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Table of Contents

Disability and Relational Poverty in the Church: Longing to Belong <i>Sharon D. Caswell</i>	3
A General Examination of the Scriptural Canon and Its Trustworthiness <i>Adrina Brown</i>	21
The Qualities of Discipleship Necessary to Walk in the Footsteps of Past Martyrs <i>Kimberly A. Hildebrandt</i>	32
A Cessationist's Response to the Global Success of Pentecostalism <i>Tod Schwingel</i>	47
Perseverance and Suffering in the Old and New Testaments <i>Violeta Collado</i>	56
Achievement of Long-term Recovery Outcomes from Substance Dependency Using a Multifaceted Wellness Approach with Christ-Centered Spirituality <i>Carolyn M. Keyzer</i>	80
A Critique of the Presumption that American Slaveholding was Justified by Old Testament Teachings <i>George Sotomayor</i>	110
Are Women More Susceptible to Deception Than Men and Therefore Unfit for Leadership or Teaching Roles in Ministry? <i>Dolores King St. George</i>	123
Communal Living in Acts: Prescribed Christian Practice or an Anomaly in the 1st Century Church? <i>Ken Jno Charles</i>	137
Book Review: The Monkhood of All Believers: The Monastic Foundation of Christian Spirituality <i>Reviewed by Kevin D. Clarke</i>	149

Book Review: Can a Sistah Get a Little Help?: Encouragement for Black Women in Ministry
Reviewed by Melvin L. Montgomery, Jr...... 152

Book Review: Not Done Yet: Reaching and Keeping Unchurched Emerging Adults
Reviewed by Anna M. Droll 154

DISABILITY AND RELATIONAL POVERTY IN THE CHURCH: LONGING TO BELONG

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Introduction

Feeble: I am a man of no strength at all, of Body, nor yet of Mind, but would, if I could, though I can but *crawl*, spend my life in the Pilgrim's way... Indeed I have found much Relief from Pilgrims, though none was willing to go so softly as I am forced to do. Yet still as they came on, they bid me be of good Cheer, and said, that it was the will of their Lord that Comfort should be given to the *feeble-minded*, and so went on their *own* pace.¹

John Bunyan wrote these words in 1678 AD, drawing attention to the distressing issue of the “feeble-minded” and those with bodily weakness being left behind by fellow Christians. Feeble-Mind, in this brilliant allegory, was offered help and assistance on his journey – even being carried up the Hill *Difficulty* by some caring Servants.² However, he did not initially find true companionship. “None was willing to go so softly as I am forced to do.”³ Those with physical and developmental disabilities often experience the same relational wasteland in churches today.

This thesis will define “poverty” as relational poverty demonstrated in the lack of meaningful relationships with others in the church context. It will explore different strategies the Church can use to weave people with disabilities into the fabric of their faith community, recognizing that they are a necessary, invited, and valuable part of a flourishing church.

Personal narratives,⁴ stories from the author's experiences,⁵ and interviews with church and community leaders will emphasize the lived

¹ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (London: Penguin Group, 2008), 269.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ “Nothing about us without us” is a mantra in disability advocacy circles. In this paper, careful attention should be paid to stories told from the perspective of someone living with a disability. It is that voice that the church needs to hear most loudly.

experiences of people with disabilities in places of worship. An exegetical analysis of Luke 14:12-24 will examine what it looks like for people with disabilities to be welcomed, seen, considered, and included in the body of Christ.

Definition of Relational Poverty

Amy Kenny, in her award-winning book, *My Body is Not a Prayer Request*, related an experience she had as a teenager where different people from her church piggybacked her up a long flight of stairs so she could participate in a worship night. She wrote:

I am passed around like a white elephant gift no one has the courage to throw away. More than one person makes the joke that we are “carrying one another’s burdens.” Only this time the burden is my body. I am everybody’s inspiration, but nobody’s friend.⁶

To be “nobody’s friend” is to live in relational poverty. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert explained relational poverty in the context of Bryant Myers’ idea that God established four foundational relationships for people: “a relationship with God, with self, with others, and with the rest of creation.”⁷ Relational poverty occurs when there is meagerness, scarcity, or absence in any of these four areas. This kind of poverty is “the result of relationships that do not work, that are not just, that are not for life, that are not harmonious or enjoyable.”⁸

While people with disabilities are often impoverished in three of the four of these foundational relationships (with self, with others, and with the rest of creation), the impoverishment in relationships with others in the context of the body of Christ is revealed when the differences between “being in” and “belonging to” a church are understood.

⁵ The author is mother to a son with Down Syndrome, an Education Specialist for a 2-year college program for young adults with intellectual disabilities, and a trained disability advocate.

⁶ Amy Kenny, *My Body is Not a Prayer Request: Disability Justice in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazo’s Press, 2022), 129.

⁷ Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor...and Yourself* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009), 54.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

“Being in” vs. “Belonging to”

There is a wide gulf between “being in” and “belonging to.” It is as wide as the gulf between the “haves” and the “have-nots.” The latter encompasses the material world, while the former pertains to relational wealth and poverty. Jesus established the Church as a place of community and care. The Church is to be characterized by love (John 13:34-35), impartiality (James 2:1-9), and generosity (1 John 3:16-18). Paul emphasized the importance of welcoming one another (Romans 15:7). Lifeway research found that 99% of pastors and 97% of churchgoers believe that a person with disabilities would feel welcome at their church.⁹ When asked for his response to this research in a personal interview on October 29, 2023, Chris Maas, a youth pastor who has Spinal Muscular Atrophy, said:

I would be curious where they got their numbers from because I would not say it is that high from my experience. I think it depends on your definition of “feel welcome.” Because I’ll walk into a church and there’s that initial welcome, greeting time. From that perspective, I’m welcome in the church. But, then it stays there. It’s all surface-level. No one asks “How do we get you involved in a deeper way with others?”¹⁰

To live in a community alongside others is not synonymous with belonging to that community. Erik W. Carter, Executive Director of the Baylor Center for Developmental Disabilities, wrote: “Although greater numbers of people with developmental disabilities are *participating* in school, work, and community life, the vision of true *membership* remains yet unrealized for too many.”¹¹

Working with young adults with disabilities has given me numerous opportunities to observe this gap between participation and membership. The following story from my journal relates an

⁹ Aaron Earls, “Churches Believe They are Welcoming to Those with Disabilities,” *research.lifeway.com* (2020, retrieved September 17, 2023, <https://research.lifeway.com/2020/03/10/churches-believe-they-are-welcoming-to-those-with-disabilities/>).

¹⁰ Chris Maas, Interview with Sharon Caswell, personal interview (Savage, MN, October 29, 2023).

¹¹ Erik W. Carter, *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: a Guide for Service Providers, Families & Congregations* (Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2007): 5, retrieved September 9, 2023, <https://archive.org/details/includingpeoplew0000cart/page/n5/mode/2up>.

alarmingly common experience for people with disabilities in faith communities:

C ____ sighed as she slid her notebook and pencil into her backpack. “Where can I go to church, then?” Putting my arm around her, I squeezed her shoulders, hating that I had to be the one to tell her that the church she had been attending for three years was going to be moving to a house-church model, and the building that was within walking distance from her campus apartment would no longer hold services. “We will figure something out,” I said, knowing it sounded hollow. She nodded, slung her backpack over her shoulder, and walked to her next class.¹²

After three years of faithful attendance, this young woman with Down Syndrome was not included in the church’s plan to move to a house-church model. She was not included in anyone’s group when the church members divided into “house churches.” Worse than that, she was *deliberately* excluded. Church leadership knew she would come the next Sunday, but instead of personally informing her of the change in structure, they chose to pass a message through a third party to let her know that the building would be closing. She had been “in” the church. For three years she had been welcomed at the door and allowed to participate in the worship service. But, she did not “belong.” A single, meaningful relationship built between this young woman and a member of the church could have – should have – communicated that she *did* belong, that she had a seat at the table, not just a spot inside the door.

In Luke 14:12-24, Jesus told a story while eating with a group of Pharisees and their guests about the Jewish expectation of inclusion in the messianic banquet at the end of the age (cf. Isaiah 25:6). The Church can learn a great deal from this parable. An exegetical analysis of this passage will provide necessary insight into the heart of the Lord toward the poor, disabled, and marginalized.

Background of Luke’s Gospel

The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles constitute the largest percentage of writings by a single author in the New

¹² Excerpt from author’s personal journal entry.

Testament.¹³ British theologian N.T. Wright posits that what Luke was inspired to write regarding salvation, the Kingdom of God, and the nature of the church are among the most significant passages in the New Testament.¹⁴

Authorship and Dating

While the Gospel of Luke does not self-identify authorship, most scholars agree that it was written by Luke, the “beloved Physician” (Col 4:14), traveling companion of the apostle Paul. Wright reports that there was no dispute or division over Luke’s authorship as early as the second century AD.¹⁵

Scholars consistently date Luke’s writing to after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, probably between AD 80 and 90.¹⁶ After the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple, Jewish Christians were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire, ushering in what is often referred to as the “times of the Gentiles.”¹⁷

Prominent Themes

Ray Summers, in his *Commentary on Luke*, wrote, “Luke’s view of Jesus as Savior for all people without regard to race or life condition extends beyond this emphasis on mercy for Gentiles.”¹⁸ Inclusion is a prominent theme in Luke’s gospel. Luke wrote about God’s concern and compassion for “social outcasts, for women, for those labeled ‘sinners’ by their fellow Jews.”¹⁹ Perhaps being a physician allowed Luke to intersect the lives of people of all social strata, giving him a broader perspective on who Jesus cared for, and who had value in His eyes. Mark Powell, in *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey*, emphasizes

¹³ N.T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 604.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 608.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 612.

¹⁸ Ray Summers, *Commentary on Luke: Jesus the Universal Savior* (Waco, TX: Word Incorporated, 1972; elec. ed.; retrieved October 5, 2023, <https://archive.org/details/commentaryonluke0000summ/page/n7/mode/2up>), 13.

¹⁹ Ibid.

that in Luke's gospel, Jesus challenges "parochial" and "prejudicial" attitudes that would "limit God's care to any particular group or nation"²⁰ The Kingdom of God includes *all* people, regardless of nationality, socio-economic status, criminal background, gender, or ability.

A second prominent theme in Luke related to inclusion is what scholars refer to as "the great reversal."²¹ Justo González says that this great reversal was "both religious and social."²² Jesus turned the understanding of who would be first in the Kingdom of God completely upside down. In Luke 4:18-28, Jesus introduced his ministry by reading a passage from Isaiah.²³ In this dramatic scene, Jesus declared his mission to "preach good news to the poor," "proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight to the blind," and "release the oppressed." In verses 25-27,²⁴ Jesus made it clear that it was not just disadvantaged Jews who would be beneficiaries of his ministry, but also the Gentiles. Jesus' inclusion of the poor, the criminals, the disabled, the oppressed, and the foreigners was not an afterthought, it was His declaration from the very beginning. The Jewish people quickly understood that Jesus was not just advocating charity and compassion, but was reversing the social order. He was warning the Israelites that their nationality alone should not "lead them to expect privileges from God."²⁵

Far from simply advocating "charity" in accordance with the Mosaic Law, Jesus expected the poor and disabled to be invited in as honored members of His Kingdom. Disability circles refer to this level

²⁰ Mark Allen Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 159.

²¹ Justo L. González, *The Story Luke Tells: Luke's Unique Witness to the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015; digitized by the Internet Archive, 2023, retrieved October 5, 2023, <https://archive.org/details/storyluketellslu0000gonz/page/29/mode/1up>), 29.

²² *Ibid.*, 32.

²³ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Luke 4:18-19 (NIV)

²⁴ "I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed – only Naaman the Syrian" Luke 4:25-27 (NIV).

²⁵ González, *The Story Luke Tells*, 33.

of inclusion and belonging as “The Luke 14 Mandate.”²⁶ Sadly, many of the obstacles and biases against the disabled at the dinner party in Luke 14 continue to be barriers to belonging in our churches today. Luke 14:12-24 teaches not only the heart of the Savior toward those with disabilities but also offers insight into *how* His Church can move from ministry *to* people with disabilities to ministry *with* them.

It is important to note that this paper will take a disability perspective when analyzing this passage in Luke. Traditionally, this passage has been interpreted allegorically: the poor, crippled, lame, and blind represent the “tax-gatherers and sinners”²⁷ and those in the highways and hedges represent “Gentiles for whom there is ample room at the feast of God.”²⁸ While there is room for a critique of these allegorical interpretations, such a critique goes beyond the scope of this paper.

Exegesis of Luke 14:12-24

¹² Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

¹⁵ When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, “Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”

¹⁶ Jesus replied: “A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. ¹⁷ At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’

¹⁸ “But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’

¹⁹ “Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’

²⁶ Joni Eareckson Tada and Steve Bundy, *Beyond Suffering: A Christian View on Disability Ministry, Study Guide*, (ed. Pat Verbal; Agoura Hills, CA: Joni and Friends, 2011), 121.

²⁷ William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Luke*, (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1975), 193.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁰ “Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’

²¹ “The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’

²² “‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

²³ “Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in so that my house will be full. ²⁴ I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’”²⁹

Textual Context

In Luke 4:1-6, the text tells us that Jesus was invited to eat a Sabbath day meal at “the house of a prominent Pharisee” (14:1). The meal was attended by “Pharisees and experts in the law,” (14:2) who were “carefully watching” (14:1) Jesus. There was a man there “suffering from dropsy” (14:3).

It is interesting to note that in this passage the original Greek does not contain the word “suffering.” The Greek reads καὶ ἰδοὺ ἄνθρωπός τις ἦν ὕδρωπικὸς ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ, which is literally translated: “And behold a man certain there was with dropsy before Him.”³⁰ Suffering may be implied because Jesus immediately healed him, but it is not a word that Luke, the physician, wrote.

There is a tendency in the Church to view all disability as suffering that needs to be fixed/healed. There is also a tendency to believe that Jesus wants to, would, and will heal all disabilities. The belief that people with disabilities are less whole than people without disabilities is called ableism. Amos Yong, Pentecostal scholar and author of *The Bible, Disability, and the Church*, indicates that the problem with this view is that “wholeness is defined according to a normate view of what nondefective bodies are or look like.”³¹ On this point, Amy Kenny is brutally honest about how difficult it is for her when the biases of people in the church prevent her from being seen as a whole and complete person. One woman could not understand why

²⁹ Luke 14:12-15 (NIV, unless otherwise stated, all Scripture references will be in the NIV translation)

³⁰ “Luke 14:2,” *Interlinear Bible*, (retrieved October 8, 2023, <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/luke/14-2.htm>).

³¹ Amos Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 38.

she did not want (yet another) prayer for healing, saying, “You need to hear that God wants to heal you. If you stopped resisting, you would be free already.”³² Amy poignantly writes, “All I need to be liberated from is the notion that disability is inherently deviant and in need of eradication.”³³ Yong concurs, writing, “There is nothing intrinsically wrong with the lives of people with disabilities...it is not they who need to be cured, but we, the non-disabled, who need to be saved from our discriminatory attitudes and practices.”³⁴

Chris also addressed ableism when he talked about the difficulty of finding a job in a church, especially as a youth pastor, with his disability.

Q: How hard was it to find a job at a church with your disability?

Chris: Very hard.

When Covid hit, my position got eliminated at my old church. It took me over a year and a half to find my current position. I would interview at a lot of churches. In the initial interviews [they’d say], “We love your story. It’s exactly what we’re looking for - Someone who can speak to the youth about persevering and God’s faithfulness.” But then they met me in person, and all of a sudden the positions were no longer available.

In the church where I used to work, it took a while to actually get the position because I wasn’t what they envisioned their youth pastor would look like. The pastor....had come out of some big anxiety and mental health struggles that God freed him from and brought him through. He loved speaking about how God can heal and touch people’s lives. The problem though, is, now on staff we’ve got a guy that doesn’t live up to that preaching. So, from a staff perspective, I always felt that I was the dirty little secret kept in the back room.³⁵

³² Kenny, *My Body is Not a Prayer Request*, 2.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church*, 118.

³⁵ Maas, 2023. Chris also talked about his thoughts on the healing of disabilities. Here are his thoughts:

“I think it’s harder for people who have gone through the healing, and came out healed because now they can’t understand why no one else is... Not saying

It is difficult, if not impossible, for people with disabilities to be on equal relational footing if the people around them see them as a source of pity, or as a prayer request. Jesus does not see people with disabilities this way, as becomes evident when he corrects some of the cultural and religious practices in Israel.

Cultural and Religious Context

Luke 14:1-24 is set in the context of a Sabbath day meal. The conversation between Jesus and those attending the meal turned to various customs, practices, and beliefs regarding these types of social gatherings. There are three areas of particular importance to the subject of this paper: The social importance of meals and banquets in Judaism, the principle of reciprocity, and retribution theology.

Meals, feasts, and banquets were ritualistically and socially important throughout both the Old and New Testaments. They were important for worship, for obtaining social and political influence, and for teaching religious and moral lessons.³⁶ By Jesus' day, "meals had become familiar expressions of common identity, social unity, and communal celebration."³⁷

Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg of the Israel Institute of Biblical Studies divides ancient Israelite meals into three categories: "ordinary, festive, and sacred."³⁸ The ordinary meals generally consisted of a luncheon during the hottest part of the day, and a more formal meal in the evening.³⁹ The festive and sacred meals were more elaborate, formal banquets where "the inviter and the invited celebrate their

they are prideful because of it, but it is hard for them to wrap their mind around, "Well God healed me from this, why is he not doing the same in your life? And they forget that more often than not the New Testament kind of alludes to the fact that the healings are actually the exception to the rule, not the rule itself.

Do you know the [story about the] one guy that couldn't get into the water? What was Jesus' question there? "Do you want to be healed?" Like. What kind of a question is that? It's a real question, because if he makes you well, your whole life, everything that you've known is now turned upside down. I've gotten to the point that when people say, Can I pray for you? I say, "Certainly, but I'm going over there."

³⁶ Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg, "Understanding Jewish Meals in their Ancient Context," *Israel Institute of Biblical Studies* (2014, retrieved October 5, 2023, <https://blog.israelbiblicalstudies.com/jewish-studies/jewish-meals-in-context/>)

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

mutual solidarity, their belonging to each other, their oneness.”⁴⁰ Being invited to a banquet indicated “the transformation of a stranger into a guest or an enemy into a covenant partner.”⁴¹ Jesus used all three categories of meals in Luke 14 to emphasize the scope of inclusion He envisioned for those with disabilities. This will be addressed in the next section.

Because of the high social and political stakes, hosts became very calculating in who was invited to their meals and banquets (and guests in what invitations they accepted). There was an expected level of reciprocity and repayment of some kind, be it political or social. The more prominent the guest list (or the more prominent the host), the more favors could be expected. Luke 14:7 says that the guests at this Sabbath day meal were jockeying for places of honor at the home of a “prominent” Pharisee. The seating chart was very important because “one’s position at the table indicated one’s rank relative to that of the other guests.”⁴² Jesus addressed this prideful thinking with both a parable about humility (Luke 14:8-11) and a correction to the host about his guest list (Luke 14:12-14). Jesus challenged the whole principle of reciprocity by instructing the host to specifically invite the “poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind” even though they could not repay. *The Baker Commentary on the Bible* explains that inviting those with disabilities would indicate that “one is not controlled by a spirit of repayment.”⁴³

Jesus’ instruction to invite these “outcasts” would have been difficult for the Pharisees and teachers of the law to understand because of their belief in retribution theology. According to the theology of retribution, those who are healthy and wealthy are blessed by God because of their righteousness, while those who are poor, diseased, or disabled are cursed by God as a form of punishment. These beliefs stemmed from a distorted, individualistic view of the blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 28.⁴⁴ The Pharisees believed that the poor and

⁴⁰ Paul J. Achtemeier and others, eds., *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc, 1952; elec. ed.; retrieved October 28, 2023, <https://archive.org/details/harpersbiblelect00acht/page/n7/mode/1up>), 92.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Dennis E. Smith, “Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106:4 (1987): 617.

⁴³ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Baker Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1989), 826.

⁴⁴ Craig A. Evans, *New International Biblical Commentary: Luke* (ed. W. Ward Gasque; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1990) 224.

disabled were excluded from the Kingdom of God and that eating with them would make them religiously unclean. “Therefore, the pious Israelite would quite naturally desire table fellowship with others of similar piety.”⁴⁵ However, inclusive fellowship in Jesus’ Kingdom requires the Church to break down this sort of superficial barrier.

Lexical and Grammatical Analysis

A closer examination of several Greek words in Luke 14:12-24 will highlight the holistic inclusion of those with disabilities that Jesus envisions and will show Jesus’ compassionate understanding of the care and intentionality it takes to bring the marginalized to the table of fellowship and belonging.

After addressing the pride of the wedding guests, Jesus turns his attention to the host, who was a “prominent Pharisee.” The word for prominent here is ἀρχόντων (archontōn), which means a ruler, commander, chief, leader; a first in rank or power.⁴⁶ The difference in position between this man and the people that Jesus is going to tell him to invite to his home could not be greater. Jesus’ instructions must have seemed ludicrous to this important man.

Jesus’ instructions to this ruling Pharisee were very direct in this passage. The Greek words for “you” and “your” are singular (root is σύ).⁴⁷ Jesus is not addressing the group. He is addressing the host directly. This is significant in light of the inclusion of people with disabilities because often Christians use more comfortable words like “the church” when thinking about where those with disabilities should find belonging. Jesus will get to broader Kingdom inclusion, but here He is saying to the host “When *you*.” Jesus is asking the host to include people with disabilities in his personal life.

Luke records three different words Jesus used to indicate which meals those with disabilities were to be invited to. In verse 12, the text reads, “When you give a luncheon (ἄριστον) or dinner (δείπνον).” In verse 13, Jesus said, “But when you give a banquet (δοχήν).” The Greek word ἄριστον (ariston) means “the first food taken early in the morning before work, breakfast.” It was later extended to signify the mid-day meal.⁴⁸ The word δείπνον (deipnon) means “supper, especially

⁴⁵ Ibid., 223.

⁴⁶ *Netbible.org* (retrieved October 29, 2023, <https://netbible.org/bible/Luke+14>).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

a formal meal held in the evening.”⁴⁹ The word δοχὴν (dochēn) can be translated as “banquet, feast.”⁵⁰ It is only used one other time in the New Testament in Luke 5:29, where it is used for Levi’s great banquet for Jesus. Steve Bundy, Vice President of Joni and Friends, professor, and pastor, emphasizes the comprehensiveness of these meals saying, “Jesus was not suggesting just a special occasional meal; rather one’s normal lifestyle should be that of inclusion of those with disabilities.”⁵¹

The final words to be examined are in the Parable of the Great Banquet in verses 16-23. In this section, Jesus is responding to a comment from one of the dinner guests. Jesus shocks his listeners by honoring the poor and those with disabilities above those who felt confident in their position at the Messianic feast at the end of the age. The method of inclusion of those with disabilities in this Kingdom banquet is worth highlighting. The host of this great banquet (God) instructs his servant with different words of invitation as He fills his house with the outcasts and those far from God.

In verse 16, the word for invited is ἐκάλεσεν (ekalesen), from the root word καλέω (kaleó). This word means “to call, to invite.”⁵² The first guests were invited in the typical manner. When these people insulted the host by making excuses to not come, the host sent his servant out to the “streets and alleys of the town” to “bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.” The word for *bring in* used in verse 21 is εἰσάγαγε (eisage), which means “to lead in.”⁵³ When the master realized there was still room, he sent his servants further out to the “roads and country lanes” to “make them come in.” The word for *make them* is ἀνάγκασον (anankason), and means “compel...by entreaties; to strongly urge.”⁵⁴

While the word ἀνάγκασον has been interpreted in terrible ways in Church history,⁵⁵ from a disability perspective Jesus’ change

⁴⁹ This word is also used of the Messiah’s feast, which likely triggered the comment and conversation turn in the following verses. *Netbible.org* (retrieved October 29,2023, <https://netbible.org/bible/Luke+14>).

⁵⁰ *Netbible.org* (retrieved October 29,2023, <https://netbible.org/bible/Luke+14>).

⁵¹ Steve Bundy, “The Kingdom of God and Disability: A Commentary on Luke 14:1-24.” PDF Article included in curriculum. *Beyond Suffering: A Christian View on Disability Ministry, Study Guide*, (ed. Pat Verbal; Agoura Hills, CA: Joni and Friends, 2011), 5.

⁵² *Netbible.org* (retrieved October 29,2023, <https://netbible.org/bible/Luke+14>).

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

from “invite” to “bring in” to “compel” is instructive if the church desires to follow the heart of the Lord and purposefully include those with disabilities in the fellowship of the saints. It is not enough to simply invite those with disabilities to church, to express that they are welcome. The Church needs to go out and *bring them in*. In response to a question about why the disabled would need to be brought in versus simply invited, Chris said, “There is skepticism. There’s the question, “What kind of joke are you trying to pull on me? Why would I be invited?”⁵⁶ This is the same question the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame would have had in the biblical context. They needed to be compelled and led in. Those with disabilities still need to be brought in, and once they are there, they need to be seated in places of honor – as full participants in the “here and now” as they will be in the “yet to come.”

Reflection and Application

So, what are the implications for the Church from this passage in Luke? It is one thing to know that Jesus loves and values people with disabilities and another thing to love and value them ourselves. If we look around our churches and do not see people with disabilities in our buildings, pews, classes, and leadership meetings, we need to ask ourselves, “Why not?” Where are they? They ought to be around every table, in the personal lives of people in the church, and around leadership tables, ministry tables, and theological tables. They need to be talked about, planned for, and intentionally brought in. Jesus’ words are filled with urgency.

In light of the knowledge of the centrality and importance of gathering around the table for social connections and community in Jesus’ day, is it any wonder that He was concerned for those who were in abject relational poverty by being excluded from these gatherings (or worse yet, brought in as an object lesson)? We are meant to be in relationship – with God, with self, with others, and with the rest of creation. People with disabilities have these same needs, and Christ was emphatic in Luke 14 that these needs can and should be met in his Kingdom people.

One area I feel is particularly relevant to assessing the affluent, Western Church is the issue of reciprocity. It may be easy to bypass the implication found in the context of the passage, thinking that it does not apply to our present situation. While we may acknowledge there is a

⁵⁶ Maas, 2023.

“You scratch my back, and I’ll scratch yours” mentality in business practices or politics, most of us would not recognize the same attitude in our churches – until we intentionally examine our practices in light of those with disabilities, especially in regard to ministry, outreach, and program funding. There is a certain amount of reciprocity that weighs into budget decisions and ministry expenditures in the church – investing in families will pay off, or in the youth, for example. Spending money on outreach to the able-bodied in our communities may lead to higher church attendance (and more giving), and more disciples as they, in turn, make disciples. There is a return on the investment. Investing in those with intellectual disabilities may not seem necessary, for example, especially if the prevailing attitudes are that they lack the capacity to grow in discipleship. The Church needs to heed Jesus’ words, “Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” (14:14) Seeking out either a person with a disability or a disability advocate to sit at the budgeting table would be a good way to assess if there are undercurrents of reciprocity in the church.

In closing, I want to let Chris’s words, as a pastor, and as a man with a disability, give us insight into what it will take to move those with disabilities from “being in” our churches, to “belonging to” our family, and how we can move the church from ministering “to” to ministering “with.” We need to listen because the disabled are still in the “streets and alleys of the town,” and they are longing to belong. We need to go out and “bring them in.”

Q: Do you think a church should focus on ministering “to” people with disabilities or “with” them?

Chris: I think the initial step does start at the “to” level because for them to walk in the door, the church has to be willing to minister to them. But, that should only last long enough to get them to the point where they can partner with and minister with them. It’s ok to start with ministering “to,” but that’s where churches stop. And it’s like, “No, that’s the first step on the stairway.”

Q: How can we move beyond that?

Chris: Some is training. I think it really comes down to a lack of education. Because they’re “normal” people, they don’t know how to think about it from another perspective. They’re not necessarily against anyone with disabilities, but because it hasn’t affected their life, they don’t think about it. When I was in college, going through the youth ministry program, none of

the classes or coursework actually touched on the issue of working with students with disabilities.

For me, in the youth group that embraced me, it was definitely the youth pastor who ministered to me first, meeting me where I was. But, [he] didn't leave me there. He kept pushing me. It was, "OK, now that you've been with us, and you've got the leadership potential you're going to be part of the youth group and responsible for things."

I think the biggest conversation to have starts by asking questions. What are we doing ministry-wise to include or create a space where everybody feels accepted or welcomed?" Are there things that we could put in place, like adaptations and things like that? Because, once you start rolling out those, that's a very visible sign to people that you're trying to meet them where they're at.

[In my new position] my disability was never a question of "Can he do the job?" It was "Because of it[his disability], he's going to do the job differently. It will look different." But that doesn't matter. For me, I do more relational [ministry]. It's all about having that... you walk in the door and you are in a place where you're known and you are loved. And that's the atmosphere I always want to create.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Maas, 2023.

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A GENERAL EXAMINATION OF THE SCRIPTURAL CANON AND ITS TRUSTWORTHINESS

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Introduction

What is the Bible? How do we know that the Bible is trustworthy? Why is the Bible called “the canon”? Why were there councils to determine canonicity? Are there missing or lost books of the Bible? What impact did Constantine have on the formation of the biblical canon? These questions are not new. Ecclesiastes 1:9 tells us, “There is nothing new under the sun.”⁵⁸ Yet questions surrounding the Bible and the validity of its content are continually asked by people worldwide as they seek to understand this historical and theological collection of books and grapple with why they should believe its testimony. This paper argues that the manuscripts that comprise the Bible are among the most authentic and reliable ancient documents that exist. As well, it endeavors to encourage believers in their faith and demonstrate the trustworthiness of the canon to seekers. This author will approach this subject from a Baptist-informed theological perspective. When referencing the Bible, canon, word of God, and Scripture, these terms refer to the Protestant Bible, which contains sixty-six recognized books and are used interchangeably by this author. The Catholic Church accepts eighty books, which include what is known as the Apocrypha. Apocryphal literature will be referenced as such in this discussion.⁵⁹

The Writing of the Law, Prophets, Gospels, and Letters

The Bible was written over the course of 1600 years by approximately 40 authors and canonized in AD 397.⁶⁰ It contains a

⁵⁸ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the Holy Bible, New International Version, NIV.

⁵⁹ J. Hampton Keathley, III, “7. The Bible: The Holy Canon of Scripture,” in the series *Bibliology: the Doctrine of the Written Word* in *Bible.org*, (2004, retrieved September 5, 2023, <https://bible.org/seriespage/7-bible-holy-canon-scripture>).

⁶⁰ J. Hampton Keathley, III, “4. The Bible: The Written Word of God,” in the series *Bibliology: the Doctrine of the Written Word* in *Bible.org*, (2004,

corpus of texts separated into two testaments, forming one volume, and was entrusted to the Jewish people for preservation and to provide instruction for life and practice. It has been referred to as the Book of Books, not only because of its variety but also because of its literary influence and theological implications for humanity.

What makes the Bible the rule of faith for Christians worldwide? Former pastor and Dallas Theological Seminary graduate J. Hampton Keathley, III says, “The word canon is used to describe those books recognized as inspired of God...Literally, it means (a) a straight rod or bar; (b) a measuring rule as a ruler used by masons and carpenters; then (c) a rule or standard for testing straightness.”⁶¹ Scripture self-attests that it is “God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16), which means inspired by God, not by man. It is inerrant, which means free from corruption, contradiction, and imperfection. Scripture is true (Ps. 33:4; 119:160), pure (Prov. 30:5 NKJV), and has been safeguarded for the benefit of mankind by God Himself as revealed through His word.⁶²

Old Testament

Professor Emeritus of Bible at Abilene Christian University Everett Ferguson notes, “By the time of the birth of Christianity the main lines of the Jewish canon were clearly drawn.”⁶³ Judaism and Christianity accepted thirty-nine books as the law, prophets, and poetry. There were points in time when other books were highly revered and circulated alongside these main writings but ultimately these were not recognized as being part of the canon. Similarly, there were doubts that arose in the process about the canonicity of “some books, such as Esther, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.”⁶⁴

Historically, the Jewish people have been people of “one book.”⁶⁵ The process of recording Scripture, the word of God, was undertaken with great seriousness and meticulous attention to detail. There were professions dedicated to writing, copying, and preserving the text, such as priests and scribes, which ensured no errors or mistakes were made in transmitting the message. If questions were

retrieved September 5, 2023, <https://bible.org/seriespage/bible-written-word-god>).

⁶¹ Keathley, “The Holy Canon of Scripture.”

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Everett Ferguson, *Church History, Volume 1: From Christ to the Pre-Reformation*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 111.

⁶⁴ Ferguson, *Church History, Volume 1*, 111.

⁶⁵ Keathley, “The Holy Canon of Scripture.”

raised about the writings, details or comments were included in the text margins to provide clarification. Keathley highlights that “later scribes known as the Masoretes developed a number of strict measures to ensure that every fresh copy was an exact reproduction of the original,”⁶⁶ expanding upon the traditions of earlier copyists. Because of these stringent steps, we can be sure we have the authentic transmission handed down to the people today.

The New Testament and the Process of Canonicity

It is interesting to observe that “The church began with a canon of Scripture. That is, it took over and claimed the Jewish Scriptures as its own.”⁶⁷ Judaism is recognized as a religion of distinct origin due to the safekeeping of the Old Testament books and its practices, customs, and traditions. At inception, the church was considered a sect within Judaism until the writings of the Apostles were circulated throughout the churches for public reading and worship and were viewed as a continuation of the Jewish canon. Receiving this established canon as its own signaled the antiquity of the Christian faith and the continuity between the two religions, giving Christians a heritage in Judaism and ancient history otherwise not afforded.

As with Judaism, there was discussion surrounding certain early writings and authorship of particular letters considered canon by some and not others, which led to a multistage process to determine canonicity. The stages are as listed: (1) the Scripture principle, (2) the canonical principle, (3) a closed canon, (4) recognition of the same closed canon.⁶⁸ Ferguson notes, “The formation of the canon passed through these different stages at different times at different places and in the thought of different authors, but the lines of development are clear.”⁶⁹ An exploration of each stage of the process and its historical and theological implications will be discussed next, along with attestation of the New Testament manuscripts.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ferguson, *Church History, Volume 1*, 110.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 113-117.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 113.

The Scripture Principle

Christianity experienced a different scenario when establishing what collection of books would belong to the New Testament. The Old Testament was carefully preserved for thousands of years. Documents in circulation recording the sayings of Jesus and the Apostles were comparatively young. Yet, for this to be a topic of consideration, it is implied that a corpus of writings existed, and they did. F.F. Bruce, author of *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, informs us, “The New Testament was complete, or substantially complete, about AD 100, the majority of the writings being in existence twenty to forty years before this.”⁷⁰ How these documents came to be assembled and recognized as authoritative to the church is captured in the Scripture principle, which refers to the role of the church and Church Fathers’ recognition of certain books as canon based on the books’ own apparent inspiration and divine authority.

The self-attestation of Scripture is a theological subject that this author will address broadly in this paper. In brief, it describes the process whereby the church “spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14 NKJV) the remaining books that would complete the Bible. Scripture proclaims, “Everything in the Scriptures is God’s Word” (2 Tim. 3:16 CEV). Bruce agrees and affirms, “The historic Christian belief is that the Holy Spirit, who controlled the writing of the individual books, also controlled their selection and collection.”⁷¹ Essentially, the principle considers what books were being recognized and affirmed as Scripture by notable leaders during that period to corroborate canonical writings from the New Testament. Ferguson notes, “Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp of Smyrna knew and quoted from Paul’s letters, presumably in a collection. Indeed, Polycarp quotes Ephesians 4:26 as “Scripture” (*Philippians* 12.1).”⁷²

The Canonical Principle and the Closed Canon

The canonical principle refers to the acknowledgment that there is a limit to the writings that constitute the canon, and the question is, what is that number?⁷³ Continuing with Ferguson, he states,

⁷⁰ F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 5th ed., (Bath, England, UK: Kingsley Books, 2018; Kindle ed.), 10.

⁷¹ F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, 16.

⁷² Ferguson, *Church History, Volume I*, 113.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 114.

“In principle, the idea of canon was established by about 180.”⁷⁴ Heretical teachings and practices were being propagated, and the church needed to address any unorthodox doctrines threatening Christian doctrine. It was partly due to this threat that the establishment of the canon became an urgent requirement.⁷⁵

A closed canon and the recognition of the same closed canon principle are intertwined. Determining the parameters of the New Testament writings and obtaining a unified consensus on which books completed it was necessary to dispute heresy and establish orthodox Christian teaching. Ferguson reports, “By the end of the second century there was a core canon recognized virtually everywhere in the great church: four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, thirteen letters of Paul, and varying other apostolic writings.”⁷⁶ Similar to the Old Testament, there were contentions about writings such as “2 Peter, 2 and 3 John.”⁷⁷ Reasons for suspicions included undetermined authorship, the age of the document, and whether the writing received widespread acceptance. Other books were considered beneficial, but not Scripture. Still, others were outright rejected as they were clearly not inspired, such as the “Gospel of Matthias and the Acts of John.”⁷⁸ Finally, it is recorded that “councils at Hippo in 393 and Carthage in 397 followed Augustine in ratifying a twenty-seven book New Testament.”⁷⁹

One of the most prevalent arguments against the historicity of the Bible, the New Testament manuscripts in particular, is that they cannot be validated, which is untrue. Bruce tells us, “There are in existence over 5,000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament in whole or in part. The best and most important of these go back to somewhere about AD 350.”⁸⁰ This information is meaningful because it provides “manuscript attestation”⁸¹ for the documents. Nonbiblical literature produced during the first and second centuries does not come close to the level of support the New Testament does in the sheer volume of preserved texts. For example, “For Caesar’s Gallic War (composed between 58 and 50 BC), there are several extant manuscripts, but only nine or ten are good, and the oldest is some 900

⁷⁴ Ferguson, *Church History, Volume 1*, 114.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 114-115.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 116.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 117.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 116-119.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 117.

⁸⁰ F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, 16.

⁸¹ Ibid., 13.

years later than Caesar's day,"⁸² which is far less attestation than the biblical documents have. However, some historians and theologians are reluctant to accept the evidence without hesitation. It would seem there is a willingness to believe in the authenticity of secular writings without further inquiry while approaching biblical texts with greater scrutiny.⁸³

Historical Verification

The integrity of the New Testament documents is also attested to "by allusions to and quotations from the New Testament books in other early writings."⁸⁴ Sometimes, history is viewed as having taken place in a vacuum. This author can reference personal conversations when questions were raised about the Bible and biblical characters, and an external nonbiblical source was mentioned that confirmed a biblical event. The fact that the books that make up the Bible were in use by the Apostolic Fathers, as is also attested to by examining the writings of historians in circulation at that time, some who opposed Christianity, serves to acknowledge the works as Scripture. Historical verification strengthens the claims of Christians that the book in its completeness was "handed down to us as it was originally given."⁸⁵

The history of the New Testament is as theologically rich as the history of the Old Testament. The main differences are the length of time in public circulation and the unique responsibility of the church to realize what constituted authoritative writings for the new dispensation. Bruce remarks, "One thing must be emphatically stated. The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth and general apostolic authority."⁸⁶ Thus, the representation of the records of Scripture, and how the records were kept safe and codified by both the Jewish people and the church, answers the questions regarding the Bible and its trustworthiness clearly and accurately. Now to extrabiblical works and Constantine the Great.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 29.

⁸⁶ F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, 19.

Noncanonical Literature

Noncanonical literature, “writings which were produced during the first two centuries before Christ and the first century AD,”⁸⁷ can be described in two categories: Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha. These books are considered Jewish literature, though some were written in or translated into Greek. A contingent of scholars think of the Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha synonymously; most often, however, it is noted that there is a difference between the two. For instance, Pseudepigraphal works are extensive, and there is no uniform list of these writings. The Apocrypha is a limited collection of books interspersed throughout the Old Testament of the Catholic Bible.⁸⁸

Pseudepigrapha

Pseudepigraphal writings are falsely credited to biblical characters but instead were written by anonymous authors. They are considered to have been written too late for inclusion in the canon, to have mythological characteristics, and to contain content inconsistent with biblical teachings. Michael E. Stone, Professor of Religious Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, tells us, “The Pseudepigrapha can be more specifically defined as Jewish writings of the Second Temple period resembling the Apocrypha in general character, yet not included in the Bible, Apocrypha, or rabbinic literature.”⁸⁹ The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947 provided both an extensive collection of pseudepigraphal manuscripts and confirmed the dating of the writings.⁹⁰

Two of the most well-known books of Pseudepigrapha are the Books of Enoch and the Jubilees; they are included in the Ethiopic Bible. *Enoch* is attributed to Enoch mentioned in Gen. 5:18-24, and Jubilees records details of Moses.⁹¹ Both claim hidden knowledge not

⁸⁷ George E. Ladd, “The Kingdom of God in the Jewish Apocryphal Literature Part 1,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 109, no. 433 (1952), (retrieved October 17, 2023, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/bsac109-433-05?highlight=pseudepigrapha>).

⁸⁸ Michael E. Stone, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Pseudepigrapha.” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 3, no. 3 (1996), (retrieved October 17, 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4201570>).

⁸⁹ Michael E. Stone, “Why Study the Pseudepigrapha?” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 46, no. 4 (1983), (retrieved October 19, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3209783>).

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Michael E. Stone, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Pseudepigrapha.”

provided in the Hebrew, Protestant, and Catholic canons. Enoch especially is mentioned frequently as one of the so-called “lost books” of the Bible and is presented as an evidence text to dispute the findings of the Councils of Nicaea and Trent. What are we to make of them? The Pseudepigrapha may be helpful from a historical perspective for understanding the cultural thought processes of the earlier centuries and to provide insight into the types of literature produced during that time. However, since they are noncanonical, they are not considered authoritative for life and practice.

Apocrypha

The Apocrypha is a collection of texts accepted as canon by the Catholic Church. It consists of the books of Tobit, Judith, I and II Maccabees (NRSVCE), along with some additional works. There are also two groups of writings: the Old Testament, which is similar to wisdom literature, and the New Testament, which is similar to the gospels and acts. The inclusion of the Old Testament Apocrypha in the Catholic Bible introduces an additional element of attestation to the process of determining canonicity: that of the authority of the church to define canon limits.

Kilian McDonnell, OSB (Order of St. Benedict), former pastor and theologian, says, “If the determining of the canon is a complex process by which the church decides its own constitution, then how one views the church will determine how one views the canon.”⁹² Whereas the Protestant Church “recognized” the authoritative books of the canon, the Catholic Church accepted those books based on the principles earlier listed and added the principle of “ecclesial obedience and authority”⁹³ to accept the Apocrypha. Ferguson records, “It was not until the age of the Reformation, when Protestants insisted on limiting the Old Testament to the thirty-nine books accepted by the Jews, that the Roman Catholic church made an official determination of which books (those called the “Apocrypha” by Protestants, Deuterocanonical by Catholics) would be included in its Old Testament (Council of Trent, 1546).”⁹⁴ Hence, the difference between the Protestant and Catholic Bibles.

⁹² Kilian McDonnell, “Canon and Koinonia/Communio: The Formation of the Canon as an Ecclesiological Process.” *Gregorianum* 79, no. 1 (1998), (retrieved October 17, 2023, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23580300>).

⁹³ Kilian McDonnell, “Canon and Koinonia/Communio.”

⁹⁴ Ferguson, *Church History, Volume 1*, 112.

The New Testament Apocrypha consists of those writings attributed to either the Apostles or those taught by them but were written after their lifetime. Literature from the Apostolic Fathers, such as The Shepherd of Hermas, Didache, 1 and II Clement, could be classed in this category.⁹⁵ Works such as these attained recognition as Scripture by some, but only briefly, as they were ultimately rejected from inclusion in the canon. These texts are still considered beneficial to read as they reflect the sincerity of faith of the writers. Accounts such as the Gospel of Thomas and the Acts of Paul, and other gospels, acts, and epistles, were widely considered heretical and rejected.⁹⁶

Constantine

In this dialogue on canon, we must consider the emperor Constantine and his influence on church history. Ferguson reports, “Constantine’s father, Constantius Chlorus, was a Neoplatonist who was tolerant of Christianity. Constantine’s mother was Helena, who came from humble circumstances. She was a Christian and later was known as Saint Helena.”⁹⁷ As emperor of Rome, Constantine expressed a favorable attitude towards Christians.⁹⁸ He professed his conversion to the faith and set out to make Christianity the state religion of the empire. It is noted that “Since there was one supreme God, Constantine felt there should be one earthly rule corresponding to the one divine rule.”⁹⁹

His involvement in church affairs famously extended to the Council of Nicaea in 325, which dealt with the Arian controversy. Constantine was present among the bishops and may have contributed the word *homoousios* to affirm the divinity of Christ, which was then included in the Nicene Creed. However, over time, he has become reputed as having forced Christianity upon the empire through political and military force and as having been solely responsible for the selection of the New Testament books.¹⁰⁰ Charles E. Hill, author of *Who Chose the Books of the New Testament?*, references Genesis 50:20 when he writes, “If this culturally useful narrative about the formation of the Bible turns out to be accurate, the Christian can still look gratefully and joyfully at the saving message preserved in the New

⁹⁵ Ibid., 49.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 57-60.

⁹⁷ Ferguson, *Church History, Volume 1*, 180.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 182.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 185.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 191-197.

Testament and say, “Constantine and his army may have meant it for evil, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should hear the life-giving voice of Jesus in the books that made it into the New Testament.”¹⁰¹ Yet, there is no evidence that Constantine’s involvement led to a selection of the books of the New Testament by force. The popular myth that he did is disproved upon examination, and the church can be sure the books we have were the ones we were to receive.

Conclusion

The history of the canon is extensive and consistent, and included the establishment and recognition of the Old and New Testaments, a fact which supports an assurance that the testimony of the Bible is true. The primary factor in determining the choice of books of the New Testament was the process of recognizing Scripture on the part of the church. Though other writings were in circulation, the early church considered Pseudepigraphal and Apocryphal literature as such and largely agreed on what was considered canon before it was formalized in 397 AD.

Evidence presented in this paper supports the assertion that there are no missing or "lost books." Though additional texts may be beneficial to read for historical reference, from a theological standpoint, they lack the authority present in the Apostles' writings. Ferguson reminds us, “If one wants to appreciate the genuine article, read the imitations. If one feels a decline in spiritual power from the New Testament to the Apostolic Fathers, there is a plunge into another world in much of the second-century New Testament Apocrypha.”¹⁰²

This conversation is relevant, necessary, and crucial. The spark of discord that lit the necessity to determine the canon in the past is still aflame in this modern age. Conversations are happening; people need to know. Is the Bible trustworthy? The evidence says yes. Isaiah 40:7 reads, “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.” When reading the Bible, be assured that the words read are “spirit and truth” (John 4:24) and have the power to transform the soul.

¹⁰¹ Charles E. Hill, *Who Chose the Books of The New Testament?*, (ed. D.A. Carson; Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022; Everand ed.), 12.

¹⁰² Ferguson, *Church History, Volume 1*, 57.

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THE QUALITIES OF DISCIPLESHIP NECESSARY TO WALK IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF PAST MARTYRS

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Introduction

Jesus incarnate reveals the ultimate example of discipleship. The New Testament demonstrates Jesus systematically calling His disciples to follow Him and to respond in their discipleship development. Jesus methodically revealed His identity as the Son of God and the disciples' identity as followers of Christ. As the disciples progressed in their training, Jesus instructed His disciples to follow His example of servanthood.

Studying the life of Jesus reveals His strategy for discipleship training. Discipleship is a process, starting with the believer's introduction to Jesus' identity, mission and worldview. Advancing through Biblical teaching and study of the Word of God, the believer learns the attributes of God and of their identity in Christ. As the believer's relationship and knowledge of Christ matures, their discipleship journey continues to advance to the imitation of Christ. It is vital for believers to learn and adopt the attributes, values and morality of Christ to grow to spiritual maturity in discipleship. If a believer's values, morals and worldview remain misaligned with Jesus' teaching, the believer will misconstrue the doctrine and actions of Jesus and will not develop to spiritual maturity in discipleship.¹⁰³

The values of American culture are grossly misaligned with Jesus' teachings and morality. American Christians are influenced by their culture. Are American Christian churches producing disciples of Christ? Jim Putnam, pastor and author of the book, *Church Is a Team Sport: A Championship Strategy for Doing Ministry Together*, writes, "American Christians are not on a mission. They look far more like the world than they should. They live the same way and chase the same things. Their marriages and families look the same. They are biblically illiterate and care little about sharing their faith with others. Churches

¹⁰³ Sookgoo Shin, "Ethics In The Gospel Of John Discipleship As Moral Progress," *Tyndale Bulletin* 68, no. 1 (2017): 154-155, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/tynbul68-1-08>.

are producing people who do not and cannot share the gospel.”¹⁰⁴ American Christians are stunted in their discipleship growth and are not progressing to spiritual maturity.

The purpose of this paper is to expound upon the claim that American Christians are not prepared for martyrdom. This paper will reveal the modern state of Christianity in America and why it is significant. Current societal views on American Christianity and Christian discipleship will be explained. This paper will describe the growing persecution against Christians worldwide and in America. This discussion will make observations about the lives of two female martyrs to support the claim. I am going to focus on a martyr from the early Church era and a present-day martyr, specifically, on their individual stories and the qualities they share which demonstrate discipleship. Through extensive study of these martyrs and a review of scholarly work, this paper will identify certain qualities of discipleship that need to be developed in the believer to walk in the footsteps of past martyrs. Lastly, this paper will examine the call of American Churches to discipleship training and development for the benefit of the believer and the Body of Christ.

The State of Christianity in America

The American people are attending Church less than they were twenty years ago. Over the past two decades, those that identify as practicing Christians, attending Church at least once a month, decreased from 45 percent to 25 percent of the American population.¹⁰⁵ Church membership is declining as well. Church membership in the United States was consistently in the 70 percent range for several decades. In the last twenty years, Church attendance has dropped to its lowest rate ever, less than 50 percent.¹⁰⁶ Theologian, author, and

¹⁰⁴ Jim Putman, *Church Is A Team Sport: A Championship Strategy for Doing Ministry Together* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 74 quoted in Kevin Michael Brosius, “Culture And The Church’s Discipleship Strategy,” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 123, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/jmat21-1-05>.

¹⁰⁵ “Signs of Decline & Hope Among Key Metrics of Faith,” *Barna*, last modified March 4, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/changing-state-of-the-church/>.

¹⁰⁶ Jeffrey M. Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time,” *Gallup*, last modified March 29, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>.

speaker, Dr Thom S. Rainer, specializes in church growth and has conducted research on the unchurched in America. His research concluded that, “America is clearly becoming less Christian, less evangelized, and less church.”¹⁰⁷

Christians are turning away from their faith at an alarming rate. There are fewer Christians today than 20 years ago. Christianity is not only fading in America, but Americans are not converting to Christianity in very high proportions, or at least in numbers enough to counter those that are turning away from their faith. As church attendance declines, there is an increase in Americans with no religious preference, they do not identify with any religion.¹⁰⁸ These numbers are at the highest they have ever been.¹⁰⁹ The Christians that are falling away from their faith are not just turning into non-practicing Christians. Half of the Christians that fall away from the faith are becoming atheist or agnostic.¹¹⁰ During an interview in March 2023, Dr Thomas D. Williams, a theologian, professor, and author of the book, *The Coming Christian Persecution*, describes this sector of the population:

And I think also what we’re seeing with the rise of the nones, N-O-N-E-S, these non-affiliated non-religious people in the US, this turning away from religion is just going to make the situation worse as there are more and more atheists and agnostics, those are easily brought over to a very hostile form of atheism that really hates Christianity.¹¹¹

The decline in Christianity is seen across all generations. The Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials have all decreased their church attendance in similar proportions over the past 20 years.¹¹² Christianity is fading in America.

American society is rejecting Christianity and becoming increasingly hostile towards those that hold Christian values. Many

¹⁰⁷ Thom S. Rainer, “Shattering Myths about the Unchurched,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 05, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 47, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/sbjt05-1-05>.

¹⁰⁸ Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time.”

¹⁰⁹ “Signs of Decline & Hope Among Key Metrics of Faith,” *Barna*.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*.

¹¹¹ Eric Sammons, “The Coming Christian Persecution (Guest: Thomas D. Williams),” *Crisis Magazine*, last modified March 24, 2023, <https://crisismagazine.com/podcast/the-coming-chritian-persecution-guest-thomas-d-williams>.

¹¹² “Signs of Decline & Hope Among Key Metrics of Faith,” *Barna*.

Christians no longer consider Christianity expedient to their lifestyle. Furthermore, they are now being persecuted for standing up for Christian beliefs. Christians are losing their jobs for not conforming to societal pressure and are afraid of retribution if they do not succumb to moral depravity. In 2015, an Atlanta Fire Chief was fired for writing a Christian book in which he described homosexuality as a sin.¹¹³ That same year a high school football coach was placed on paid leave for praying on the field after football games.¹¹⁴ A baker that declined to bake a cake for a same-sex wedding, because it went against his religious beliefs, has been harassed and sued repeatedly for the past ten years.¹¹⁵ The threat of retribution is making many Christians reconsider their belief system. Williams adds more to the topic by addressing the rise of extreme secularism in the West. He describes extreme secularism as, “a much more aggressive form where religion is looked upon as an enemy, where Christians are seen to be bigots because of their morality.”¹¹⁶

The prioritization of individual happiness, which is prolific in modern society, directly contradicts the teachings of Christ. American culture emphasizes the freedom and entitlement to anything that produces pleasure, no matter how exorbitant. This is contrary to the teachings of Christ. Jesus explained that discipleship requires a surrendering of our individual wants and desires (Mark 8:34-36). As the believer matures in discipleship, the believer becomes more Christ-like in beliefs, words and actions. Jesus taught on many occasions that His followers would be treated as He was treated (John 15:18). Disciples of Christ deny themselves of worldly desires and wholly submit to God’s omniscient will for their lives knowing that they are a part of God’s eternal plan and purpose (Rom 8:28-29).

According to the current American worldview, willful suffering and surrendering one’s desires are distressing signs of mental

¹¹³ Todd Starnes, “Atlanta Fire Chief: I was fired because of my Christian faith,” *Fox News*, last modified May 6, 2015, <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/atlanta-fire-chief-i-was-fired-because-of-my-christian-faith>.

¹¹⁴ Jason Hanna and Steve Almasy, “Washington high school coach placed on leave for praying on field,” *CNN*, last modified October 30, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/10/29/us/washington-football-coach-joe-kennedys-prays/>.

¹¹⁵ “Activist Lawyer Targets Jack Phillips in Third Lawsuit,” *Alliance Defending Freedom*, last modified August 16, 2023, <https://adflegal.org/article/activist-lawyer-targets-jack-phillips-third-lawsuit>.

¹¹⁶ Sammons, “The Coming Christian Persecution.”

derangement. Eugene Weiner, Rabbi, professor, and author of the book *The Martyr's Conviction: A Sociological Analysis*, writes "In the modern western world, the psychological climate discourages total commitment and martyrdom. Individuals willing to martyr themselves for a cause strikes us as irrational and motivated by psychological problems."¹¹⁷ Identifying as a Christian and a disciple of Christ, abides contrary to modern society's belief system. Christians are at risk for being persecuted, ostracized, and marginalized for their beliefs. Are American Christians ready to follow Christ at all costs?

American society is becoming increasingly intolerant towards any disagreement with what the majority feels to be true. Suffering and possibly dying for religious beliefs may seem extreme in American culture, but we are currently witnessing increasing hostility towards Christians. We watch as Christians' freedom of speech and freedom to practice what they believe are challenged and punished. Christianity is no longer the majority religion and is now being marginalized. Intolerance to anything that differs from the societal norm has become commonplace. The persecution of Christians and societal pressure to conform or risk retaliation, are the beginning stages that can lead to suffering or even dying because of religious beliefs.

Past and Present Martyrdom

During the early Church period, Christians were persecuted by the Jews because of their belief in Jesus Christ and by the Roman government for their rejection of pagan society. Roman culture deified the emperor and his family. Christian theology, that holds to the belief that Jesus Christ is Lord and the worship of any other is sin, was a direct contradiction to Roman law. The totalitarian Roman government would not accept the Christians' refusal to worship Caesar as lord. Therefore, Christians were counted as treasonous to the very constructs of Roman law and a threat to the Roman state. Ancient Roman culture despised Christians and held them in great contempt to the point of persecuting and killing many of them.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Eugene Weiner and Anita Weiner, *The Martyr's Conviction: A Sociological Analysis* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 2 quoted in J. Tristan Hurley, "Finding The "Missio Dei" In Persecution And Martyrdom," *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 15, no. 2 (Fall 2018): 2, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/jbtm15-2-02>.

¹¹⁸ Everett Ferguson, *Church History: From Christ to Pre-Reformation*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 63-64, Kindle.

Currently, in several areas of the world, Christians are persecuted and martyred for their belief in Jesus Christ. Aid to the Church in Need, an organization that supports and provides aid for persecuted Christians around the world, published a report that reveals, “Christians are the victims of at least 75% of all religiously-motivated violence and oppression.”¹¹⁹ Christians are targeted more than any other religious group in the world. Open Doors, an organization that monitors persecution, violence and deaths of Christians worldwide due to their faith, reports, “5,621 Christians were murdered for their faith last year, 2,110 churches and Christian buildings were attacked last year and 5,259 Christians were abducted last year.”¹²⁰ The persecution and martyrdom of Christians is occurring in modern times.

The early Church martyr featured in this study is Perpetua, a Christian martyr who kept a diary of her experiences leading up to her martyrdom in 203 AD. The present-day American martyr featured in this study is Rachel Scott, one of the victims of the Columbine School shooting, which occurred April 20, 1999. The shooters targeted Christians and asked many of the victims about their faith before killing them.¹²¹ Perpetua and Rachel Scotts’ experiences and revelations documented in their diaries will be studied to ascertain certain qualities of discipleship that both women possessed.

Qualities of Discipleship

David F. Wright, theologian, author, and professor writes that martyrs of the early Church, “were truly filled with the Spirit.”¹²² Every believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13), but every believer does not walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16, 25).¹²³ The believers of Christ are set apart by God from unbelievers by the Holy Spirit who is given

¹¹⁹ “Persecuted and Forgotten: A report of Christians Persecution and Oppression in the World 2017,” *Aid to the Church in Need: United Kingdom*, accessed September 21, 2023, <https://acnuk.org/persecuted-and-forgotten/>.

¹²⁰ “World Watch List,” *Open Doors*, accessed September 21, 2023, <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/>.

¹²¹ Darrell Scott, Beth Nimmo, and Steve Rabey, *Rachel’s Tears: The Spiritual Journey of Columbine Martyr Rachel Scott*, 10th Anniversary ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 109-110, Kindle.

¹²² David F. Wright, “The Testimony of Blood: The Charisma of Martyrdom,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160, no. 640 (October 2003): 387, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/bsac160-640-02>.

¹²³ Robert L. Deffinbaugh, “15. Siding With the Spirit (Romans 8:1-17),” Bible.org, last modified August 18, 2004, <https://bible.org/seriespage/15-siding-spirit-romans-81-17>.

when accepting salvation (Eph 1:13). Just as discipleship is a process, walking with the Holy Spirit is a process as well. The believer makes decisions every day to either live according to “the dictates of the flesh” (Rom 8:13 AMP) or to live by the fundamental truths of Christ and to align their values with those of Christ. The first quality of discipleship that prepares a believer for martyrdom is walking with the Holy Spirit, which is accomplished by submission to the Holy Spirit, a posture which positions a Christian to receive insight and revelation.

Romans 8:13 explains that the Holy Spirit gives us power to continually resist and subjugate the works of the flesh so that we may walk in the Spirit. In a culture that venerates monetary success and power, choosing to deny ourselves and stand resolute to our convictions will cause rejection by society. Theologian John F Walvoord writes on this topic, “For the world, there is immediate gain but ultimate loss: for the disciple, there is immediate loss but ultimate gain.”¹²⁴ Renouncing our worldly desires by committing to Christ and submitting to the Holy Spirit leads to spiritual maturity in discipleship.

Walking with the Holy Spirit allows for His influence and guidance throughout every area of our lives. This results in boldness and courage to do His will. Scripture reveals in Romans 8:14 that those that allow the Spirit of God to lead them are God’s children. Walking with the Holy Spirit equips believers for divine service (Zech 4:6). Deffinbaugh elaborates further, “Walking in the Spirit not only means walking in the power which the Spirit provides but walking in accordance with the prompting of the Spirit.”¹²⁵

Perpetua and Rachel chose to walk with the Holy Spirit. Even when facing death, they had the courage and boldness to stand resolute in their confession of faith. Perpetua’s father repeatedly and unsuccessfully pled with her to renounce her Christianity to save herself. When Perpetua was tried by the tribunal, she was told to sacrifice to the Emperor as to a god, but she refused and was sentenced to death.¹²⁶ The two teenagers responsible for the Columbine school shooting targeted certain groups, one of which was devout Christians.

¹²⁴ John F. Walvoord, “16. Teaching in Anticipation of Rejection,” *Bible.org*, last modified January 1, 2008, <https://bible.org/seriespage/16-teaching-anticipation-rejection>.

¹²⁵ Deffinbaugh, “15. Siding With the Spirit (Romans 8:1-17).”

¹²⁶ W.H. Shewring, trans. “Medieval Sourcebook: St Perpetua: The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity 203,” *Fordham University*, last modified October 6, 2023, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/perpetua.asp>.

Rachel boldly refused to deny God when asked by a shooter about her faith, even while facing imminent death.¹²⁷

It is the Holy Spirit who reveals God's truth to His people (1 Cor 2:10). The Bible speaks of the last days in Acts 2:17-18, when God will pour out His Spirit on all people. There will be dreams, visions and prophetic revelations. Verse 18 declares that there will be an outpouring of God's Spirit on His servants and they will prophesy. Wright concludes that, "Martyrs and confessors received visions and were given not only the words to speak by the Spirit, as Jesus Himself had promised, but also the strength to wrestle with demonic forces in a contest unto death."¹²⁸ Christians will wrestle with demonic forces and spiritual wickedness (Eph 6:12). The spiritual battle cannot be fought with human strength or power (2 Cor 10:3-4). Submitting ourselves to the Holy Spirit allows for divine revelation, unveiling of spiritual truths and divine strength to fight demonic activity.

In prison, Perpetua had many dreams and visions that were documented in her diary. Perpetua dreamed of a ladder to heaven and a serpent right at the ladder's steps waiting to terrify anyone going up, hoping to prevent believers from reaching heaven. In a vision, Perpetua fought in an amphitheater where she defeated the enemy and then went to the Gate of Life. Her visions revealed that she would fight the devil to the death and that she would be victorious.¹²⁹

Rachel Scott received prophetic revelation of future events. Less than a year before the Columbine High School shooting, she wrote in her diary that, "it would be her last year of life." She also drew a picture of eyes with 13 tears falling into a rose that grew out of a Columbine plant. The tears turned to blood drops as they fell to the rose. She drew a cross with the scripture from John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (NKJV). A stranger called Rachel's parents after her death and had a dream of the very picture Rachel drew. The drawing was a prophetic revelation of the 13 victims killed during the Columbine school shooting.¹³⁰ The martyrdom of Perpetua and Rachel resulted in souls coming to Christ.¹³¹ Walking with the Holy Spirit and trusting God's

¹²⁷ Scott, Nimmo, and Rabey, *Rachel's Tears*, 108, 110, 182.

¹²⁸ Wright, "The Testimony of Blood: The Charisma of Martyrdom," 388.

¹²⁹ Shewring, trans. "Medieval Sourcebook: St Perpetua: The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity 203."

¹³⁰ Scott, Nimmo, and Rabey, *Rachel's Tears*, 46, 184-186.

¹³¹ Wright, "The Testimony of Blood: The Charisma of Martyrdom," 394. Scott, Nimmo, and Rabey, *Rachel's Tears*, 147, 197.

divine plan, allowed Perpetua and Rachel to fulfill God's purpose for their lives and bring nonbelievers to Christ.

The next quality of discipleship needed to follow in the past steps of martyrs is commitment to servanthood. Jesus declares in Matthew 23:11, "He who is greatest among you shall be your servant" (NKJV). Jesus taught His followers that discipleship is servanthood. As Christians progress to spiritual maturity, the greater will be the service they will provide. Dr Alvin L. Reid, professor and author writes, "It is instructive that this act of servanthood (washing the disciples' feet), occurred only a short time before the supreme act of servanthood - Christ dying on the cross for the redemption of mankind."¹³² Jesus Christ our Lord became a servant to humanity to fulfil His divine plan of salvation to all that believe in His name. It is necessary for the followers of Christ to commit to discipleship, to commit to walking with the Holy Spirit, and to commit to servanthood so that in facing persecution, threats and even death, we will endure to the end (Matt 24:13; Mark 13:13; 2 Tim 2:3).

While Perpetua endured hardship in prison, she received a vision of her brother and knew she must intercede in prayer on his behalf. She interceded in prayer for her brother, "day and night with groans and tears."¹³³ Perpetua could have easily been engrossed with her own suffering and foreboding to consider intercessory prayer, but her commitment to servanthood came before her personal desires. Rachel Scott committed herself to being Jesus' faithful witness. There are countless stories of how she would show benevolence to outcasts at school and look for ways to show God's love through kindness, despite being ridiculed and losing friends.¹³⁴ Dr Reid explains this as servant evangelism. He states, "Servant evangelism is nothing more or less than a combination of intentional, personal witness with intentional acts of kindness."¹³⁵ Rachel and Perpetua were targeted because of their faithful Christian witness. Both women were committed to serving God, despite persecution and the foreknowledge of their own deaths.

¹³² Alvin L. Reid, "Reaching a Postmodern World through Servant Evangelism," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 62, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/sbjt05-1-06>.

¹³³ Shewring, trans. "Medieval Sourcebook: St Perpetua."

¹³⁴ Scott, Nimmo, and Rabey, *Rachel's Tears*, 90, 93-96.

¹³⁵ Reid, "Reaching a Postmodern World through Servant Evangelism," 60-61.

The Call to Discipleship

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt 11: 28-30 KJV). Jesus’ call to salvation and to discipleship echoes throughout time. It has not lost its power, application or purpose. J. Hampton Keathley III, theologian and pastor explains this call, “For those without the Savior, it is equivalent to a call to believe in Him...For those who are already believers, it is a call to follow him as a committed disciple; it is a call to completely turn their lives over to Him.”¹³⁶ The call to discipleship is an invitation to every believer for a personal relationship with Jesus.¹³⁷

As modern society continues to fall away from Christianity, it is of vital importance that Christians commit to the discipleship process. As demonic influence increases, Christians are forced to choose a side in the battle between God and Satan. Christians must be rooted in Christ and the Word of God to endure (Mark 4:16-17). Theologian, pastor, and author, James G. Samra explains, “All Christians are disciples and are called to participate in the discipleship process, both by receiving instruction and living out their faith for others to see and imitate.”¹³⁸ Samra goes on to explain that the spiritually mature disciple is responsible for instructing and demonstrating discipleship behavior to the Body of Christ.¹³⁹ The individual believer is responsible for answering Jesus’ call to discipleship and submitting to the discipleship process.

Jesus gave His disciples their mission in The Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19-20. It reads, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (KJV).¹⁴⁰ Kevin Michael Brosius,

¹³⁶ J. Hampton Keathley III, “The Call to Discipleship: An Invitation To Rest (Matthew 11:28-30),” *Bible.org*, last modified June 22, 2004, <https://bible.org/article/call-discipleship-invitation-rest-matthew-1128-30>.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ James G. Samra, “A Biblical View of Discipleship,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160, no. 638 (April 2003): 234, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/bsac160-638-08>.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Kevin Michael Brosius, “Culture and The Church’s Discipleship Strategy,” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 126, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/jmat21-1-05>.

author and chaplain, explains further that, “According to Jesus in this passage, the mission is about being intentional at making disciples and in instructing them to follow Christ.”¹⁴¹ All churches have been mandated by God to teach, train, and develop disciples. Christians that attend church should not remain spiritually immature in Christ. The Church must be proactive in following The Great Commission and raising up disciples of Christ.

Matthew 9:36-38 states, “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest’”(NKJV). Dr Rainer tells the story of a twenty-three year old man he interviewed that had recently accepted Christ. The new convert stated, “I just didn’t know what I was missing...I can’t understand why Christians aren’t beating down doors to share the gospel. Why didn’t someone tell me about Jesus before I turned twentythree?”¹⁴² The unbelievers need to hear about Jesus, even if the believer is just planting a seed. Jesus is calling His believers to discipleship. He instructs us to pray for laborers. Pray for disciples to answer the call of God and to submit to the discipleship process. Pray for disciples to be developed into spiritually mature believers that are able to effectively witness to unbelievers. The Church must answer The Great Commission to reach the unsaved by raising up disciples of Christ and training them to witness and gather the harvest.

Conclusion

American Christians are not prepared for martyrdom. American Christians have accepted the call to salvation but have not accepted the call to discipleship, either from lack of knowledge or unwillingness to give up worldly desires. When forced to choose between themselves or their faith, American Christians that have not aligned their values with Christ’s values, will prioritize themselves, just as American culture dictates.

All believers are called to the discipleship process and to spiritual maturity in Christ.¹⁴³ The lives and martyrdom of Perpetua

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Thom S. Rainer, “Shattering Myths about the Unchurched,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 05, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 49, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/sbjt05-1-05>.

¹⁴³ Samra, “A Biblical View of Discipleship,” 234.

from the early Church era and Rachel Scott from modern times have been studied and are examples to Christians of discipleship qualities that believers can endeavor for and emulate. Certain qualities of discipleship that are necessary to walk in the footsteps of past martyrs are walking with the Holy Spirit by submitting to the Holy Spirit and commitment to servanthood. Believers can begin their discipleship journey by answering Jesus' call to discipleship and personal relationship. The Church can follow The Great Commission by actively contributing to the discipleship process with teaching and instruction of the believer towards spiritual maturity.

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A CESSATIONIST’S RESPONSE TO THE GLOBAL SUCCESS OF PENTECOSTALISM

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Preface

I grew up in the independent Christian Church (Restoration Movement) tradition that placed a strong emphasis on the inerrancy of Scripture. The Bible was our sole authority for faith and practice. Our hermeneutic was a combination of text and context, always seeking first the intended meaning for the original reader. Church tradition was valuable to help understand the evolution of Church, and personal experience was used primarily in the area of application. It was very common for Bible teachers to expound on the historical background of the text, and regularly ask the question, “What does the Bible say?” Being taught these principles I was encouraged to challenge the doctrinal positions of the teachers, preachers and professors who taught me sound hermeneutics.

One of the views held by churches of the Restoration Movement was classical cessationism, the belief that certain spiritual gifts such as prophecy, healing and speaking in tongues ceased with the apostles and the finishing of the canon of Scripture. Though I learned to articulate and defend that view well, I never fully embraced it as my own position. I fully believe that certain gifts would cease in God’s timing. I also believe that there is a correlation between God’s timing, and the ministry of the apostles and the finishing of the canon. In my mind, however, that correlation is not so clear as to rule out other places and times when those gifts might again be deemed by the Holy Spirit to be necessary. An obvious example of one such time might be on the mission field where God’s Word has yet to be translated into the native language.

While reading Douglas Jacobsen’s book, *A Global Gospel* (2015), I was astounded by his claim that Pentecostalism now represents 25% of world Christianity. If Jacobsen’s claim is accurate, it demands my further review.

Introduction

The discussion of spiritual gifts in the Church today often becomes a heated debate resulting in attitudes that are unbecoming of Christ-followers. While cessationists often see themselves as being

intellectually superior to their counterparts, Pentecostals often view cessationists as spiritually inferior antagonists. For the first half of the twentieth century, Pentecostalism was viewed as a faith on the fringe of Christianity, however, according to a 2015 survey, one of four professing Christians in the world today is of the Pentecostal persuasion (Pew Research Center 2011). Even more astounding is the fact that in the Global South, where Protestant missionaries have been laboring for over 200-years, Pentecostals make up over 50% of the Christian population.

This essay will explore the challenge to cessationist theology that is presented by the global success of the Pentecostal movement. It will present some basic differences between the beliefs of cessationists and those of Pentecostals, paying greater attention to the cessationist position as the one in question. It will then review the numerical growth of the Pentecostal movement over the past 100 years. Finally, it will give a suggestion for a cessationist response.

Major Differences

Cessationism is the belief that certain spiritual gifts ceased to exist after the death of the apostles. There are various cessationist positions that differ on the specifics of which gifts would cease, and when. Full cessationists believe that all miracles along with any miraculous gifts have ceased. Classical cessationists believe that the miraculous gifts of tongues, prophecy and knowledge ceased with the death of the apostles. A third less-common designation is a concentric cessationist who believes that the gifts would cease over time. Daniel Wallace describes concentric cessationism:

Rather than taking a chronologically linear approach, this kind of cessationism affirms that the gospel moves, like a rippling effect of a stone dropping into a pond, in a space-time expanding circle away from first century Jerusalem, the sign gifts will still exist on the cutting edge of that circle. Thus, for example, in third-world countries at the time the gospel is proclaimed, the sign gifts would be present. This view then would allow for these gifts to exist on the frontiers of Christianity but would be more skeptical of them in the ‘worked-over’ areas (Wallace 2004).

In their hermeneutics, cessationists typically follow a Reformed theological pattern that focuses primarily on the historical and literary analyses of a text in order to determine how the passage would have been understood by its initial readers. Only after the initial understanding is discovered do they attempt to apply that understanding to contemporary life. Henry Virkler states that “application is the important step of translating the meaning a biblical text had for its original hearers into a meaning it has for believers in a different time or culture” (Virkler 1993, 77). Pentecostal hermeneutics differs in that in the initial interpretation, the interpreter places a greater emphasis on how Scripture might be understood today. Craig Keener describes what he calls Spirit Hermeneutics as being “designed to function as a biblical theological reflection supporting a *dynamic*,¹⁴⁴ experiential reading of Scripture” (Keener 2016, 2). Douglas Jacobsen states it this way, “Protestants tend to be word-oriented, emphasizing the cognitive content of the biblical revelation and its logic-based interpretation. Pentecostals, by contrast tend to emphasize spirit, the *experienced reality*¹⁴⁵ of God in one’s life and in the world” (Jacobsen 2015, 18). Where a person places personal experience in the process of determining the author’s intended meaning is key to that person’s understanding of Scripture.

The pivotal text in this discussion is 1 Corinthians 13:8-13:

⁸ Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away with; if *there are tongues*, they will cease; if *there is knowledge*, it will be done away with. ⁹ For we know in part and prophesy in part; ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away with. ¹¹ When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully, just as I also have been fully known. ¹³ But now faith, hope, *and* love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (NASB)

Based upon this text, the classical cessationist maintains that the gifts of tongues, prophecy and knowledge would cease “when the perfect comes.” This view holds that the Greek word *teleion* which is translated “perfect” in many English texts is better translated

¹⁴⁴ Emphasis mine, throughout the first chapter, Keener uses the word “dynamic” to indicate a change from one reader to the next.

¹⁴⁵ Emphasis mine.

“complete” as it more frequently refers to completion or maturity. While “perfect” can be a suitable English translation it can also connote sinlessness rather than completeness. This connotation sometimes causes the reader to see it as a reference to a sinless person and therefore anticipate that the gifts would cease at Jesus’ return. Paul Butler suggests that if this word had been referring to Jesus, the masculine form *teleios* would have been used rather than the neutered form *teleion* (Butler 1970, 271). The interpreter, therefore, is left to identify what the *teleion* is a reference to.

The classical cessationist understands the context of 1 Corinthians 13 to stress the superiority of agape love which would never cease, by contrasting it with the more desirable but lesser gifts of tongues, prophecy, and knowledge. Since in the next verse, Paul uses the analogy of a child becoming an adult, the classical cessationist assumes that the phrase “when the perfect comes,” was a reference to a certain point of maturity of the Church when such gifts would no longer be needed. He then associates that point in time with the death of the apostles and the completion of Scripture. Both times would assume a more mature Church since the apostles’ teachings were central to the early Church (Acts 2:42), and the apostles themselves were instrumental in the transference of spiritual gifts (2 Tim 1:6; Rom 1:11).

Pentecostals maintain that these gifts would continue throughout the Church. While some Pentecostals do believe the *teleion* is a reference to Jesus’ return, others do not but they also do not see the need to pinpoint a time not specified in Scripture. They assume that the tongues practiced in the modern Church is proof that the gifts have continued. Cessationists challenge that assumption suggesting that the modern practice of tongue-speaking is not what was described in Acts 2 where they believe the apostles were speaking in existing languages of the day that they personally had never studied. The cessationist is also quick to point out that many groups who are not associated with the Holy Spirit exercise some form of tongue-speaking in their worship. For it to be evidence of the Holy Spirit, it would need to rise above the others as it did in the New Testament example.

Growth in Biblical Proportions

While the cessationist may deny that the subjective experiences of Pentecostals are evidence of the Holy Spirit, he cannot deny the fruit being produced. According to different sources, Pentecostalism represents 25% of world Christianity. While the number of adherents to

a particular religious tradition is hardly a qualifying factor for validating its beliefs and practices, a significant and steady increase in that number is worthy of consideration. The Pentecostal movement is generally seen to have begun in the early 20th century, but its exponential growth has become even more pronounced in the past 50 to 60 years (Svelmoe 2014, 439).

The growth of Pentecostalism has been simplistically categorized into three general waves of growth, the first coming around the turn of the 20th century. Even though some tenets of Pentecostalism may have been in existence since the Apostolic age, the modern Pentecostal movement seized on the momentum of the 19th century Holiness revival that spread across the United States. One notable outgrowth began at Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas. In reaction to complacency and formalism, Charles Parham instructed his students to pray, fast, study Scriptures, and wait on the Holy Spirit. In turn, Agnes Ozman, a student in Parham's school, allegedly spoke in Chinese, marking the beginning of the modern tongue speaking movement (Straub 2016). Parham claimed that by 1905, 25,000 persons in Texas alone had embraced Pentecostalism (Neusner 1999). Another outgrowth known as the Azusa Street revival started in Los Angeles in 1906. The Apostolic Faith Gospel Mission led by William Seymour became a place where people could go to receive spiritual help and then return to their hometowns. As a result, groups of Pentecostal believers began springing up all over the world (Neusner 1999). Many of these groups were started by people who, although they embraced Pentecostalism, remained part of their Protestant denominations, hoping to bring renewal or some other aspect of their newfound faith into their existing denomination. Eventually, however, many became either discontented or unwelcome in their traditional church.

The Pentecostal movement grew steadily during the first half of the 20th century and then in the second wave of growth, nearly doubled in twenty years with additions from the Charismatic Movement where believers once again embraced a Pentecostal understanding but maintained a formal membership in a non-Pentecostal church. This time around, their numbers were such that the churches were forced to find a place for them. The largest charismatic movement in the world is the Catholic Charismatic Renewal which is particularly strong in Latin America where there are an estimated 100 million (Jacobsen 2015, 38). A third wave of growth began in the 1980s. Since then, the Pentecostal movement has doubled once again, this time with the aid of the neo charismatic movement. Neo charismatic Pentecostalism has become tremendously popular with its promise of the blessing of health and

wealth to those who have faith to claim it (Jacobsen 2015, 39). In 2011, 600 million Christians saw themselves as Pentecostals. That is roughly the number of all of Christianity in 1910 (Pew Research Center 2011). In a little over a century, Pentecostalism came to represent one fourth of a world-religion that has existed for nearly 2,000 years (Straub 2016).

While the growth of Pentecostalism might be conveniently categorized into three chronological waves, the different brands of Pentecostals are not as easily sorted out. The mainline identifiable denominations make up less than half of the Pentecostals in the world. The other half are made up of indigenous churches in Asia and South America, African Initiated Churches, Charismatic Catholic Renewal, and proponents of the Prosperity Gospel. It might even be fair to state that much of the increase in those numbers over the past 50 years may be attributed to the use of different ways of defining Pentecostals. Nevertheless, the rapid growth of the Pentecostal movement lies in stark contrast with many Protestant denominations which have actually declined over the same period of time. Regardless of any hermeneutical differences, the cessationist would do well to study the fruits of Pentecostalism. What is it about the Pentecostal movement that gives it worldwide appeal?

Worldwide Appeal

There seem to be multiple factors that contribute to the appeal of Pentecostalism. Some play a more active role in different contexts and yet some element of each one is universally present. In some African countries, along with decolonization came a desire for independence from the established European mission churches. The new African churches established their own unique personalities and styles which were similar to those of the Pentecostals. William Svelmoe states, “Pentecostalism grows in large part in other words, because of its natural connection with the traditional religiosity of the region. It adapts well to African based and indigenous religious worldviews” (Svelmoe 2014, 452).

Pentecostalism is a religion of power. It emphasizes God’s power made available through the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals embrace all spiritual gifts, especially those of miraculous nature such as tongues, prophecy, and healings. They emphasize that God can and will heal the sick. While most other Christian faiths believe that God can do all things, the difference lies in the expectation. “Pentecostals expect these kinds of things to be part of normal, everyday Christian life: most other

Christians see them as extraordinary, exceptional occurrences” (Jacobsen 2015, 37).

Pentecostalism is a religion of joy. It has world-wide appeal due to the element of expressive worship. One observation of this writer has been that many Pentecostals discussing their faith tend to place a greater emphasis on worship expression than they do on spiritual gifts. Svelmoe states, “The joyful, even boisterous, worship style of Pentecostalism also provides a strong attraction to religious folk who love pageantry and lively music and singing” (Svelmoe 2014, 452). This element of joy would be particularly appealing to individuals whose previous worship experience has lacked it.

Pentecostalism is a religion of renewal. From the Azusa Street revival to neo charismatic phenomenon, Pentecostalism has a history of bringing newness to Christians whose faith has stagnated. Yet, Pentecostalism at its core is also evangelistic. “Pentecostalism speaks to an impoverished people who need a community and a divinity that will focus on their daily needs, both psychological and physical” (Svelmoe 2014). Pentecostalism is also a religion of hope and promise. The Prosperity Gospel, though seen by many Pentecostals as wreaking havoc (Straub 2016, 233), has become tremendously popular in a world where hope in mankind has become increasingly thin.

The above elements are all biblical. The Apostle’s charge to the church in Philippi was to “rejoice in the Lord always” (Phi 4:4). As for evangelistic zeal, Jesus’ command to His disciples was to “go into all the world and make disciples” (Matt. 28:19). In respect to renewal, Jesus stated that He was making all things new (Rev. 21:5). His promised return is a promise of eternal hope for all who have faith in Him. In and of themselves, these elements are not exclusively Pentecostal but Christian. Of late, however, the Pentecostals have done a much better job employing them than many Protestant denominations.

Conclusion

The global success of the Pentecostal movement appears to have as much to do with their joy, the expression of their faith, their evangelistic zeal, and their similarity to indigenous religions as it does their position on certain spiritual gifts. The hermeneutical principles applied by the cessationist that has led him to his conclusions are not in conflict with these observations. However, in light of the staggering growth of the Pentecostal movement and the overwhelming claim to spiritual gifts in the Global South, the most consistent cessationist

theology is concentric cessationism. Whatever one's position on Paul's use of *teleion* in 1 Corinthians 13 might be, he would do well to revisit the main thrust of that chapter, *agape* and return to a gospel of power, joy, and renewal.

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PERSEVERANCE AND SUFFERING IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

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What is a Theology of Suffering?

A theology of suffering is the study of what the Bible says concerning suffering, as it relates to God's character and what the Bible says about suffering. Understanding why people suffer in this world is one of the most significant challenges for believers and non-believers. Why does a good God allow suffering? Is he really good? Is he not powerful enough to save us from suffering? In reality, if we do not have a Biblical understanding of suffering, we will ignore the true character of God and his purpose through suffering. Therefore, how can we understand what suffering is and why we suffer? "Suffering now is a necessary preparation for and complement to future glory . . . Only when death has had its full say, only when mortality has corrupted to death, only then will the believer escape the clutches of death."¹⁴⁶ As Christians, it is possible to bring God glory through suffering until we meet Him face to face and live with Him in heaven forever.

Jesus and Suffering

It is significant to recognize that suffering itself is not good, nobody wants to suffer. It was not the first plan of God. As the book *Suffering and the Goodness of God* says: "The existence of sin and the Devil, and God's ongoing determination to root them out and finally destroy them, are reminders that a primary existential calling card of this world fallenness- human suffering- it is not itself good. Of course, God can use it for good purposes and unerringly does so but suffering itself is not good – as we realize when suffering invades, infects, and affects our lives personally."¹⁴⁷ However, God, in his mercy, takes the evil that humanity and the Devil has done with his plan and transforms this suffering into something useful for the life of the Christian and those around him. This doesn't make it painless, but it does give it a purpose.

¹⁴⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 483.

¹⁴⁷ Christopher W. Morgan & Robert A. Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 26.

"Jesus is the suffering love of God for the world. Jesus Christ is the salvation of God."¹⁴⁸ Jesus did not resist suffering on the cross because he knew it would restore humanity's relationship with God. In the same way that a mother forgets the pain of childbirth when she finally has her baby in her arms, in the same way, Jesus, when resurrected, emphasized the joy of saving people and having a personal relationship with each Christian.

Suffering as a Witness of God

If Jesus, the son of God and savior, experiences suffering, why wouldn't people as well? It is because Christ endures suffering in this world that it is present in Mark 8:27-35 how Jesus prepares his disciples for future sorrow and rejection. According to the author Scott W. Sunquist, "This passage links Jesus' identity with His suffering and glory and links His followers' calling to cross-bearing." When a believer takes up his cross, it is a reflection of self-denial and extreme obedience. Jesus already took His cross for every person in the world and was an example of complete submission to the Father.

Consequently, the Christian's and church's turn is now to take the cross for His glory. That's why Paul applied this teaching in his life, saying, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church."¹⁴⁹ The suffering of the believer is to participate in the good work of Jesus in conquer the evil.¹⁵⁰

"Finally, suffering is an expression of missional spirituality closely related to humility, gentleness, and obedience."¹⁵¹ As the Bible presents, Jesus accepted His Father's will even though it was hard and he struggled with obedience. He asked the father to take the cup of the cross to Him.¹⁵² Being a faithful witness is painful because it is a spiritual battle. However, when the believer overcomes sin, this is part of the Christian's witness. In the Bible, believers are called to imitate Christ's humility¹⁵³ and follow the strength of the Holy Spirit to fulfill a specific purpose. It is through the humble testimony of suffering that is

¹⁴⁸ Scott Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Barker Academic, 2013), 199.

¹⁴⁹ Colossians 1:24.

¹⁵⁰ Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission*, 213.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 213.

¹⁵² Mark 14:36.

¹⁵³ Philippians 2: 1-11.

present the essence of the believer's spirituality.¹⁵⁴ Why do the righteous suffer? Why people that try to do right are not exempt from suffering? Suffering has been a battle since the early days for Jews, Christians, and people in general. Job is the perfect example of righteous suffering, and he not even had the book of Job in the Bible to comfort himself as Christians do nowadays! Numerous examples of suffering can be seen in the Old Testament and New Testament. It is possible to learn from them. But then, if obeying God, the individual is not exempt from sorrow; why?¹⁵⁵

Christians are not an exception to suffering because they are human.

Believers are still human and are not exempt from tragedies, illness, poverty, natural disaster, or death. Of course, God has done many miracles by freeing many from problems and suffering.¹⁵⁶ In the same way, it shows how Jesus responded to Paul in his Visions and His Thorn: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."¹⁵⁷ Then, why would a person want to be Christian if he is going to suffer anyway? The reason is because you face the problems with a very different perspective. It is not the same to face a difficulty alone when you are in the same trouble but full of "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."¹⁵⁸ Also, the Holy Spirit's guides will help you make the right decisions in a hard situation. Therefore, the problem may be the same, but how you handle, feel, and react to it is completely different when you remain in God.

General Overview of Suffering in the Old Testament

The Old Testament does not present the theme of suffering in a systematic description. However, suffering is existent all through the events and characters. The problem of pain began with the manifestation of "the presence of evil" in the garden of Eden and continued with the fall of humanity.¹⁵⁹ Then, it is possible to learn about suffering in almost every book of the Old Testament. Some examples are: The suffering of the wait of Abraham and Isaac to have

¹⁵⁴ Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission*, 213, 214.

¹⁵⁵ Billy Graham, *Till Armageddon. A perspective of suffering* (Brooklyn, NY: Word Books, 1981), 81.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 83.

¹⁵⁷ 2 Corinthians 12:9.

¹⁵⁸ Philippians 4:7.

¹⁵⁹ Morgan and Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, 47.

children, the pain of Jacob to work/wait seven years more to marry Rachel,¹⁶⁰ the suffering of the people of Israel during their enslavement for 400 years,¹⁶¹ the pain of the people of Israel to spend 40 years wandering through the desert,¹⁶² and the tragedy of Ruth and Naomi losing their husbands, and moving to a land that was foreign to Ruth.¹⁶³ Other examples are the trouble for the Jews that was the consequence of Haman's plots and which inspired Esther to act to deliver her people,¹⁶⁴ the difficult ministry of Jeremiah,¹⁶⁵ Daniel and people suffering through the battle between the king of the north and south and the deliverance from the burning fiery furnace.¹⁶⁶

It is significant to highlight that through all those sufferings, the goodness of God can be clearly seen. The person's pain is a place where God shows His goodness to the people and relieves them.¹⁶⁷ One example is in Deuteronomy "Then we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, toil, and oppression. And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand, an outstretched arm, great deeds of terror, and signs and wonders. And he brought us into this place and gave us this land flowing with milk and honey."¹⁶⁸ The goodness of God shows His character and qualities as a living God present for his people in times of pain.¹⁶⁹

Types of Suffering in the Old Testament

The book *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, written by Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A Peterson, describes the eight kinds of suffering in the Old Testament. Following is the explanation of each one with some biblical examples offered.

¹⁶⁰ Genesis 29:20-35.

¹⁶¹ Genesis 15:13.

¹⁶² Numbers 32:13.

¹⁶³ Ruth 1:1-22.

¹⁶⁴ Esther 3:1-15, Esther 4:1-7:10.

¹⁶⁵ Jeremiah 20:7.

¹⁶⁶ Daniel 3:16-30.

¹⁶⁷ Morgan and Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, 47.

¹⁶⁸ Deuteronomy 26:7-9.

¹⁶⁹ Morgan and Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, 48.

Retributive Suffering is the Judgment of God

Retributive suffering arrives because of sin since transgression causes the judgment of God. The Lord judges the whole world.¹⁷⁰ Consequently, the virtuous man will be rewarded and the sinful one will be disciplined.¹⁷¹ God, in His love, gave man the free will to choose between good and evil.¹⁷² This free will implies individual responsibility because each person is in charge of his or her actions. God informs in the Bible of the moral standard for life, and this information is not to give the believer a more difficult life. Instead, it is for the person's good. Retributive suffering results from the failure of the standards of God, and as a result, the person suffers.¹⁷³ Some examples of this kind of suffering are in proverbs: Laziness casts one into a deep sleep, and a lazy person will suffer hunger.¹⁷⁴ and Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.¹⁷⁵

Educational or Disciplinary Suffering

This suffering is not necessarily related to our sin; instead, it is productive suffering that helps the Christian to shape his/her character and grow in faith and as a person in general.¹⁷⁶ To accept this suffering, the believer must recognize that God cares more for our character than our comfort.¹⁷⁷ Some examples of disciplinary suffering are in proverbs “Discipline your children, and they will give you peace; they will bring you the delights you desire.”¹⁷⁸

Vicarious Suffering

Vicarious suffering is demonstrated when one person suffers as a substitute for the benefit of others. It is a mystery observed during the time of the prophets, where they encountered abuse and suffering from

¹⁷⁰ Proverbs 16:10-11.

¹⁷¹ Morgan and Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, 68.

¹⁷² Deuteronomy 30:19.

¹⁷³ Morgan and Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, 68.

¹⁷⁴ Proverbs 19:15.

¹⁷⁵ Proverbs 13:20.

¹⁷⁶ Proverbs 3:11.

¹⁷⁷ Morgan and Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, 70.

¹⁷⁸ Proverbs 29:17.

the individuals they were trying to release as a messenger of the Lord.¹⁷⁹ Another example of vicarious suffering can be seen in the two goats given as a substitute for the sinful offering to God in Leviticus 16. Also, one of the most excellent examples of vicarious suffering is found in the character who suffers at the behest of others, the servant of the Lord in Isaiah 52.¹⁸⁰

Empathetic Suffering

Empathetic suffering occurs when the people who love and care for the sufferer are affected by his/her pain.¹⁸¹ This suffering can be seen in two ways: first, the empathy and suffering that God has for his people when they are in pain: "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."¹⁸² And second, in the suffering of the people who love the one suffering. An example of this was the pain Naomi experienced when Ruth suffered.¹⁸³ Finally, there should be discomfort in the heart of any believer to see a neighbor in pain, and the Christian should somehow seek to support that person.¹⁸⁴

Evidential or Testimonial Suffering

This kind of suffering reveals the proof of God's faithfulness and a great testimony of the believer.¹⁸⁵ It results from suffering for trust in the Lord which produces a testimony of faith. An example of this would be found In Hebrews 11, "Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. 36 Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment."¹⁸⁶

Revelational Suffering

Revelational suffering refers to the pain that gives the believer a greater understanding of God. This type of suffering is one that

¹⁷⁹ Morgan and Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, 71.

¹⁸⁰ Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

¹⁸¹ Morgan and Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, 73.

¹⁸² Psalm 34:18.

¹⁸³ Ruth 1:13.

¹⁸⁴ Proverbs 19:17.

¹⁸⁵ Morgan and Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, 73.

¹⁸⁶ Hebrews 11: 35-37.

reveals the genuine patience and love of the Lord.¹⁸⁷ One example is the comparison of Hosea and the love of God. Hosea had suffered since his wife, Gomer, abandoned him and started working as a prostitute again. However, Hosea continued to keep firm in his love for her. This suffering brought Hosea to know more about the character of God. In the same way, Hosea's suffering out of love for his wife is an illustration of God's love and faithfulness toward Israel.

Doxological Suffering

This suffering aims to present God's glory, praise, and purpose.¹⁸⁸ An example of this would be David, who, despite his suffering, recognizes the glory of the Lord. "Therefore, David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the assembly. And David said: "Praise be to you, Lord, the God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting."¹⁸⁹ Another example would be how the suffering of Joseph being sold into slavery and spending years in prison resulted in a victory for the purpose and glory of God.

Eschatological or Apocalyptic Suffering

This suffering refers to the apocalyptic suffering predestined for the end times.¹⁹⁰ Several prophets inform about this kind of suffering as is found in Zechariah 12-14 and Daniel 2 -12. According to this apocalyptic suffering previous to the second advent of God, people will suffer immensely. Purified people will be prepared to face a completely new day in God's eschaton in this environment of affliction.¹⁹¹

The Suffering of Job

"Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely[a] defend my ways to his face."¹⁹² How can Job maintain his faithfulness to God after suffering so much undeserved suffering? At the beginning of the book of Job, Scripture presents how God calls Satan's awareness

¹⁸⁷ Morgan and Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, 75.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 76.

¹⁸⁹ 1 Chronicles 29:10.

¹⁹⁰ Morgan and Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, 76.

¹⁹¹ Mal 3:3.

¹⁹² Job 13:15.

to Job as a model of integrity. However, Satan insists that his piety resulted from his great blessing and that he will not keep his honor if he suffers. Consequently, God gave Satan permission to afflict Job and test his piety.

Even though Job was unaware of what was happening, Job passed the first exam. He lost his children, camels, and all his sheep and was left without prosperity, and Scripture reads, "A and said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.'"¹⁹³

After all that Job was left with his wife and his health,¹⁹⁴ and that also broke down.¹⁹⁵ "His wife said to him, 'Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!'"¹⁹⁶ Seeing that God allows a virtuous man to suffer in that way for no reason is very stunning.¹⁹⁷ Job is a perfect example of the abovementioned testimonial suffering. Through his suffering, he shows faithfulness to God and is an example to his friends. In Job's life one can see the mystery of undeserved suffering as well as the complete providence of God.¹⁹⁸

In this difficult situation, Job had to decide what path he wanted to take. On the one hand, his wife was motivating him to commit suicide, but on the other hand, he trusted that the Lord would intervene and tell him why he was suffering or help him to set him free from the curse of that pain. In the same way, believers today must take the example of Job in times of difficulties and the silence of God.¹⁹⁹

Job and many Christians that experience underserved suffering may experience the frustration of the silence of God and the suffering battle for meaning;²⁰⁰ this is one of the reasons why Job presents us with an example of perseverance.²⁰¹ Even though Job had lost the palpable feeling of intimacy with God, he kept his faith and decided not to be persuaded against God by his emotions. This should be an example for every Christian to bear witness to their faith through

¹⁹³ Job 1:21.

¹⁹⁴ Job 2:1-22:2.

¹⁹⁵ J. Bryson Arthur, *A Theology of Suffering* (Carlisle CMA: Langham Global Library, 2020), loc 1722.

¹⁹⁶ Job 2:9.

¹⁹⁷ Job 2:3.

¹⁹⁸ Arthur, *A Theology of Suffering*, loc. 1730.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 1740.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 1942.

²⁰¹ James 5:10-11.

suffering and to honor God even in the silence of God because, in that moment, God is also working.

The feeling of the abandonment and silence of God made Job produce noise to justify his innocence, as was the advice of his friends. Job was begging for justice without an answer. "Teach me, and I will be silent; make me understand how I have gone astray."²⁰² Then Job continues in his discussion with his friends about why he was suffering, but he continues to persevere, which pleases God. Job's friends were not listening to God. Each one sought an explanation for the situation using their doctrine as if they were doing mathematical equations and ended up criticizing Job.

Therefore, Job did not allow the critics of his friends to affect him 100% percent. Likewise, believers should be careful about the voice they listen to, especially when God is silent.²⁰³ In his sinful nature, Job complained, but he did not turn his back on God.²⁰⁴ God describes Job as "my servant"²⁰⁵ referring to his sorrowful heart. In the end, God, in his mercy and power, returned to Job more blessings than he used to have.

In the book *A Survey of the Old Testament*, the author offers a significant lesson from the book of Job.²⁰⁶ The book of Job teaches that God is loving and powerful; it teaches the reader that it is great to communicate your difficulty to God when one is experiencing pain. Also, the book of Job teaches that God is in control even when it does not look like he is close to us. God always has a purpose in what He allows in the believer's life.²⁰⁷

The Suffering of Joseph

Why would a lovely God allow a teenager to suffer, be exiled from his family, and be in prison for many years? This story is about Joseph who was his dad's favorite and had a colorful coat. Joseph informs of his dream where his brothers kneel to him, and His brothers become more jealous. His brothers decided to sell him as a slave to Egypt, and they told his father that he had died.²⁰⁸ This narrative taught

²⁰² Job 6:24

²⁰³ Proverbs 2:2-12.

²⁰⁴ Arthur, *A Theology of Suffering*, 2094.

²⁰⁵ Job 42:7.

²⁰⁶ John Stevenson, *A Survey of the Old Testament: The Bible Jesus Used* (Delhi, IN: Redeemer Publishing), 489.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 490.

²⁰⁸ Genesis 37:28.

how toxic family members create destructive relationships.²⁰⁹ However, the Bible shows a model of the character in the life of Joseph. It shows the reader how to react in the form of suffering.²¹⁰

Joseph is an example of suffering and perseverance. He faces many devastating events in which it is possible to mention the following major trials: the death of his mother,²¹¹ being sold as a slave for his brothers,²¹² suffering the loss of family and being exiled from his home,²¹³ experience the awkwardness of a foreign culture,²¹⁴ the sexual harassment by his master's wife,²¹⁵ accused of false charges, sent to prison,²¹⁶ and forgotten in prison for approximately two years.²¹⁷ However, despite all these painful events, it is clear and admirable to see how Joseph maintained an attitude of honoring God and using his talents for the benefit of others wherever he was.

The story of Joseph shows that the efforts and dishonesty of others cannot ruin the plan of God. It is clear that Joseph faced loneliness and suffering. However, his trust in God helped him to keep going and to develop the character that the Lord designed for him to have so he could fulfill his purpose. Therefore, when Joseph finally exited the prison, he put to use all those years of preparation. He was ready and put into practice what he learned to satisfy God's plan.

The suffering Joseph experienced ended up being rewarded. Joseph became the viceroy of Egypt, having the second most important position after the pharaoh.²¹⁸ Joseph's economic plan consisted of storing up food and grain supplies for an upcoming period of starvation.²¹⁹ God put him in this position so he could be the instrument for God who then saved the people from famine. When the food crisis eventually impacted the family of Joseph, the brothers went to the city of Egypt to look for food, and Joseph had to face his past and decide what attitude he would have as he took into account his past suffering.

²⁰⁹ Gerald Peterman and Andrew Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace: A Biblical Theology of Suffering* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers), 177.

²¹⁰ Genesis 37:50.

²¹¹ Genesis 35:18-19.

²¹² Genesis 37:27,28.

²¹³ Genesis 37:28, 36.

²¹⁴ Genesis 37:36; 39:1.

²¹⁵ Genesis 39:14-15, 17-18.

²¹⁶ Genesis 39:14,17.

²¹⁷ Genesis 39:20.

²¹⁸ Genesis 41:41.

²¹⁹ Stevenson, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 69.

Joseph is a powerful example of forgiveness.²²⁰ After all of his psychological, emotional, and relational suffering, Genesis 45 records the processing of his pain and the point where he decided to show a costly form of godliness, that is, to forgive his undeserving brothers. The New Testament text also reinforces this lesson when it reads, "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."²²¹ Consequently, no matter how hard life is and how long people have suffered, God wants the believers to maintain innocent and noble hearts willing to forgive others as He forgives humanity as well.

Joseph's story explains the strength a believer endures when seeing suffering as a part of God's broader purpose.²²² Despite that display of strength, this hope does not take out the pain; it helps one to endure the trial, trusting God's plans and love for his sons and daughter. In the end, all the suffering will bring a great purpose. As Joseph says, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."²²³

The Suffering of David

David, the man with a heart according to God's heart, is a great example of suffering and perseverance.²²⁴ Throughout His life, it is possible to see different kinds of suffering: First, was the pain of waiting for the correct time to see the promise of God to be King and the persecution he faced because his family struggled to accept him as future King. And finally, the other type of suffering was a consequence of his sin.

The first thing that can be highlighted is that sometimes, after God gives the believers a promise or a call, the believer may face a battle or experience difficulty. In Samuel 1, David was anointed as a king of Israel.²²⁵ However, he had to fight and be brave to obtain that promise from God. In the same way, David had to fight against the giant Goliath,²²⁶ and similarly, believers have to face all different kinds

²²⁰ Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace*, 190.

²²¹ Matthew 6:14-15.

²²² Morgan and Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, 58.

²²³ Genesis 50:20.

²²⁴ Acts 13:22.

²²⁵ 1 Samuel 16:7.

²²⁶ 1 Samuel 17.

of giants to fulfill the purpose or promise of God in each Christian's life.

On the other hand, David's life is an example of the pain caused by waiting for the time of God to see the promise fulfilled. Saul, rejected the idea of a new king. Therefore, David endured the pain of being persecuted by Saul. It is significant to highlight that the passing of time is never in vain, those years of persecution of David prepared him to be king. However, those who wait-receive the reward, as David was finally installed as king as God promised,²²⁷ and believers have the promise of eternal life.

Another kind of pain David experienced was suffering as a consequence of his sin, as explained above; the type called retributive suffering. The Book of 2 Samuel can be separated into two sections. First, the one showing David's reign of prosperity and then the other showing David's reign being challenged. The link between these two sections is David's sin.²²⁸ Here it is possible to see the importance of being in the right place at the right time. After David decides not to participate in the war, David stays home, becomes tempted, and sleeps with Bathsheba, who gets pregnant.²²⁹ In order to cover up his sin, David has Uriah killed.²³⁰ Joab is called by David and instructed to murder,²³¹ God sends David a messenger,²³² David's son dies,²³³ Bathsheba becomes pregnant again,²³⁴ and Joab wins a victory and instructs David to take Rabbah.²³⁵ In all those events, David's sins were covetousness, adultery, and murder. He suffered because of his sin and regretted his sins and expressed it in his Psalms "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions."²³⁶

David communicates his pain through numerous Psalms,²³⁷ that reflect on his experiences of rejection and suffering. Many of these Psalms were in the context of his persecution by Saul or when David was escaping from Absalom, his son. Michael R. Stead in his article

²²⁷ 2 Samuel 5.

²²⁸ Stevenson, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 339.

²²⁹ 2 Samuel 11:2-5.

²³⁰ 2 Samuel 11: 6-17.

²³¹ 2 Samuel 11:18:27.

²³² 2 Samuel 12:1-4.

²³³ 2 Samuel 12:15-23.

²³⁴ 2 Samuel 12:24-25.

²³⁵ 2 Samuel 12:26-31.

²³⁶ Psalm 51:1-4.

²³⁷ Psalms 22, 34, 39, 69, 118.

"Suffering Servant, Suffering David, and Stricken Shepherd,"²³⁸ suggests that there is a connection between the sufferings of the servant in Isaiah 40–55 and the suffering David in Psalms. The author suggests that Isaiah's suffering servant is a development of the anguish in the Psalms presented by David.²³⁹ Some examples of this would be: Isaiah 53:3–5,7 "He was despised and rejected by men," and the Psalm that reads, "But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. He was despised and rejected by men."²⁴⁰

The Suffering of God and His Answer to Suffering in the Old Testament

Because God loves us, he also feels our pain.²⁴¹ An example of this is expressed as "O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me! For I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam."²⁴² God suffers with His people. Therefore, any believer connected to Him by his covenant does not have grief alone; God is with them. Moreover, he offers His guidance and support.

After studying different events and types of suffering in the Old Testament, it is possible to have a deeper understanding of the goodness of God and His character. The Old Testament does not offer a systematic analysis of suffering or justification; however, every case of pain can be studied regarding the revelation of God.²⁴³

The Old Testament does not intend to have a partial or complete answer to the theme of suffering. In the beginning, it was asked why a lovely God allows pain. The answer to this is the fall of humanity in Genesis 3. Suffering was not the plan of God. However, at the entrance of sin in the world, as this is not heaven, Christians will

²³⁸ Michael R. Stead, "Suffering Servant, Suffering David, and Stricken Shepherd" in *Christ Died for Our Sins: Essays on the Atonement from the Doctrine Commission of the Anglican Church of Australia* (Canberra, Australia: Barton Books, 2013) 63.

https://www.academia.edu/15602460/Suffering_David_Suffering_Servant_Stricken_Shepherd

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Psalm 22:6.

²⁴¹ Morgan and Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, 61.

²⁴² Micah 6: 1-5.

²⁴³ Morgan and Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, 77.

experience afflictions,²⁴⁴ but also believers we will be prepared through trials for the second coming of the Lord and affliction will be no more. The Old Testament shows characters as imperfect, which permits us to see a lovely personal God who has mercy, and helps them, and is close to them despite their sins. As a result, the Old Testament presents a God who cares about the people's pain. Even if the Old Testament does not have a specific definition/explanation concerning suffering, by means of the examples of how He handles the pain of His people, He shows the Christian that He cares, He is suffering with the individuals, and that at the end the believer's pain will work for His Glory.²⁴⁵ As the Word reads, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."²⁴⁶

The Biblical Understanding of Suffering in the New Testament

The biblical understanding of suffering in the New Testament teaches that the Scripture does not present suffering as does a movie, where magically all the problems disappear. Instead, the Bible presents suffering very realistically, where real people experience struggle, ruin, joy, and all kinds of emotions and that people face real sorrows and challenges.²⁴⁷ Proper understanding this topic is significant since this competence is often absent in ministers and an individual's ignorance can affect their relationship with God. One might ask why has God allowed this to happen? Does He not love me? Does He not want to protect me? As a result, trusting in the Lord may result in disappointment. If the person does not have a healthy theology of suffering, he or she will not understand God's purpose for each situation. We would not be able to see the difficulties as opportunities and endeavor to seek the face of the Lord instead of his hands.

The competence of having the biblical understanding of suffering can be effective when the believer acknowledges that people will face difficulties and painful situations while they are still in this world. As it is written in John 16:33, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."²⁴⁸ Christians are already a new

²⁴⁴ John 16:33.

²⁴⁵ Morgan and Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, 77.

²⁴⁶ Isaiah 41:10.

²⁴⁷ Kenneth Haugk, *Don't Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart: How to Relate to Those Who are Suffering* (St. Louis, MO: Stephen Ministries), 20.

²⁴⁸ John 16:33.

creation in Christ; however yet to be alive as a completely new creation. The whole fallen creation should await its full restoration at Jesus' return.²⁴⁹ Accordingly, while people are in this world, they will suffer. They have the hope of eternal life; however, this hope will help them endure suffering, but it won't take pain itself away.

The prosperity Gospel proclaims that people will always prosper and be blessed. In the same way, many teachings nowadays focus more on the blessings God can provide to the people than what the Bible says. He wants to bless individuals, but He is more focused on developing character. Having a biblical understanding of suffering gives a real perspective on the world, eternity, expectations, and how we should relate with God. Finally, this prepares believers to face situations with hope.

In the Bible, the theme of suffering is throughout the New Testament. It is found in present trouble, the pain of society waiting thirstily for the Messiah, the suffering of the people Jesus heals, the agony of the disciples, the persecutions of the apostle Paul,²⁵⁰ all the martyrdoms as a testimony to the Gospel,²⁵¹ and the main one, the suffering of Jesus through his sacrifice and death on the cross. Romans 8:28 provides a wide perspective of the Christian's relationship with God in the past, present, and future. Romans 8:28 reads, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." However, it is important to highlight that Paul is not referring to this lifetime. Paul is focused on an eternal perspective; thus, this must be emphasized to others who are solely hoping for a better time on earth. Rather, a person should acknowledge that the pain is temporary, and not without purpose, and the hope is that anguish will be fully recompensed in the restoration in the second coming of Christ.²⁵²

A great illustration of biblical suffering is in Romans 8:22 "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." This illustration is perfect because it shows us how the mother knows intellectually that her pain is temporary. She knows she will have relief from her pain, and she is looking forward to welcoming her gift and blessing of her new child. But hope does not invalidate pain.²⁵³

²⁴⁹ 1 Peter 1:3-5.

²⁵⁰ Acts 14:19.

²⁵¹ Acts 8:1-13.

²⁵² Haugk, *Don't Sing Songs to a Heavy Heart*, 21.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 22.

This competency is a tool of healing, unity, and the Great Commission because having a right understanding of suffering teaches us the holy, lovely character of God. This is acknowledged in the church and as brothers and sisters, they promote support for each other in our suffering. It helps with discipling others according to of the Great Commission because it proclaims that our time in the world is temporary, and we should give our suffering to God and focus our hope on Him.

Types of Suffering in the New Testament

In the book *Between Pain & Grace: A Biblical Theology of Suffering*, the authors present the types of pain that are found distributed in the New Testament. The objective is to illustrate how pain in the New Testament can be categorized into “external or objective threats (sources of pain) and personal and subjective suffering.”²⁵⁴ The categories are described as pain derived from physical, spiritual, and subjective/personal sources. Following is Table 1. which lists the sources accompanied by the verses that support them.²⁵⁵

Pain through Physical Sources	Spiritual Sources	Subjective / Personal Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storm: Luke 8:23 • Famine: Acts 11:28 • Disease/ Illness: John 5:3 • Accidents: Luke 13:4 • Abuse, violence, or Oppression: James 2:6; Matthew 2:16, Luke 16:32-33 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demons, Demonization: Matthew 4:24 • The Enemy: 2Corinthians 2:10 • False Teachers: Acts 12:23 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger: Matthew 2:16 • Anxiety/Distress: Luke 1:12 • Agony/Anguish: Acts 21:13 • Grief/Sorrow/ Tears: Mark 3:5

The Suffering of Jesus: Jesus and His Passion

²⁵⁴ Peterman & Schmutzer, *Between Pain & Grace*, 29.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 13 -36.

"Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. When he had said this, he breathed his last."²⁵⁶ Jesus, without a doubt, is the greatest and most palpable example of suffering. Christ left His throne in heaven, came to earth, and lived a humble life without comforts for the love of humanity. The people of that time expected that the Messiah would be a military leader or king full of wealth who would defend them from the Roman government, perhaps due to incorrect biblical interpretation.²⁵⁷ However, God's thoughts are higher than ours.²⁵⁸ And Jesus, instead came as a carpenter facing the sufferings of this earthly world. Jesus was tempted,²⁵⁹ envied and criticized by others,²⁶⁰ not recognized in his land,²⁶¹ betrayed by a friend Judas,²⁶² abandoned by his disciples at his worst moment,²⁶³ and felt anxious, sad, and abandoned by God.²⁶⁴ He was humiliated, beaten,²⁶⁵ and experienced the great suffering of a painful death through crucifixion. Therefore, when a person suffers, He can understand them because He experienced it.

The suffering of Jesus had a divine and eternal purpose. Christ came to this world to save humanity. As a result of the actions of the first Adam, sin, death entered the world. However, Jesus, as the representative of the last Adam, changed the sin penalty into eternal life through His sacrifice. The curse of Adam and Eve was abolished and removed through His suffering.²⁶⁶ Through His pain and sacrifice, humanity can be free by faith and grace;²⁶⁷ and individuals can have a new life and are a new creation in Christ,²⁶⁸ and the relationship with God has been reconciled. People do not need to do more to achieve atonement;²⁶⁹ the spotless lamb was replaced with the purity of Christ and brought atonement for all humanity. As a result of the suffering of

²⁵⁶ Luke 23:46.

²⁵⁷ Zachariah 9:9-10.

²⁵⁸ Isaiah 55:8-9.

²⁵⁹ Matthew 4:1-11.

²⁶⁰ Matthew 27:18.

²⁶¹ Luke 4:24.

²⁶² Mark 14:43-50.

²⁶³ Mark 14:50.

²⁶⁴ Matthew 27:46.

²⁶⁵ John 19:1-25.

²⁶⁶ Arthur, *A Theology of Suffering*, 2116.

²⁶⁷ John 3:16.

²⁶⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:17.

²⁶⁹ Leviticus 17:11.

Jesus, not only is it unnecessary for the priest to minister in the tabernacle according to the Old Testament mandate, but as sons and daughters of God, it is possible now to enjoy the privilege of His presence. Therefore, the suffering of Jesus was part of the plan of love by God to save humanity.

How does the suffering of Jesus relate to the types of suffering? The suffering of Jesus, on the one hand, was underserved because he never sinned. But, on the other hand, humanity deserved the consequences of their sins. He carries the human penalty, which makes His suffering deserved.²⁷⁰ The Bible is very clear and specific concerning the suffering of Jesus in the crucifixion. Nevertheless, analyzing his pain on the cross makes it possible to know his character better. The way he handles His suffering is a perfect example of Christian suffering. First, He recognizes and expresses to others his pain, and He asks His spiritual family to be with Him "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."²⁷¹ Despite his fear and anxiety, he remained obedient, faithful to God, and kept in prayer. "My Father, if possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." He showed His power as the Son of God "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"²⁷² He did not focus his suffering on himself but continued to think and pray for others. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."²⁷³ He continued firm until he fulfilled his purpose, Jesus said: "It is finished."²⁷⁴ He surrendered to God until the end "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."²⁷⁵ Finally, it is certain that studying the suffering of Jesus was contrary to what people would expect of the Savior. His life and death were distinguished by vulnerability and poverty. However, Jesus' vulnerability to death was substituted with the power of the resurrection when He rose from dead by the power of God.²⁷⁶

Jesus experienced unimaginable physical suffering during His crucifixion. When the soldiers scourged Jesus, the scourging formed

²⁷⁰ Arthur, *A Theology of Suffering*, 2164.

²⁷¹ Matt 26:38.

²⁷² Matthew 26:53-54.

²⁷³ Luke 23:34.

²⁷⁴ John 19:30.

²⁷⁵ Luke 23:46.

²⁷⁶ Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 293.

deep lacerations and significant blood loss; Jesus Christ faced hemarthrosis in the garden of Gethsemane before his crucifixion, as Doctor Luke mentions, "and being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground."²⁷⁷ His wrists and his feet were nailed, as an effect was interfering with his respirations. His death was caused by exhaustion asphyxia. As the author, Pierre Barbet expresses in his book, *A Doctor at Calvary: The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ as Described by a Surgeon*, "He premeditated them and willed them, out of His love, so that He might redeem us from our sins. He directed the whole of His passion without avoiding one torture, accepting the physiological consequences, without being dominated by them. He died when and how and because He willed it. Jesus is in agony till the end of time. It is right; it is good to suffer with Him and to thank Him when He sends us pain, to associate ourselves with His."²⁷⁸

Jesus changes people's perspective on suffering. In the Old Testament, pain focused on sufferers trusting God or the suffering of Israel. The Gospel, on the other hand, relocates the whole picture of suffering, which is a main theme in the Old Testament, in the story of Christ's suffering.²⁷⁹ The suffering of Jesus during his crucifixion and resurrection is the most significant event in history. Since the reality of the fall spurred God's plan to save humanity, the death and resurrection of Christ was purposeful and necessary. The four Gospels express that to be genuine followers of Jesus believers must follow the same path,²⁸⁰ "Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me."²⁸¹ So, in the same way that Jesus, through his suffering, set people free and gave them a new life, Christians are called to use their suffering for His glory, His kingdom, and helping others, knowing that any who suffers for Jesus, receives His understanding and help because He experienced it.

Paul and Suffering

"Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking regarding Christ's afflictions, for the sake

²⁷⁷ Luke 22:44.

²⁷⁸ Pierre Barbet, *A Doctor at Calvary: The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ as Described by a Surgeon* (Muriwai, NZL: Muriwai Books, 2017), 164.

²⁷⁹ Morgan and Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, 93.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 94.

²⁸¹ Matthew 10:38.

of his body, which is the church."²⁸² Do you rejoice when you suffer because of the Gospel? How willing are you to sacrifice yourself for the welfare of souls? Paul is a great biblical example of taking up your cross and following Christ.²⁸³ Despite his good economic position, prestige, and status as a law teacher, he chose not to focus on himself and to surrender everything to Christ. How did he accomplish this? Studying his life can help Christians learn to surrender to God and to go through difficulties with joy from an eternal perspective. Although many Christians may think they do not want to be like Paul because they don't want to suffer, it is precisely his joy, peace, and love, and God's wisdom in difficulty, that made many convert to the Gospel. He was in prison and joyful.²⁸⁴ He was persecuted for the Gospel but focused on the needs of the church, and he was sentenced to death but was satisfied and trusting in God. Who wouldn't want that joy? All Christians need it because many do not have these difficulties; however, they do not even have joy.

Although the theme of suffering is not exclusively developed in one chapter of Paul's theology, Paul's pain was essential to his mission to the Gentiles. Paul's suffering and endurance were how the good news was spread to other nations. Consequently, his theology of suffering was the foundation of his approach to evangelism, rather than simply a result of his mission. Why? Because he was consistent with what the Bible said and through what he did, people could connect, affirm and internalize the message of Christ. His pain authenticates and confirms that the Gospel gives evidence of its truth.²⁸⁵ His apostolic calling was to be characterized by suffering since the beginning when God called him to his mission "But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."²⁸⁶

Even though Paul was anointed and used his suffering to convince souls, the devil used this same tool of suffering to attack his ministry. In Corinth, the Scripture describes how the false apostles considered the suffering of Paul as a weakness and as sufficient evidence to invalidate his ministry.²⁸⁷ His opponents considered that a

²⁸² Colossians 1:24.

²⁸³ Matthew 16:25–29.

²⁸⁴ Philippians 1:3–11.

²⁸⁵ Thomas Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2001), 87.

²⁸⁶ Acts 9:15–16.

²⁸⁷ 2 Cor 11:13–15.

real apostle would demonstrate only the characteristic of strength and not weakness in ministry. They also criticized his ministry for his lack of success in evangelism,²⁸⁸ which is ironic because Paul is the greatest preacher after Jesus of the New Testament. But at the end of the message of this passage is that Christians should always be strong in weakness. In the same way, this is a perfect lesson to remember that sometimes suffering in a person's life is the tool that will help in the future for others to believe that they also can overcome different situations through the experience and wisdom gained in pain.

One example of the role of Paul's suffering is in 1 Thessalonians. After this congregation was established, Paul was concerned about the firmness of the church's faith since he knew that they would face difficulties, and he was uncertain how suffering would affect the church.²⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the church kept firm in their faith, and Paul was delighted to see their perseverance despite the difficulties.²⁹⁰ Also, Paul offers his example of suffering to the Thessalonian church in the same way the Thessalonians became a model for others.

Paul was clear that the path of Christianity will present suffering, but that God will always be with the believer in their pain as he expresses in Romans, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?"²⁹¹ Because of this understanding about suffering, he mentions a list of troubles in Romans 5:3: tribulation, persecution, hardship, and danger, which seems like an apocalyptic representation of the end times. However, he understood and taught that believers must learn to be content in any situation, acknowledging that Christians already have the biggest gift, salvation. He understood that in Christ, he could be content in any situation and face any situation with His power. As he says in Philippians, "Not that I speak regarding need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things, I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."²⁹² Many preachers nowadays use this verse inappropriately, giving the importance that believers can do anything in Christ, which is true if God has called the person; however, the focus of Paul is that in the

²⁸⁸ 2 Cor 2:14-16; 4:3-4.

²⁸⁹ Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 84.

²⁹⁰ 1 Thessalonians 3 :6 -10.

²⁹¹ Romans 8:35.

²⁹² Philippians 4:11-13.

power of the cross, we can be content in any situation because the Christian heart is in the center in the eternal glory. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."²⁹³

²⁹³ 2 Corinthians 4:17.

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ACHIEVEMENT OF LONG-TERM RECOVERY OUTCOMES FROM SUBSTANCE DEPENDENCY USING A MULTIFACETED WELLNESS APPROACH WITH CHRIST-CENTERED SPIRITUALITY

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Abstract

There is a lack of research on long-term recovery from substance dependency that combines a multifaceted wellness approach with Christ-centered spirituality. Despite the need for recovery from Substance Use Disorders (SUDs) to be holistic (body, mind, and spirit) and multifaceted (all aspects of human functioning), this is seldom provided in a single long-term program. Recovery programs that are Church-based and Christ-centered have the advantage of being low-cost, easily accessible, culturally appropriate, and incorporating faith in Jesus Christ (Keyzer, 2021). However, they all too often focus on the spiritual aspects and exclude the other dimensions of wellness. The study has relevance in treating SUDs with a multifaceted wellness approach combined with Christ-centered spirituality. The researcher wanted to explore the lived experience of substance-dependent individuals who had attained at least two years of sobriety by completing a Multifaceted and Christ-Centered (MCC) recovery management program.

Qualitative research, using phenomenological research methods, was used in this study. The sample selection is from an organization that offers a one-year recovery management program. The program combines a multifaceted wellness approach with faith in Jesus Christ. The researcher provided a survey to a sample of ten recovering drug/alcohol addicts who had attained 2-12 years of sobriety within this specific MCC context of recovery. Because their program followed a Brain Disease Model and not a Moral Model of recovery, the results of the study were surprising. Responses in their own words revealed an inner transformative experience that had acquired a high level of internalized moral values. "Moralization refers to conversion of a preference into a value, within a culture and in individual lives" (Frank & Nagel, 2017, p. 131).

Introduction

Despite the multifaceted wellness approach for treating SUDs being a biblical and mental health perspective, there is a lack of research on Multifaceted Christ-Centered (MCC) recovery management programs. The holistic view of mental health is a “dynamic state of physical, psychological, social, and spiritual wellbeing” (Nutbeam, 1997; Perry & Jessor, 1985, as cited in Gerig, 2017, p. 141). Similarly, the biblical view of wellness is expressed as - the prospering of the entire person, including their body, soul (mind, will, and emotions), and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23; 3 John 1:2). A Christ-centered approach to mental health, therefore requires a holistic (body, spirit, and soul) paradigm to be fully biblical. A scriptural approach to recovery would not ignore the damage caused to the addicted brain. Scientific research proves how substance abuse affects the brain’s dopamine reward system and executive functioning, such as decision-making, self-regulation, and controlling inhibitions (Volkow et al., 2022).

The purpose of the study was to explore the phenomenon of long-term recovery experienced by participants of a Multifaceted and Christ-Centered (MCC) recovery management program. Phenomenological studies are needed to understand how models of recovery affect change and how participants’ self-understanding is affected. (Frank & Nagel, 2017). “Unfortunately, much less is known about recovery supports than about treatment, such as which kinds of services are most effective, how they work, and how they are best adapted to the needs of different people” (NIDA, 2022/09/28).

The study sample was from Mighty Wings in South Africa, which offered a one-year addiction recovery program that combined a multifaceted and Christ-centered approach. The researcher is also the developer of this MCC recovery management program. I hoped that exploring the recovery journey through the lens of this group could provide insight into what they personally experienced and achieved. The study aimed to understand how Christian faith, combined with multifaceted recovery management programs, achieved long-term recovery outcomes as perceived by the sample. Their subjective experiences and perceived benefits have relevance to community-based and Church-based recovery management services. According to Creswell, “A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (2007, p. 59). The questions that drove this study were:

1. How has a multifaceted wellness approach to recovery management influenced the recovery outcomes of participants? 2. How did they experience this MCC program? 3. How did faith in Christ influence the participants' recovery experience?

Background and Context of the Study

The sample in this study had achieved more than two years of sobriety after completing the one-year MCC addiction recovery program. The program combined a psychoeducational course, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), Celebrate Recovery Twelve Steps (C.R.12-Steps), and life skills courses. Life skill lessons were facilitated weekly and consisted of managing stress, decision-making, boundaries, anger management, communication, codependency, building relationships, self-esteem, and spiritual/moral regeneration. The program was outcomes-based in that recovery goals were identified at the start of the program and drafted into a personalized recovery plan. A Recovery Management Assessment (Appendix B) provided a 232-item questionnaire to assess recovery outcomes at the start and various stages of the program. This assessment enabled participants to identify their strengths and measure their growth in the following areas: routine, physical vitality, social/family relationships, work/career, financial wellness, spirituality, mental and emotional wellbeing, managing triggers and temptations, internal locus of control, and integrity.

Attendance was two evenings per week in groups of three to eight people facilitated by trained peer facilitators with more than one year of sobriety. Twice weekly drug testing was mandatory. Sessions started with praise and worship, followed by small group sessions. After completing their one-year program, participants are invited to train as small-group facilitators.

The Multifaceted Wellness Approach to Treating Substance Dependency

The wellness approach to mental health proposes a multidimensional approach to health rather than a one-dimensional approach to treating sickness or disease (Gerig, 2017). “Addiction and SUDs are complex. The solution will be no less complex. Holistic wellness, the restoration of function, and the global health of an individual is multifaceted and occurs over time and across various systems of support from formal treatment to spiritual fulfillment”

(Brown & Ashford, 2019, p. 10). A wellness approach further considers a person's development and environmental systems that influence the cause of the problem and incorporates them into treatment (Gerig, 2017). The intrapsychic relationship between human beings and their social, physical, and biological environments is at the core of mental health and directly correlates to how well people cope or not (2017). Bronfenbrenner's multidimensional approach is a valuable framework for understanding human functioning within the context of their developmental and environmental influences (Gerig, 2017; Brooks & McHenry, 2015). Participants in this study addressed how their multiple environments influenced the development and maintenance of their addiction. Awareness of environmental triggers helps to prevent relapse. Gerig (2017) discusses five criteria for mental health counseling from a wellness and developmental approach.

The first criterion is the achievement of wellness, as opposed to the absence of symptoms. This one-year MCC program is focused on building a new life in recovery and not just achieving sobriety. The orientation phase provided a psychoeducational course to clarify their understanding of addiction development, identify relapse triggers in their multiple environments, and define new goals in recovery. Recovery goals were identified and incorporated into their recovery plans. Sharing struggles and victories with others in recovery groups aimed at gaining support to move forward and breaking isolation and shame.

Attention to a holistic and Christ-centered approach is the second criterion. Individuals are viewed holistically as physical, cognitive, psychological, social, and spiritual beings. Using the program's multifaceted wellness approach to recovery, participants focused their recovery on eight main life areas, 1) physical, 2) spiritual, 3) mental, 4) emotional, 5) social/recreational, 6) vocational, 7) financial 8) environmental. Participants drafted their unique recovery plans clarifying how they would protect themselves from triggers in their eight main life areas and how they would improve functioning in all these domains. The spiritual aspects of recovery were woven throughout the material with a focus on surrendering to the Lord Jesus Christ as opposed to the Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) 'God of your understanding.' Hoffman (2016) proposes that positive, healthy attachments lead to freedom and that biblical wholeness starts with being rightly attached to God. Focusing purely on cognitions and behavior will not address the root of the problem (2016). "Recovery happens when one finds oneself in the right relationship with God, others, and self" (Curtis, 2020, p. 20).

Attentiveness to individuality is the third criterion. Individuals are unique beings, with no two being the same. Participants hold themselves accountable to their individualized recovery plans. Their relapse warning signs are identified in their orientation phase. Their families and unique support systems are integrated into their recovery, providing accountability and support. This program did not include individual therapy and psychiatric treatment, but these were sought out if or when needed. Participants are encouraged to become involved in their local churches and communities and to develop a recovery lifestyle.

Fourth, attention to neurological realities is imperative. Strategies must capitalize on the ability of the brain to restructure and adapt through socio-environmental interactions. In their orientation phase, their psychoeducational course provided images of addicted brains to explain the effects of mind-altering drugs on the brain. The Brain Disease Model proves scientifically how the hijacked brain sustains addiction and that willpower is insufficient to withstand the intensity of cravings and the complex trigger and reward system of the brain (Volkow et al., 2002). The participants' first 100 days of recovery included safety features of protecting themselves from triggers and stressors while 'rewiring' their responses to cognitive, emotional, and environmental triggers. Participants completed a CBT 10-week program focusing on 1) thoughts (cognitions), 2) schemas and erroneous beliefs, and 3) behavioral reactions to drug triggers in their environments. CBT was followed by an 8-week, peer-facilitated course using DBT methods to assist participants with emotional triggers.

A fifth important criterion is to ascertain strengths and deficits and to use "skill-building approaches through which new strengths can develop" (p. 133). In the same way that the absence of a disorder does not produce wellness (Gerig, 2017), the absence of substance abuse does not produce coping skills, spirituality, or quality of life. Participants in this study learned and practiced practical coping skills to restore the gaps in development. The lack of healthy life skills and effective coping in development is a major contributing cause of substance abuse (Hoffman, 2016). "Outpatient addiction treatment today places significant resources in psychotherapy and psychodynamic group therapy often at the expense of teaching basic life skills our clients need to negotiate day-to-day living" (La Salvia, 1993, p. 439).

Cognitive Therapies

Curtis (2020) combined cognitive behavioral pastoral counseling in his local Church for participants of C.R.12-Steps to improve recovery outcomes. Curtis (2020) states, “The goal is to help the client become aware of the dysfunctional thinking and automatic thoughts that are causing them distress and then help them restructure their thinking to ease or eliminate the distress.” Pearce et al. (2015) explain that religiously integrated CBT uses the same principles and tools but adapts to the client’s religious beliefs to identify and replace unhelpful thoughts and behaviors. Cognitive approaches to mental wellness have foundations in scripture, where biblical transformation proposes renewing the mind (Romans 12:2) and replacing negative thoughts (2 Cor 10:5). The participants in this study learned to dispute addiction thinking with a biblical perspective. They learned to identify drug-using thoughts triggered by emotional or environmental cues and replace them with affirmations that reinforced a recovery mindset aligned with their faith.

Figure 1: Sample of the participants’ CBT course (permission granted by Mighty Wings)

WEEK 2: SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Scripture: The armor of God

Eph 6: ¹⁰ Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

The battleground is not in some mystical heavenly world, but the battleground is, in fact, our minds. Controlling our thoughts is a vital part of recovery. Thinking about and fantasizing about the drug gives power to the strong desires deep in our flesh. Talking about drugs, junkie pride, daydreaming, and fantasizing about using can trigger waves of craving and justification to use and will lead to a fall. Our minds are powerful playgrounds, and opening the door to negative thoughts invites temptation. Allowing your mind to travel down the

wrong road will bring you to destruction. Thoughts, conversations, and fantasizing about drugs can trigger cravings which will lead to a fall.

POSITIVE CONFESSION: FOR TO BE CARNALLY MINDED IS DEATH, BUT TO BE SPIRITUALLY MINDED IS LIFE AND PEACE, ROMANS 8:6

Understanding that willpower alone is not sufficient to resist the strong temptations to use drugs brings us to ask, "what other power is available"? God's power is available to all who ask for it. When you are fighting something bigger than you, you need more than your limited human strength.

Many recovering addicts literally need a miracle to beat their addiction. God is a God of miracles, and instant miracles can happen. But, the greatest miracle of all is the amazing transformation that takes place when you consistently draw from His power and strength and develop a deep loving relationship with your creator. Recovery is not only abstinence; it is a deep transformative change whereby you become all that you were created to be and humbly and gratefully receive strength and wisdom from the One who loves you.

Limitations of the Medical Model in Treating Substance Dependency Disorders

The medical model has dominated the counseling profession with a one-dimensional approach focusing on treating the symptoms of a disorder rather than a multi-faceted approach to achieving optimal mental wellness through the life stages within the various contexts of human interaction (Gerig, 2017). The acute model of addiction is characterized as a “mechanistic, expensive illusion, disconnected from the processes of long-term recovery” (Dodd, 1997, as cited in White et al., 2012, p. 5).

Statistics show that only a small percentage of those with SUDs engage in treatment, and of those who do, 40-60% relapse (National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA), 2022). “Recent data from 2020 shows that only 13 percent of people with drug use disorders receive any treatment” (NIDA, 2022). Statistics for 2020 confirmed that over 93,000 people died from drug overdose (NIDA, 2021). More is needed to meet the need with a different approach to traditional treatment. Nora Volkov stated, “The magnitude of this crisis demands

out-of-the-box thinking and willingness to jettison old, unhelpful, and unsupported assumptions about what treatment and recovery need to look like. Among them is the traditional view that abstinence is the sole aim and only valid outcome of addiction treatment” (Nida, 2020).

Recovery Management Model

The Recovery Management Model states that substance dependency requires long-term management rather than short-term clinical interventions disconnected from the person’s culture, religion, and environment (White & Sanders, 2008; White et al., 2002; Dennis & Scott, 2007). “Perhaps the most significant consequence for community mental health has been the rise of the recovery perspective” (Gerig, 2017, p. 357). Recovery management focuses on quality-of-life outcomes and “the achievement of global health and the quality of life of the individual and family” (White et al., 2003, p. 3). The Recovery Management Model’s wellness approach identifies recovery across “five zones of personal experience: physical, psychological, relational, lifestyle and spiritual” (White et al., 2002, p. 2). In following a recovery management model of recovery, participants in this study focused on improving long-term outcomes in all their life areas. Recovery role models facilitate the programs. White states that “the natural community is an oasis of human and spiritual resources that can be tapped to resolve personal and family problems” (2018, p. 12). This philosophy places the Church as an ideal recovery environment.

The Role of the Church and Significance of Christ-Centered Recovery

“Because churches exist to help people find God and the quality of life He offers, churches have a unique opportunity to help alcoholic [and addicted] families build new, sober lives” (Cairns, 1992, p. 41). “Churches can be significant partners in treatment, complementing the treatment services of other institutions” (Cairns, 1992, p. 47). 12-Step programs are hosted in churches worldwide. The Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) website boasts a membership of over 2 million people in over 180 nations worldwide. The spiritual component of recovery within the 12-Step program has become central to 73% of recovery programs in the USA (Grim & Grim, 2019). The spiritual traditions of the A.A. were originally founded in the evangelical group called the Oxford Group (White, 1992). The A.A. has long departed from its Christian roots, where the God of the Bible has been replaced

with the “God of your understanding” to make a “multi-lingual spirituality” more acceptable to the broader population (White, 1992, p. 2). Despite this shift, A.A. and N.A. groups are hosted in many churches worldwide. “Surrendering to the ‘universal god of your understanding’ is not the ministry of Christ to broken people and is not the Christ-centered approach that people expect to find in the Church” (Keyzer, 2021, p. 7). Celebrate Recovery offers a Christ-centered 12-Step program for hurts, hang-ups, and habits. Celebrate Recovery is offered in 37,000 churches worldwide and 48 prisons, according to their website. However, more research is needed on its effectiveness in providing long-term recovery. “Little is known about its ability to engage and retain members over time or whether it helps reduce relapse rates and enhances the odds of long-term recovery” (Kelly & White, 2012, p. 9).

Despite the biblical perspective of wellness being holistic (body, soul, and spirit), there is an avoidance of the Church, in general, to include treatments that are perceived to have roots in psychological theories. Psychological therapies that address thoughts, cognitions, and emotions have been demonized by pure biblical counseling approaches (Adams, 1979; Belzman, 2010). This avoidance of psychological therapies by the Church at large has left a void in Christian counseling of much-needed wellness approaches to treating SUDs and other mental health disorders. Therefore, very little is known about those who have achieved long-term sobriety using an MCC approach.

Justification for the Study

Relevance to Mental Health

This study could help expand the reach of mental health services to include those who prefer community-based services that fit their culture and faith. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH, 2015), “the majority of people with drug use disorder never receive any form of treatment,” and “even among people with moderate-to-severe drug use disorder, less than 20% had treatment in 2015.” The long-term struggle with addiction and its resultant effects on the family and society has negative implications on the mental health of society at large. The burgeoning crisis of substance abuse, addiction, and overdose deaths requires a multifaceted approach outside of the limitations that the medical model can achieve. Detoxification treatment from depressants and alcohol dependency usually requires medical support but is deficient in providing the social support and

holistic change needed to sustain sobriety. Community-based and Church-based recovery management models are able to provide long-term recovery services as independent or complimentary services to medical treatment or detoxification. They further provide the benefits of being low-cost, easily accessible, and integrating the culture and religion of that community.

The wellness approach to mental health is at the very heart of mental health services and falls within the definition of professional counseling by the American Counseling Association (Gerig, 2017). The wellness approach to mental health counseling identifies the Micro, Exo, and Macro environments, sociopsychological developmental aspects, and holistic elements into fully comprehensive programs (Gerig, 2017). However, little is known about the lived experience of those who achieved sobriety within this wellness paradigm. Insights may point to how these experiences could provide the potential to duplicate these programs in other cultures or countries.

Relevance to Christian Counseling and Church-Based Programs

Church-based programs are usually limited to Celebrate Recovery 12-Steps or Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.), or Narcotics Anonymous (N.A.) programs. The study has relevance to understanding the efficacy of combining C.R.12-Steps, CBT, DBT, coping skills, and psychoeducation with a Christ-centered approach.

The one-dimensional spiritual perspective is not the biblical perspective of wellness. The research has relevance in combining church-based, Christ-centered 12-Step programs with a multifaceted wellness and biblical approach to improve outcomes for long-term sobriety. This research may indicate the value of expanding the Church's addiction recovery services to include a comprehensive wellness approach for those with substance use disorders and possibly other mental health disorders.

Theoretical Framework

This study used a 'Wellness' lens to explore the lived experience of those who achieved long-term recovery. The sample in this study completed a recovery management program with a multifaceted wellness approach. Recovery management is holistic and has a wellness and developmental dimension combined with social support systems (Onken et al., 2007). As discussed, the concept of holistic wellness draws from the commonalities found in biblical and

mental health perspectives. The multifaceted wellness perspective provides a theoretical lens to understand the influence of program elements on the sample's recovery outcomes. A hermeneutic involving the assessment of data drawn from qualitative phenomenological research methods was used in this study, whereby insight into the lived experience of those who completed an MCC recovery management program was gained. Because 'Wellness' is a broad concept, the theoretical elements of 'Wellness' were narrowed down to the five criteria for mental health counseling from a wellness and developmental approach, as previously discussed.

Researcher Assumptions and Biases

The researcher's involvement with the organization where the study is conducted is an obvious bias. Therefore, a Likert scale survey was used to answer questions on specific program elements, followed by their written description of their experience. I have provided this MCC one-year program to hundreds of participants for over 15 years. The knowledge I have lacked, and which this project addresses, is an understanding of the subjective experience of those who achieved long-term recovery after having completed this one-year MCC program.

Methodology

As previously discussed, the questions that drove this study were: 1. How has a multifaceted wellness approach to recovery management influenced the recovery outcomes of participants? 2. How did they experience the various courses and aspects of this MCC program? 3. How did faith in Christ influence the participants' recovery experience?

The researcher used a hermeneutical phenomenological approach to understand how a multifaceted wellness approach combined with Christian faith played a role in the long-term recovery processes and outcomes. Creswell describes van Manen's hermeneutical phenomenological research approach as "the interpretation of a lived experience" (2007, p. 59). The phenomenon of interest in this study is the achievement of long-term sobriety using a multifaceted and Christ-centered approach. Creswell explains that in this type of research, the researcher "collects data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals" (2007, p. 59).

Sample

The target sample consisted of 10 participants consisting of 7 males and 3 females. Their ages were between 25-60. They were of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. One person had achieved 2 years of sobriety; four individuals had achieved between 5-8 years, and five individuals had achieved 9-12 years of sobriety. The participants in this study had all completed the one-year program and had since been abstinent for a minimum of two years. All participants were drug tested twice weekly on multi-panel urine screen tests to confirm sobriety.

When they started their program, only one person was active in their faith in Jesus Christ, five had previously committed their life to Christ but were struggling with their faith, two believed in Christ but had never committed their lives to serve him, and two people did not believe in Christ. Before starting their one-year program, two individuals had severe substance use disorder for over two years, and eight had severe SUDs for over 5 years. One of whom specified that their addiction had been for over 19 years. Six individuals did not attend inpatient detoxification before starting their MCC program, three people had brief 7-10 day detoxification, and one had completed long-term inpatient treatment.

Method of Inquiry

The method of inquiry was a survey that was emailed to 15 participants. Participation was voluntary. 10 people completed the survey, and 1 responded late. The researcher protected the rights of the participants by adhering to the American Counseling Association code of ethics for research participants in the following manner (2005, p.16). Participants were free to decline and to have any questions or concerns addressed. Prior to doing the questionnaire, all participants signed informed consent forms to participate in the study. The reason for the study was explained in the informed consent form. The researcher agreed to protect anonymity and confidentiality. The limits of confidentiality were agreed upon and signed. The names of the participants will not be revealed in the research report. Password codes protect their signed consent forms and completed surveys on my computer. The survey questions aimed to evoke an articulation of how a multifaceted wellness approach combined with Christian faith assisted them in achieving long-term sobriety from substance dependency.

Data Analysis

Data gathered in the surveys were analyzed to identify common themes in the experiences of participants in the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Creswell (1998) recommended the following steps (as cited in Leedy & Ormrod, 2005): 1) Identify statements that relate to the experienced phenomenon and break them down into small segments or meanings 2) Group statements into categories that reflect the various meanings 3) seek diverging perspectives to identify emerging themes 4) Develop an overall description from the various meanings to describe the phenomenon as participants described it.

Emerging Themes

Several themes emerged from the experiences of the sample who had completed a one-year MCC program. The researcher identified common experiences that related to the phenomenon of their unique recovery journey. Similar phrases and common experiences were sorted into specific categories. They answered questions in terms of the value they placed on what they gained from the various courses in their one-year program. Program gains were factors that helped them to grow and helped to prevent relapse. These were expressed more in terms of recovery values than in achieving goals or acquiring skills. Their perceptions regarding their program were surprising when considering that acquiring moral values was not the primary focus of their program. Their program framed recovery as the opportunity to restore the damage caused by addiction in eight life areas 1) physical, 2) spiritual, 3) emotional, 4) mental, 5) social, 6) financial, 7) vocational, and 8) environmental.

Accountability Combined with Support

The sample expressed accountability as the need to be held accountable to their individual recovery plan by their groups and family. Role models are valued for their ability to hold them accountable. Being heard, seen, and understood in a judgment-free environment while being accountable was of great value. A participant stated their appreciation of “Having peers and leaders that knew exactly what I was going through – That I could share my darkest moments without judgment.” Having their families and recovery role models hold them accountable was of utmost importance and emerged as one of the main themes of the narrative. They made the following

statements about being held accountable, “I loved being tested at Mighty Wings, resulting in strong accountability to build back trust with my family/support by showing that I am staying clean.” Accountability was not just for relapse prevention but something that held them to a higher standard. One person stated, “The accountability was the biggest factor, being surrounded by leaders and people who have walked the road I was on, being challenged in group to be honest and open about my feelings etc. On the other side, having my family also attend meant that it was not just my problem that I needed to fix – this also helped me stay committed.”

Regular drug testing kept them accountable to their families and emerged as one of the most valued tools to prevent relapse. They confirmed their appreciation for testing in statements like, “I was also afraid that the lack of testing would leave a door open to temptation,” and “It also gave my family the reassurance they needed to know that I am testing clean weekly.” Another stated that the thing that helped prevent relapses was “Being tested. The extremely strict routine and understanding every action has a consequence.”

Responsibility

Taking responsibility for their lives and past mistakes was a recovery value that was evident in much of the narrative. One person wrote, “I am a completely different new person that can live in the open and not isolate and hide in my room. I can be a mother that my daughter deserves and a loving girlfriend, a caring sibling and a caring child to my elderly mother – They don’t have to look after me I can finally look after them.” Responsibility was expressed in relation to accountability and building trust. One person wrote, “As I followed my Recovery Plan and proved to be more trustworthy, my Support started to see the person they once knew and the trust build allowed the door to open on reinstating a relationship, also the accountability factor in conjunction with boundaries and consequences gave the freedom to both parties to make their choices and not live in the manipulation game, this built confidence in the home to each member to be responsible for themselves.”

Integrity

Integrity is highly valued as being open and honest, doing what you say you will do. One person stated, “one of the things that I learned and that really worked is “do what you say and say what you do.” This

helped my family know exactly what I was doing and that if I said I was going to do something I did it.” Restoring the damage caused to their families is a major motivation to recover and prevent relapses. Becoming trustworthy is expressed as necessary for rebuilding relationships. Facilitating groups helped them restore self-worth by becoming role models and standing as a person of integrity. Integrity is also described by participants as the quality of a person who takes responsibility, faces their consequences, and submits to rules. The participants expressed high value for the strict rules of the recovery center.

Faith in Jesus Christ

Faith is expressed more as a tool to move them forward than to keep them from relapsing. Faith is attributed mainly to a relationship with Christ and getting the strength to grow and overcome challenges. One client expressed the value of having Jesus Christ in their recovery process as, “I was able to give my heart all over to the Lord and ask for his forgiveness and thank him for saving my life. I made amends and through the 12 step program got rid of all my old hang ups and habits. Our Sunday Evening Praise and Worship sessions brought me closer to God and I realized through that that I need to practice my faith actively to grow every day. God has restored all my previous broken relationships and I’m set free from my addictive past.”

Surrender is experienced as an act of their faith. One participant described their first three months in recovery, “This was a difficult phase as I was lonely and had no friends and didn’t know who I was yet – I felt lost and hadn’t surrendered to the M.W. programme yet – I was a dry addict.” Another stated, “When I realized God had never left me, I left him – my life and understanding the importance of surrendering myself to God and sharing my every thought and action with God meant I would never be alone.”

Belonging and connection to God was another value attributed to Christ-centered recovery. One person stated, “Joining the program and using my faith I came to learn of my true identity as a Christian and the lies that I have believed for so many years. By practicing my faith everyday I had a sense of belonging as well as a changed mindset seeing life through God’s eyes and not my own. It has cemented my faith and I can trust God’s word and His promises. By keeping my eyes on Jesus and not focusing on my shortcoming I am able to overcome obstacles. It also allowed me to throw of excess baggage that I was carrying around for far too long and I am able to forgive those that hurt

me and ask for forgiveness for those I have hurt...I am able to go to God with all that life throws at me and I can trust Him fully in good times as well as trying times. He is my Rock.” Faith is expressed in a loving relationship and connection with Jesus Christ. “Jesus Christ became my spiritual redeemer once my faith started to grow. When I started believing in Christ my recovery became easier to manage.”

Forgiveness was a significant theme that emerged, as being forgiven by God and being able to forgive themselves and others. Freedom is expressed in being without guilt and shame. One participant stated, “My new life is free from any weight of previously living two lives, always deceiving, hiding things, filled with lies, feeling guilty. Not feeling chained to this heaviness.”

Emotional Control

The sample identified controlling emotions and triggers as one of their main struggles during the early phases of recovery. They stated high value in achieving emotional stability by doing the CBT, DBT, and life skill programs. The participants completed a CBT program called Empowered Recovery Program (ERP), and a Dialectical Behavioral Program called GAP. These two programs, combined with life skills and psychoeducation, were expressed as excellent tools for managing environmental stressors that triggered mental and emotional responses. One participant stated, “I have tools that I can now use in my everyday life and try my best to stay in the one minded frame, where I’m not too emotion nor too rational.” Participants expressed their need for emotional and rational coping skills before examining their past hurts. One person stated, “If you came straight out of active addiction into Steps, you most definitely will not be ready to look into the mirror and really look deep within. I experienced it like the peeling of an onion. There are so many layers that you first have to peel and really work through before you will be ready for Steps. When I started my Steps, I was excited to really work me.”

Wholeness and Lifestyle

Wholeness is often expressed as finding their identity, having balance, and changing lifestyles. One participant said, “Mighty Wings is an outpatient program that teaches you how to change your lifestyle and not only abstain from drugs. You are able to have a normal life with accountability on a bi-weekly basis through testing at the Centre.” Another participant knew that unless there were a lifestyle change, they

would continue to disappoint themselves and their family. He said, “I saw what my addiction had done to my family and had to change my lifestyle. I tried a 28 day program a few years back and it did not work for me, I decided to do one year program to sacrifice one year for the rest of my life.” Years of relapsing proved that focusing on abstinence did not produce recovery. This participant stated, “I realized that I needed each area of my life assessed/addressed and felt the lack of accountability and non-holistic approach offered by other organizations were not going to be beneficial to me, nor assist in my long term recovery.” Others stated, “The programme helped me understand my self and addiction” and, “My life is in control and fairly balanced (Which I continue to strive to have my spiritual, social, vocational, health, work balance).”

Holistic/Multifaceted Recovery Programs

The value of the 12-Step program is identified as honestly coming to terms with one’s past and finding forgiveness and peace in Christ. 12-Step programs are synonymous with reconnecting with God, self, and others. However, when asking the question regarding if they thought that it would be sufficient to do only their CR12-Step program, they answered the following: “No, I believe for a holistic recovery to take place, the full suite of programs is needed. Doing the 12-steps fresh out of addiction will be of little use as the mind and emotions are still settling.” “No I don’t think so, the other programs cover very valuable topics especially ERP and Life skills – In these two courses you learn how to face life on a daily basis and recognize the mistakes you’ve made in your life by not dealing with issues.” “No. Orientation helped me understand what is addiction why I got addicted and how I can start restoring my life my recovery plan is my guide to a sober life, ERP for me is the foundation of recovery Boundaries, goal setting, Routines and the homework helped me plan my life better, this all prepared me for the difficulties of step 4 witch [which] is very emotional and can become unstable if none of the above was in place. DBT helped me understand my emotions and why I react the way I did which helped me support myself through step[steps].” “No, I feel if I went straight into the 12 steps I would have been an emotional mess and more likely to relapse as I wouldn’t have been taught how to deal with my emotions yet and how to be honest and surrender during my 12 steps. “I do not put God in a box. Can he take someone out of addiction in an instant, and they never go back....yes, He is God after

all! Was the 12 step program inspired by Him...I do believe it was. Are all the other programs beneficial, yes, the more the better.”

Their responses to a single approach to recovery from SUDS revealed that ALL the participants placed immense value on a multifaceted approach. One participant stated, “ERP helped me to dig deep and prepare me for 12 steps to come and it helped to be more engaged with the program. Discipleship is needed to grow the spiritual part of the program and cement faith. ERP is needed to deal with the emotional part as God created us emotional beings and it has taught me to identify my emotions and deal with them constructively.” Another stated, “In fact, just doing orientation [psychoeducation], I learned so much of addiction and of myself. The rest of the program completely changed my life and identity of who I wanted to be.”

Emerging Phenomena

Outward Changes Followed by Internal Transformation

*“We do not think ourselves into new ways of living,
we live ourselves into new ways of thinking.”*

(Richard Rohr)

Once I identified common themes, I was able to recognize some interesting phenomena. It appeared that in the early stages of abstinence, these participants had struggled to clearly envision what recovery looked like. One person expressed recovery in the first three months as scary, “Because I was scared to face the damage I had done and didn’t want to admit it and deal with it – It felt easier to quit the programme and escape by using (Run away from my devastation that had caught up with me, the guilt and shame was overwhelming).” There was a struggle to grasp what a life in recovery would be for each one. One participant stated, “I initially felt overwhelmed committing to something with such a long duration and thought to myself that after the year is done I would go back to using.” Another participant stated, “At first, my family chose the programme for me, but after about 6 months the penny dropped.” Another stated, “At first it was a very strange experience as I did not know what to expect. By doing a life recovery plan, testing twice a week as well as being accountable assisted in staying clean.”

These participants were primarily learning to “live their lives into new ways of thinking” and used CBT and DBT to manage relapse triggers. As one participant stated, “I do not believe in walking away from drug addiction, I believe in walking towards my life in Christ. The

bonus of walking towards Christ is that my addiction becomes more and more distant.” Recovery in a community of recovering addicts helped model recovery for those who have no internal road map. The discipleship model of Jesus Christ is seen as walking alongside a disciple as a role model and teacher (1 Cor 11:1). Participants also saw that being a role model was beneficial to their own recovery and to becoming a person of integrity. One person stated the value of “Being able to stay on as a volunteer, becoming a leader – Feeling part of something bigger than me and feeling that Mighty Wings was my chosen family.”

Inward Transformation and Moral Development

This sample identified addiction recovery as being more about inward transformation than behavioral change or abstinence. It was about gaining something they did not want to lose. For example, they identified integrity as more than a recovery value; without it, they felt like they were back into addiction. The first six emerging themes were expressed in terms of recovery values rather than skills or personal gains. They were 1) Accountability combined with support, 2) Responsibility, 3) Integrity, 4) Faith in Christ, including surrender, belonging, and forgiveness, 5) Emotional control, and 6) Wholeness and lifestyle. The seventh theme expressed Holistic/Multifaceted Recovery as necessary for achieving long-term recovery.

The emergence of recovery values indicated moral growth and development, which was not the primary focus of their program. The program was based on the premise that addiction is a brain disease that can be managed, not cured. The recovery management model posits that addicted individuals need to move from a culture of addiction to a culture of recovery (White, 1996). This sample had acquired common internal values in a recovery culture with which they now identified. Even ten years after completing their programs, they still identified with these internal values and were active in their faith.

Discussion and Implication of the Study

It can be assumed from this study that a wellness approach to treating SUDs can effectively combine Christian faith with multifaceted recovery management programs to achieve long-term recovery outcomes. Completing multifaceted recovery programs with a Christ-centered approach set these clients up for success that achieved unexpected results.

There is evidence in this study that the transition from addiction to recovery resulted in participants identifying recovery as a ‘moral transformation.’ The irony is that in this sample, addiction was not framed as a problem of weak morals, yet they expressed their achievements of long-term recovery in moral values. Their one-year program followed a Brain Disease Model. Images of brain scans used in psychoeducation programs gave them an understanding of why addicted individuals fail to stop using and how the hijacked brain sets them up for relapse. This model served them well when this knowledge translated into limiting triggers, being tested, and having accountability and support. Bible-infused CBT and DBT programs empowered them to overcome environmental and emotional triggers to relapse. Expecting willpower or faith to be sufficient to resist dopamine-enforced triggers is a limited set of strategies for a complex problem.

All the participants in the study stated that achieving the quality of recovery they experienced would not have been possible if they had only completed the 12-Step Celebrate Recovery Program, which focused on hurts, hang-ups, and habits. They attributed CBT and DBT courses to learn to control their emotions and manage triggers. The participants expressed their need for improved emotional stability and self-control before starting the C.R.12-Step process of examining their past hurts and traumas. The multifaceted wellness approach, using a combination of treatments with clear recovery goals, supported by accountability and support, was articulated by all in this sample as crucial to achieving long-term sobriety and quality of life in recovery. This outcomes-based, multifaceted wellness approach facilitated a holistic and biblical paradigm of body, soul, and spirit. Gerig proposes that in counseling, “we work with our clients in ways that empower them to live their lives and not their diagnoses”(2017, p. 133).

Having clear goals in all their major life areas allowed these clients to start living balanced lives from the very start of their program, before their brain chemicals were restored, before triggers were neutralized, before strong faith in God, before their relationships were restored, before having attained any significant period of abstinence. The camaraderie of their fellow recovering addicts, family support, and strong accountability encouraged them to stay on track. This ‘track’ was clearly defined upfront in their recovery plans to which they were held accountable. They could further track their progress on the ‘Recovery Management Assessment.’

Accountability to maintain sobriety and achieve recovery outcomes was integral to their program. Their family was a part of their recovery process, whereby they nominated a family member to receive

attendance and testing results. Drug testing was highly valued to prevent relapse and keep them accountable. Despite completing their programs many years ago, being open and honest to accountability structures remained a value they still held in high regard. Recovery had translated into a change in identity and not just behavior.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study could be identified in the lack of research to compare results. This study is unique in that the multiple components of addiction recovery are structured into a one-year program, with little available research to compare it to, especially as it combined an outcomes-based and Christ-centered paradigm. This research study is limited to those who achieved long-term sobriety rather than those who dropped out of the program. The age demographic indicated that the majority were in their twenties when joining this program which limits the results to age 25 and older and does not include adolescents. Nine of the ten participants were white, and one was mixed race. There was no representation for the black population. The majority had not relapsed during their one-year program, but two had relapsed on the program and restarted after brief inpatient treatment and have since achieved long-term recovery. The study does not show the value of combining their peer-facilitated recovery program with professional services such as inpatient treatment, private psychological therapy, and psychiatric treatment. Some of these participants used these services when needed during their recovery journey.

The strength of this study was that there were ten recovering addicts; five had 9-12 years of recovery; four participants had 5-6 years; and one had 2 years. Three of them were women, giving voice to the females in recovery. Some participants were still involved with the organization as group facilitators, but the majority were no longer connected to the organization. Despite this fact, their perspectives on recovery were undeniably similar. Researcher bias was limited in that the research was not focused on validating this one-year model but rather on exploring the recovery experiences of those who had achieved long-term recovery after completing this one-year program.

Moral Outcomes

The researcher did not anticipate that the sample would ascribe moral values to achieving long-term recovery. Because this

organization used a Brain Disease Model as a paradigm for understanding addiction, the aspect of low morals or weak character was ruled out as being the cause of substance dependency and relapses. Addiction was not framed as being morally weak; instead, the brain disease perspective was used to explain the limitations of using willpower to prevent relapses. Because their one-year program was outcomes-based and orientated to achieving goals in all their life areas, the researcher expected that results would be described more in terms of goals and outcomes such as happier life, improved income, and personal achievements. Research by Hibbert & Best examined 'Quality-of-Life' outcomes of recovering alcoholics who had maintained long-term sobriety (5 or more years) had revealed that "functioning reaches a level above population norms offering hope of moving to a functioning level beyond the pre-morbid state" (2010, p. 1). Higher levels of Quality-of-Life implied "that recovery is not simply about the removal of symptoms, but may offer a transformative process that enhances and exceeds what is available in 'ordinary' life" (Hibbert & Best, 2011, p. 7,8).

The sample in this phenomenological study was not assessed on the Quality-of-Life questionnaires. Instead, answers in their own words revealed an inner transformative experience that had acquired a high level of moral values. The moral values that emerged were 1) Accountability and supportive relationships, 2) Responsibility, 3) Integrity, 4) Faith in Christ, including surrender, belonging, and forgiveness, 5) Emotional control, and 6) Wholeness and a balanced lifestyle. It can be concluded from this research that long-term recovery from SUDs using a multifaceted and Christ-centered approach was the achievement of a balanced life and an 'internal morality.'

Morality, Brain Disease, or Choice

The results of the research brought into focus the role of morality in addiction. The influence of CR-Steps, recovery role models, and clarification of recovery outcomes may have contributed to this sample identifying recovery as a moral transformation. Moral and spiritual regeneration is synonymous with 12-Step programs. Moral and spiritual regeneration was the original founding principle of the A.A. (Anonymous & Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1967). "Addiction appears to be a deeply moralized concept" (Frank & Nagel, 2017, p. 129). The Moral Model holds fast to the perspective that addiction is a choice and, therefore, people are responsible for their substance dependency and addictive behavior. The Brain Disease

Model has demonized the Moral Model as framing addicts as morally weak, thus causing shame and stigmatization. However, moral conflict is foundational to many psychological theories. According to Freud, moral standards are identified as the role of the superego. A moral dilemma from a Freudian perspective is when the Id wants its driving needs met (the need for drugs), and the Ego's inability to uphold the superego's moral standard and restrain the Id's drives creates a moral dilemma.

Framing addiction as purely a disease of the brain assumes to remove the moral dilemma that people in addiction suffer. Calling it a disease does not remove the guilt and shame of an addicted person who took money to feed their children to buy drugs or prostitute themselves for their next fix. The moral dilemma is also expressed in Romans 7:19-20 "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me" (NKJV). The biblical perspective on addiction focuses on surrendering to Christ as a solution to the sin of gratifying one's flesh.

Herein lies the conflict that the Church often has in treating addiction, which is that the focus is purely spiritual. Stigmatizing people for their inability to control their urges to use addictive drugs and labeling their problem as a 'sin' or a lack of faith does little to assist them. Christ-centered approaches to mental health must include a holistic (body, spirit, and soul) paradigm to be fully biblical (3 John 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:23). Acknowledging the damage caused by addiction to the brain and resultant effect on the mind, will, and emotions is scriptural. As seen in these participants, the transformation of the inner man reflected a significant level of moral transformation. "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2, NKJV). The study revealed that Christian and Bible-infused cognitive behavioral programs combined with strategies to accommodate the hijacked brain proved highly effective in achieving long-term sobriety. When addicted individuals understand that recovery is a choice hampered by a hijacked brain, they learn to protect themselves from relapse and use support structures to hold themselves accountable to achieve healthy choices.

Relevance for Mental Health

Gerig (2017) states that according to the American Counseling Association, it is the responsibility of licensed professionals to possess knowledge and skills for the promotion of wellness. “Achieving wellness, as opposed to the mere absence of symptoms, is, therefore, the goal of mental health counseling (Gerig, 2017, p. 133). The Wellness approach to recovery provides a platform to implement multifaceted programs in community-based recovery centers by adapting to the community’s needs and incorporating cultural and religious beliefs. According to Gerig, “By integrating such methods, counselors assist individuals, families, and communities not simply to get by, but to flourish” (2017, p. 149). The study indicates that a multifaceted wellness approach provides long-term solutions for recovery, not just sobriety maintenance. The wellness approach applies to both mental health and Christian counseling and is adaptable to a community’s different cultures and unique needs.

A phenomenon that emerged from this study was that Christian cognitive-behavioral programs combined with accountability and social support were significant in preventing relapses and gaining control of thoughts, emotions, and environmental triggers. The sample unanimously stated their preference for having stabilized emotions before starting their 12-Steps and attributed this to CBT and DBT programs. Despite cognitive treatments effectively preventing relapse, they lack clarity on what defines recovery. Outcomes-based recovery combined with the wellness paradigm of recovery contributed to their experience of a multifaceted approach. The research indicates that a recovery plan from the start, combined with accountability, helped participants to maintain sobriety.

Moral values emerged as the gains of recovery, which may have relevance to the hot debates on the Brain Disease Model. Despite significant scientific research supporting addiction as a disease of the brain, this model is constantly being questioned (Volkow et al., 2022). Because of the stigmatization of weak morals inferred by the Moral Model and the perceived helplessness inferred by the Brain Disease Model, there are arguments for other models of addiction treatment that are empowering and non-stigmatizing (Frank & Nagel, 2017; Peele, 2016). Frank & Nagel (2017) suggest that awareness of the negative impact of moralization caused by various models of recovery on those in addiction could lead to other non-stigmatizing approaches to recovery. It is, therefore, incumbent on those who provide addiction recovery programs to work within paradigms of recovery that empower

people to maintain their choice for abstinence, reduce helplessness, and avoid stigmatization.

Relevance for Church-Based Services and Christian/Pastoral Counseling

Addiction recovery centers and church-based programs generally provide non-professional services with a strong emphasis on spirituality and community support and rarely combine cognitive programs. This research has relevance in equipping the Church with multi-faceted Christ-centered solutions for substance dependency problems. The study shows that Celebrate Recovery 12-Steps can effectively combine Christ-centered cognitive behavioral programs and accountability to reduce relapses. CBT enhances self-control (National Drug Abuse, 2018). Not only does CBT help to rewire hijacked brains, but when combined with faith, clients have an added dimension of skills training to help achieve abstinence and recovery. The physiological damage to an individual caused by addiction requires the Church to have a comprehensive view of the problem with Christ-centered solutions. As stated by one of the participants, “God created us emotional beings, and it [CBT] has taught me to identify my emotions and deal with them constructively.”

A study by Livne et al. (2021) revealed that frequency of church service attendance independently lowered the odds of substance use and SUDs across multiple substances. The erroneous perception that this is sufficient for the treatment of SUDs limits recovery options for Christian believers with SUDs. Fully comprehensive services need to include a Christ-centered paradigm for those who want a congruent experience of recovery within their faith. The multifaceted wellness approach that includes body, mind, and spirit is not only biblical but also yields good results in treating SUDs, as seen in this study.

Statistics show that millions of people have achieved years of sobriety from substance dependency without surrendering to Christ. However, for the person who wants to incorporate faith in Christ into their recovery process, we can assume from this study that a multifaceted and Christ-centered approach achieved long-term recovery, which was perceived by the sample as a lifestyle change and moral transformation.

Possible Future Directions for Research

Outcomes-based recovery has an educational stance that can be adapted to specific cultures and faiths and easily implemented in communities using peer facilitators. More research is needed to understand the efficacy of outcome-based recovery.

A wellness and recovery management approach facilitates a learning element that provides growth in areas previously stifled in development. Kohlberg's theory on moral development is best understood through child development. However, a process of change and learning in a recovery management setting has revealed a similar process of moral development through the stages of recovery. More research is needed to explore the development of this phenomenon.

Closing Remarks

I am in awe of the bravery and effort that it takes to achieve long-term recovery from addiction. I feel immensely privileged to have had the trust of these incredible overcomers to interpret their stories. The struggles endured by individuals were not captured, but the interpretation of their recovery achievements has revealed insights that may have future implications for other recovery centers and research. Thank you to all those who participated in this study.

“For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother” (Matthew 12:50).

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A CRITIQUE OF THE PRESUMPTION THAT AMERICAN SLAVEHOLDING WAS JUSTIFIED BY OLD TESTAMENT TEACHINGS

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Introduction

On April 16, 2015, an organization called The New York Apologetics moderated a debate at Stony Brook University. The debate featured Christian apologist Dr. Frank Turek, who co-authored the book titled *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (2004) with Norman L. Geisler, and Dr. Michael Shermer, who is the publisher of *Skeptic* magazine, a monthly columnist for the website *Scientific American*, as well as the author of *The Moral Arc: How Science and Reason Lead Humanity Toward Truth, Justice, and Freedom* (2015). As the conversation between these two doctors progressed, Turek asked the question, “What basis did we have to judge the Nazis as immoral if these are just our values and they have their values?” to which Dr. Shermer responded,

Because the people who are being oppressed in particular the Jews stood up and said, ‘We are not going to put up with this anymore and we want this stopped.’ Other groups then came to their rescue; same thing with slavery, same thing with women’s rights—it was all the Christians who objected to the slavery abolitionist, it was Christians who objected to women’s rights in the franchise, it is Christians who object to same-sex marriage I’m telling you [the audience] none of you endorse slavery anymore although you would have two hundred years ago.²⁹⁴

Sadly, the situation is not aided by the fact that a few days prior to this debate, *Time USA* published an article entitled “How Christian Slaveholders Used the Bible to Justify Slavery” (February 2018), wherein it was asserted that “The rest of the Old Testament was often

²⁹⁴ “Is Morality Better Explained by God or Science? Frank Turek vs. Michael Shermer,” *Cross Examined*, YouTube Video, (February 26, 2018, 55:11 to 55:52, retrieved 25 August 2023
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKKofNwvt1k&t=0s>).

mined by pro-slavery polemicists for examples proving that slavery was common among the Israelites.”²⁹⁵ In our contemporary times, many people, particularly those outside the Christian faith, hold a myriad of misconceptions including the idea that the Bible endorses wrongdoing and can offer supposed support of the American slave trade.

The objective of this paper is to critically analyze the presumption that slavery during the historical period of the United States was justified by biblical teachings. The secondary aim is to provide clarification on this very sensitive subject matter by examining biblical standards. Therefore, this paper will make use of sources from scholars of religious studies and biblical commentaries. This paper is not intended to condemn any scholar who has overlooked important information in the Bible regarding slavery but rather to respectfully present to the reader the event that took place in the Old Testament: voluntary servitude. Although the indentured servanthood model was not perfect, Israel’s laws demonstrated a moral sensitivity that was not demonstrated in the slaveholding in our American context.

Slavery in the Old Testament

Throughout world history, slavery can be described as overly dehumanizing. It is a part of history that we dare not repeat in any shape or form. Slaves were seen as property and their slave owners would do as they pleased without fear of consequences. They were put into labor in uncomfortable circumstances as if they were sub-human. The common mistake made by many is the comparison of the conditions of slavery characteristic during one historical period and cultural context to the context of the Old Testament of the Bible. Rather, the conditions of slaveholding in Israel emphasized servanthood. It is with this in mind that we will clarify that slaveholding of a dehumanizing type was not the situation in the case of slavery in Israel.

Considering the economic conditions during the era of the Old Testament, Israelites who were short on shekels, the Israeli currency of the time, would willingly become indentured servants to work off a debt. When one compares this to the concept of slavery that was taught in our American US history class in school, it is rather a different view because American slaves were enslaved unwillingly, meaning that they

²⁹⁵ Noel Rae, “How Christian Slaveholders Used the Bible to Justify Slavery,” *Time USA*, <https://time.com/5171819/christianity-slavery-book-excerpt/>

were made to be slaves by force, and they were seen as property. The Scripture in Leviticus 25:44-46 reads:

44 Your male and female **slaves** are to come from the nations around you; from them you may **buy slaves**. 45 You may also **buy** some of the temporary residents living among you and members of their clans born in your country, and they will become your **property**. 46 You can bequeath them to your children as inherited **property** and can make them **slaves** for life, but you must not rule over your fellow Israelites ruthlessly.²⁹⁶

We must recognize that almost the entire Old Testament is originally written in ancient Hebrew and certain translations of the Bible may fail to translate the Hebrew in its most accurate sense. When an average American reads this passage, they may think about the slavery from their history class where they were taught the horrors of slavery whereby black people were tortured by their slave owners, and were seen as less than. When we look at the Hebrew word *ebed* עֶבֶד when translated to the English language, it does translate to the word ‘slave,’ but Irish scholar J.A. Motyer writes that “Hebrew has no vocabulary of slavery, only of servanthood.”²⁹⁷ In laymen terms, the word ‘servanthood’ is a better rendition of the Hebrew and there was nothing wrong with being labeled as a servant. Old Testament scholar John Goldingay comments that “there is nothing inherently lowly or undignified about being an *ebed* עֶבֶד.”²⁹⁸

Readers may be concerned about the terms *property* and *buy*, and one can be empathetic to their misunderstanding. We must be completely honest when learning the terms that were used in those times and avoid anachronistic²⁹⁹ tendencies by recognizing that we may use the same terminology in different ways in today’s times. For instance, if one was gathered to be in a sort of reunion with family and

²⁹⁶ This passage is from the NIV translation. The bold markings are of this author.

²⁹⁷ J.A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 239.

²⁹⁸ John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel’s Life*, vol. 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 460.

²⁹⁹ Anachronistic is defined as belonging to a period other than that being portrayed.

friends to watch a National Football League or any other sports conference, the words *trade*, *belongs* and *owners* might be heard being used by several head coaches, sports reporters, or even the players themselves. In these circumstances, we do not view this as slavery but rather entering a formal contractual agreement.

Upon reading the Old Testament passages, we can find several examples where a servanthood/employee arrangement can be formulated.³⁰⁰ One example of this servanthood/employee contract can be found in Genesis 29 where it states that Jacob loved Rachel and agreed to work for Laban for seven years so that he could be married to her. What we can take from this is that Jacob entered this servanthood/employee contract for love. Other examples to entering this contract are not so romantic.

In Israel, the act of becoming a servant was considered a viable means of survival during times of economic duress. Within situations where an individual lacked sufficient collateral, they might offer themselves as stated in Leviticus 25:47 (NIV) “if any of your fellow Israelites become poor and sell themselves...” Upon the execution of a valid agreement, the individual would serve as a servant for a period of six years, as stated in Jeremiah 34:14 (NIV), which reads, “Every seventh year each of you must free any fellow Hebrews who have sold themselves to you. After they have served you six years, you must let them go free. Your ancestors, however, did not listen to me or pay attention to me” (NIV).

It is noteworthy to observe that in the event that a slave owner were to retract the release of a Hebrew servant they would be reminded of their own past as a slave in Egypt and that such an action would be in violation of the law of Moses. The disobedience of the people of Jerusalem in granting liberty to their fellow servants, as prescribed by the law, is evident in Jeremiah 34:17. As a consequence of their disobedience, God withdraws his protection and grants them liberty to suffer the consequences of the sword, pestilence, and famine, and to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.³⁰¹

Directing our focus towards Deuteronomy 15, it becomes apparent that upon the release of a servant, his or her duty to the household ceased, yet a responsibility arose for the master. Yahweh had mandated

³⁰⁰ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus, New American Commentary 2* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2008), 474-475.

³⁰¹ Referencing the NIV.

a provision to prevent the recurrence of indebtedness so that the servant may live his days as a debt-free man.³⁰² Deuteronomy 15:13-15 states:

13 And when you release them, do not send them away empty-handed. 14 Supply them liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your winepress. Give to them as the Lord your God has blessed you. 15 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today.³⁰³

Paul Copan holds the esteemed position of the Pledger Family Chair of Philosophy and Ethics at Palm Beach Atlantic University in Florida. He is also an accomplished author, having written books like *When God Goes to Starbucks: A Guide to Everyday Apologetics* (2008) and *True for You, But Not for Me: Overcoming Objections to Christian Faith* (2009). Copan emphasizes the importance of thoroughly examining the text of Deuteronomy 15, urging readers to not merely skim over it. He highlights the revolutionary objective conveyed in this passage, which aims to completely eliminate the system of debt-servanthood within the land. Specifically, the text states, "there will be no poor [and therefore no debt servanthood] among you" (v4).³⁰⁴

In light of Copan's proposition that the elimination of debt was a goal, it should also be acknowledged that extended servitude was forbidden, except in certain cases. There was the case where the servant voluntarily chose to remain out of love and had no desire to part ways with their master. If the servant decided this, then a covenant took place using an awl and piercing it through the ear into the door signifying that the person was to be considered a servant to the master forever.³⁰⁵

In Israel, the servants (slaves) were granted certain rights and provisions, distinguishing them from the slaves depicted in American history lessons. It was mandated that they be treated as individuals deserving of dignity and respect. As stated in the Anchor Bible Dictionary (1992), "We have in the Bible the first appeals in world literature to treat slaves as human beings for their own sake and not just

³⁰² Gordan McConville, *Grace in the End: A Study in Deuteronomistic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 147.

³⁰³ This passage is from the NIV translation.

³⁰⁴ Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?: Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 128.

³⁰⁵ Deuteronomy 15:16-17 (NIV).

in the interests of their masters.”³⁰⁶ Returning to Copan, he has outlined three significant provisions of Israel, arguing that if "Bible-believing Southerners" had followed these provisions, the presence and importance of antebellum slavery would not have existed or been much of a concern.³⁰⁷ These provisions include the liberation of injured servants, the establishment of laws against kidnapping, and the act of aiding runaway slaves.

Release of Injured Servants

This provision for the release of injured servants can be read in Exodus 21:26-27 (NIV), which states: “26 An owner who hits a male or female slave in the eye and destroys it must let the slave go free to compensate for the eye. 27 And an owner who knocks out the tooth of a male or female slave must let the slave go free to compensate for the tooth.” In the context of historical workman compensation, it was stipulated that in the event of an inadvertent injury inflicted upon a male or female servant by their employer (referred to as the "master"), such as the loss of an eye or tooth, the servant was to be released from their servitude. It was strictly prohibited to subject servants to any form of physical abuse.

In Exodus 21:20, the law code goes even further by stating that if a slave dies as a direct result of being beaten with a rod by their master, the master must be punished. God does not view a servant’s life any different from those that are free and as stated before, laws were in place instructing how to treat the servants. The word *punished* here can be translated to mean the death penalty when reading Exodus 21:12 (NIV), which declares: “Anyone who strikes a person with a fatal blow is to be put to death.”

Anti-Kidnapping Laws

Another distinctive characteristic of the provision lies in its unequivocal condemnation of the act of abducting an individual with the intention of selling them as a slave. This transgression is deemed as a capital offense, subject to the penalty of death. This can be found in Exodus 21:16 (NIV): “16 Anyone who kidnaps someone is to be put to death, whether the victim has been sold or is still in the kidnapper’s

³⁰⁶ Muhammad A. Dandamayev, s.v. “Slavery (Old Testament),” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

³⁰⁷ Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?*, 130.

possession.” Critics of the Bible neglect to mention this aspect when drawing comparisons between the Old Testament ethics and the antebellum South. Alternatively, it may be argued from the same critics that this legislation pertaining to the prevention of abductions is merely from a single scriptural passage. However, it is worth noting that this law is also explicitly mentioned in Deuteronomy 24:7 (NIV): “7 If someone is caught kidnapping a fellow Israelite and treating or selling them as a slave, the kidnapper must die. You must purge the evil from among you.”

Helping Runaway Slaves

Throughout this paper, we have only discussed Israelite servants rather than foreign ones. It should not be overlooked that the ancient world was vast and there existed foreign nations beyond Israel that are worth exploring here in regard to the topic of servitude. By examining specific provisions for runaway slaves, we can discern another instance of how Old Testament ethics diverged from what was normative practice in the antebellum South. Israel was instructed to provide a secure refuge for foreign slaves in Deuteronomy 23:15-16 as it reads: “If a slave has taken refuge with you, **do not hand them over to their master**. Let them live among you wherever they like and in whatever town they choose. Do not oppress them” (vs. 15-16).

In the year 1850, the United States Congress enacted the Fugitive Slave Act, a legislative measure that mandated the lawful return of escaped slaves to their respective owners. Any individual who impeded the process of arrest, endeavored to rescue a fugitive, or provided assistance or concealment to a runaway slave would be held accountable, facing a substantial fine of \$1,000 and a potential imprisonment period of up to six months.³⁰⁸

A thorough analysis of these three provisions in Israel provides evidence that Copan's statement holds true - the adoption of these laws would have prevented the existence of antebellum slavery or significantly reduced its impact. Furthermore, it is also imperative to acknowledge Copan's assertion that a superficial reading of the text, divorced from its proper context, is insufficient. Critics may

³⁰⁸ Connor Lennon, “Slave Escape, Prices, and the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850”, *The Journal of Law & Economics* 59, no. 3 (2016): 671. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26456962>.

disseminate their own interpretations via social media platforms, and viewers may unquestioningly embrace their rhetoric. Nevertheless, it would be prudent to genuinely comprehend the intended significance of these verses.

These biblical passages may present difficulties, particularly for the average Christian when faced with an adversary engaged in a dialogue. By carefully examining specific verses from the Old Testament, we can dispel certain misconceptions.

Liberation of Slaves

Exodus 21:4 (NIV) reads that “If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall go free.” The chapter contained within the book of Exodus outlines the terms and conditions for the liberation of Hebrew servants. In that moment, the individual is faced with a decision between departing independently upon the seventh year of debt release, or to remain as a permanent servant in order to remain with his spouse and offspring. It is widely acknowledged that the current situation that the man faced is far from ideal; however, in accordance with Copan’s suggestion, it is imperative that we undertake a thorough analysis of the text at a more profound level.

Upon initial examination, this text appears to exhibit a biased treatment towards women and offspring. The male counterpart, who is apparently favored, can enter into a service agreement and subsequently exit it. Yet the wife whom he wedded during his tenure under his master, as well as any offspring that were born during this period, were seemingly confined within the confined to the master’s residence and lacked the freedom to depart.

Although the verse is translated using the word *man*, it can draw from reason that this scenario is not gender specific since we see immediately following in Deuteronomy 15:17 “Do the same for your female servant.” Provided that the woman was not given by her father as a prospective wife to a man, she was given the same standard household duties, and she could leave as endorsed by the same law similar to her male counterpart.³⁰⁹ Copan states that “various scholars suggest that the Scripture text could be applied to females quite readily: ‘If you buy a Hebrew servant, she is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, she will go out free... If her master gives her a

³⁰⁹ Gregory C. Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993) 199, Google eBook.

husband, and they have sons or daughters, the husband and the children will belong to her master and she will go out by herself.’”³¹⁰

Why does the verse contain the term “*man*”? As previously mentioned, case law was not typically gender specific. Additionally, Israelite judges were proficient in applying the law to both male and females. Copan affirms that the mere use of masculine gender pronouns in many verses of the law, rather than alternating between “he” and “she,” does not imply the exclusion of women.³¹¹

In this matter, the employer takes the initiative to arrange a marriage between the unmarried man servant and a female servant. It is worth noting that in cases of debt servitude, the employer’s family may partake in negotiations pertaining to such marriage. By accommodating the male servant within his household to fulfill his debt, the employer has essentially made an investment. Consequently, the employer would face potential losses if the servant were to breach the contractual agreement and leave. In the context of military service, even if a soldier were to enter into matrimony, they would not be able to simply abandon their obligations, as they would still be indebted to the military in terms of their service time. Therefore, it would be illogical to permit the male servant to depart with his family without settling the outstanding debt.

While it is acknowledged that this verse does not exclude women, it is pertinent to examine the male’s employee perspective on the matter. The male servant who is released has three choices. The first is to wait until his wife and children complete their service while he works somewhere else. The second alternative is that the liberated man can find employment elsewhere and use the saved shekels to pay his employer to relieve his wife and children from their contractual obligations. While this may appear to be a logical choice, it will be challenging to support oneself and earn sufficient income to pay off the debts of his family. The third alternative is to devote oneself entirely to the master. He may choose to remain at home with his family and remain in a relatively stable economic situation.

Upon careful analysis of this text, it becomes evident that this arrangement starkly contrasts with the chattel slavery prevalent in the South. In the latter, a slave was not a temporarily indentured servant who willingly offered himself to reside in another individual’s household in order to settle his debt.

Leviticus 19:20-21 (NIV) is an additional Bible verse that necessitates additional elucidation, which reads:

³¹⁰ Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?*, 137-138.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

20 If a man sleeps with a female slave who is promised to another man but who has not been ransomed or given her freedom, there must be due punishment. Yet they are not to be put to death, because she had not been freed. 21 The man, however, must bring a ram to the entrance to the tent of meeting for a guilt offering to the Lord.

A distinction must be made between the subject at hand and Deuteronomy 22:23-27,³¹² which addresses the act of adultery committed by a betrothed free virgin, punishable by death. Additionally, this distinction applies to an *ebed* עֶבֶד who is betrothed to another man, likely also an *ebed* עֶבֶד.

In this passage, two significant issues are brought to light. First, it is emphasized that the girl in question was engaged rather than married. Engagement in Jewish culture was just as bonding a covenant as marriage itself.³¹³ Second, she held the status of a servant girl rather than being free, as she had not yet been redeemed by a family member or liberated by her master. This particular circumstance is cited as the reason for not punishing either the girl or the seducer. Consequently, her master did not possess this customary claim over her, nor could he seek compensation due to her engagement.³¹⁴

The objective of this legislation, similar to other laws pertaining to women, was to safeguard those who were in a more precarious position. The young woman in question was exploited, but she was not penalized. It is noteworthy that despite her reduced social standing, it is considered to be a temporary condition. This does not impede her from being granted her liberty (Lev. 19:20).

No comparison should be drawn between Leviticus 19:20-21 and

³¹² Deuteronomy 22:23-27 (NIV) reads: If a man happens to meet in a town a virgin pledged to be married and he sleeps with her, you shall take both of them to the gate of that town and stone them to death—the young woman because she was in a town and did not scream for help, and the man because he violated another man's wife. You must purge the evil from among you. But if out in the country a man happens to meet a young woman pledged to be married and rapes her, only the man who has done this shall die. Do nothing to the woman; she has committed no sin deserving death. This case is like that of someone who attacks and murders a neighbor, for the man found the young woman out in the country, and though the betrothed woman screamed, there was no one to rescue her.

³¹³ Jack Hayford, ed. *New Spirit-Filled Life Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002), 1290.

³¹⁴ Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?*, 139-140.

Deuteronomy 22:23-27, as there is no provision for the death penalty for either the female servant or the male servant.

Conclusion

According to the scriptures, as stated in the first chapter of Genesis, every individual has been created in the image of God. Genesis 1:27 (NIV) confirms this by stating that “God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Many can interpret this verse to mean that humans possess qualities that distinguish them from animals, as God has instilled in us some of His own attributes. It is apparent that Yahweh does not differentiate between individuals based on their perceived importance, as demonstrate by the book of Genesis.

When considering the latter portion of Isaiah, four passages emerge that introduce the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as our *ebed* עֶבֶד. These passages are 42:1-4, 49:1-7, 50:4-11, and 52:13-53:12. It has been prophesied that the Jewish Messiah will serve humanity. Jesus stated this in Matthew 20:28 (NIV) when he spoke of The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, emphasizing his purpose as the Son of Man. He made it clear that his mission was not to be served, but rather to serve others and sacrifice his life as a ransom for many.

Certain scholars have utilized the Old Testament as a means to justify the practice of slaveholding in the United States. However, a thorough examination of the matter reveals that such critics fail to acknowledge the profound significance of Jesus Christ, who willingly embraced a life of servitude and endured immense suffering for the salvation of humanity. It is crucial to recognize that while unfortunate individuals in America were tragically coerced into a life of enslavement, Jesus exemplified a voluntary commitment to serving others.

Critics also often draw comparisons between slavery in America and the Old Testament of the Bible. However, it is important to remember that the Old Testament slavery was not based on race and was instead a form of voluntary servitude used to pay off debts. Additionally, the act of slave trading was condemned and punishable by death, as stated in Exodus 21:16 (NIV).

By elucidating the meaning of specific Bible verses and what they explain about slave holding in Israel, it is hoped that certain misconceptions can be dispelled. This paper has argued that any attempt to compare ancient biblical events in regard to slavery with slaveholding in US history requires judicious analysis. If one were to

rationalize between the experience of servanthood in Israel and slavery in America, any rational person would opt for the experience in ancient Israel. As already stated, Israel's laws demonstrated a moral sensitivity that was not demonstrated in the slaveholding in our American context.

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ARE WOMEN MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO DECEPTION THAN MEN AND THEREFORE UNFIT FOR LEADERSHIP OR TEACHING ROLES IN MINISTRY?

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Introduction

Some English translations of 1 Timothy 2 seem to represent that the Apostle Paul does not want women to be teachers of the Bible, or teachers of men, or to have authority over men for several reasons. One reason complementarians put forth, propensity toward deception, draws from their conclusions on verse 14; "and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor."³¹⁵ Their logic is faulty since, if the woman was deceived and sinned because of the deception, yet the man committed the same sin willfully and knowingly while not deceived, why, then would God want the more rebellious of the two to be the only spiritual leaders and teachers of all peoples from that point on for all time? This paper will argue that there is no ontological or biblical evidence for women being inherently more easily deceived than men, as some views may hold. Therefore, ministry positions should not be withheld from women solely on the basis of being more easily deceived.

Having been the only female executive leader of one of the ministries under a certain international organization, I was highly blessed to serve. I loved my work, but I was regularly challenged with some manner of gender bias. Whether it was a condescending comment about my gender directly to my face or being excluded from meetings with all the other ministry leaders (all male), it was relentless at times. I was the only employee at the leadership level not allowed to bring the devotional message to an all-staff meeting. As my performance record became lauded widely within the larger ministry, I was allowed to lead devotions for the mixed-gender staff of the ministry division for which I was the leader, was eventually able to attend more overall leadership meetings, and gained the respect of the organization's top leaders. My experience there prompted me to search the scriptures deeply in the hope of understanding more fully what God's view of women in

³¹⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced employ the *ESV Study Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

ministry truly is, for my own sake but also for the amazing women in my life who have great love for Jesus, and the call to work in ministry. This paper is one small, but important piece of that search.

The scope of this work will be limited to the topic of deception and whether Paul's comments in 1 Timothy 2:14 indicate that women may not hold ministry leadership positions based on being more easily deceived than men. Space does not permit the broader discussion of 1 Timothy 2:8-15, though a few references will be made outside of verse 14.

Secular View of Deception and Gender

Deception, in psychology, is defined as a mental process through which an individual deliberately convinces others to accept a false belief in order to gain some type of benefit or to avoid loss for the deceiver. Similarly, from an economic viewpoint, deception is defined as "a successful or unsuccessful deliberate attempt, without forewarning, to create in another [an untrue] belief in order to increase the communicator's payoff at the expense of the other."³¹⁶

The Zhang study in the National Library of Medicine, using scientific methods of measuring brain activity, showed that deceptive tactics were common among both men and women when playing a card game and gambling for money. Gender played no real difference in the players' desire to deceive competitors. Females, however, exhibited more eye contact at times when cheating would most likely occur. "One supporting hypothesis is that females are more likely to understand others in the presence of visual contact, but males do not, or may use contact more as a special threat."³¹⁷ The study pointed out that eye contact may have helped the females to analyze whether the opponent was cheating. The study also supported the social nature of females who may use "more mentalizing processes to deduce another person's thoughts."³¹⁸

In 2014, Time Magazine stated, "Women are perceived as easier to mislead, and are more likely than men to be lied to during negotiations, according to a recent study from researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of

³¹⁶ Zhang, Mingming, Tao Liu, Matthew Pelowski, Dongchuan. "Gender difference in spontaneous deception: A hyperscanning study using functional near-infrared spectroscopy." *Scientific Reports*, August 8, 2017, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5548786/>.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

Pennsylvania."³¹⁹ The study showed that women are lied to more often in negotiations by both men and women. "One of the study's experiments showed that part of the reason women are lied to more often is that they're perceived as being less competent but warmer than men in negotiations. The warmer a woman's personality was in the study, the more she was expected to be easily fooled."³²⁰ The UC Berkeley study lead author, Laura Kray, explained the apparent reason negotiators would choose deception in a negotiation; "People are aware of stereotypes, and use them to their advantage when they're motivated to do so."³²¹

It is clear in the Zhang study above that both men and women are equally deceptive when they have something to gain. Christians aware of human sin nature would not be surprised to learn that scientists conclude, through studying brain reactions within behavioral reactions, that males and females are both prone to commit deception for their own advantage.

The Times article showed that both men and women negotiators lie to women more often than to men due to the *perception* that women can be more easily deceived. The reason given as to why they are believed to be easier to deceive is because they are *perceived* as less competent than men.³²² Are women less competent than men?

In 2019, Northwestern University reported their analysis³²³ of a study done by their researchers over seven decades, from 1946 to 2018. No other study known had exposed gender stereotypes in such a way for that length of time. More than 30,000 respondents were asked to compare men's and women's competence, communion, and agency. "More adults now report that women and men are equal in general competence. But among

³¹⁹ Nolan Feeney, "Study: Women More Likely to Be Lied to in Negotiations Than Men," *Time Magazine*, August 3, 2014, <https://time.com/3076463/women-negotiations-deception/>.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Hilary Hurd Anyaso. "Women No Longer Regarded as Less Competent Than Men but Still Seen as Less Ambitious and Decisive: New analysis investigated how gender stereotypes have evolved over seven decades." *Northwestern Now*, July 18, 2019, <https://news.northwestern.edu/stories/2019/07/women-no-longer-regarded-as-less-competent-than-men-but-still-seen-as-less-ambitious-and-decisive/>.

those who see difference, most see women as more competent than men... Women now earn more bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees than men."³²⁴ In the other two areas, communion and agency, perception has stayed the same since the 1940s. Women are still perceived as more communal; more social, compassionate, and emotional, while men are still perceived as having more agency; ambitious, aggressive, and decisive. Women participating in the workforce more over the past seven decades could account for the perception of their competence being equal to men, but "Most leadership roles require more agency than communion, and the lesser ambition, aggressiveness and decisiveness ascribed to women than men are a disadvantage in relation to leadership."³²⁵

If the perception is that a woman is as competent as a man, she might be hired for specific jobs. However, if a woman is perceived as having less agency, that woman might be passed over for a promotion to a leadership role. "Now, for the first time in the Fortune 500 list's 68-year history, more than 10 percent of Fortune 500 companies are led by women. The Jan. 1, 2023 start dates of five new Fortune 500 chief executives brought the number of female CEOs up to 53, pushing the tally over the long-awaited threshold."³²⁶

If over ten percent of all Fortune 500 CEOs are women, and if that small number is a "long-awaited threshold," it means just under 90% of the CEO positions in the top corporations are still held by men in 2023. Women are just as competent as men but not often perceived as having "the stuff" worthy of top leadership.

The Setting in 1 Timothy Regarding Deception

For centuries, women have been denied certain roles in ministry for many reasons. One reason some believe Paul prohibited women from teaching in 1 Timothy is because they are more easily deceived (less competent) than men. However, Paul's primary concern in 1 Timothy is the influence of false teachers in Ephesus on both men and women. Philip B. Payne (Ph.D. Cambridge), former professor of New Testament at Cambridge, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Gordon-Conwell, Bethel, and

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Hinchliffe, Emma. "Women Run More than 10% of Fortune 500 Companies For the First Time," *SHRM Executive Network*, January 30, 2023, <https://www.shrm.org/executive/resources/articles/pages/women-run-ten-percent-fortune-500.aspx>.

Fuller, and known for his studies on textual criticism regarding Paul's teachings on women says, "The false teaching is of such central concern to Paul that nearly every verse in this letter relates to it."³²⁷ Payne describes the church in Ephesus as "a predominately Gentile congregation," as well as "a continuing Jewish influence"³²⁸ propagating "misuse of the law... promoting controversies and arguments... arrogance... endless genealogies... and myths."³²⁹

Both Jews and Gentiles brought false assumptions and teachings to the Christians in Ephesus. Paul, the great preacher of grace through faith being the only condition for salvation (Eph. 2:8-9), continually battled new Jewish converts who would not let go of Old Testament laws (i.e., 1 Tim. 1:7, Phil. 3:1-8, Gal. 2:16). A few differences in Jewish tradition and the new Christian way included no more need for circumcision and dietary laws. Jewish women had been unable to study the Old Testament but were now encouraged to learn about the new covenant of the risen Messiah.

Acts 19 speaks of how Gentile Ephesians idolized Artemis and worshipped at the Temple of Artemis. Egalitarian Linda L. Belleville (Ph.D., University of Toronto) is an adjunct professor of New Testament at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary. Belleville explains the myth that Artemis was superior to her twin brother, Apollo, because she was born first. However, "the true story [of creation] was just the opposite. For Adam was formed first, then Eve (1 Tim 2:13). And Eve was deceived to boot (v. 14) - hardly a basis on which to claim superiority."³³⁰ Belleville is not conversely making the point that men are superior. She suggests that Paul was shutting down the overbearing women who were ignorant of the scriptures and deceived by false teaching while acting as though they believed themselves to be superior to the men in the church due to the cult of Artemis worship in Ephesus. Craig Keener (Ph.D., Duke University), professor of biblical studies at Palmer Theological Seminary, challenges his fellow egalitarian, Belleville, in saying, "The prominence of Artemis in Ephesus no more need have translated into prominence for Ephesian women than the prominence of Athena had

³²⁷ Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. 2009), 296.

³²⁸ Ibid., 295.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ James R. Beck, ed., *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 89-90.

done for women in Athens (historically one of the least women-friendly Greek cities, an ancient influence in Ionian Ephesus)... I also doubt that priestesses in the imperial cult provided much of a model for NT ministry."³³¹ Keener has missed Belleville's point. Belleville did not argue that the priestesses were a model for NT ministry. Belleville argued that the birth order of Artemis, making women so prominent in Ephesian culture, was no more a statement of superiority than was Adam's birth order a statement of superiority over women, and therefore, the reason Belleville believes that Paul even brought up Adam's birth order was to dispel its meaning regarding superiority. NT Wright (D.Phil., Oxford University) is a Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at the School of Divinity at the University of St. Andrews. Wright agrees with Belleville that the culture of Ephesus, specifically, was indeed affected by the worship of Artemis and the belief in female superiority. "They [females] ruled the show and kept the men in their place."³³²

Due to the patriarchal era of those living in New Testament times, Keener's point might be well taken if it were not for the extreme aberration of the Artemis cult, especially in Ephesus where the Temple of Artemis was located and Timothy was ministering. Belleville and Wright seem to have the better assessment of the challenges Timothy was facing in regard to the culture of female superiority. Wright points out that Paul might likely be saying, "I don't mean to imply that I'm now setting up women as the new authority over men in the same way that previously men held authority over women."³³³ The Artemis culture in Ephesus is an important context in understanding why Paul may have used Adam's being created first and Eve's deception as examples to show that women are not superior to men as the Artemis religion claimed.

Eve's Deception in 1 Timothy 2:14

Some scholars view verses 13 and 14 of 1 Timothy as; the male was created first (v. 13); *therefore*, he is less prone to deception than the female (v. 14). There seems to be no empirical evidence that birth order defines intelligence or gullibility. While the woman was deceived, the man knowingly and willfully defied God. Eve told God the truth about the serpent deceiving her, yet

³³¹ Beck, *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, 112.

³³² N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Scripture: Engaging Contemporary Issues* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014), p. 80.

³³³ Ibid.

does not seem to directly accept blame herself, but "Faced with his disobedience, the man blamed God and Eve for what he himself had done."³³⁴ Neither being deceived unto sin (the woman), nor willful disobedience (the man) are good qualifications for spiritual leadership. Egalitarians Deborah H. Gill and Barbara Cavaness, both with the Assemblies of God, holding Ph.D.s from Fuller Theological Seminary state,

The serpent's words to Eve and her responses make it clear that he was talking to both Adam and Eve. All the 'yous' in the Hebrew text are plural and the woman answers in terms of 'we.' Adam stood by her side, but remained silent. From the time of her creation, the Scripture narrator never mentions their being apart. They were tempted together, yielded together, and ate together. The text does not say that Eve tempted Adam or that he ate reluctantly.³³⁵

In considering the deception of Eve, Belleville says, "She listened to the voice of false teaching and was deceived by it."³³⁶ Paul was comparing Eve to the women in the Ephesian church. Nevertheless, does that mean that only women are deceived by false teachers? Belleville reminds us of Paul's warning in his second letter to the Corinthians, written to both men and women in the church, "But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). Seeking consistency in Pauline theology, 1 Timothy 2:14 and 2 Corinthians 11:3 must be understood together. Keener comments, "Paul draws an analogy between Eve and the Corinthian Christians in 2 Corinthians 11:3; the basis for the comparison is that both were easily deceived. This example indicates that he could apply the image to anyone easily deceived."³³⁷ Paul did not think females are the only gender easily deceived since he warns both males and females against false teaching and uses the analogy of Eve's deception in both cases. Other scriptures where Paul warns both genders against being

³³⁴ Deborah M. Gill and Barbara Cavaness, *God's Women: Then and Now*, Rev. ed. (Danville, IL: Grace and Truth Publishing, 2009), 40.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

³³⁶ Beck, *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, 91.

³³⁷ Beck, *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, 240.

deceived include 1 Cor. 6:9-10, 15:33, Eph. 5:6, Gal. 6:7, Col. 2:8, 2 Thess. 2:3, 1 John 3:7.

Author, women's Bible study leader, and complementarian Beth Moore discusses the ability of any of God's people (not gender specific) to be seduced into sin.³³⁸ Speaking to an audience of both genders, the apostle Paul said, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). Moore claims that she receives many letters from both men and women believers that fall into the seduction of sin. "Based on the findings landing on my desk, increasing numbers of dear brothers and sisters throughout the world are undergoing tremendous suffering at the paws of the roaring lion... Many sincere believers fall before they even know what hit them."³³⁹ Moore expounds on this notion using Galatians 6:1. "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." The Greek word for "brothers" in this passage means both brothers and sisters and implies that both genders can be deceived or seduced into sin. Moore also points out that the word "caught" in Greek is *prolamban*, meaning that it "catches the individual by surprise, suddenly, without notice, i.e., before he is aware of what has happened."³⁴⁰ Moore states that some versions translate "caught" as "overtaken."³⁴¹ Could this have happened to Eve and Adam? Not all sin is pre-planned. What is clear, however, is that both men and women sin and can be "overtaken" by or deceived into it.

The apostle Paul named numerous women as those he commended and trusted. (Rom. 16:1-16). It is doubtful that Paul would have trusted any women if they were all incompetent in speaking God's true gospel. Cynthia Long Westfall is an assistant professor of New Testament at McMaster Divinity College. Westfall makes an interesting observation in that while the apostle Paul did not want women who were misled by false teaching to spread that teaching, he did see certain other people groups, involving men, as groups who fell to deception also. "In Romans 1-2, if it is given that Paul is contrasting gentiles with Jews, gentiles as a whole are viewed as being deceived, self-deceived, and deceiving others. They have failed to acknowledge God... However, Paul does not restrict gentiles from teaching and leading even though

³³⁸ Beth Moore, *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*, Reprint (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Press 2022), 12.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 15

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 23

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

he represents them as being more prone to deception than Jews."³⁴² Westfall also remarks that Paul calls Cretans liars, brutes, and lazy. If Titus rebukes them, they may become sound in their faith (Titus 1:12-13), and Paul goes on to tell Titus to appoint elders and overseers in the towns of Crete.³⁴³ Paul's generalizations did not apply to all people in each group, just some until they grew in their faith. Westfall states, "The suggestion that all women are disqualified from any service to the church because they are prone to deception or destined to repeat the pattern of the fall would mean that God's creation was inherently flawed or sinful and/or that the work of Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit were not sufficient for women."³⁴⁴

Complementarian Thomas Schreiner (Ph.D., Fuller Theological Seminary) is a professor of New Testament at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. At one time, Schreiner believed that women were more easily deceived than men. However, he now believes 1 Tim. 2:14 refers to the serpent circumventing Adam's headship to tempt Eve and later states,

In the history of the church, some have argued that women are less intelligent or more apt to be deceived than men. The idea that women are less intelligent is not taught elsewhere in Scripture and Paul does not argue from lack of intelligence but from the experience of deception... So even though Eve sinned first, sin is traced to Adam, pointing to male headship... I argued in a previous essay that perhaps Paul is suggesting women are more prone to deceit than men, but this view has the disadvantage of suggesting an inherent defect in women, for the language of deceit in Scripture always involves a moral failing. Thus, I think Paul likely is reflecting on the fact that the serpent subverted male headship by tempting Eve rather than Adam.³⁴⁵

Craig Blomberg (Ph.D., University of Aberdeen, Scotland) is a distinguished professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary. A self-proclaimed complementarian, Blomberg alludes to agreement with Schreiner. In referencing Genesis 3, Blomberg says, "It is interesting that the serpent approaches only the woman to deceive her (vv. 1-5),

³⁴² Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 111.

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Ibid. 116

³⁴⁵ Beck, *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, 315.

and yet God confronts the man first to call him to account for his rebellion (vv. 9-12). Was the woman more vulnerable and the man more responsible?"³⁴⁶

Payne contends that "Paul's abundance of citations about the susceptibility of men as well as women to deception significantly reduces the plausibility that he intends an anthropological generalization that women are more prone to deception than men."³⁴⁷ Payne emphasizes an additional and crucial point:

If Paul had argued that all women are by nature easily deceived and therefore not reliable teachers and that men are not so deceived, it would be an argument for prohibiting women from teaching at all, whether that teaching be to men or women, with or without a position of authority in the home, church, or society... Furthermore, if Paul believed women were more vulnerable to deception by Satan than men, why would he affirm women prophesying in 1 Cor. 11:2-16?³⁴⁸

In discussing scripture's acceptance of women prophesying before men as well as women, Payne points out that the Old Testament encourages women to speak out about God in public. "The Lord gives the word; the women who announce the news are a great host" (Ps 68:11). "Joel predicts a future, greater prophetic role for women: 'afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy... Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days' (Joel 2:28-29; cf. Acts 2:14-21)."³⁴⁹

What of the Holy Spirit being poured out on both men and women? Does reliance upon the Spirit not give wisdom to men and women alike when false teaching is imposed on them so that they may not be deceived? There fails to be scriptural basis for such a concept. Rather, Paul's great concern throughout his writings, as discussed herein, prompted his repeated warning to both men and women not to be deceived by false teaching.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 131.

³⁴⁷ Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters*, 411.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 410.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 56

Kevin Giles, an ordained Anglican minister has been writing on women in the Bible for more than forty years. In referring to 1 Timothy 2:13-14, Giles says this:

"It is an exceptional ruling, addressing an exceptional problem in a church of the first century. Paul is saying no more than, it is you women, like Eve, who have been deceived, stop teaching your false doctrines... For women to set themselves over free men in Paul's cultural context was totally unacceptable. We must never divorce Paul from his historical and cultural context."³⁵⁰

Conclusion: Theological Analysis of Women in Ministry Relative to Eve's Deception

Women are not more easily deceived than men nor less competent than men. Therefore, women should not be disqualified from ministry or leadership in ministry on either basis. Other bases disqualify women from certain church offices in various protestant denominations. However, as it relates to being gullible or incompetent, there is no validity in using that argument to prevent women from being either participants or leaders in serving the Lord personally or vocationally. This paper did not afford time or space to address all the various reasons or scriptures used to prevent women from teaching or holding various offices within the church but was limited to the discussion of Eve's deception.

Paul uses the example of the destruction of Satan's deception of Eve to warn against the deception of the false teachers in Ephesus, Corinth, and other areas in his travels. Paul's primary concern in 1 Timothy is helping Timothy guard the people he shepherded in Ephesus from the false teachers and those falling prey to the false teaching. Paul uses the same example of Eve being deceived in 1 Timothy 2:14, directed at women, and in 2 Corinthians 11:3, directed at both men and women, to warn against believing a false gospel not based on grace alone. Numerous other scriptures where Paul warns against being deceived by false teachers are strong evidence that he did not think women could be deceived and men could not. The point was that whoever is being deceived should not turn around and teach the wrong doctrine to others. Instead, Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2:2 that all faithful people (not gender specific) who have learned the truth from

³⁵⁰ Kevin Giles, *What the Bible Actually Teaches on Women*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018, 127-128.

him should in turn teach others. In this paper's focus verse of 1 Timothy 2:14, Ephesian women were lied to regarding the true gospel, and Paul did not want them to spread the same false teaching. Later in 1 Timothy, he explicitly allows women to teach other women and children. One would have to wonder if Paul was so concerned about women being deceived and teaching wrong doctrine; did he not care about what other women or children were being taught? That theory is inconsistent with Paul's warnings to all people not to follow after false teachers. Nor is that theory consistent with Paul allowing Priscilla or other women to lead or co-lead others by teaching. Even in the Old Testament, God allowing Deborah (and others) to lead or prophesy. Paul states that women are to learn in 1 Timothy 2:11. The implication is "before you mislead someone else."

The deception issue cannot be used to keep all women from teaching God's Word to all people for all time, or 1 Timothy is a letter of contradictions. Men would not be allowed to teach God's Word, either, as Paul is just as concerned about men being deceived by false teaching, as shown above. Payne pointed out that Paul even affirms women prophesying in 1 Cor. 11:2-16. Therefore, they are not disqualified from speaking from God's Word, even in the presence of men. 2 Timothy 2:2 describes qualifications for proclaiming God's Word as being faithful and able to teach without designating gender, using the Greek word *anthropoi*, which means people, both men and women.

My own story in ministry, described in the Introduction, has repeated itself time and again. I have served in leadership under a church umbrella and parachurch ministries as well, not as a pastor but as a ministry leader in other capacities. While some men did not seem to be disturbed by my gender in the least, some elders objected to my being hired, others referred to me as having a "man's job," and still others admitted they were waiting for me to fail (another way of expressing their belief that I was incompetent). It was only by working harder and performing as well or better than my male predecessors that the remarks and attitudes subsided, and I became more accepted for my competence. I cannot say there has ever been a situation where there were not some stragglers, even in the face of the evidence of my performance, who still thought I was out of place in my leadership positions. However, I can only rest in the Lord's acceptance and seek to honor Him by giving my best to His Kingdom. I have failed at *always* giving my best, but our God gives new mercy every morning, and we must devote each day to His service and get up and try to do better. Never give up because someone else judges your worth by wrong

standards, such as Eve's deception, meaning all women are too incompetent to understand or utter God's Word. We must keep our eyes on the Lord and serve Him alone, especially in the face of someone else's being deceived by a false teaching that claims all women are too incompetent to understand or utter God's Word or that males are naturally more competent and are not deceived by false teaching. I could name some males who have even been in the headlines for teaching false doctrine, and I know a few personally who lead with false doctrine in their congregations.

There are doctrines or scripture that some denominations and systems claim as the reason not to allow women to teach the Word or to be ordained as pastors, or even to lead parachurch ministries. Ordination for the pastorate is not the subject of this paper. This serves only to answer the claim that a reason for disallowing women in any form of ministry leadership is because they are more prone to deception than men, a faulty and unjust understanding with no biblical or biological basis.

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COMMUNAL LIVING IN ACTS: PRESCRIBED CHRISTIAN PRACTICE OR AN ANOMALY IN THE 1ST CENTURY CHURCH?

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Introduction

Many lessons were learnt growing up in a home with nine siblings. Sharing was mandatory since resources were limited. It was imperative that items like clothing, shoes, and others, be well cared for, especially if there was a younger sibling who could potentially utilize these items when the current custodian would outgrow them. However, amid the clothing commonalities as it were, there was this temptation to delineate at every opportunity between what was for common use and what was private. Many in the household understood what was considered common, yet this did not preclude one from breaching the bounds of what was seemingly private property. Naturally, this resulted in verbal and sometimes minor physical squabbles. In reaction to these disagreements, some members defaulted to ends of the spectrum, either giving themselves to complete hoarding or sharing everything. The dichotomy between selfishness and complete sharing has long been a contentious discussion of which the body of Christ is at the epicenter, fueled in part by the western individualistic societal construct.

The dominantly individualistic ideologies in the western societies we live in today have certainly pervaded the body of Christ. Sharing things in common has become periphery to the order of church business in many cases, since the body is made up of members who were once dominated by these very ideologies. Church budgets reflect minuscule amounts as a percentage allotted to alleviating the plights of the poor or other vulnerable groups. Understandably, many small churches are cash strapped and are barely keeping the doors open. Shouldn't then the onus fall on individual members to adopt a sharing mindset to be our brother's keeper? Certainly, this is a difficult concept to inculcate in the minds of believers today since we ourselves are products of these individualistic and selfish societies. The modern Church certainly grapples with this idea of communal living and even basic sharing, but the early Church practice of communal living may prove to be insightful in this regard. It must be noted that the cultural norms and values of Mediterranean countries in the early Church era

were vastly different from that of the western world, especially in the 21st century context. Mark L. Strauss wrote, “One of the fundamental differences between Middle Eastern and Western values is that of group mentality (also known as dyadism) versus individual mentality.”³⁵¹ As such, the concept of communal living may have been more palatable in these early Christian societies.

Scripture reveals that the early Church practiced communal living as intimated in chapters 2 and 4 in the book of Acts. However, was this prescribed practice or was it an anomaly? This study will argue that communal living was prescribed Christian practice, demonstrated by the early Church in Acts and also found to be a practice promoted by Jesus himself. The methodological approach will be an exegetical review of the relevant scriptures in Acts and other NT scriptures and will also include scholarly views on the subject, as well as the applicability of the practice today. The first section will deal with the main scriptures of study from the book of Acts, with an exegetical analysis of communal living. This will be followed by other New Testament scriptures on generosity, while the third section will focus on possible applications today.³⁵²

Exegesis on Selected Passages in Acts

In this section, scripture pertaining to communal living found in Acts will be exegeted. This will be done in two subsections where the two selected passages will be studied separately but will also be viewed for synergistic threads. Preceding this exegesis will be a brief overview of the book of Acts.

In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck wrote, “By far the most popular view of the purpose of Acts is the one which states that it is a historical one. According to the approach, Luke’s goal was to record the spread of the gospel message from Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”³⁵³ This perspective truly reflects the book in the overall message that it communicates. This work of Luke is a sequel to a first work which we know as the

³⁵¹ Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits One Jesus* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 203.

³⁵² All scriptural references will be taken from the English Standard Version Bible unless otherwise stated. Additionally, the term Modern is used broadly to cover every period post the reformation.

³⁵³ John F. Walvoord, and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 1983), 350.

Gospel of Luke. Eckhard J. Schnabel, New Testament Theologian and Professor at Gordon-Conwell describes Luke's two volume work as such, "In the first volume, Luke writes about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In the second volume, he describes the growth of the Church and the expansion of Christian communities through the work of early missionaries, particularly Peter and Paul (Acts)."³⁵⁴

Walvoord expands this view with his own when he posited that, "Most recognize that Acts shows the universality of Christianity. Is this its primary purpose? The gospel goes to Samaritans, the Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius, Gentiles at Antioch, poor and wealthy, educated and uneducated, women and men, the high and lofty, as well as those in humble positions."³⁵⁵ The book chronicles the historical events of the early Church, but also showcases intentionally, yet subtly, God's plan of broadening the gospel's reach to the unreached people groups of the day.

The date of writing varies widely among scholars depending on the point of reference of study. Walvoord states, "The writing of Acts must have taken place before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70/"³⁵⁶ Whereas Joseph A. Fitzmyer writes, "The dating of Acts is controverted. The views of modern commentators fall generally into three categories: early, late, and intermediate dating."³⁵⁷ He posits that the early date runs between 61-63 AD, the late dating somewhere between 100-130 and lastly, the intermediate dating in the 80s AD. Eric Schnabel summarizes the date of writing in this way, "As regards the date of composition, most scholars assume that Luke wrote the book of Acts between AD 80-90."³⁵⁸ This second volume of Luke's work is very instructive and informative on the events surrounding the early Church, yet provides a plethora of historical information, guidance and examples to the modern Church.

The book of Acts begins with the author apprising his readers that this was a second publication to a literary work dedicated to one Theophilus. He narrates that the disciples were instructed to remain in town (Jerusalem) and await the promise which was the gift of the Holy Ghost. This sets the stage for the beginning of the Church. Everything

³⁵⁴ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Exegetical Commentary on The New Testament Acts* (ed. Clinton E. Arnold; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 26.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Walvoord, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 351

³⁵⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer. *The Acts of the Apostles New Testament Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 51.

³⁵⁸ Schnabel, *Exegetical Commentary*, 27.

that ensues henceforth feeds of this empowerment that the disciples received of the Father as promised by the Son Jesus. It is with this in the backdrop that the exegesis of the selected passages in Acts commences.

Exegesis on Communal Living in Acts 2:44-45

Luke describes an early Church which is astoundingly unified. Vs. 44 begins, “πάντες δὲ οἱ πιστεύοντες ἦσαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ καὶ εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινά,”³⁵⁹ The very first word *pantes* denotes unity even in its inflected form (plural) from its root *pas* meaning (all).³⁶⁰ The word conjures the idea of totality.³⁶¹ This is inclusive language expressing complete avoidance of the exclusion of anyone. All those who are of the same faith or those who believed in Jesus Christ were together. Again, Luke highlights unity in the word together. Interestingly, he immediately segues to communal living language with the phrase *kai eikon apanta koina*. The verb utilized (*eikon*) is 3rd person imperfect active indicative plural, which means, (“they” had) but not in the sense that it was a completed past time action, but an incomplete action. This is an action that was continuous, though in the past tense. This describes an ongoing action of having all things in common. The term common (*koina*) typifies what is shared by all. Eckhard gives two distinct possible interpretive applications of this statement,

Second, Luke explains that the unity of the believers expressed itself in practical ways: the believers shared their possessions. The statement “they had all things in common” (εἶχον ἅπαντα κοινά) can mean that the believers sold everything they owned and pooled the proceeds (as the Essenes required their members to do). Or it can mean that they remained owners of their property while being willing to use their possessions for the common good.³⁶²

³⁵⁹ *Greek New Testament* (retrieved 10/7/2023, <https://www.laparola.net/greco/index.php>).

³⁶⁰ William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar* (4th ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 496.

³⁶¹ Johannes P. Louw, Eugene A. Nida, “Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains” (2nd ed, 2 Vols, New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1989), 597.

³⁶² Eckhard, *Exegetical Commentary*, 181.

Eckhard's position is that the second option is congruous with what other verses such as 2:45 espouses. Additionally, chapters 4 and 5 lend credence to the second option. Vs. 45 indeed crystallizes what Eckhard posited as quoted. It reads, “καὶ τὰ κτήματα καὶ τὰς ὑπάρξεις ἐπίπρασκον καὶ διεμέριζον αὐτὰ πᾶσιν καθότι ἂν τις χρεῖαν εἶχεν.”³⁶³ The KJV renders this sentence as such, “And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.”³⁶⁴ As in the case of the translation of *kai eikon apanta* noted above, the translation of the verb *epipraskon* misses the verb's true meaning in its inflected form. KJV renders the action as a completed past action. In other words, “they sold” (end of story) their possessions or their property, a one-time event that never reoccurred. However, the verb is in its imperfect active indicative plural form with the augment epsilon (€) indicating past tense but denoting a continuous action. Simply, they “were selling” (continuous) as the ESV correctly puts it, as the needs would arise. Striking is the sacrificial nature of those who were of means. Although this verse does not tell us or give a sense of whether this was done out of obligation or voluntary in nature, it is certainly an admirable gesture to forego one's freedom to excess, and be willing to liquidate the very excess that distinguishes him/her from the poor and needy. Not only does this display magnanimity, but it also reflects a desire for common identity, thus shedding light on the unity motif that seems to bleed through these verses.

These continuous acts of generosity are the basis to the concept or in some opinions, to the ideal of communal living. There was a disbursing of the proceeds of the liquidated possessions to the vulnerable believers or more appropriately, those who were unable to sustain themselves. Paramount to the concept that Luke promulgates, is the distribution not of the assets, but of the proceeds derived from the sale of said assets, creating a community in unity of access. No one of lesser estate had opportunity through compulsion, to ingratiate those who were of means. Communal living was the great equalizer of access to sustenance. This ideal can be viewed as communistic by some, but in all honesty, Luke stymies any occasion of this thought process, since the emphasis was on sharing the proceeds and not the assets. Considering that the emphasis is on divestment of property, the following extrapolated summary extinguishes the communism concern. Luke refrains from highlighting an early Christian Community of Goods, rather, he focuses on the liquidation of assets to help the poor.

³⁶³ Greek New Testament. <https://www.laparola.net/greco/index.php>).

³⁶⁴ *The Holy Bible Authorized King James Version*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010).

Christians in Jerusalem did not share property but would sell property to help the materially poor. The community that Luke characterizes is not one that opposes the right to own private property, nor is he positing a world that repudiates the ideal of communism of love, but instead posits a logical principle regarding property where the needs of the poor are at the forefront.³⁶⁵ These two verses in Acts are not isolated incidences of communal living, but a practice that resurfaces in chapter 4 and also chapter 5 (which is not covered in this study). The next section will focus on chapter 4 where Luke reinserts this concept into his historical writing of the early Church.

Exegesis on Communal Living in Acts 4:32-37

This passage of scripture encapsulates the proposed exploration of synergistic threads previously mentioned. Eckhard notes, “The summary in 4:32-37 shares several elements with the summary in 2:42-47.”³⁶⁶ The exegesis will show common threads in Luke’s second communal living mention. However, due to the depth or expansive nature of this passage, and the limitations of this study, certain key words will be extracted while ensuring illocutionary integrity. Primarily, one can easily identify the unity motif in 4:32 previously seen in 2:44-45. It must be established that the underlying tone here from Luke is that unity is the backbone or the active ingredient in communal living. In verse 32 Luke begins, “Τοῦ δὲ πλήθους τῶν πιστευσάντων ἦν καρδία καὶ ψυχὴ μία,”³⁶⁷ that could be rendered, “The multitude of those who believed were of ONE (*mia*) soul (*(psuchē)*) and heart (*kardia*).” This unity permeates every fabric of the community. Unity emanated from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as they united in faith and fellowship. The author continues to bring the communal thrust home in the second part of the sentence with “καὶ οὐδὲ εἷς τι τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῷ ἔλεγεν ἴδιον εἶναι, ἀλλ’ ἦν αὐτοῖς πάντα κοινά.”³⁶⁸ Luke writes “No one said (*elgen*-he/she/it said) that any of the things that he had was his own, but they had everything in common.”³⁶⁹ This is such a vivid reminder of the complexities of my childhood experience. It is evident that Luke is deliberately making this point of emphasis. The great grace of God (4:33) was upon all as they testified about the Lord’s resurrection. It is interesting that immediately

³⁶⁵ Eckhard, 182.

³⁶⁶ Eckhard, 267.

³⁶⁷ *Greek New Testament*.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁹ *ESV, The Holy Bible*.

after Luke's mention of this grace that he injects in vs 34 that "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."³⁷⁰

This verse is instructive as to the atmosphere that existed among the brethren. It was one of unity and the expression of God's love through communal living. This practice was not in isolation but one that echoes throughout the New Testament. Jesus and his disciples lived communally as we will see in the next section.

Jesus and Communal Living

Jesus' environment was socially stratified with clear distinctions between the affluent and the poor. According to J. Daniel Hays, "In the first-century AD Palestine, the term "poor" probably referred to the vast majority of the population."³⁷¹ In an environment where poverty was seemingly ubiquitous, Jesus' ministry reflected concern for this vulnerable group. The teachings of Jesus will now be scrutinized to show his emphasis on communal living as normative for the disciples' lifestyle.

In the early stages of Jesus' ministry, he called 12 men to be his disciples, all emanating from diverse backgrounds, and which included fishermen and a tax collector. As articulated in scripture, they left everything or all (πάντα),³⁷² behind to follow Jesus as intimated in Luke 5:11. Consequently, their usual means of providing for themselves became non-existent. Jesus ostensibly became their source of provision. Interestingly, Jesus himself left his own riches in heaven to be incarnated as human to save all of humanity. Evidently, this forsaking of all to forge a new community was very pervasive from its inception.

Obviously, communal provision was an essential component for this small new community as they mobilized to fulfill the mission. Jesus' communal living with his disciples involved the existence of a "money bag" with Judas Iscariot as the custodian and treasurer, as revealed in John 12:6 and 13:29. This was presumably used to care for their daily needs and evidently replenished by the contributions of the

³⁷⁰ ESV.

³⁷¹ J. Daniel Hays, "Sell Everything you have and give to the Poor: The OT Prophetic Theme of Justice as the Connecting Motif of Luke 18:1-19:10." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55:1 (Mar 2012), 49.

³⁷² Eugene Johannes, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 567.

likes of Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Suzanna (Luke 8:2-3). Therefore, the money bag served as a single and central money pot where all contributions from the faithful would be kept for the sustenance of the disciples, and maybe others. This clearly displays communal living. In the next paragraph we will examine an infamous encounter that Jesus had with the rich young ruler.

From the moment he announced his ministry, Jesus made it a point of duty to express his concern for the poor. In their commentary on the encounter, John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck wrote, “This event probably took place as Jesus was leaving the house somewhere in Perea.”³⁷³ Jesus was on his way to a new journey and was asked by the young man “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17-22). Jesus gave a list of commandments that he should first keep, but the rich young ruler was supposedly a devout Jew who religiously met these requirements. Strategically, Jesus injected the burden of the poor into the equation. The young ruler was asked to liquidate all his assets and give the proceeds to the poor. Again, we see a synergistic thread to Acts’ communal living. If this was extremely difficult for this wealthy young man to receive, how much more for westerners with individualistic mindsets. In an article published in *Trinity Journal*, Joseph H. Hellerman wrote, “Western scholars almost invariably read Jesus’ troubling command to the RYR through the distorted lens of western individualism.”³⁷⁴ Positing that Jesus’ imperative to the young man was just limited to him, and not the wider society misses the point.³⁷⁵ The western mind would surely narrow the command to just the young man. However, the ancient Near East societies were not individualistic in their family structures. Hellerman postulated, “In the collectivist society of Mediterranean antiquity, individuals were viewed as representing the groups to which they belonged. Those listening to Jesus’ dialogue with a rich man (singular) would immediately interpret his comments in terms of a class of people (plural) – the rich.”³⁷⁶ This encounter makes a strong case for the communal living motif that Jesus espoused, lived, and taught.

Indubitably, Jesus embodied communal living and as such lived communally with his disciples. This practice was embraced after

³⁷³ Walvoord, and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament*, 150.

³⁷⁴ Joseph H. Hellerman, “Wealth and Sacrifice in Early Christianity: Revisiting Mark’s Presentation of Jesus’ Encounter with the Rich Young Ruler,” *Trinity Journal* 21:2 (2009): 145.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 145-146.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 146.

the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts as intimated previously. Consequently, it is not idealistic to conclude that communalism was prescribed practice. As demonstrated in this paper, the communal experience in Acts was not an anomaly but rather one promulgated by Jesus himself. It is important to note that communalism was not carried out in the same way or influenced by the same unity and zeal as portrayed in the early segments of Acts. Nevertheless, as the examples in this study reveal, communal living was prescribed practice. Consequently, how then do we apply this concept in today's church?

Application

Luke was not an idealist or some quack who envisioned some utopic society. Whether implicitly or explicitly, he represented accurately God's original intent on communalism as we will now see through a summary as supporting evidence.

In the garden of Eden, God provided everything necessary for the sustenance of Adam and Eve. They lived communally with God as their source (Gen 2:8-24). This was disrupted by sinfulness as provoked by the serpent (Gen 3:1-7). Consequently, the planned incarnation of the Messiah brought about a new version of communalism, if you will. Jesus espoused the concept and thus lived communally with his disciples as previously intimated. Additionally, he instructed his disciples after his resurrection to be in one place and to await the promise. The promise came and they were energized and empowered to live communally as Acts chapters 2 and 4 reveal. Although some semblance of communalism was practiced throughout the rest of the NT, the format was considerably altered in an almost unrecognizable fashion. Admittedly, slivers of the concept through acts of generosity can be found throughout the NT like Paul's collection for the Jerusalem church (Acts 11:27-30). It is important to inject at this juncture that in the eschaton communalism will be the order of the day. The kingdom of God is all about communalism. No individualistic ideologies or concepts will be allowed. Neither will anyone own property. Once again, we will live communally with each other with our God as our provider.

Eschatological communalism will be our eternal experience. Since this natural life is eternal preparation and practice, it behooves the Church in this modern society to live communally. It may not be realistic in some sense to expect every believer to liquidate their material possessions, but concern and care for the vulnerable among us must be urgently addressed. Instead of leaders of local churches

fleeing the flock to enrich themselves, or to pursue the construction of behemoth templelike structures, the resources collected can be reallocated to meet the needs of the poor in these congregations. The following programs would undoubtedly showcase communalism in a real way. They include the implementation of housing programs, feeding programs, financial education, mentorship, leadership training, and voluntarism projects. For example, skilled church members could come together to help the vulnerable with their car and home repairs, thereby ensuring that care and concern for the vulnerable and poor are a liturgical refrain that “no more will the poor be forgotten or sidelined in the church.” These types of communal initiatives are only possible with the unification of the local body and the concept can be developed to even include the wider Church family.

Unity in the Church has been and therefore should be the impetus to the modern practice of communalism in the various forms and programs prescribed above. Eckhard posits, “The unity of a local church is real only when it is visible. “The Church” is not just a concept but the specific reality of individual believers meeting and worshipping together in a local congregation. In like manner, its unity is not just a theological idea but the concrete reality of believers living and serving each other.”³⁷⁷ Unity breeds care and concern for each other which ultimately leads to concrete action that brings about the visibility that Eckhart articulates. Unity should not only be the focus of the local church, but the common faith shared among us in differing denominations should draw us closer in ways that are tangibly beneficial to the vulnerable among us. Cross denominational programs are not farfetched idealistic concepts. They are possible if resources, minds, and hearts are focused on the needs of the vulnerable instead of focusing on strategies of doctrinal differentiation that further divide. Pooling of resources across denominational lines can have greater impact on our communities than individual congregations attempting to resolve community issues on their own.

Conclusion

Communal living in Acts was not an anomalous event. Though not practiced in the same format throughout the rest of the accounts in the NT literature, it is undeniable that remnants of the practice remained post Acts. Jesus, as the standard bearer as revealed in the Acts of the Apostles, embodied communalism in his care, concern, and

³⁷⁷ Eckhard, 274.

way of life with his disciples. He promoted unity and this unity was the impetus for communalism in the early Church as believers were empowered by the gift of the Holy Ghost. Communal living today may not necessarily have to mirror the way of life in Acts, but the Church can develop ways and use innovative programs such as those suggested above, to follow the example of Christ and the early Church. These programs can certainly help meet the needs of the vulnerable and poor among us. In this way, we can emulate the unity that the early Church displayed which incentivized and motivated them, as led by the Spirit, to act in the ways intimated in Acts. Communal living is prescribed practice and will be our way of life in our eternal home.

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Monkhood of All Believers: The Monastic Foundation of Christian Spirituality

By Greg Peters

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic

2018, 224 pp., paperback \$24.99.

Reviewed by Kevin D. Clarke

Greg Peters is a Benedictine oblate who is the author of several books that reflect his monastic scholarship, including *Reforming the Monastery: Protestant Theologies of the Religious Life* (2013) and *The Story of Monasticism: Retrieving an Ancient Tradition for Contemporary Spirituality* (2015). In his more recent book entitled *The Monkhood of All Believers: The Monastic Foundation of Christian Spirituality*, Peters argues that monasticism is essential and pertinent to all Christians. Although not every Christian is an institutionalized monk, all believers are monks because they have been called to interiorized monasticism.

Peters starts by introducing the importance of monasticism to every believer, then provides “a highly selective historical overview of Christian monasticism” (2) throughout the rest of the book. In the first part, he comprehensively defines monasticism to demonstrate that a monk is single-minded in being in union with God. He then examines monastic history as he further contends that one does not have to engage in institutional monasticism to be a monk since a believer who interiorly seeks God single-mindedly can also be ascetic. He concludes the section by discussing interiorized monasticism as a life of faithful devotion to God in keeping with one’s baptismal vows. In the second part of the book, Peters describes ascetism as a part of the “remedy for humankind’s sinfulness” (106) and a practice for all Christians to engage in. The ascetic life is embedded in the priesthood of all believers which is grounded in scripture and shared by both Catholics and Protestants. In his last section, the author defends why monasticism is for all Christians, then discusses the vocation of monastic living.

Peters mainly uses two theologians, Paul Evdokimov and Raimon Panikkar, to support his argument of interiorized monasticism. Evdokimov is from the Eastern Orthodox tradition while Panikkar did extensive studies in non-Christian religions. Both Evdokimov and Panikkar are geared towards a theology of a “nontraditional, noninstitutionalized form of monasticism” that showcase that “all human beings have something in common that manifests itself in a

monastic lifestyle” (80). To further substantiate his thesis, Peters also included research from Martin Luther, a former Roman Catholic monk, who argued that monastic vows were in violation of the gospel and ultimately resulted in two classes of Christian disciples (84). The gospel is meant to unify all believers, therefore, interiorized monasticism based on one’s baptismal vows is the stable foundation upon which monastic living should be based.

Peters does well to provide adequate historical support for his overall claim for the monastic lifestyle of all Christians. He includes relevant research from Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant sources to demonstrate that monasticism is present across all Christian traditions. He also includes biblical references from the book of Acts to show the practices of the earliest Christians. Although Peters’ research was thoroughly done, the basis for his assertion for the monkhood of all believers primarily rests on the two theologians, Evdokimov and Panikkar, who supported his claim. A wider selection of monastic interlocutors that included dissenting voices could have added more depth to his argument. Furthermore, Peters could have included more biblical exegesis to support his monastic foundation of Christian spirituality.

The Monkhood of All Believers is a useful book that challenges the reader to reimagine monasticism as a fundamental part of Christian spirituality. It reexamines an aspect of spiritual formation that has long been limited to institutional and external forms of monastic living and proposes a theology of monasticism that is a necessary part of the Church and daily Christian practices. It is therefore relevant to all Christians who desire to live with an interiorized single-minded devotion to God.

Can a Sistah Get a Little Help? Encouragement for Black Women in Ministry.

By Teresa L. Fry Brown

Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press

2008, 176 pp., paperback \$19.95, Kindle \$8.49

Reviewed by Melvin Lee Montgomery, Jr.

The Rev. Dr. Teresa L. Fry Brown, Ph.D., is the Bandy Professor of Preaching at Candler School of Theology Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. She became the first African American woman to attain the rank of full professor. She is the author of several books, including *Delivering the Sermon: Voice, Body, and Animation in Proclamation* (2008), *Weary Throats and New Songs: Black Women*

Proclaiming God's Word (2003), *God Don't Like Ugly: African American Women Handing on Spiritual Value* (2000), and several publications such as "Prophetic Truth Telling in a Time of Fatigue and Fragmentation," in *Questions Preachers Ask* (2016) and "Reestablishing the Purpose and Power of the Preached Word through Black Church Studies," *The Black Church Studies Reader* (2016).

In *Can a Sistah Get a Little Help? Encouragement for Black Women in Ministry*, Brown provides an insightful assessment of the unique challenges black women face in ministry. She draws from her experiences as a black woman in ministry, a professor of homiletics, and as former Director of Black Church Studies at Emory University. She offers a compassionate analysis of the numerous obstacles that black women face within the black church as it relates to ministry and leadership. The book is structured around seven themes taken from letters she has written with topics such as: "I Think I'm Going Out of My Head," "Hormonal Shift," "Stumbling Blocks and Safety Nets," and "Carving Out Your Own Space." Brown draws from her journey of ups and downs and bitters and sweets of ministry to encourage women called to ministry within the black church.

Finally, Brown gives some examples of black women in ministry throughout the history of African American preaching who have overcome many obstacles in ministry and gone on to have successful and impactful careers. She references Elizabeth, the first recorded African American woman preacher who was born into slavery and did not preach her first sermon until she was 42 and preached until she was 90. Brown is candid about the many challenges black women in ministry face, from sexism to financial insecurity. She talks about the importance of black women forming networks of support from peers and mentors in ministry. She encourages her readers to foster resilience and to stay focused on their calling, even in the face of setbacks and disappointment. She writes, "Within the enslaved community, the black preacher emerged as the central figure, who inspired and gave hope."

Brown handles important and problematic areas of women in ministry within the black church experience and gives them skills to achieve self-worth and self-confidence. I recommend this book to black women in ministry and anyone interested in issues of race, gender, and spirituality. In addition, this book should be read by anyone looking to understand the unique challenges and opportunities of the ministry as a black woman within the African American church.

Not Done Yet: Reaching and Keeping Unchurched Emerging Adults

By Beth Seversen

Downers Grove, IL: IVP

2020, 248 pp., paperback \$20, Kindle \$14.99.

Reviewed by Anna M. Droll

Containing data gathered from participants from “bright-spot” American churches, Beth Seversen’s book is worth reading for several reasons. Foremost, it is an important text because the American church is in desperate need of acquaintance with these churches experiencing success in attracting and discipling unchurched, young adults. Therefore, it serves as a handbook directed toward church leadership, who, aware of the call to develop pathways toward receiving unchurched emerging adults into their church communities, need guidance. Yet, Seversen’s book has a farther reach because it expounds on principles that can be adopted as best practices for reaching any population. For example, people who envision establishing an outreach in their neighborhood or within an adult senior community will find Seversen’s description of the “compelling community” (ch. 6) helpful. In addition, this volume is a stimulating read for educators. It raises awareness about the reality many educators in Bible colleges and seminaries encounter today, that is, professors find themselves key mentors to young adults who embark on a biblical education with little understanding of Christian discipleship. Yet, students are drawn to a faith community where *belonging first* is particularly attractive and, as Seversen points out, this is itself a principle that facilitates the journey to knowing the Christ of the Scriptures (ch. 11).

According to Seversen, imitating “bright-spot” churches requires a change in mindset in respect to ideas about inclusion. In fact, the art of welcoming the unchurched involves not just the crucial invitation to belong, but the invitation to also contribute to the life of the congregation. The change of paradigm requires that evangelism itself be revived as a biblical priority and then embedded creatively into “as many ministry areas as possible” (123). Leading a culture change within the church is paramount and requires embracing the concept of evangelism “inside the church box” (173) rather than outside church walls. While pastors and mentors walk with young adults “toward commitment” (27), negative stereotypes about church and its members are eliminated. Moreover, lest a posture of inclusion portray churches that veer from the traditional stance toward human sexuality, bright-spot churches promote conservative biblical teachings while also

retaining young adults on the trajectory toward understanding Christian commitment. Interviews revealed that emerging adults rooted in such church cultures navigated biblical learning “with no hint of dissatisfaction or plans to disaffiliate with their churches over these questions” (200). In conclusion, this book merits use in various settings.