has been referred to the metanarrative or meta-story—the story which explains all that is and gives the framework for a person's worldview.

Biblical theology is built in the belief that the Bible reveals God's plan and therefore the Bible has a unifying structure. The structure provided by God's plan can be expressed in different ways. One of the ways to see this structure is defined by covenants. While covenants helped structure God's revelation, they also reveal God relating to humans and the unfolding of God's plan to redeem his people. O. Palmer Robertson defines a covenant as "a bond in blood sovereignly administered. When God enters into a covenantal-relationship with men, he sovereignly institutes a life-death bond."¹⁰ How these covenants relate to one another has been one of the big debates throughout church history. The question is how much continuity or discontinuity is there between the

⁹ Lawrence, *Biblical Theology*, 30.

¹⁰ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 4.

covenants, particularly between the old and new covenants. It is best to understand there to be both continuity and discontinuity between the covenants because biblical evidence points to a unified character of God’s plan through the covenants, but the details of each covenant are important to contribute to the one overall plan of God. Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum state, “Through the progression of the covenants, we come to know God’s glorious plan, how all God’s promises are fulfilled in Christ and applied to the church as God’s new covenant and new creation people (Heb. 1:1-3; cf. Eph. 1:9-10, 22-23; 3:10-11) and how we are to live as God’s people today.”¹¹ Covenants, and specifically the larger reality of God’s kingdom established through covenants, provide a relational framework upon which the biblical storyline can be understood, and God establishes a relationship with his people.

Another belief which biblical theology is built on is that the story of the Bible is ultimately centered in Jesus Christ. Gentry and Wellum explain, “As God’s eternal plan is enacted on the stage of human history, it moves from creation in Adam to consummation in Christ.”¹² God’s redemptive plan is progressively unfolded to reveal that Jesus Christ fulfills all the promises of God (2 Cor. 1:20). Graeme Goldsworthy states that all of Scripture relates to Christ in some way and so can be understood as Christian Scripture.¹³ God’s story cannot be understood apart from Jesus Christ and how all Scriptures speak about him (John 5:39-40). Edmund Clowney writes, “The story of Jesus, then, does not begin with the fulfillment of the promise, but with the promise itself, and with the acts of God that accompanied His word.”¹⁴ The story of the Bible is truly the story of Jesus. Roark and Cline state, “God’s story is a grand story—the grandest of them

¹¹ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 36.

¹² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 36.

¹³ Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 23.

¹⁴ Edmund P. Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 16.

all, in fact—it's centered on his plan of redemption in the person and work of Jesus Christ.”¹⁵ God's progressive revelation is the story of his redemptive plan unfolding to bring his people back into relationship with him. This redemption is accomplished through the life and work of Jesus Christ. The believer is redeemed as the Holy Spirit applies this salvation.

Biblical theology traces many themes through the Bible, but the backbone to the Bible's overarching story are the themes of kingdom and covenant. Goldsworthy states, “Two key events, above all, are seen as the preparation for the coming of Jesus. These are the covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the reign of David.”¹⁶ These two events present the themes of covenant and kingdom. These two themes are connected and it can be said that God's kingdom comes through the biblical covenants. Gentry and Wellum outline their belief that, after the fall, God's saving kingdom comes into this world through covenants. These covenants are God establishing a relationship with his people. God's saving rule and reign come through biblical covenants over time.¹⁷ The concept of God's kingdom can also be seen as part of the promise and fulfillment motif such that the story of the Bible can be stated as the kingdom revealed in Old Testament history, the kingdom revealed by the prophets as a future hope, and finally, the kingdom revealed in Christ.¹⁸ An expanded understanding of the biblical storyline framed as kingdom comes from Vaughan Roberts, who articulates the story as the perished kingdom, the promised kingdom, the partial kingdom, the prophesied kingdom, the present kingdom, the proclaimed kingdom and the perfected kingdom.¹⁹ Covenant and kingdom

¹⁵ Roark and Cline, *Biblical Theology*, 17.

¹⁶ Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 56.

¹⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 34.

¹⁸ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 26.

¹⁹ Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 26.

both get to the heart of what holds the storyline of the Bible together: God in relationship with his image bearers. As Roark and Cline state, “The very heart of the Bible’s message is the good and right reign of God over all his people and over all his creation. The story of Scripture, then, is the story of God the King, and his loving and gracious purposes of saving a people for himself to delight in his glorious presence forever.”²⁰

In addition, and organically related to kingdom and covenant, the Bible can be understood to have four major plot movements. These four movements are creation, fall, redemption, and consummation.²¹ Hunter and Wellum say, “These four plot movements are helpful because they follow the Bible’s own plot and help us think about the Bible’s unique worldview against other worldviews.”²² Using these four plot movements also help connect the whole Bible together and show the unified biblical narrative,²³ and help answer some of the questions that all human have about life, such as why does something exist, what went wrong with the world, is there a solution to the problem, and what is the ultimate end of history? The first two movements of the Bible’s plot are revealed in the first three chapters of Genesis. Genesis 1–2 presents God creating all that is out of nothing and making humanity the pinnacle of his creation. Genesis 3 presents what went wrong with the account of Adam and Eve rebelling in the Garden. However, there is a glimmer

²⁰ Roark and Cline, *Biblical Theology*, 74.

²¹ There can be debate as to whether the Bible’s storyline is best understood as having four or five movements. N. T. Wright puts forth a five-movement framework (creation, fall, Israel, Jesus, church) in his *Scripture and the Authority of God* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2013). Even among those who hold to the same number of movements, there are differences. Some individuals use different terminology to describe the four plot movements. The greatest difference seems to be between restoration and consummation. The usage of these terms can point to different understandings or conclusions in the arena of eschatology. These differences are of less importance than the commonality of holding to a four-movement breakdown of the biblical narrative. For the purposes of this work, the four-movements structure of creation, fall, redemption, consummation will be used.

²² Trent Hunter and Stephen Wellum, *Christ from Beginning to End: How the Full Story of the Scripture Reveals the Full Glory of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 52.

²³ Bruce Riley Ashford, “The Story of Mission: The Grand Biblical Narrative,” in *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations*, ed. Bruce Riley Ashford (Nashville: B & H, 2011), 6.

of hope in the promise of an “offspring” or “seed” of the woman who will one day defeat the enemy. This glimmer of hope sets up the movement of redemption. The plot movement of redemption covers the bulk of the Bible. Hunter and Wellum state, “The rest of the Bible, with all the stories and details in that storyline—the people, the sacrificial system, its saving events—slowly unfolds this initial “good news” promise, which is fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ.”²⁴ The last movement is new creation, or consummation. This last movement is the end to which all history is moving. While Christ brought the new creation through his life, death, and resurrection, just as the Old Testament prophets predicted would occur with the coming of the Messiah, it is only in Jesus’s return at the end of the age where the new creation as a place will be brought to its fullness and completion. Hunter and Wellum describe these four movements as “the wide-angle lens of Scripture.”²⁵ Upon these plot movements the covenants and other themes are placed.

Modern Development and Use of Biblical Theology

Geerhardus Vos defines *biblical theology* as “that branch of Exegetical Theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible.”²⁶ Vos helped pioneer the discipline of biblical theology what it is today within contemporary evangelical practice of biblical theology. Vos outlines four features of biblical theology which Michael Lawrence reflects in his work, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church*. These four features are that revelation is progressive, historical, organic, and practical.²⁷ Goldsworthy presents a list of contemporary evangelicals who have helped develop biblical theology and their contributions. He lists people such as

²⁴ Hunter and Wellum, *Christ from Beginning to End*, 53.

²⁵ Hunter and Wellum, *Christ from Beginning to End*, 54.

²⁶ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 5.

²⁷ Lawrence, *Biblical Theology*, 27.

Geerhardus Vos, Edmund Clowney, Dennis Johnson, William VanGemeren, William Dumbrell.²⁸ After this survey of contemporary evangelicals Goldsworthy draws the conclusion that “none of us can claim to have the final word on the matter.”²⁹

Goldsworthy’s quick overview of the different approaches of biblical theology used by others demonstrates that people try to understand the overarching story of the Bible in many ways. No matter the difference in opinion on the details of how the storyline of the Bible is structured, the fact remains that trying to understand the narrative is vital to understanding the message.

Less formal biblical theology can be found in different forms within writings aimed at helping build up the church. These are less formal in that they are not academic theological works but rather are aimed at using the overarching storyline of the Bible as a tool to help the church. A common thread among these is the idea that the grand narrative of the Bible helps provide understanding which is beneficial to a person’s faith and life. The book *Understanding the Big Picture of the Bible* is an example of a work that seeks to use the storyline of the Bible to help the church. In this work the authors seek to show how the “Big Picture,” or narrative, of the Bible impacts how a person should read the Bible. Knowing the story of the Bible means that reading the diverse parts of the Old Testament ultimately find their coherence and sense in the coming of Christ. The conviction that the story of the Bible is centered on Christ helps readers understand how the whole canon holds together, but the Old Testament reveals God and his ways for the benefit of God’s people on its own. In the introduction Vern Poythress states, “At the heart of understanding all these Old Testament books is the truth that they point forward to the suffering of Christ, his resurrection, and the subsequent spread of the gospel to ‘all

²⁸ Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 84-98.

²⁹ Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 98.

nations' (Luke 24:47)."³⁰ The work goes on to address how the Bible can be seen through the lens of the covenants and the promises of God and the fulfillment of those promises, as well as the center role of Christ as the one the Old Testament anticipates. Poythress is seeking to take the story of the Bible and make it a tool that helps people read the books of the Bible with greater understanding. A similar work is Vaughan Roberts' *God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible*. Roberts' work seeks to put the pieces of the Bible together using one common theme: kingdom and the king. Roberts writes, "My aim is to provide all Christians, from the new convert to the mature believer, with an overview of the whole Bible that will help them see how the different parts fit together."³¹ The plot and flow of the Bible helps give understanding to each part of the Bible and how it fits within the greater narrative.

Other uses of biblical theology are the tracing of themes throughout the Bible to give a greater understanding of the story from one perspective. Two examples of this are T. Desmond Alexander's *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* and Nancy Guthrie's *Even Better than Eden*. Alexander's work seeks to trace the themes starting in the book of Revelation. Alexander states, "The approach adopted here is to begin at the end. As is often the case, a story's conclusion provides a good guide to the themes and ideas dominant throughout."³² Some of the themes Alexander traces are the presence of God, dealing with evil, being a holy people, and the themes of the lamb. Guthrie's work is similar in that it uses the themes found within Scripture to help readers see how they are included in the Bible's story. Guthrie states,

And whether you know it or not, this same grand story—the story found in the sixty-six books of the Bible—shapes the world you live in who you are, and what you want too. That's why you and I need to know this story. It is where we find

³⁰ Vern S. Poythress, "An Overview of the Bible's Storyline," in *Understanding the Big Picture of the Bible*, ed. Wayne Grudem, C. John Collins, and Thomas R. Schreiner (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 9.

³¹ Roberts, *God's Big Picture*, 10.

³² Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 10.

answers to our questions about what really matters now and into eternity. This story has the power to change everything about our stories.³³

Guthrie's work is written for the average church member. It uses the Bible's storyline as a tool to help people see how the narrative of the Bible encompasses their own story and gives meaning to much of what they experience in life. Guthrie traces the themes of wilderness, being made in God's image, the bridegroom, Sabbath, and offspring, among others. The focus is on how God's plan has an end that is better than the paradise, which was Eden. In this manner it is very devotional, and it seeks to give hope to the reader. Guthrie sums up this hope: "May you find yourself in this story and its happily ever after, May you make your home, even now, in Christ, and may he one day welcome you into his eternal home that will be even better than Eden."³⁴ There is value in works like these that help trace themes and make sense of them within the storyline of the Bible. These works give greater understanding about how the Bible is unified and how the biblical narrative relates to and encompasses all of life.

Other less formal biblical theological works seek to show how all the stories that humanity tells and the stories that make up experience only make sense within the scheme of God's grand story. Mike Cospers's *The Stories We Tell* is an example of stories as echoes of the Bible's narrative. The belief is that the grand narrative of the Bible encompasses the whole of the world and humans cannot help but echo it in their own story telling.³⁵ In this way, the Bible's storyline of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation help make sense of why humans tell the stories they do. Similar to Cospers's work is Jared Wilson's *The Story of Everything*, in which he makes the case that human experiences and stories find their true meaning and place within God's story. Wilson states, "The metanarrative of God's plan for the world gives perspective and proportion to our own personal narratives, but it doesn't diminish them, really. If anything, placing

³³ Nancy Guthrie, *Even Better than Eden* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 12.

³⁴ Guthrie, *Even Better than Eden*, 161.

³⁵ Mike Cospers, *Stories We Tell* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 13.

our stories in subjection to the sovereign story of God enhances them, gives them more meaning and resonance.”³⁶ These works and others like them help show how the grand narrative of the Bible encompasses all of human experience and is reflected in the stories humanity creates and shares.

Other works that endeavor to trace the plot of the Bible in an accessible way are Chris Bruno’s two books, *The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses* and *The Whole Message of the Bible in 16 Words*. These books are not formal biblical theologies; rather, they are works aimed at the average church goer. These books still have the goal of using the storyline of the Bible and the themes developed within that storyline to give greater understanding. Bruno states, “In this book, we are going to trace the storyline of the Bible and look at how some of the central themes are developed throughout its pages.”³⁷ Bruno’s aim and conviction is that through knowing the overarching storyline of the Bible, either through looking at certain benchmark verses or key words, a person will understand the whole of the Bible. Bruno writes, “I think it is important to have a good grasp of the overall story of the Bible.”³⁸ These two books are built on the conviction that a deeper understanding of the Bible’s story will give a better understanding of how God has been working and is working. This is one of the great benefits of biblical theology and Bruno helps make this benefit accessible to the average churchgoer.

There are even works aimed at families and children that trace the story of the Bible in such a way as to give a general overview of the grand narrative of the Bible. Kevin DeYoung’s *The Biggest Story* is one such work. In ten chapters DeYoung seeks to tell the story of the Bible, hitting the big movements and showing how Christ is the one promised at the beginning. DeYoung makes clear his purpose for the book: “Our kids can

³⁶ Wilson, *The Story of Everything*, 29.

³⁷ Chris Bruno, *The Whole Story of the Bible in 16 Verses* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 11.

³⁸ Chris Bruno, *The Whole Message of the Bible in 16 Words* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 147.

become acquainted with many Bible stories without ever grasping the Biggest Story that makes sense of all the others.”³⁹ This work seeks to make sense of the multitude of stories contained within the Bible by placing them within the overarching storyline. Another kids’ book that seeks to trace the story of the Bible is *The Garden the Curtain and the Cross* by Carl Laferton. This work sets the storyline of the Bible through three key settings: the garden at the beginning, which is connected to the temple, which is then connected to the cross of Christ. The author says, “The story of this book is the story of the whole Bible (but a lot shorter!).”⁴⁰ These works show how the story of the Bible can be used to help children grasp the meaning of the Bible and how the different parts fit within the narrative. Works such as these can be formative for families and children and help Christians gain a better grasp on the storyline of the Bible and in doing so deepen their grasp on God’s redemption plan.

This survey of how biblical theology is being used within the church shows the impact that the understanding the storyline of the Bible can have. While many other works could be referenced, those noted in this section give an overview of the variety of ways in which the biblical narrative has been used to help the church. These works also show a common belief that knowing and grasping the overarching story of the Bible is important for the average Christian.

The Bible’s Story in Evangelism

Story is an effective means of communication. All of humanity loves stories and listens to stories. Eugene Peterson even calls story “our most accessible form of speech.”⁴¹ Stories are accessible because they have an ability to present information in a compelling way. Stories also have the ability to draw one in and allow a person to see how

³⁹ Kevin DeYoung, *The Biggest Story* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 128.

⁴⁰ Carl Laferton, *The Garden, the Curtain, and the Cross* (Charlotte, NC: The Good Book for Children, 2016), 32.

⁴¹ Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 40.

the story and the truths conveyed relate to their own life. Peterson continues, “A good storyteller gathers us into the story. We feel the emotions, get caught up in the drama, identify with the characters, see into nooks and crannies of life that we had overlooked, realize that there is more to this business of being human than we had yet explored. If the storyteller is good, doors and windows open.”⁴² Stories can draw people in and help present concepts and truths in ways they can understand and apply.

Stories are used in the Bible to communicate profound truths. For instance Nathan confronting King David in 2 Samuel 12. Nathan used a story to lay out the truth of David’s sin in a way that David could not ignore. Another example is Hosea, which is a book of prophecy in the form of a story lived out by the prophet. The points of God’s message are found within the story. Jesus Christ is known as a storyteller, as he told many parables. Jesus’s teaching contains many parables, and some well-known examples are the stories of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) and the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Peter and Paul in the book of Acts tell the story of the Bible leading to Jesus (Acts 2:14-41, 13:13-41). There are many examples of stories being used in the Bible to communicate God’s message and move people to respond.

The biblical story encompasses all of humanity and so telling the Bible’s story can be an effective way of presenting the gospel. In presenting the gospel as a story, a person can grasp hold of how and why the gospel relates to them. Nancy Guthrie explains,

There’s another story, a story found in the pages of the bible—from the book of Genesis through the book of Revelation—that shapes and defines where I came from, why I am the way I am, what my life is like day to day, and what is ahead for me in the future. It is this story that explains my deepest joys as well as the empty places where contentment can be elusive. It is this story that explains my drive to be somebody and my sensitivity to feeling like a nobody. It explains what makes me cry and why I can laugh. This story explains my desire to look good, my craving for the good life, my longing for home and security, and much more.⁴³

⁴² Peterson, *Eat This Book*, 41.

⁴³ Guthrie, *Even Better than Eden*, 11.

Presenting the biblical story helps people grasp the meaning of their life within the greater meaning and greater story of the Bible. People can see how their own story falls within the narrative of a God who creates, redeems, and loves.

Stories communicate differently than a simple statement of fact. Some people just want to hear facts and come to their own conclusion, but other people need help processing ideas and concepts, and stories that provide that help. Sam Chan points out that stories work through at least two means. The first is that stories communicate concepts without using the words for those concepts. A story communicates a lesson about humility without ever using that word. The second is that stories make the listener see through the worldview of the narrator.⁴⁴ One of the benefits of having listeners see through the worldview of the narrator is that they are asked to suspend disbelief; they have to assume what is being said is real for the sake of the story. Chan states, “In the same way, when we tell stories from the Bible, the listener is asked to suspend disbelief about Jesus, miracles, and people rising from the dead.”⁴⁵ Story telling allows a Christian to present key components that might otherwise be dismissed or questioned that are essential to the biblical story. In this manner, a person can hear a more in-depth presentation of the gospel before arguing over details. N. T. Wright explains,

Stories, are, actually, particularly good at modifying or subverting other stories and their worldviews. Where a head-on attack would certainly fail, the parable hides the wisdom of the serpent behind the innocence of the dove, gaining entrance and favor which can then be used to change assumptions which the hearer would otherwise keep hidden for safety.⁴⁶

Stories are useful tools to present profound truths in simple ways that can pull the listener into understanding God’s big story of redemption. Stories can also put people at ease as they listen to them, as they present truths in a way that someone can be non-threatening. Christine Dillon says, “One huge advantage of using stories is simple that the hearer

⁴⁴ Sam Chan, *Evangelism in a Skeptical World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 176.

⁴⁵ Chan, *Evangelism in a Skeptical Word*, 177.

⁴⁶ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 38.

enjoys the story and doesn't feel threatened by it."⁴⁷ Stories have a way of being easy to listen to and inoffensive, which makes them a great tool to start a conversation on important topics.

Gospel presentation can be made simple through outlining the biblical story. One such method is the "3 Circles," released by the North American Mission Board in 2014. This simple tool seeks to outline the overall story of the Bible in three components connected by three arrows. The three components are God's design, brokenness, and the gospel. Sin connects God's design to brokenness showing that humanity's sin resulted in the brokenness all humans experience. The way out of this brokenness to the gospel is to repent and believe. Once a person knows the gospel they are encouraged to recover and pursue God's design, in that way the presentation comes full circle.⁴⁸ This tool seeks to paint a picture of the story of the Bible which is conveyed as all of humanity's story. While not using the language of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation, it seeks to give a similar outline of all of history. This brief outline is important for those who have not heard the Bible's story as it helps them understand the main movements.

Telling the main movements of the Bible is important because many people do not have knowledge of what the Bible is truly saying. Presenting the biblical narrative can help a person grasp the big picture of the message, which will enable them to understand how a gospel presentation makes sense and fits within that narrative. Alvin Reid states,

Most of us also have some knowledge of the whole biblical message and how the work of Christ relates to all Scripture. But most people with whom we have gospel conversations—and this is crucial—do not have such knowledge. They need to understand the gospel from the second way, from the perspective of the whole Bible. They need to see the story of Jesus is as big as the Bible itself, the story of Jesus is

⁴⁷ Christine Dillon, *Telling the Gospel Through Story: Evangelism That Keeps Hearers Wanting More* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 23.

⁴⁸ Jimmy Scroggins and Steve Wright, *Turning Everyday Conversations into Gospel Conversations* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 74.

bigger than our times and our individual lives, or even the spiritual aspect of our lives alone.⁴⁹

Explaining the Bible through a simple series of plot movements helps a person understand how sixty-six books written by different authors and in several languages can have one great story of redemption woven throughout. The movements of the Bible also make communicating the grand narrative easier for Christians and allow for a greater comfort in evangelism.

Evangelism based in the overarching storyline of the Bible can help reach those who have little knowledge of the Bible and the gospel message. It can also help reach those who might think they know what the Bible says but have a skewed view due to life circumstances or poor encounters with subpar evangelists. Reid says,

You can see that sharing Christ is helpful when we relate the truth we can see every day, whether in the stories we love or design we see. This is so vital for a culture that no longer knows the story of the Bible. We don't need to choose between the specific, propositional statements of the gospel truth and the glorious story of the Bible. But we do need to help people see both the truth of the gospel and the great story of God's redemptive plan.⁵⁰

Christians need to be equipped with a full understanding of the biblical storyline to be able to communicate the greatest story ever told: the story of God's redemption plan. Reid presents the storyline's movements as creation, fall, rescue, and restoration. This four-movement framework is helpful in communicating the Bible's storyline and is used by many evangelists, though the wording might change a little.

Knowing the Bible's storyline framed as creation, fall, redemption, and consummation allows a Christian to use the stories that society tells to point to the greater story of God's redemption plan. This is the idea that humanity's stories reflect and echo the greater story which all of humanity is in, God's story. Cospers states, "I believe the Big Story of the Bible—creation, fall, redemption, and consummation—is so pervasive, so all-encompassing of our world, that we can't help but echo it (or movements within it)

⁴⁹ Alvin L. Reid, *Sharing Jesus Without Freaking Out* (Nashville: B & H, 2017), 25.

⁵⁰ Reid, *Sharing Jesus*, 28.

when we're telling other stories."⁵¹ This means that the attentive Christian can use the common stories told on TV, in movies, or around the campfire as a bridge to the story of God's love for his people. Humanity's stories reveal that people long for something more; that people are broken and are hoping for a savior. Cospers states, "The stories we tell are all part of the story he's telling. We tell stories because we're broken creatures hungering for redemption, and our storytelling is a glimmer of hope, a spark of eternity still simmering in our hearts (Eccles.3:15)."⁵² Christians who know the storyline of the Bible are able to see within the stories of the world opportunities to present the true story that makes sense of all the other stories. Christians can present the Bible's story as the story that interprets and makes sense of all other stories, which can be an effective means of evangelism. Tim Keller states,

Christians do not claim that their faith gives them omniscience of absolute knowledge of reality. Only God has that. But they believe that the Christian account of things—creation, fall, redemption, and restoration—makes the most sense of the world. I ask you to put on Christianity like a pair of spectacles and look at the world with it. See what power it has to explain what we know and see.⁵³

The Bible's storyline helps makes sense of reality and human experience, which means it can be an effective tool in helping to share the gospel. Using the Bible's story to make sense of people's stories allows a Christian to show how the gospel provides meaning for all of life, which not only makes the gospel attractive, but also makes the gospel more plausible for listeners looking for meaning.

The Bible's storyline of creation, redemption, fall, and consummation is a great tool for evangelism. It enables Christians to communicate the gospel in the form of a story, which can grab the imagination of the listener. The gospel as a story also allows a person to listen and see how their own life might fit within the larger story of the Bible.

⁵¹ Cospers, *Stories We Tell*, 13.

⁵² Cospers, *Stories We Tell*, 29.

⁵³ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Riverhead, 2009), 127.

The listener can see echoes of the Bible's story within their own story. These echoes can serve as a bridge to connect people's stories to God's redemptive plan.

Conclusion

Biblical theology has provided a greater understanding of the overarching storyline of the Bible. Biblical theology has granted greater understanding not only of different elements of the story contained within the Bible, but also of how Christ stands at the center of God's redemptive plan. The church has benefited with the growing number of works which highlight the storyline of the Bible. These resources help grow the church's understanding of the ultimate story which makes sense of all of existence.

The Bible's storyline not only helps give Christians a better understanding the redemptive plan of God, it also becomes a powerful tool which can be used to reach the lost world. Communicating God's redemptive plan as a story allows Christians to communicate the gospel in a way which can grab the imagination of the listener and break through to their heads and hearts. Evangelism grounded in a robust biblical theology and presented as the ultimate story which explains all other stories, should be a practice in which all Christians are equipped.

CHAPTER 4

DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENTATION OF USING GOD'S STORY IN EVANGELISM CURRICULUM

The purpose of the project was to teach the congregation of River Valley Community Church the Bible's overarching narrative as well as how to use it as a tool for evangelism. To fulfill this purpose a curriculum was developed and implemented. The overall project of development and implementation had three stages: the development stage, the implementation stage, and the evaluation stage.

Development Stage

The development stage of the project was eight weeks long and took place from the end of July 2020 to September 19, 2020. The main portions of this stage included receiving ethics approval for all instruments used in the project, administering the pre-curriculum survey, developing the curriculum, and having the curriculum evaluated.

The ethics packet was approved on August 4, 2020. This approval allowed the project to move forward with the administering of the survey, which would help inform the final direction of the curriculum. The curriculum could be fine-tuned by the responses gathered by the survey.

The survey was administered to the congregation of River Valley Community Church on Sunday, August 9. The congregation had access to a physical copy of the survey for two weeks. The congregation also received an email with a link to an electronic copy of the survey they could use instead of the physical paper copy. These two different applications of the survey were used to help gather the most responses possible. The electronic and physical surveys were identical in content and appearance.

The majority of responses to the survey were received within the first week of the project's development stage, which made it possible to start creating of the curriculum. The curriculum was planned to be eight weeks long, to give enough time to cover various aspects of both evangelism and the storyline of the Bible.

The actual development and design of the curriculum took four weeks. This allowed two lessons to be completed and designed each of the weeks. The first lesson was the biblical basis for evangelism to set the stage for the church's need to be equipped for this task. The second lesson connected the concept of story to evangelism, which is a necessary hinge for this project because the basis for this project was that God's story given in Scripture is useful for evangelism. The third lesson started to address God's story by going through creation and how it relates to evangelism. The fourth lesson continued God's story by addressing the plot movement and epochal significance of the fall for the overall message of Scripture. The fifth lesson addressed redemption and the sixth lesson addressed the consummation of all things at Christ's return. The seventh lesson sought to start putting God's story together and also guided participants through certain themes found in the Bible. The eighth and final lesson sought to provide scenarios in which participants could put what they learned into practice.

The goal of the first lesson was to establish the biblical basis for evangelism. The biblical rationale and command to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ is one of the foundational truths of the curriculum and this study. By establishing a strong biblical basis for all Christians to be involved in evangelism, the rest of the curriculum would be seen as applicable and relevant. This lesson also aimed to have participants consider their pre-conceived notions about evangelism as well as their own personal history that might influence their practice of evangelism.

The goal of the second lesson was to establish that story telling is a powerful tool for communication and can be used in evangelism. This lesson served as a bridge from evangelism to evangelism using story. The second lesson focused on how story can

be used in effective communication of truths in ways that are easy to receive. The lesson ended considering God's story, the overarching narrative of the Bible, and how that story encompasses all of humanity. This lesson was heavily influenced by some of the popular level biblical theology books, such as *Even Better than Eden* by Nancy Guthrie.¹

Starting with the third lesson and continuing through the sixth lesson, the narrative of the Bible was explored according to the four-fold plot movements of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Each lesson took one of these plot movements and first established the biblical basis and then sought to apply the movement to humanity's story. These lessons taught the participants the skill of being able to affirm how each person's story can only be grasped within the overall story of Scripture. Unless a person sees his own story in light of Scripture, he cannot make sense of who he is. Showing people how their story makes sense within the overarching story of the Bible involves challenging aspects of people's story at the same time as pointing to how their longings and searching can only be fulfilled in God. The goal was to help participants see how the gospel offers a better story. These lessons were influenced by Joshua Chatraw's *Telling a Better Story*.²

The goal of lesson 7 was to show how the various parts of the Bible make sense in light of the story of God. That a person can understand how the individual pieces of the Bible relate to one another as well as grasp the significance that one storyline holds the Bible together. This goal was achieved by showing how God's one plan is unfolded in Scripture by tracing various central themes and motifs through the Bible, showing how these themes and elements have significance and make sense within the framework of God's story.

The goal of lesson 8 was to apply all the information learned through the lessons as well as have a chance for participants to apply what they learned by using God's story

¹ Nancy Guthrie, *Even Better than Eden* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 45.

² Joshua Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story: How to Talk about God in a Skeptical Age* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 73.

in evangelism. The main way this was accomplished was through scenarios in which class participants tried to relate to a person's story using God's story. This practice intended to enable the participants to see and experience how using God's story in evangelism might be applied outside of the classroom setting. Participants were evaluated during this time so they could grow in their skill set.³ The lesson ended with a challenge to put any newfound skills and understandings to practice by using those skills in evangelism.

Once the curriculum was developed, it was sent to a panel of pastors to be evaluated.⁴ This panel consisted of six pastors within the local community of Fort Smith, Arkansas. The panel's purpose was to evaluate the curriculum according to two main criteria: faithfulness to Scripture and applicability of the curriculum. The pastors on the panel were given a copy of the curriculum and an evaluation sheet. They were asked to respond as quickly as possible so that any input could be factored into the curriculum.

Implementation Stage

In the implementation phase of the project, the curriculum was used to lead a class made up of congregants of River Valley Community Church. The curriculum was scheduled for a Sunday night class and the duration of the class was set for one hour in length. The class was designed for discussion as well as teaching through the material.

The class, called "Using God's Story in Evangelism," was taught eight consecutive weeks, starting on September 20, and ending on November 8. These dates were chosen to minimize the impact of the holidays on class attendance as well as to correspond to the local school calendar. The class was on a Sunday evening to achieve the maximum participation from the congregation.

³ See appendix 3.

⁴ See appendix 2.

While the in-person class was taking place, the curriculum was recorded separately using Google's plugin Screencastify and uploaded the same week.⁵ This program allowed a recording of both the curriculum and the person teaching so that those watching could follow along as well as listen to the teacher walk through the lessons. The video format of the curriculum was then uploaded to YouTube, to the River Valley Community Church channel, so that those who could not attend the class could still follow along and benefit. The considerations of providing the content virtually was an attempt to have as many participants as possible from the congregation participate in the project while COVID-19 pandemic was ongoing. The virtual lesson did not contain discussion in this format and so it was not as engaging as the in-person class. In addition, participants who used the virtual option could not be evaluated at the end of the class on their use of God's story in evangelism. Because of these considerations, in-person participation was encouraged over online.

At the end of the class, participants were given the evangelism and biblical knowledge survey.⁶ The scores of the survey were compared to the scores of the pre-class survey to determine the project's effectiveness. Congregants who chose to participant online had an electronic copy of the same survey.

Evaluation Stage

After the implementation of the curriculum, the survey results were compiled and the whole project was evaluated to see if it achieved the goals stated in chapter 1. These goals were to assess the current practices and frequency of evangelism among the congregation of River Valley Community Church, assess the congregation's knowledge of Scripture's overarching storyline, develop a curriculum to equip the congregation to

⁵ All of the recorded lessons are on River Valley Community Church's YouTube channel. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h4wS3Jyf4pc&list=PLtlSH6TlhcnrhOEZ7GhLTP93bT-TvsNgN>.

⁶ See appendix 1.

use Scripture's storyline in evangelism, increase the congregation's knowledge of Scripture's storyline, and equip members of the congregation to engage in evangelism.

To determine the success of the first goal, the pre-curriculum surveys were compiled, and the congregation's responses were examined. The responses to part 2 of the general information section related to the congregation's current practices and frequency of evangelism. These questions ask the frequency of their evangelism efforts as well as whether they feel equipped for the practice of evangelism.

Goal 2 would be met by using the pre-curriculum survey. The survey has a section on the Bible's storyline containing fifteen questions that sought to determine a person's knowledge of the Bible's story. These questions were based on a six-point Likert scale using the range of Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Disagree Somewhat, Agree Somewhat, Agree, and Strongly Agree.

The third goal of developing curriculum would be measured as a success with the completion of the curriculum, "Using God's Story in Evangelism." The curriculum was developed for use with the congregation of River Valley Community Church for the purpose of fulfilling this goal. The effectiveness of this curriculum would be measured through goals 4 and 5.

The fourth goal would be considered met through the comparison of participants' pre-curriculum surveys and post-class surveys. Using a t-test, the survey scores on questions relating to Scripture's storyline would be compared to determine if there was any significant change. This change is a good indicator that the participants' increased score on the post-survey was due to the curriculum and not chance.

The fifth goal would be considered met through comparing the participants' survey responses as well as using the evangelism practice evaluation form. In particular, the responses to the section on evangelism would be compared to determine if there had been any significant change in their feeling of being equipped or not. A t-test would help in the process to determine if the change was significant or could be contributed to

chance. The evangelism practice evaluation form was used to see if participants were proficient in evangelism.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECT

The premise of project was that through a knowledge of the Bible's overall story, Christians can be equipped for evangelism. Building on this conviction, the project sought to increase the congregation's confidence in evangelism through the increase in knowledge of the Bible and its storyline. The purpose of the project was the subject of the goals and determined whether or not the project was a success.

Evaluating the purpose of the project as well as the five goals outlined in chapter 1 help determine whether this project was successful. The goals and methodology to determine whether the project was successful serve as the starting point in the evaluation and assessment of the project. Reflection on the whole process as to what worked and what could have been improved also offers further evaluation of the project. In this chapter, the project will be evaluated by the five goals stated in chapter 1, and at the same time reflection of the process will be added to help further assess the impact of the project on the congregation of River Valley Community Church.

One note is that this project was implemented during the fall of 2020 in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic impacted the congregation's participation in the project as well as resulted in a very different church environment. While the project was successfully completed, the reach within the congregation was not what it could have been.

Evaluation of the Purpose

The purpose of this project was to train the congregation in biblical theology for the purpose of evangelism at River Valley Community Church in Fort Smith, Arkansas. A curriculum which taught the biblical storyline for the purpose evangelism was

developed to achieve the project's purpose. The curriculum was titled "Using God's Story in Evangelism."

The purpose of training the congregation was successfully met to a limited extent. It was successfully met in that training took place by the teaching of the curriculum. However, success was limited due to the number of individuals from the congregation who participated in the training.

Those of the congregation who participated in the "Using God's Story in Evangelism" class were trained in biblical theology as well as how to use biblical theology in their everyday evangelism. The emphasis was on seeing Scripture broken down into four plot movements of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. Seeing Scripture in this way helps a person understand the overarching metanarrative of Scripture, which in turn helps a person understand the whole of the Bible. The curriculum developed for this project taught through each of these four plot movements as well as showed how different themes and motifs were developed through the plot movements.

Class participants were also taught how the Bible's storyline relates to evangelism. Through the curriculum, participants were taught that everyone's story can be clearly seen in light of the four plot movements of the Bible. The curriculum taught that knowledge of how the world was created by God, fell into sin, is redeemed through Christ, and knowledge of how there will be a glorious end awaiting believers, explains humans' longings and desires. Since everyone's story comes under God's story, there is a natural link between that allows God's story to be used in evangelism. Using God's story in evangelism is being able to explain how God's story makes sense of people's life, longings, and expectations.

Due to the limited number of people who participated in the class, it cannot be said that the congregation was trained. Since only eight individuals completed the class in-person and nine through the online option, only a small part of the congregation was trained to use biblical theology for the purpose of evangelism. While the curriculum can

still be used and become part of an ongoing training of River Valley Community Church, at the time of the completion of this project only a small segment of the congregation has completed it.

Evaluation of the Goals

There were five goals for the project. Goal 1 was to assess evangelism among the congregation. Goal 2 was to assess the biblical knowledge among the congregation. Goal 3 was to develop a curriculum designed to teach the biblical storyline and its use in evangelism. Goal 4 was to increase the knowledge of Scripture's overarching storyline. Goal 5 was to equip members of the congregation to engage in evangelism informed by Scripture's storyline.

Goal 1: Assess Evangelism Practices and Frequency

The first goal was to assess the current practices and frequency of evangelism of the congregation of River Valley Community Church. This was accomplished through the giving of a survey in which one section of the general information was about individuals' experience practicing evangelism and the frequency in which they engaged in evangelism. Sixty-one adult members of the congregation took the survey, 39 filling out a paper copy and 22 completing the electronic survey.

The goal was considered successfully met when 30 percent of the congregation completed the survey. With a membership of 87 adults and a completion of 61 surveys, there was a completion rate of 70 percent. This was a very good rate of completion. The electronic version was important so that members who were isolating due to the pandemic could be involved.

The survey helped give a picture of the congregation of River Valley Community Church as well as their feelings and practices in evangelism. The demographics of the congregation could be seen through the general questions at the start of the survey. All of the congregants who completed the survey were self-proclaiming

Christians, and the majority had been Christians for over fifteen years. Of the 61 responses, 41 listed that they had been Christians for fifteen years or longer. It could be assumed that the congregation would be made up of mostly mature believers since a large percentage of Christians have been believers for more than fifteen years. The total breakdown of “years as a Christian” can be seen in figure 1.

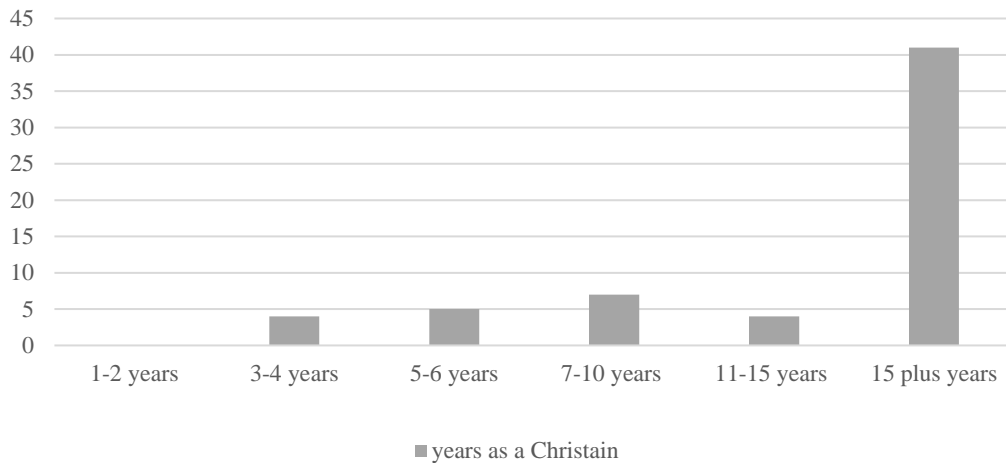


Figure 1. How long members have been a Christian

Congregants who participated in the survey also recorded their age range, which showed that River Valley Community Church is a middle aged congregation. The average age of the congregations fits with the number of years most have been Christians and supports the assumption of a more mature congregation. The highest number of responses recorded was 15 within the age range of 45 to 54, but the age range of 55 to 64 had 14 responses as well. The total breakdown of ages can be seen in figure 2.

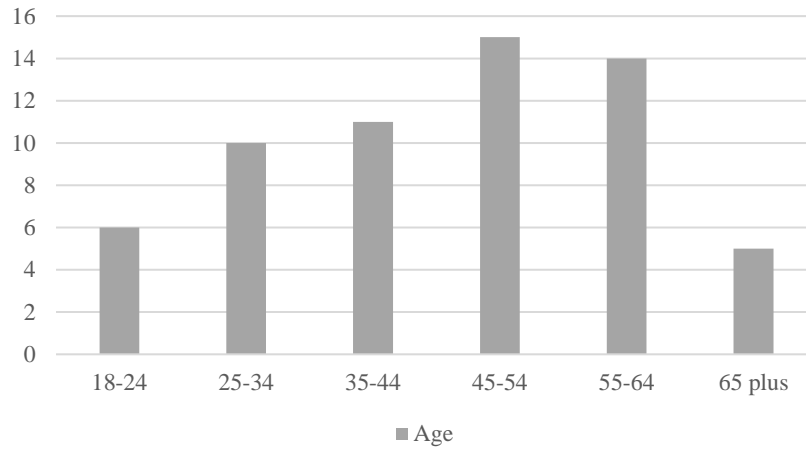


Figure 2. Age of congregation members

The survey responses also showed that most of the congregation has been a member of River Valley Community Church for a significant time. The church has only existed for 12 years, which means that anyone who has been a member for more than 8 years has been with the church for most of its existence. Of the 61 responses 25 indicated they had been members for at least 8 years or more. This means that the maturity of people surveyed have sat under the teaching of the church for a significant amount of time. This also means that the church has had ample time to equip the congregation for evangelism as well as other ministry. The total breakdown of how long the survey participants have has been a member can be found in figure 3.

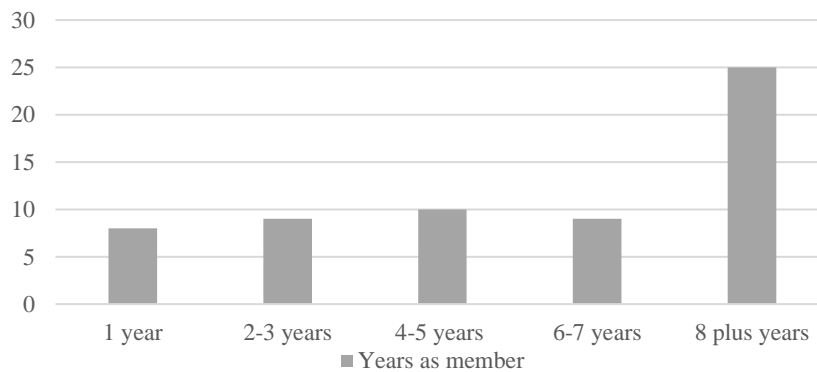


Figure 3. Length of membership

The most important responses in the general information section were contained in part 2, which surveyed frequency of evangelism and how the individual felt equipped for evangelism. This section helped make clear where the congregation thought it stood in terms of evangelism. The results were surprising in that they did not seem to meet the expectations set out in chapter 1 of this project. The congregation was determined to have a weakness in evangelism due to the lack of stories told about sharing their faith as well as lack of evidence of inviting people to the church.

The survey responses revealed that every single individual has shared their faith before, except for one. This seems to indicate that the church can and has shared their faith. When the frequency of the practice of evangelism is examined, the bulk of responses indicated that participants had shared their faith within the last week of the survey or within the last month of the survey. Nineteen responded that they had shared their faith within the last week and twenty responded that they had shared their faith within the last month. The full breakdown of the frequency of evangelism can be seen in figure 4. The responses also show that most, 51, feel equipped for evangelism.

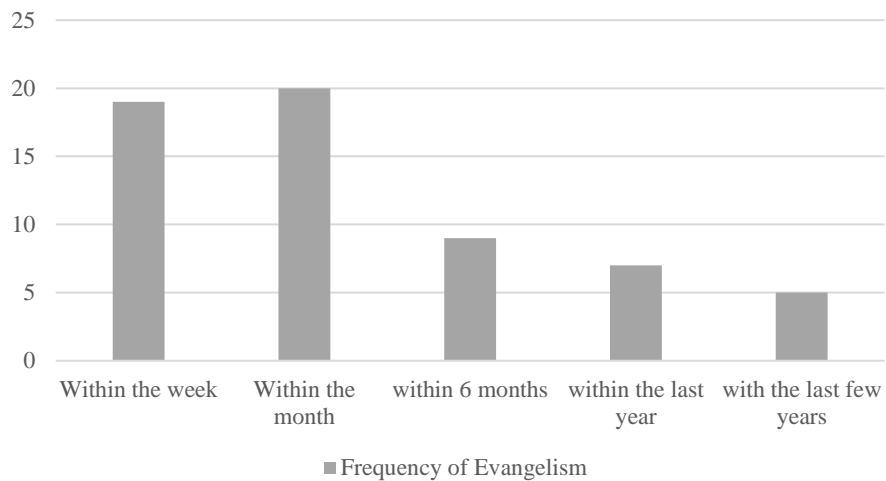


Figure 4. Frequency of evangelism of members

The survey responses seem to indicate there was no need for an effort to increase evangelism within the congregation. Evangelism seems to be a practice that is frequently undertaken by the congregation of River Valley Community Church. The results of this survey do not align with the previous examination of the congregation's strengths and weaknesses.

One explanation could be that the previous examining of the church was slightly incorrect regarding evangelism as a weakness in the church. However, the problem with that explanation is that the staff and leadership of the church agree that the congregation as a whole does not seem to be engaged in evangelism in any noticeable fashion. This would lead one to believe that there might be a problem within the survey that would show this discrepancy between itself and the previous evaluation of the congregation.

Another explanation would be that since the survey required a name to be given and the individuals knew the pastor was going to be examining the surveys. therefore, they may have been overly optimistic on the frequency in which they practice evangelism. While the survey responses should be trusted, there can be unconscious movements by the persons taking the survey to present themselves in the best light. Since this explanation cannot be confirmed, it at bests stands as a hypothesis on the discrepancy between the previous evaluation of the congregation and the survey.

Another explanation could be that the survey was vague in what constituted evangelism and sharing the faith. Because the definition was not clearly stated on the survey, a person could assume a lower standard for what constituted evangelism than the survey was meant to record. A lower standard, which could be mentioning going to church or that a person believes without presenting the gospel, could help explain how the congregation believes it is conducting evangelism on a more frequent basis than the leadership of the church believes they are. This could have been addressed through having an open response question where individuals could record methods they have used in

evangelism. Listing methods or more detailed accounts of what they consider evangelism could have helped determine what definition an individual was using for evangelism.

Another fact that could have influence on this discrepancy is that several individuals who responded on the hardcopy survey had trouble circling yes or no on the question of whether they felt equipped for evangelism. Since these were physical paper surveys, at least four people added a comment about being unsure whether they are equipped or not. These comments were along the lines of “Sometimes” or listing different areas they feel more equipped in than others. The question about evangelism, whether equipping or frequency, might be a question which is hard to obtain a clear picture through these simple questions. The section of the survey using a Likert scale helps give a clearer picture of how the congregation feels about evangelism.

The congregation’s view of evangelism, in particular their ability and comfort, is clearer in the Likert scale section of the survey. The first nine Likert scale statements and responses pertain to evangelism and the individual’s confidence with evangelism. The majority of these responses were high, tending to be four points or higher on a six-point scale. This would indicate a high level of confidence in the realm of evangelism. The average response to each of the nine questions can be found in figure 5.

Two statements and responses stand noticeably lower than the rest. These were statements 4, “Lack of Scripture’s storyline hinders me from sharing my faith,” and statement 9, “Sharing the gospel makes me nervous.” The first statement is of particular interest to this project since it relates directly to the aim and premise. One of the key premises of this project is that a robust knowledge and ability to articulate the biblical storyline would help a person share their faith. The responses being low, meaning that many individuals disagreed with that statement, shows that the congregation has not made a connection between the Scripture’s overarching narrative and evangelism. If that is the case, then this project would help the congregation make that connection as well as equip them in using the Bible’s story for the purpose of evangelism. Another explanation of the

low value of the responses to this statement could be that the congregation does not feel a need to use the storyline of Scripture in evangelism since they already feel equipped. This explanation would fit with the high number of individuals who responded that they feel equipped for evangelism.

The responses of statement 9 received the lowest level of response, the average being 2.79 on the six-point scale. This would indicate that while the congregation states they are equipped and practice evangelism, they are still nervous while doing it. This is a common experience for many people. I hoped that this was one of the markers that would show significant change for those who went through the curriculum.

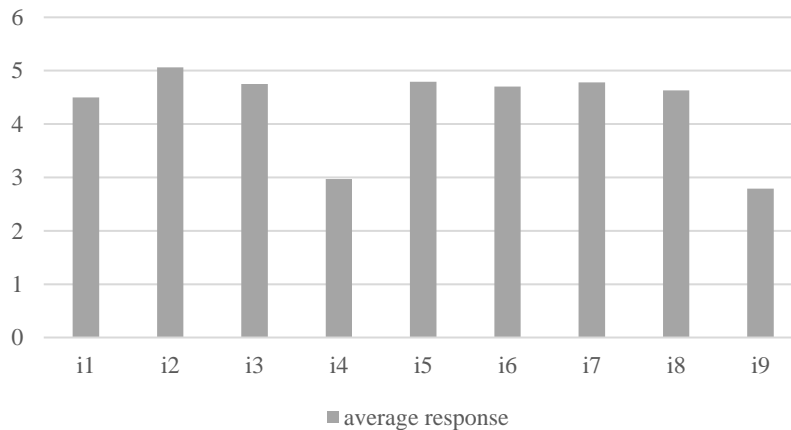


Figure 5. Average response for evangelism survey

Goal 2: Assess Biblical Knowledge

The second goal of this project was to assess the biblical knowledge of the congregation, and in particular their knowledge of biblical theology. This goal was accomplished through the survey given to the whole of the congregation before the curriculum was developed. This was the same survey used to assess their frequency and attitude toward evangelism. The last portion of the survey contained fifteen statements relating to biblical theology and the storyline of the Bible. The congregation was asked to

respond to these statements using a six-point Likert scale. The Likert scale being strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, agree, strong agree.

The goal was considered accomplished when 30 percent of the congregation completed the survey, and the data was analyzed. As previously mentioned, 70 percent of members of River Valley Community Church responded to the survey, a total of 61 responses. The data was analyzed and so the goal was successfully accomplished.

The first item of note with the responses to the survey was that the overall score was very high. The average score on the biblical knowledge section was 5.09. The breakdown of the responses can be seen in figure 6. This high score would seem to indicate that the congregation had a firm grasp on the biblical storyline, which would raise the question of a need for the curriculum focused on the biblical overarching narrative.

There are some possible explanations for why knowledge of the biblical storyline was deemed to be a weakness, but the survey seemed to indicate otherwise. The first explanation is that the survey was a poorly worded and written test for knowledge of the biblical storyline. The statements could have been too easy to agree with or have been too easy for the congregation to know what they were supposed to answer.

Another explanation is that biblical theology has been a component of River Valley Community Church's preaching and teaching for the past two years. During this time, the congregation could have grown in their knowledge so that the initial assessment of lack of biblical theology being a weakness could have been addressed to some degree. This explanation is supported by a statement written on one of the paper surveys which stated, "Your sermons have given me a GREAT appreciation for the Old Testament." While this statement was just one person's response, it does show how the recent biblical teaching of the church could have had an influence on the congregation's knowledge of biblical theology.

Examining the statements can help understand where the congregation needs to grow in their knowledge of the biblical storyline. The lowest scored statement was

statement 10. This was one of the statements that was worded in the negative so that the Likert scale would be in reverse order, with strongly disagreeing being scored a 6. While the negative wording of the statement could have impacted the responses, the other negatively worded statement did not score as low. The statement was worded, “The stories of the Old Testament are primarily moral in nature.” The average response to this statement was 3.77. It could be argued that the congregation being divided on the primary purpose of the Old Testament can show a lack of knowledge of the biblical storyline. The curriculum was built to help show that while there are moral components to the Old Testament, the primary purpose is to convey the story of redemption through the storyline of the Bible.

The statement with the highest level of agreement was statement 4, which said, “All Scripture is useful for the Christian.” The average response was 5.63. This high level of agreement shows that the congregation appreciates all of Scripture and knows that it is useful. This is an encouraging response since a strong emphasis of the preaching and teaching of River Valley Community Church is to uphold the usefulness and relevance of the whole Bible.

A few other statements scored just slightly lower than the norm. These were still relatively high, showing more agreement than disagreement, but not as strong of agreement as the average. These were statements 12, 13, and 14. Statement 12 said, “Jesus uses the same imagery as the Old Testament.” The average response to this statement was 4.82. While this is still a strong agreement, it is lower than the average. The curriculum was designed to focus on imagery and themes developed through the biblical storyline and so address this statement.

Statement 13 said, “The Bible can be divided into four parts, Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Consummation.” The average response to this statement was 4.87. The lower response could be attributed to a poorly worded statement. It would have been clearer to state that the Bible’s storyline or the biblical narrative could be divided into the

four parts, rather than saying simply the Bible could be divided. The curriculum used this division of the Bible to help explain the biblical narrative and in so doing addresses this statement.

Statement 14 said, “I can trace the storyline of the Bible.” The average response was 4.56. This lower response could indicate that while the congregation has some knowledge of the storyline of the Bible, they are less confident in their ability to articulate that storyline. The curriculum was designed for this reason: to given the congregation the ability and confidence to relate the storyline of the Bible to other people and so be of use in sharing the faith.

The survey showed that the congregation of River Valley Community Church has a firm grasp on the concept of the Bible having an overarching storyline, but may be less confident in how to express that storyline or how it can be easily broken down into component parts. An evaluation of goal 4 determined if the curriculum achieved its purpose in giving the congregation greater knowledge on how to breakdown God’s story.

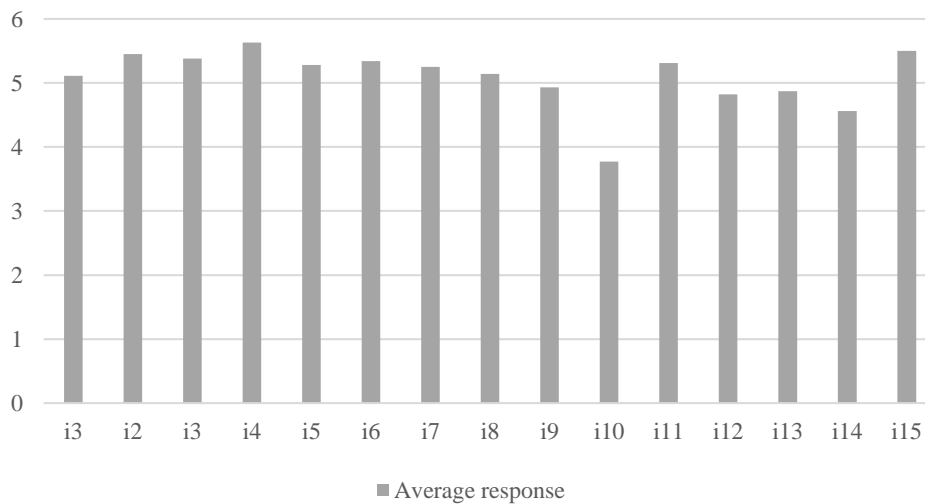


Figure 6. Average response for biblical knowledge survey

Goal 3: Develop a Curriculum on the Scripture's Storyline

The third goal of the project was to develop a curriculum to equip the congregation in the use of Scripture's storyline for the purposes of evangelism. This eight-lesson curriculum laid out the reason for evangelism as well as the biblical storyline according to the four plot movements of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. The curriculum intended to increase the congregation's knowledge of the biblical narrative and in the process increase their confidence in evangelism.

This goal was measured by a panel of pastors who evaluated the curriculum to see if it was faithful to the Bible and if it was applicable for evangelism. This goal would be considered successfully when 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. Six pastors in the local area of River Valley Community Church were asked to evaluate the curriculum and three responded with an evaluation. Ideally, more responses would have been gathered, but getting responses back from various pastors was a problem. The pastors' responses were incorporated into the development of the curriculum, so the responses were needed before the curriculum was given to the congregation during class.

The three pastors who responded rated all areas of the curriculum at sufficient or higher. This meant that the goal was successfully met. The pastors did offer some insights that influenced the curriculum. One suggestion was that for material being about evangelism there was not a place where the participants were urged to ask people to respond to the gospel. Blake Boylston wrote, "The only thing I would add is potentially more content on a gospel response." Due to this comment, I added a section in lesson 8 on asking people to respond to God's story. The simple outline of God, Man, Christ, and Response was used to show the need for asking people to respond to the gospel for evangelism to take place. This outline was taken from *What is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert.¹ Kevin Thompson made the comment that there needed to be more material

¹ Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel?*(Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 31.

teaching before the question parts of the lessons. This comment reflected that much of the teaching was designed to come during the discussion in the classroom setting and so was not reflected in the student material. This showed a weakness of the material, that it might not be as effectively used by someone less versed in biblical theology. Frankie Post did not add any comments that influenced the final develop of the curriculum.

The panel of pastors determined that the curriculum was sufficiently faithful to the Bible's storyline and as applicable for the congregation for the purpose of equipping them in evangelism. This review enabled the curriculum to be taught to those of the congregation willing to come in person for an eight-lesson class on Sunday evenings as well as those who chose to follow online. The online option lacked the discussion that an in person classroom setting naturally has, but had the same material and training.

Goal 4: Increase Knowledge of Scripture's Overarching Storyline

Goal 4 was evaluated through comparing the pre-curriculum survey scores with the post-curriculum survey scores for congregation members who participated in the class. Through comparing the scores and noting an increase in the overall average response, as well as individuals' responses, it can be concluded that the goal was successfully met. Participants' knowledge relating to the Bible's storyline increased.

The increase of knowledge was a significant change. The measure for this goal and its significance included a post-curriculum survey, and the goal was met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-curriculum survey scores: $t_{(15)} = -6.766, p < .0001$.² Because the t-test determined the change in scores to be significant, it can be confidently assumed that the change in scores was not due to accident or chance.

² Twelve members of the congregation started the in-person class, four dropped out through the eight-week process and one did not complete a post-curriculum survey. The one who did not complete the survey was excluded from the t-test. It is not known how many might have participated online and did not turn in a post-survey, but nine did complete and turn in a survey, which means a total of 16 participants turned in a pre and post class survey.

The true success of the curriculum would be determined on how well participants learned the biblical storyline. The increase in scores in the post-curriculum survey would indicate that they did learn the storyline. A weakness in the survey's questions would give a weak measure of the participants' increase of knowledge.

Goal 5: Equip Members for Evangelism

Goal 5 was to equip the members of the congregation of River Valley Community Church in evangelism informed by Scripture's storyline. This goal was evaluated by comparing the scores of the pre-curriculum and post-curriculum survey responses of members who participated in the class. The responses showed an increase in average feeling of being equipped and confidence in evangelism, which indicates that the goal was successfully met.

Equipping in evangelism resulted in a significant change. The measure for this goal included a post-curriculum survey, and the goal was met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-curriculum survey scores: $t_{(15)} = -6.766, p < .0001$. The t-test score showed that the change in the individual's feeling of being equipped was significant.

This goal was also evaluated through the observation and evaluation of practice sessions where individuals had an opportunity to demonstrate what they learned. This evaluation occurred for those who participated in the in-person class, online participants did not have an evaluation compacity. Of the eight congregation members who participated in the in-person class, all were evaluated as sufficient in being able to articulate the storyline of Scripture and relate that to a specific scenario for the purpose of evangelism. This met the mark of 80 percent, which was the standard stated in chapter 1.

Strengths of the Project

Teaching the congregation biblical theology for the purposes of evangelism had several strengths. One strength was that many of the congregation turned in an initial

survey. Another strength was the curriculum itself and its usefulness for the purpose of the project. These strengths helped make the project as successful as it was.

Sixty-one members of River Valley Community Church turned in a pre-curriculum survey. This high percentage of response (70 percent) enabled a more accurate understanding of the congregation's attitudes, practices, and frequency of evangelism as well as their knowledge of the biblical storyline than if there were fewer responses. The percent of members who responded exceeded expectations, especially in a time of lower attendance and participation overall due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another strength of the project was the curriculum. The curriculum received high evaluations by the panel of pastors, and the participants who went through the class responded well to it. The curriculum was built to equip a Christian to be more confident in evangelism by training them in the use of God's story and how that relates to everyone's story. The post-curriculum survey showed a significant change in the participants' answers, which indicates that the curriculum did indeed increase knowledge as well as equip participants for evangelism. The main strength of the curriculum was the teaching of the biblical storyline in the simple outline of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. This outline allowed participants to understand the flow of the biblical narrative as a cohesive story and so understand redemptive history to a greater extent. This greater understanding gave participants greater confidence in their ability to articulate the truth of the faith.

Another strength of the curriculum was the discussion that took place in the in-person classes. Discussion could not be part of the online engagement due to how it was formatted and presented, but was a large part of the in-person class. The discussion allowed participants to think through, in a group setting, how the biblical narrative related to their own personal stories as well as every human's story. The discussion also allowed participants to work out how biblical themes were developed through the course of the Bible, which is a great tool for understanding redemptive history and the Christian faith.

Weaknesses of the Project

The project had several weaknesses, or areas which could be improved. The first weakness was the number of participants from the congregation who went through the class. The second weakness was the dropout rate of those who did go through the class. The third weakness was the quality of the survey questions relating to biblical theology. The fourth weakness was the shortcomings of the online option. These weaknesses contributed to the project not being as successful as it could have been.

The first weakness is the small number of participants who went through the class “Using God’s Story in Evangelism.” While 61 members of the congregation took the pre-curriculum surveys, only 16 members took the class and turned in a post-curriculum survey. The small number of participants makes it hard to state that this project had a large impact on the congregation. Since only 16 members went through the class and received training through the curriculum, most of the congregation did not receive training or equipping in evangelism using God’s story. The small number of participants also impacts the quality of any statistical analysis. Larger numbers would have given a better statistical analysis of the significance and effectiveness of the curriculum.

The second weakness of the project was the dropout rate of participants who started the class and did not finish. In the in-person class, 4 church members started the class and did not complete all eight lessons. Also, one member completed the eight lessons but did not turn in a post-curriculum survey and so could not be included in the final analysis. While 4 does not seem like a large number, it is 20 percent of all members who started the in-person class. The online option also had a high dropout rate, though it cannot be easily quantified. One indication of people starting to take the class online but not finishing is the view count of each video. The early lessons have a view count of more than double the later lessons. This lower view count would also indicate that members of the congregation might have started to watch the class and follow along but did not finish.

Another weakness was the quality of the survey questions. The pre-curriculum survey showed a high score in many of the responses. This was especially true in the biblical knowledge portion of the survey. This could indicate that the questions were too easy and therefore did not giving an accurate picture of the congregation's knowledge.

The last weakness was the online option for the curriculum or class. This option was offered to increase participation. This was especially important in a time when people might be more uncomfortable meeting in-person for a class. The online option was set up to be self-paced through watching videos of the material being taught. By the nature of these videos, some curriculum elements present for the in-person classes could not be present for the online option. The first of these was discussion. A large benefit to the in-person class was the discussion that took place between the participants and the teacher. While some couples watched the videos together and were encouraged to engage in discussion, there was no guarantee that their discussion would have been as beneficial as the in-person class's discussion. The in-person class also had the benefit of practicing using God's story for evangelism and receiving feedback. This aspect was not present in the online option since there was no way for participants to be evaluated. This meant that the online option was of a different quality overall than the in-person class.

What Should Be Done Differently

Through implementing and planning this project, several elements would benefit from being done differently. The two main elements were the surveys given to the congregation and the number of participants for the project. These elements could be changed to increase the quality of the project as well as its success.

The survey was a weakness and could have been done differently. One of the things which could be changed is having the congregation members write their name on the survey. Since their names were on the surveys, there was no assumption of anonymity. This lack of anonymity meant that the members knew that their pastor was going to be reading what they wrote and how they responded. This knowledge of the pastor seeing

their responses could have led them to not be as honest as they would have been and trying to put responses they would think the pastor would want to see. One way to correct this issue would be to have the participants put a pin number of their choosing on their surveys. They would remember that pin number and use the pin for the post-curriculum survey and their responses could still be compared.

Another improvement in the surveys would be to spend more time crafting the questions. While the survey achieved its purpose, it could have been better worded and thought out. The fact that the responses were high for the biblical knowledge portion of the survey is an indicator that the questions might have been common knowledge and not achieving a true indication of their knowledge of the biblical storyline.

One of the main weaknesses in the project was the small number of participants. If this project were run again, more time could be spent gaining participants to go through the class and curriculum. While more time and effort would not guarantee more participants, it might help increase the number.

Another improvement would be to ensure that the online option was of the same quality as the in-person class. This might entail changing the format from a self-paced video class to one where a group met virtually. Meeting virtually would allow those participating online to have discussion as well as be evaluated and receive feedback at the end of the curriculum.

This project could be improved and achieve its goals with a greater amount of success in several ways. While the project was successful in many ways, it could have been improved to give a more accurate accounting of the congregation and its growth in the areas of knowledge and equipping.

Theological Reflection

Biblical theology is important for all Christians to have a robust understanding of the biblical narrative and how the Bible is cohesive. Increasing one's knowledge of how the storyline of the Bible progresses and how that impacts themes helps increase

confidence in one's own ability to articulate the Bible's story. Graeme Goldsworthy writes,

The immediate appeal of biblical theology to preachers, teachers and ordinary Christians is that it provides a 'big picture' that makes sense out of the bewildering bulk and variety of the biblical literature. It seeks to view the whole scene of God's revelation from the heights- to mount up with eagles' wings and allow God to show us his one mighty plan from creation to new creation. When the Bible ceases to be a mass of unconnected stories and other bits of writing, and begins to look like a unity that connects the narratives of Israel with those of the four Gospels, that shows us the progression from creation to new creation, and that highlights the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the prime focus of the whole Bible, people usually sit up and take notice.³

Biblical theology or simply understanding the biblical narrative helps Christians grasp the Bible and how it holds together. Getting the "big picture," as Goldsworthy states, is very important for Christians. A "big picture" gives Christians a framework for understanding the whole of the Bible. When Christians see the storyline of the Bible and see that there is a direction, purpose, and one central focus, which is Christ, they can understand their own faith in deeper ways. As Goldsworthy says," people usually sit up and take notice."

This project sought to help congregation members who participated in the class "Using God's Story in Evangelism" to take notice of the beauty and utility of God's story. The class sought to give members a "big picture" through which they could understand their faith and the Bible with the hopes that this increase in knowledge would lead to an increase in confidence in sharing their faith.

All Christians have been called and commanded to proclaim the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 28:18-30 is the Great Commission, which states that Christians are to go and make disciples of all nations. This can only be accomplished through the action of the whole church and includes sending missionaries as well as sharing with neighbors. In 1 Peter 3:15, Peter urges Christians to give a reason for the hope they have. To be able to give a reason is to be able to articulate belief as well as why

³ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 19.

one believes it. Christians need to be able to fulfill the call and command to proclaim the gospel.

Churches have a responsibility to train and equip their congregation for the call and command to proclaim the gospel. Ephesians 4:11-12 states that God has given the church people with certain gifting and roles for the purpose of equipping all the saints for the work of ministry. This passage indicates that the church and the church's leaders are in place to make sure that the whole body of the church is equipped for the ministry. The ministry of the church includes proclaiming the gospel to those who do not believe. The church should be training and equipping the congregation in all forms of ministry, including evangelism for the purpose of bringing people into the faith.

Through this project and the curriculum, I sought to equip the congregation for ministry. The church sought to give members a framework of understanding the biblical narrative so that the members would increase in knowledge and be more confident in their understanding of the faith. This confidence in their understanding would also help the members feel more confident and equipped to share their faith. The curriculum developed for this project had the purpose of using the biblical narrative for the purpose of evangelism. This teaching of the biblical narrative would take place through knowing that God's story encompasses all human stories. Since God's story encompasses everyone's story, God's story helps make sense of the world, each person's life, and struggles, as well as their hopes and dreams. God's story makes sense of this whole world and members were equipped to present this great story for people to respond to.

Personal Reflection

The biblical storyline has been in a prominent place in the ministry of River Valley Community Church for the last two years. The value it has for helping Christians understand the Bible as well as for explaining the Bible is immense. Through the sermons and teachings this has been presented again and again to the congregation with hopes that they can truly grasp the overarching story that God has made known through the Bible.

Through the project, it was clear that the church needs robust teaching on the storyline of Scripture. While the emphasis already present has addressed this issue to some extent, there always needs to be reminders and continual teaching on the overarching narrative of the Bible and why it matters.

This project was a continuation of this emphasis on the biblical storyline. It sought to take this teaching and continue make it clear to all who would participate in the curriculum as well as how it could be valuable to each member. One hope was that the members would be transfixed by the beauty that is God working through history and appreciate how God has woven the story together. This beauty should be preached from the pulpit as well as taught in different classes. One goal for the congregation of River Valley Community Church is for all members to see and appreciate the beauty of God's story in new ways. Appreciating God's story can lead to greater worship and service as people see how God's story encompasses all that is.

Understanding the biblical storyline also benefited the members as confusion about the Bible could be cleared away and addressed. People can become confused about how the Bible holds together and how the parts make sense considering the "big picture." Without an understanding of the Bible's storyline, a Christian can struggle to comprehend the truth God presents in each part of the Bible. One of the tasks of faithful Bible teaching is equipping the congregation with the ability to understand God's Word. The biblical narrative can be used for churches and pastors to equip their congregations.

I learned through this project that a minister's own passions and emphasizes influence the whole of the ministry. The church takes note of the pastor's disposition and follows suit, mostly unconsciously. This means it is important to have good biblical emphasis so the church is not taken off track. Having an emphasis on the biblical narrative gives the church a good framework on which to understand their faith. This is a good emphasis for a pastor and should be a help to the church as they benefit from the pastor's passion and focus.

This project demonstrated the importance of equipping the church. Many members did not feel equipped to share their faith or to articulate the gospel with non-believers. One of my own weaknesses, which this project brought to light, was not having provided training in different areas for the members of the congregation. The church should always be seeking to provide opportunities for members to be trained in evangelism as well as other forms of ministry. Too often the modern church falls into the belief or idea that the staff or pastors do the ministry of the church. This idea leads to the pastor and staff being overwhelmed as well as the ministry being limited in scope. The church needs to be unleashed through being equipped for ministry. The whole church body needs to be turned loose on the community in which it resides so that the gospel can be preached, people can be loved and served, and needs can be met, all for the glory of God.

Through this project I learned how to address the needs of the church in a way that can result in change. It is a valuable skill for a person in ministry to be able to evaluate where their church might have a weakness and then think through how to address that weakness. While I have had that ability in some capacity before, this project allowed me to think through how to develop biblical foundations and measure the success of the efforts to change the church.

Conclusion

This project was successful in meeting all its goals and achieving its purpose. While the scope of this success was limited to the participants who went through the curriculum, it was still a success. Members of the congregation were trained in evangelism through knowledge of the biblical storyline.

The biblical storyline was taught to members of River Valley Community Church for the purpose of using this knowledge in evangelism. Knowing the overarching narrative of the Bible gave members who went through the curriculum more confidence in the Bible. The biblical storyline was also used to train members in relating a person's story with God's story. The aim was training to be able to introduce a person to God's

story as the best possible explanation and best story to make sense of life and the world. The comparison between pre- and post-curriculum surveys showed an increase in both knowledge of the biblical storyline as well as confidence for evangelism.

This curriculum can be integrated into the continuing ministry of River Valley Community Church to ensure that the congregation continues to grow and be equipped in evangelism. It can also be combined with other material to present a more robust and comprehensive view of the practice of evangelism. The church already has other resources that relate to evangelism, such as a class which focuses on writing out one's testimony. This project, and in particular the curriculum developed for the project, could be adapted and combined with the testimony class. This combination could help in equipping the church for evangelism in a variety of ways.

The project will continue to contribute to the overall ministry of River Valley Community Church. This contribution will come in the form of experience in enacting a project to produce a desired result within the congregation. The project will help set up the standard for how to achieve change in the church and how to address needs and weaknesses that the staff and pastors might see in the congregation and ministry. It is for these reasons that this project will have lasting impact far beyond any training and equipping that has taken place already. The church has been given the ability to address issues in a comprehensive manner for the benefit of the whole ministry.

River Valley Community Church has benefited from a curriculum that can be used for equipping the congregation in both knowledge about the faith as well as for evangelism. The church also has a model for how to address areas that might be considered weaknesses in the future. The project accomplished what was needed for the church to address the weakness of evangelism as well as lack of knowledge in the area of the Bible's storyline.

APPENDIX 1
EVANGELISM PRACTICES AND BIBLICAL
KNOWLEDGE SURVEY

The following instrument assessed the participants' basic knowledge of Scripture's storyline as well as their motivation for evangelism. There are some general questions to gather demographic information, followed by nine statements with a six-point Likert scale evaluating motivation for evangelism, and fifteen statements with a six-point Likert scale measuring biblical knowledge. This survey was given as a pre- and post-survey, given before and after the class on using God's story in evangelism, to test increase in knowledge as well as increased equipping.

Evangelism and Biblical Knowledge Survey

Agreement to Participate

The survey in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current practices and frequency of evangelism as well as biblical knowledge amongst the members of River Valley Community Church. This research is being conducted by Adam Kareus for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Survey					
Part 1: General Information					
Directions: Answer the multiple choice questions by circling the correct answer.					
1. Do you consider yourself a Christian?					
		YES		NO	
2. How long have you been a Christian?					
1-2 years	3-4 years	5-6 years	7-10 years	11-15 years	15+ years
3. What is your age in years?					
18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 and over
4. How long have you been a member at River Valley Community Church?					
1 year	2-3 years	4-5 years	6-7 years	8 plus years	
Part 2: Evangelism					
5. Have you ever shared your faith with anyone?					
yes			no		
6. If you have, when was the last time you did so?					
Within the week	Within the month	Within the last 6 months	Within the last year	Within the last few years	
7. Do you feel equipped to share your faith?					
yes			no		

Directions: Please answer the statements to the best of your ability using the following scale.						
SD= Strongly Disagree D=Disagree DS= Disagree Somewhat AS= Agree Somewhat A= Agree SA= Strongly Agree						
Statements:	SD	D	DS	AS	AS	A
1. I feel equipped to engage in evangelism.						
2. Scripture's storyline helps me to share my faith.						
3. I am confident in my ability to relate how parts of the Bible relate to my faith.						
4. Lack of Scripture's storyline hinders me from sharing my faith.						
5. I feel like the church has equipped me to share my faith.						
6. I can convey how Scripture's story includes everyone.						
7. I feel comfortable to share my faith.						
8. I am motivated to share the gospel.						
9. Sharing the gospel makes me nervous.						

Part 3: Scripture's Storyline						
Directions: Please answer the statements to the best of your ability using the following scale.						
SD= Strongly Disagree D=Disagree DS= Disagree Somewhat AS= Agree Somewhat A= Agree SA= Strongly Agree						
Statements:	SD	D	DS	AS	A	AS
1. The Bible has one cohesive storyline.						
2. All of Scripture points to Christ.						
3. Christ fulfills the Old Testament promises.						
4. All Scripture is useful for the Christian.						
5. Themes within the beginning of the Bible are carried throughout the whole of Scripture.						
6. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the promise contained within Genesis 3:15.						
7. The Old Testament enriches our understanding of the gospel.						
8. Knowledge of the Old Testament helps one understand Jesus' teaching.						
9. There is not a consistent storyline of the Bible.						
10. The stories of the Old Testament are primarily moral in nature.						
11. Jesus is the promised son of David.						
12. Jesus used the same imagery which was used throughout the Old Testament.						
13. The Bible can be divided into the four categories of creation, fall, redemption, consummation.						
14. I can trace the storyline of the Bible.						
15. The stories of the Old Testament point to Christ.						

APPENDIX 2
CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following instrument was used to evaluate the curriculum for biblical faithfulness and applicability for evangelism. This rubric was given to the expert panel and their feedback helped complete the curriculum.

Name of evaluator:					
Date:					
Scripture's Storyline for Evangelism Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Faithful to the Bible					
The lessons clearly present Scripture's overarching storyline.					
The material is faithful to the Bible's message and themes.					
The material is theologically sound.					
The main point of each lesson is clearly stated and relevant.					
The points of the lesson clearly support the main point.					
Applicability of Curriculum					
The lessons clearly relate to how to communicate the gospel.					
The lessons clearly connect Scripture's story with evangelism.					
Overall, the lessons is clear in intent and material.					

APPENDIX 3

EVANGELISM PRACTICE EVALUATION

This instrument was used to evaluate the practice sessions of the participants as they engage in evangelism.

Name of Evaluator:		Date:			
Practice Sessions in Evangelism Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Knowledge of Scripture's Story					
The participant clearly understood Scripture's story and could communicate it.					
The participant is able to clearly communicate the main themes of Scripture.					
The participant understands how Scripture works together.					
Communication					
The participant communicated clearly and effectively.					
The Gospel					
The gospel was clearly presented through Scripture's storyline.					
The participant clearly connected Scripture's story to the person.					
Overall, the presentation was clear well executed.					

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL CURRICULUM FOR EVANGELISM TRAINING AT RIVER VALLEY COMMUNITY CHURCH IN FORT SMITH, ARKANSAS

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021
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The purpose of this project was to train the congregation in biblical theology for the purpose of evangelism at River Valley Community Church in Fort Smith, Arkansas. Chapter 1 summarizes the context of the church, the rationale behind the project, as well as the goals of the project. Chapter 2 explains the biblical basis for the project focusing on a few key passages. Chapter 3 summarizes the influence of biblical theology and current usage of biblical theology on the project. Chapter 4 outlines the project and how it was implemented. Chapter 5 summarizes the evaluation of the project and whether the project met its goals.

VITA

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