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ABSTRACT

APOLOGETIC-BASED CURRICULUM ADDRESSING
INTELLECTUAL SKEPTICISM AMONG YOUNG
ADULTS IN KNOXVILLE, TENNESSEE
AND THE SURROUNDING AREAS

by

Bryan Laue

Adviser: Gaspar Colón

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Professional Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: APOLOGETIC-BASED CURRICULUM ADDRESSING INTELLECTUAL
SKEPTICISM AMONG YOUNG ADULTS IN KNOXVILLE,
TENNESSEE AND THE SURROUNDING AREAS

Name of researcher: Bryan Laue

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Date completed: May 2022

Problem

In the Knoxville community, young adults who lack biblical knowledge and confidence struggle to accept question and answer Bible study guides without additional intellectual support. This struggle by young adults is attributed to a lack of knowledge and trust in the Bible as the Word of God. In addition, I have observed that when young adults read the Bible, it evokes feelings of alienation and distance from the spiritual conversation when underlying doubt in the Bible is present. One contributing factor is the lack of extra-biblical apologetics within question and answer study guides.

Method

An apologetic-based curriculum was designed and introduced to groups of participants in Knoxville, Tennessee, and the surrounding areas in the Fall of 2020. Ten young adults with doubts and skepticism about the Bible went through four written lessons to help them grow in their confidence in the Bible and its teachings. Data was evaluated using a quantitative pre and post-intervention study and qualitatively with a post-intervention group interview.

Results

The study revealed that an apologetic-based study using sources outside the Bible to address questions and skepticism about the Bible was positively received. In addition, learners developed a greater understanding of their own beliefs and the views of others. The study provided a process for learners to challenge and evaluate their foundational beliefs to accept the Bible. The lessons addressed the questions and skepticism of some, and for others, it re-affirmed their beliefs. Overall, there was an increased trust in the reliability of the Bible and a greater openness to studying it.

Conclusions

Based on the pre and post-intervention surveys and the group interview, the apologetic-based studies did appear to positively influence learners' trust in the Bible and willingness to study it. In addition, the study also catalyzed deeper conversations about views and beliefs with participants' families and friends. Consequently, further exploration of apologetic-based curricula as a tool to aid young adults in faith development is merited and recommended.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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A professional dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Ministry

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April, Thank you for your constant encouragement and support.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Description of the Ministry Context

The project took place in Knoxville, Tennessee, and the surrounding area. Knoxville, Tennessee, had a population of 184,465 in 2017, an increase of 0.293% since 2016. The median household income is \$36,331 per year, 29% below the Tennessee median income of \$50,972. The demographic make-up of the community is 71.5% Caucasian, 17.3% African American, 5.58% Hispanic, and the remaining 5.62% represents various ethnic groups. Regarding educational attainment, 31% of the population have a bachelor's degree or higher, 28.7% have some college or an associate degree, 28.4% have a high school diploma or GED, 10.8% have less than a high school diploma, and only 1% have no schooling (Towncharts Knoxville, 2020).

Individuals claiming to be Evangelical Protestant make up 42.5% of the population. Those claiming no religious affiliation are 37.1%, Mainline Protestant 11.9%, and Catholic are 5.1% of the population (Knoxville, Tennessee, n.d.). Senior citizens find this area a great place to retire with many social activities and varied dining options. In addition, there are many employment opportunities for young adults in the service and hospitality industry. The University of Tennessee in Knoxville provides undergraduate

and graduate studies resources. The membership demographics are about 85% Caucasian and 15% various minority groups.

The Smoky Mountain Seventh-day Adventist Church has a membership of 119, with an average attendance of 65 per week. A core group of about 18 people was involved in various ministries throughout the church. The two predominant groups in the church are senior citizens and young adults. There are weekly prayer meetings with about thirty in weekly attendance. Senior citizens make up most of those who attend the weekly prayer meetings. Most of the young adults in the church grew up in the local church. Some of the young adults are active in the weekly responsibilities of the church, but others only attend on a regular to semi-regular basis.

In February 2020, my family and I began our pastorate at the Smoky Mountain Seventh-day Adventist Church as part of a two-church district. The year 2020 was when Covid-19 started to impact both the social and general health in North America. These events led to a reluctance on the part of individuals to participate in a study that involved groups. Because of this impediment, groups in the study were limited to two learners or done through an online platform.

Statement of the Problem

In the Knoxville community, young adults who lack biblical knowledge and confidence struggle to accept the question and answer Bible study guides without additional intellectual support (Towncharts Knoxville, 2020). Barna Group found that more than six in ten non-Christian Millennials have never read the Bible (Millennials and the Bible: 3 Surprising Insights, 2014). I have observed that when young adults read the Bible, it evokes feelings of alienation and distance from the spiritual conversation when

underlying doubt in the Bible is present. One contributing factor to this is the lack of supporting evidence from outside the Bible within the question and answer bible study guides. Supporting this view, Smith, and Denton (2005) found that nearly one-third of Christian students leave the church because of intellectual skepticism and doubt.

Statement of the Task

The task of this project was to develop, implement, and evaluate an apologetic-based curriculum to introduce biblical concepts to young adults and address intellectual skepticism. In addition, the task of this project was to determine and assess the impact of the curriculum based on increased acceptance and intellectual confidence in the Bible.

Justification for the Project

Young adult ministry in North America has experienced many challenges and hurdles in the 21st century. Postmodernism, with its deconstructionism, absence of moral absolutes, and relativity of truth, has brought difficulties that have challenged believers and shaken the faith of many, states one study (Dyck, 2010). Deconstructionism is becoming more and more common among young adults brought up in a church setting. The relativity of truth is a real struggle for people in this generation. An individual's specific belief is perceived as an opinion based on personal experience. Lennox (2011) shares that since 2005, atheism stepped up its efforts to attack belief in God and belief itself. New atheism has become proactive in evangelism and reaching out like never before. This change in approach is significant from the past when atheists were content to disagree but not actively change a believer's mind. Barna Group (2015 Sees Sharp Rise in Post-Christian Population, 2015) research shows the impact of these developments has dramatically increased in the number of post-Christians in the North American

population. This research is essential as spiritual leaders plan to increase belief in the Bible and share its teachings. Spiritual leaders and teachers need to take note of the cultural changes that are happening in North America and adjust their approaches to ways that are more conducive to reaching the generation. Gilson (2013a) states that the cultural shift is about nominal Christianity no longer being tolerated than a sizeable spiritual change. Many young adults are still spiritual, but they are not buying into a Christianity reduced to a worship service once a week (Idleman, 2012; Powell, 2016). Young adults need to be part of a Christian community that loves and cares about them and involves them in meaningful ways. Smith and Denton (2005) state that Americans, in general, have become more skeptical of the Bible, and youth who have left the church mention intellectual skepticism as one of the main rationales for leaving the church.

Delimitations of the Project

This project was limited to young adults living in Knoxville, Tennessee, and the surrounding areas between the ages of 18 to 35 who were not currently attending any church and had skepticism concerning the Bible.

Description of the Project Process

This project examined three topics regarding Scripture: doubt and uncertainty, intellectual adaptation, and apologetics to develop a theological basis for an apologetic-based curriculum. Researching these topics helped the facilitator to discover and better understand young adult faith development, curriculum development, and apologetic responses to intellectual skepticism. With this knowledge, an apologetic-based curriculum was adapted from the 4MAT model and developed to introduce biblical concepts to young adults and address intellectual skepticism. The first step was to study

and evaluate the biblical stance concerning doubt and skepticism, including apologetics in Scripture. Throughout the Bible, God communicated with people where they were: cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually. God understands that people are all at different places when communicating personally with them. Therefore, throughout the Bible, readers can see how God communicated his will and ways to people in a way they could understand and move forward in their relationship with him.

Intellectual adaptation was incorporated when addressing the questions and concerns from diverse multigenerational, cultural, or cognitive backgrounds. Believers were to give a reasoned defense of what they believed to anyone who asked and to do it with kindness and respect. Jesus never intended people to follow him absent-mindedly. Mark 12:30 says, “And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment.” In this scripture, Jesus reminds his audience that following him is not an emotional journey when the mind and thoughts are ignored. He wanted his followers to use their minds and give reasons for believing in and following Jesus. Jesus engaged in apologetics, using his miracles and prophecy as evidence. Jesus also used the Old Testament scriptures as a reference to establish faith in him and his words. He would often refer to the words of the Old Testament and then expand and teach based on that accepted belief. Jesus met people at the place of belief and then gradually led them deeper in their knowledge of him and their heavenly father. He adjusted his teaching approach to the people he was ministering to, and the disciples of Jesus followed his example as they traveled around teaching about Jesus. One of the most notable examples is seen in the ministry of Paul as he traveled and talked to the Greeks about God.

Defending ones' faith and answering the questions of others through objective evidence is part of the process of faith development. The apostle Paul also counseled in Romans 12:2, "And do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

Second, current literature was reviewed, specifically for understanding and addressing the relevant questions of young adults. Society, in 2021, is both a relativistic and postmodern world. Apologetics is a valuable tool to help answer the questions of the 21st century and build confidence in a theistic worldview. In his book, *A Reasonable Response*, Craig (2013) shares that people deserve to have substantive answers to life's questions. McDowell (2006) points out that young adults in the 21st century are contending with more ethical and moral temptations, along with more intense emotional and relational struggles than any other generation in history. This generation needs tools to help them address the growing challenges and struggles they face. It must be done with gentleness and respect (S. McDowell, 2009). Apologetic conversations need to look more like diplomacy than a battlefield—authentic relationships with Christians living grace-filled lives of authenticity.

Third, studied and evaluated curriculum formation, including experiential and inquiry-based learning. The 4MAT approach was beneficial for helping young adults better understand and learn new ideas. It is based on research from various fields but mainly considers distinct learning styles and the use of the left and right hemispheres of the brain. While different learners have preferences in learning, using this approach helps the learner broaden and expand their learning capabilities (McCarthy, 2012). This

approach follows the brain's learning pattern and has been used for all types of millennial learners.

Fourth, surveyed and interviewed young adults with doubt and intellectual questions about God and the Bible. Lastly, developed or adapted a curriculum that uses apologetics to address queries and intellectual skepticism among young adults. Evaluation of curriculum effectiveness was established by comparing the before and after qualitative growth of the young adults through an assessment of the learning outcomes for the model and corresponding curriculum, measuring biblical knowledge and attitudinal shift including, but not limited to, confidence in the Bible. The curriculum involved ten young adults in Knoxville, Tennessee, and the surrounding areas during one year.

Expectations of the Project

This project increased my effectiveness and knowledge as a leader to better engage in spiritual discussions with those who doubt the Bible. It also helped address any awkwardness that may happen due to questions and doubt. This project helped me understand why more young adults have a higher degree of skepticism regarding the Bible and its trustworthiness. The secular society of the 21st century often dismisses the Bible, asserting that it is packed with myths, contradictions, and scientific inaccuracies (Halverson, 1996). That is why objective, verifiable evidence needed to be presented to address these assertions and encourage skeptics to face their doubts. It was also imperative that discussion and interactions be kind and respectful of each person who participated. Effective persuasion requires more than having the right answers; it means being diplomatic in all interactions (Koukl, 2019). Finally, this project also helped me

develop a tool to help other spiritual leaders and members better understand the thought processes and engage with skeptics with a non-confrontational methodology. It was crucial to assist those with doubts about the Bible to examine the Bible as they would any other historical document and see that it is a book that can be believed in and trusted (Boyd, 2008). It was also helpful to do this in the context of learning and exploration of beliefs rather than a dictatorial approach. This project assisted in providing resources to the local Seventh-day Adventist churches as they minister to the young adults in Knoxville, Tennessee, and surrounding areas. Through this project, the young adults that participated had a better understanding of their own beliefs and continue to grow in their belief and knowledge of the Bible as the word of God. Also, through relationships, the learners in the study have greater trust and curiosity toward organized religion after having a positive experience. This project also provided methods and tools to help churches in the North American Division engage with young adults who struggle with intellectual skepticism regarding the Bible.

Outline of Project

Chapter 1 sets the description of the ministry context, the statement of the problem, the statement of the task, the delimitations of the project, and the description of the project process.

Chapter 2 lays the theological groundwork to understand doubt and uncertainty in the Bible. It also looks to understand better the reason and use of intellectual adaptation and apologetics in the Bible.

Chapter 3 focuses on literature in apologetics, stages of faith development, and curriculum development within the last ten years.

Chapter 4 describes the initiative, including the development, the intervention context, the current approach, the current need for an apologetic method.

Chapter 5 suggests that using an apologetic-based curriculum is an essential tool when discussing the Bible's trustworthiness with skeptics.

Chapter 6 shares the study results and things learned through apologetic-based curriculum development. It also included some recommendations.

Definition of Terms

Apologetics: (a) systematic argumentative discourse in defense of a doctrine. (b) a branch of theology devoted to the defense of the divine origin and authority of Christianity (Merriam-Webster.com, n.d.)

Millennials: People born between 1984 and 1998 ("Glossary of Barna's Theographics & Demographics").

Skepticism: (a) an attitude of doubt or a disposition to incredulity either in general or toward a particular object. (b) i. the doctrine that true knowledge or knowledge in a particular area is uncertain. ii. the method of suspended judgment, systematic doubt, or criticism characteristic of skeptics (c) doubt concerning basic religious principles (Merriam-Webster.com dictionary, n.d.).

4MAT: Bernice McCarthy originally developed the model in 1980. It is based on research from many fields but mainly a synthesis of findings from learning styles and right and left brain dominance (McCarthy, 2012).

Variant: is any place among the New Testament manuscripts where there is not uniformity of wording (Morrow, 2014).

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

Introduction

Faced with intellectual skepticism about the Bible and its teachings, countless youth and young adults in North America have been told to believe and not question. Furthermore, they are instructed to trust ministers, churches, and organizations without the corresponding evidence to answer their questions and concerns. The results have been devastating, leading to an increase of intellectual skepticism and a breakdown in the process of faith development (Nones on the Rise, 2012).

Openness to question and doubt is one of the most crucial needs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America (Kijai, 1993). Along with this, the church needs to meet people where they are and lead them through a faith-development process. God demonstrates his willingness to answer questions and work with those struggling with doubt throughout the Bible. The Bible says, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isa 1:18¹). God meets people where they are in their faith development and invites them into a conversation, using objective evidence

¹ The Bible verses are from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

and reason to help them move from questions and doubt into an ever-deepening faith relationship.

The purpose of the theological reflection in this chapter is to develop a biblical understanding of how God deals with questions and doubts in the process of faith development. This chapter is reflective of God's engagement through the Bible. It engages with the role of doubt and uncertainty, intellectual adaptation, and apologetics.

Doubt and Uncertainty

At some point, almost everyone has had uncertainty about their faith. As a result, there is doubt about God, the Bible, and the critical basics of Christianity. The Bible contains many stories of people who struggled with the human condition of doubt. Leaders of Faith such as Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Gideon, and others experienced doubt (Gen 17:15-21; Exod 4:10; 1 Kgs 19:2-3; Judg 6:13). Even one of Jesus' disciples, Thomas doubted Jesus' resurrection; he said, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" (John 20:25).

Furthermore, even Jesus hanging on the cross cried out, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt 27:46). Jesus is quoting Psalm 22, where the Psalmist expresses feelings of rejection and brings these uncertainties before God. These passages, and others like them, affirm the idea that God does allow people to bring their uncertainties and doubt to him.

There is a difference between unbelief and doubt. One well-known author said this about doubt, "Christ distinguished between doubt and unbelief. Doubt says, 'I cannot believe.' Unbelief says, 'I will not believe.' Doubt is honest. Unbelief is Defiant" (Blanks,

2018). Unbelief is a deliberate choice not to believe in God or have faith. However, that is not what doubt is. *Webster's dictionary* defines doubt as a feeling of uncertainty or lack of conviction. There is a difference between the open-minded uncertainty of doubt and the closed-minded certainty of unbelief. Paul and Silas preached the gospel to the Berean Jews in the book of Acts, yet these Bereans were not content to listen and believe but showed signs of uncertainty until they had searched things out for themselves. The book of Acts says it this way, "Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11). The Bereans' insistent query, in the end, led to a positive outcome, "As a result, many of them believed, as also did a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men" (Acts 17:12). This scripture is an example of the open-minded uncertainty of doubt. The Bereans were open to what Paul and Silas had to say, but they were uncertain about their beliefs until they examined things for themselves. Paul also told the Thessalonians, "Test all things; hold fast what is good" (1 Thess 5:21). Speaking to the Colossians, Paul warned, "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col 2:8). It was essential to be open to moving from doubt or uncertainty to belief. The Bereans did not dwell on their uncertainty, and they went looking for answers and validation. It is important not to dwell on doubts without searching for answers, for lingering may lead to unbelief. Veale (2013) points out that doubt is not something to hide or conceal but often can be a juncture for a deeper understanding and maturity. Through the resolution of doubts, individuals learn why they can trust the Bible and often

gain a profound appreciation of God. Guinness (1976) shared an insightful view of doubt. He said that if we have examined what we believe, the idea of doubt should not make us concerned. If the doubt is substantiated, then it has helped us in our pursuit of truth. On the other hand, doubt addressed strengthens our belief through the process.

In the Bible, the people who experience doubt often come from two groups. Some are honest seekers to know and follow God, and some doubted not wanting to face their sin and rebellion. For example, John the Baptist was a sincere follower and messenger of God sent to prepare the way for the Messiah. Jesus, speaking of John, said, "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist" (Matt 11:11). Nevertheless, while enduring hardship in prison and wondering about the Messiah's role, he sent this message to Jesus, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" (Luke 7:19). This scripture expresses doubt or uncertainty about Jesus' role as the Messiah. However, John did not wallow in his doubts or take them to the Pharisees, who would not have hesitated to add to and possibly deepened his uncertainty, but he took them directly to Jesus. When presented with John's uncertainty, Jesus did not rebuke John for doubting. Instead, Jesus provided evidence, complimented him, and encouraged him, all while fully aware that John was struggling with doubt (Luke 7:21-22). The other doubters represented by the Pharisees and law teachers held tightly to their doubts, not wanting to address their sin and rebellion. They did not come to Jesus because they had honest doubts; they were scoffers, there to mock and attack the work of Jesus. Of these two groups, those who had real doubts and uncertainties received the evidence and encouragement that they needed that strengthened and affirmed their faith. On the other side, the group represented by the Pharisees and law teachers dwelt

upon their doubts and uncertainties while maintaining their preconceived views and understanding of the role of the Messiah.

Those arguing against engaging with or talking about the reality of uncertainty or doubt in the process of faith development often use one of the following scriptures to defend their platform. An often-quoted text found in the book of James says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind" (Jas 1:5-6). Commenting on this passage, the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Nichol, 1978) states that the doubting mentioned here is not referencing intellectual doubts or uncertainties but spiritual instability regarding whether or not God will hear and answer the request. It speaks of stopping, dwelling on doubt, in a place between belief and unbelief. The promise is that God has wisdom, which is knowledge along with understanding, and will share it generously without condemning. We learn and ask different questions that stimulate new thinking methods by asking questions and receiving answers. In response, this leads to following new paths not previously followed or understood. This text does not speak against intellectual doubts or uncertainties that come with faith development but promises that God knows and understands that he wants seekers to have.

The interaction between Jesus and Thomas after Jesus' resurrection is another place in scripture often used to say there is no place for doubt or uncertainty regarding faith development. Jesus' words to Thomas recorded in the gospel of John say, "Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into

my side. Stop doubting and believe'" (John 20:27 NIV). Jesus confronts Thomas' doubts and uncertainties in regards to Jesus' resurrection with objective evidence and proof of his resurrection. Jesus then urges Thomas not to dwell with his uncertainties but move from unbelieving to believing. Jesus does not condemn him for his apprehensions but encourages him to continue his faith development.

The book of Habakkuk has compelling insights into how God has handled doubt and uncertainty in the process of faith development. First, the prophet Habakkuk struggled to understand the justice of God in an unjust world (1:1-14). Then God shared that he would use the Chaldeans to punish Judah for their wickedness (1:5-11), but the prophet countered with a series of complaints and doubt (1:12-17). Finally, in response to Habakkuk's doubt, God answered his questions concerning the wicked and ultimate judgment (2:2-20). As a result of this process, the prophet's faith was developed to the point that he promised faithfulness to God even when he did not wholly understand his ways (3:1-19).

God has provided evidence to meet doubt and uncertainty about his character and power throughout creation and scripture. For example, in the book of Romans, Paul says, "His invisible qualities are seen from the world's creation onward because they are perceived by the things made, even his eternal power and Godship, so that they are inexcusable" (Rom 1:20). These pieces of evidence address both intellectual skepticism and support the process of faith development.

Intellectual Adaptation

Throughout the Bible, God uses various ways to clearly and effectively communicate with people. For example, the book of Hebrews shares, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;" (Heb 1:1-2). Christian (2011) shares that God communicated with people through the inner still, small voice of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:12, Acts 13:2, Acts 16:6-7, 1 Kgs 19:12, Isa 30:19-21), through the advice and counsel of the men and women of God (Prov 12:15), through dreams and visions (Matt 1:20-21; Acts 10:9-18) and even through angels (Luke 1:26-38). God also used his prophets and everyday men and women of God to communicate his will and message to people. Sometimes God would indicate a specific way to convey a message. For example, God told Ezekiel to share the punishment of Israel by acting out the transgressions of the people. This example included Ezekiel lying on his side for 390 days, which symbolized the 390 years that Israel had transgressed (Ezek 4:1-5).

Another pertinent story is how God directed the prophet, Nathan, to reveal David's sin. Following God's directions, Nathan told King David a story of a rich man who had vast sheep and cattle but stole and killed the prized lamb of a poor man. In response, "David's anger was greatly aroused" and declared, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this shall die" (2 Sam 12:5). Nathan then proclaimed, "You are the man!" and rebuked David for stealing Bathsheba and murdering her husband. The prophet Nathan conveyed this, God-orchestrated drama to aid King David in seeing his sin, and David responded with the admission: "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam 12:13).

Pritchard (2015) argues that this is not simply an intellectual line of reasoning that persuades David of his need, but it utilizes visual and physical means to communicate God's message.

At other times, God would allow men and women of God to use their knowledge of the culture to intellectually adapt to terms and language. Each group would be more suitably understood. An example of this is when the prophet Hosea wanted to convey that God loves his people, even when they repudiate him. Hosea publicized this message to the people of Israel by bequeathing his children the names "Not Loved" and "Not My People." Later in the book, he delivers God's message that "Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, And I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; Then I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!' And they shall say, 'You are my God!'" (Hos 2:23).

There are four different gospels in the New Testament because the four separate authors had diverse audiences in mind when they wrote the distinctive themes. The Gospel of Matthew was written for a Jewish audience, as it emphasized how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. The author depicts Jesus as Israel's Messiah, the King of the Jews. Jackson (2016) shares that Matthew demonstrates how God's promises in the Old Testament, concerning the coming Messiah, find their fulfillment in Jesus (Matt 1). On the other hand, Mark conveys his message to people throughout the Roman Empire, who are unaccustomed to the religion of the Jews and the Old Testament. Subsequently, Mark's Gospel does not start with the birth of Jesus or genealogy that establishes Jesus as the Messiah. Instead, it begins with the ministry of Jesus (Mark 1:1). Mark portrays Jesus as the servant of the Lord, undertaking whatsoever

God desires of him. The emphasis is on doing, and Mark demonstrates that Jesus finished the job he came to do. Jackson also explains that the book of Luke was written to the more intellectually minded Greeks and explained Jesus' story in an orderly and exact way while providing exact historical details based on eyewitness testimonies (Luke 1:1-3). Luke connects with the Greek people's intrigue with the flawless man by stressing the humanity of Jesus and revealing him as the perfect man. The apostle John, an eyewitness to the life of Jesus, wrote the fourth gospel. He endeavored to communicate how the eternal God became man.

Furthermore, by recording Jesus' signs and miracles, he attempted to help his readers exercise belief in Jesus as the son of God (John 20:30-31). Each of the gospel writers endeavored to convey the gospel message keeping in mind the different languages, literature, and cultural ideas of their audience. The authors let their audiences' questions, doubts, and preconceived notions set their approach's tone. They did this to effectively communicate the gospel message to an intellectually and culturally diverse society.

The apostle Paul is an example of intellectual adaptation through his endeavors to communicate and associate with diverse audiences. Paul provides insight into his ongoing practice, "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews, I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak, I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might, by all means, save some" (1 Cor 9:19-22). Paul incorporated his audience's language,

referenced their literature and cultural ideas, and highlighted his similarities with each group he addressed.

In the book of Acts, Luke revealed that the way Paul communicated the gospel was very effective, "Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed" (Acts 14:1). Paul intermingled with nonbelievers and answered their objections rooted in their doubts and uncertainties. Paul persuasively communicated the gospel to each audience with methods that made sense to them. When Paul spoke to the Jews, he referenced the Old Testament, "Then Paul, as his custom was, went into them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures" (Acts 17:2). Paul used the Old Testament as his primary source when ministering to the Jewish people because it was their recognized authority. Paul incorporated an entirely different approach when ministering to a Gentile audience. Many in his Greek audience were pantheists, polytheists, or atheists.

Consequently, Paul did not begin using the Old Testament scriptures but intellectually adapted to meet them at their level of understanding and uncertainty. He referenced the Greek statue of "the unknown God" and referred to a Greek poet, then went on to share the identity of this "unknown God." The book of Acts records this dialogue,

Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the one whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: 'God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. (Acts 17:22-24)

Paul adapted the gospel message while maintaining its integrity to intrigue by answering a specific audience's underlying doubts and uncertainties. He then counseled others to do the same, "Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Col 4:5-6). Answering the questions and uncertainties of people from various dissimilar cultures, languages, and academic backgrounds necessitates intellectual adaptation centered on the specific audience.

One more example of intellectual adaptation came in the form and ministry of Jesus Christ. Who left heaven and the presence of God the Father, adopting the nature of both God and man to reveal the Father. He came to this world and "emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:7-8). God knows our limitations and sent his Son, Jesus, to come to this world. Throughout his ministry on this earth, Jesus consistently communicated his message on an intellectual level that the common man or woman could understand.

Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin and a respected Jewish teacher who wanted to know more about Jesus. He sought Jesus out at night out of concern for what his fellow members may think. From the beginning of their interaction, Jesus engaged in intellectual adaptation. Nicodemus had a robust knowledge concerning the Jewish scriptures, so Jesus went directly to the point by saying Nicodemus needed to be born again. Nicodemus began by asserting, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher sent by God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." Jesus' response was slightly destabilizing, "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Jesus deliberately revealed to Nicodemus something that would puzzle this knowledgeable teacher of the law, and Nicodemus perplexedly replied, "How can this be?" "How can a man be born when he is old?" (John 3:1-21). Pritchard (2015) believes this intentional destabilization of Nicodemus' preconceived notions and theories initiated a platform for meaningful conversation. Jesus adapted his interaction with Nicodemus based on his intellectual knowledge and particular needs along with his inquiries.

The Samaritan woman that Jesus interacted with at the well did not have Nicodemus's religious training. To connect with her, Jesus adapted his intellectual approach, never using the terminology "born again" as he had with Nicodemus. Jesus' method took into account her cultural and personal history in his attempt to open dialogue with her. He requested her help and spoke about physical thirst, spiritual thirst, and the sin that created that thirst. There was one thing that Jesus did with both Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, which was to ask something out of the ordinary, that destabilized their preconceived notions. As noted by her response, she was astonished by his request, "that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria" (John 4:9). Often people are anxious about asking questions or do not realize their underlying questions. Pritchard (2015) asserts that spiritual leaders draw individuals into a conversation by asking questions and appropriately expressing their vulnerabilities where leaders can help them process unrevealed doubts and uncertainty. This process has the potential to aid in faith development. Jesus spoke to the woman, asked her a question, and used their familiar topic of water to explain that He is the "living water" and the supplier of "eternal life." We see in these two examples a depiction of how Jesus conversed with Nicodemus and the woman at the well. Jesus did this by adapting to each individual's intellectual and

spiritual level. He sometimes intentionally confused people and destabilized their existing ideas to help them open up to new ones.

Jesus' interaction with the two men on the road to Emmaus is another example of how Jesus used intellection adaptation. First, Jesus approached and joined the men in their conversation and journey (Luke 24:15-16). He then asked questions that drew out their misunderstandings and doubt about the Messiah (24:17-19). In response, Jesus adapted his approach to correct and enlighten their understanding. He used the writings of Moses and the prophets to establish their faith, building upon their current knowledge and comprehension (24:25-27). Through this process, Jesus used intellectual adaption to address their doubts and bring about faith development.

Throughout the Bible, God worked through men and women communicating via intellectual adaptation. People were engaged where they were cognitive, emotional, and spiritual. There was an awareness of diverse cultures, languages, and knowledge. Intellectual adaptation is imperative when working with diverse multigenerational, cultural, or cognitive backgrounds. Each group will ask different questions and necessitate adjustments to plainly and successfully communicate the gospel.

Apologetics

Apologetics is the defense or vindication of faith through bolstering individual comprehension or addressing the uncertainty of others. Craig (2010) explains that the Greek words *apologia* and *apologeomai* are used 17 times in the New Testament and are utilized primarily for a person's defense (Luke 12:11; 21:14; Acts 22:1; 24:10; 25:8, 16; 26:2, 24). The apostle Peter said this about defending the faith, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense (*apologia*) to everyone who

asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;" (1 Pet 3:15). Christians were frequently accused by nonbelievers and intimidated with persecution (1 Pet 3:13-17; 4:12-19). Peter maintains that Christians, when challenged and threatened, are to present a reasoned defense for anyone who inquires. Even though the text does not scrutinize a theory or academic instruction of apologetics, the importance of a rational justification concerning one's faith and addressing the questions of others is present.

Some argue against apologetics, asserting that the Bible does not require defending. Those in opposition state the Bible only needs expounding since it is, "The word of God is alive and powerful" (Heb 4:12). However, Geisler (2012) asks the question, "How do we ascertain whether the Bible, the Qur'an, or the Book of Mormon is the word of God? For a Christian to accept the Qur'an as the word of God, objective evidence would be expected" (p. 25). The identical expectations are normative when asserting the Bible is the word of God in a secular society.

Those in disagreement concerning the comprehension of God via reason cite, "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor 1:21). The context does not pertain to the existence of God, but the design of salvation, through the cross. Geisler (2012) explains that the plan of salvation is "foolishness" to the depraved mind and cannot be comprehended simply by reason. Lastly, in the same letter, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the evidence they currently possess through the resurrection of Jesus. Paul states, "you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you" (1 Cor 1:5-6). Coulter (2011) explains that this does not refer to human beings' incapability

to know God through his revealed evidence (Rom 1:19-20; 2:12-15). Instead, it is a direct reference to the human condition of depravity and irrational denunciation of the message of the cross.

Some groups also maintain that having doubts or questions about God is folly or foolishness (Ps 14:1) and is folly to engage in such discussions (Prov 26:4). The book of Proverbs also says, "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes" (26:5). Coulter (2011) asserts that it is imprudent to discuss a topic with a person who will not listen to the reason which holds opposing views. Geisler (2012) emphasizes that helping an individual process through their errant thinking, through rational dialogue, may assist the person in pursuing Godly wisdom versus his or her own.

Skeptics also assert that the Bible is not a source for apologetics. Coulter (2011) points out an important fact to keep in mind is that the Bible was written primarily to believers, not to unbelievers. Many of these believers already had confidence in the fundamental foundational truths of Christianity. For this reason, there was not much need to defend or persuade concerning these beliefs. Apologetics concentrates primarily on the questions and uncertainty of nonbelievers to remove the impediments to faith development. Though apologetics is not as evident, it is present throughout the Bible. Moses practiced apologetics by demonstrating miracles in the presence of Pharaoh (Exod 4:1-9). Through fire coming down from heaven on Mount Carmel, Elijah believed Yahweh was the one true God (1 Kgs 18). Jesus performed many signs and wonders that stood as evidence that he was the Son of God (John 3:2; Acts 2:22). Thus, throughout the Bible, there is a plentitude of evidence substantiating the use of apologetics.

Jesus often engaged in apologetics, using his miracles, wonders and prophecy as evidence to believe in him (John 2:23; 10:25; 10:38; 14:29). Geisler (2013) explains that Jesus never encouraged people to follow him thoughtlessly, without evidence or reason. Instead, he directed his followers, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Matt 22:37). Following Jesus did not mean leaving the mind and personal questions and uncertainty behind an individual to follow Jesus into emotional bliss. Jesus constantly prompted the people, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Matt 11:15). For those who wanted to follow the will of God, Jesus promised, "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own" (John 7:17). He taught that comprehension of God's will depends on a desire to understand and follow the truth. The individual who wants to know and follow God's direction will have sufficient evidence (Rom 1:20).

Over the years of his ministry, Paul defended himself and the gospel on various events. With the Corinthians, he realized his claim of apostleship was in question. Consequently, Paul had to counter their criticisms to defend his apostleship (1 Cor 9:3; 2; 12:19). At another juncture, Paul revealed to Timothy, "At my first defense no one supported me" (2 Tim 4:16), referring to the initial time he stood trial. Paul also expressed appreciation for the support which he received from the Philippians. Paul shared with the Philippians, "just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace" (Phil 1:7). In this case, the defense's focus is the gospel and not Paul. Boa and Bowman (2005) state that the ministry of Paul

incorporated defending the gospel against its critics, especially those who claim that it is seditious or in any way dishonest. Consequently, Paul said, "I am appointed for the defense of the gospel" (Phil 1:16). He also added that his work incorporated "casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:5).

In his letters, Paul did not merely reiterate the prerogatives of the gospel when addressing dissimilar gatherings. He was not apprehensive, using reason and powerful arguments to further his message and counter the unbelief of others (Acts 17:2; 18:4; 19:8-9). Luke, relating the ministry of Paul, states, "And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8). Paul consistently defended himself and his beliefs against assaults of skeptics from Jewish or Gentile backgrounds. Simultaneously, he used wide-reaching evidence to substantiate and neutralize criticisms and answer people from diverse intellectual levels.

Other New Testament figures offered evidence to defend their beliefs. At the commencement of his book, Luke underscored the accuracy of the gospel by referring to his investigative process. Luke shared,

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus. (Luke 1:1-3)

Luke explained that the information he shared was reliable and based on eyewitnesses and verifiable historical events. He went through this process and work for this reason, "that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed" (Luke

1:4). Luke wanted his audience to have confidence in and be able to defend what they believe.

The apostle Peter maintained that Christians should know and defend their beliefs with gentleness and respect. Peter shared, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;" (1 Pet3:15). The apostles lived in a time when non-Christians maligned the behavior and beliefs of Christians (1 Pet 3:13-17; 4:12-19). Therefore, Christians were to speak a reasoned defense of what they believe to anyone who asked, with gentleness and respect. This defense would include nonbelievers and other believers in the process of developing their faith.

Conclusion

Intellectual doubt and skepticism fill society regarding the teachings of the Bible. The expectation for youth and young adults to "just believe" what we say without offering them evidence to base that belief on is not reasonable. Doubt and uncertainty are nothing new. People considered champions of faith in the Bible had and expressed doubts and uncertainty. However, they did not dwell on doubts but looked for answers based on reliable evidence when faced with doubts. Questions and doubts were not looked down upon but provided answers and evidence while being encouraged to develop their faith.

Throughout the Bible, God communicated with people where they were: cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually. Intellectual adaptation was incorporated when addressing the questions and concerns from diverse multigenerational, cultural, or cognitive backgrounds. Adjustment to the current queries and uncertainties is vital to communicate the gospel to a new generation. Each generation will ask diverse questions

and relate to issues in different ways. As a church, we need to be open and ready to listen and answer their questions.

While the principal audience of the scriptures were believers, there were numerous occasions when the Bible addressed uncertainty. Believers need to give a reasoned defense of what they believe to anyone who asks and do it with kindness and respect. Jesus never intended people to follow him absent-mindedly. He engaged in apologetics, using his miracles and prophecy as evidence. Defending one's faith and answering the questions of others through objective evidence is part of the process of faith development.

This theology lays a foundation for an apologetic-based curriculum that addresses the questions of a diverse modern culture. Addressing the current issues and questions among youth and young adults supports faith development. Spiritual leaders need to meet people where they are in their faith development and, through conversation, using objective evidence and reason, help them move from questions and doubt into an ever-deepening faith. We will now turn our attention to apologetic and curriculum development literature focused on the last ten years.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Youth and young adult ministries in North America have experienced many challenges and obstacles in the 21st century. Postmodernism, with its deconstructionism, absence of moral absolutes, and relativity of truth, has brought difficulties that have challenged believers and shaken the faith of many, states one study (Dyck, 2010). Adding to the obstacles, Lennox (2011) shares that since 2005, atheism stepped up its efforts to attack belief in God and belief itself. Barna Group (2015 Sees Sharp Rise in Post-Christian Population, 2015) research shows the impact of these developments has dramatically increased in the number of post-Christians in the North American population. Furthermore, Pew Research (Nones on the Rise, 2012) has reported that the number of Americans that do not identify with any religion has also risen. Gilson (2013b) states that it is not a sizeable spiritual change as the end of nominal Christianity. Smith and Denton (2005) state that Americans, in general, have become more skeptical of the Bible, and youth who have left the church mention intellectual skepticism as one of the main rationales for leaving the church.

Ministry to youth and young adults within the church has been primarily about entertainment, rallies, energizing speakers, and maybe some community service over the past two decades. While this is not bad, the results have been less than encouraging. Kinnaman and Hawkins (2011) share that this younger generation's faith has often been

shallow and on the surface. After years of research, Kinnaman also pointed out that the heart of the issue has been a faith-development problem. Echoing these views, McDowell and Hostetler (1994) described that many of our "faithful" youth are not even able to distinguish right from wrong. Outside the church, Barna Group (Millennials and the Bible: 3 Surprising Insights, 2014) found that non-Christian millennials believe that the Bible is a book written by men full of strange stories and advice. The church, youth, and young adult leaders must recognize that addressing faith development and intellectual skepticism is necessary to succeed in ministry, both inside and outside the church.

This chapter review lays a foundation for addressing these two significant challenges by reviewing literature from 2005-to 2015. In addition, seminal works over the past forty years are also explored, which offer persuasive evidence in favor of an apologetic curriculum grounded in relationships to address the ministry needs of the 21st century. Thus, this chapter structure reviews the literature on apologetics, stages of faith development, and curriculum development.

Apologetics

Apologetics deals with giving a rational defense or advocating for a specific position or view. Craig (2010) explains that apologetics does sound like the word "apologize," but it does not refer to the practice of telling someone sorry for what we believe. Instead, beliefs should always be communicated with gentleness and respect, as directed in 1 Peter 3:15. The word apologetics comes from the Greek word *apologia*, often translated as a "reasoned statement or vindication" (p. 15). Groothuis (2011) notes that an *apologia* dealt with a legal courtroom defense and evidence in the New Testament

of the Bible. Apologetics is not limited to Christianity, being practiced by religious and irreligious groups (p. 24).

Within the realm of Christianity, Sproul (2003) states that apologetics' role is to construct a case for faith, relevant to every culture, and the best alternative to other religious and secular worldviews (p. 16). Sharing a defense for faith should never be defensive or argumentative but should sequentially present evidence leading to a sound conclusion. Quarreling, fighting, or a heated argument, will only make people upset and end possible future conversations.

Reasons for Apologetics

Amid the 21st century American moral and cultural wars, there is a need to utilize apologetics to address the aggressive attacks of secularism. Secularism is a worldview void of the supernatural, including God. Secularists have labeled Christianity as dangerous and have removed all religious teachings and beliefs from American culture. Christians cannot continue to preach the gospel and ignore the cultural changes and moral relativism of humanity around them. The reason is that the gospel's culture directly impacts the hearer and the application. One author (Craig, 2010) shares that some cultures are more open to the Christian faith than others, and the degree of openness is often in proportion to the culture's receptivity to the gospel. Groothuis (2011) adds that apologetics can function as a form of pre-evangelism. Apologetics addresses intellectual obstacles and helps create favorable conditions for the receptivity of the gospel (p. 28). Unfortunately, Collins (2010) shares that faith and reason are often seen as mutually exclusive. Deeper faith perspectives are often limited to academic fields, leaving most

Christians to fend for themselves. Christians must present sound arguments and evidence for the rationality of their faith to be taken seriously in an ever-growing skeptical world.

Believers need to know what they believe and why they believe it, in terms that our secular society can understand and respect. This ability gives believers a needed degree of confidence about sharing their faith with non-Christians. Craig (2010) reminds us that apologetics can also help establish a strong faith base for times of doubt and pressure from others. Youth and young adults need more than passionate worship and emotional support to stand for their faith in this generation.

Objections to Apologetics

Objections to apologetics come from both inside and outside the Bible. Those who support the Bible only position state "the Bible does not need to be defended." However, Geisler (2012) asks the question, "How do we identify that the Bible, instead of the Qur'an or the writing of Confucius, is the revelation of God's word?" (p. 25). Objective sources outside the Bible lay a foundation for trusting and believing the Bible. No Christian would accept the statement that the Qur'an was the Word of God without objective evidence (p. 25).

Another argument is that "natural humanity cannot understand spiritual things." The reference given is (1 Cor 2:14), "the man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God." However, Paul does not say that the men of the world do not observe truth about God; he says they do not receive or welcome it. Paul points out in Romans 1:20 that humanity recognizes the things of God. Geisler (2012) believed they knew the facts and evidence, but they had not allowed God to come into their hearts.

Some believers assert there is no place for reason when it comes to faith. However, faith is vitally important; faith and reason work together in harmony. First Peter 3:15 says to believers, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" God created humanity with the ability for rational thought, and this does not mean leaving rationality behind when it comes to following Jesus by faith.

Skeptics also have a variety of arguments against the use of apologetics when dealing with spiritual matters. For example, "logic cannot tell us anything about God." Nevertheless, Geisler (2012) stated that the above statement is self-defeating because it states that logic does not work with God and then applies it to God. However, while it is limited, logic can tell us some things about God in the general sense (p. 27). Along the same lines, Fideism states that reason cannot answer questions relating to God. Nevertheless, it too is self-defeating by its use of reason to address the issue of God and reason.

A different opposition Geisler (2012) contributes is that "No one is converted through apologetics." If this statement is about the Holy Spirit using apologetics to bring people to Christ, then this statement is entirely inaccurate. C. S. Lewis recounted that almost everyone he knew had come to believe in God through one argument or another. Morrison was converted while writing a book refuting Jesus' resurrection. Greenleaf accepted the gospels after discovering the evidence for their authenticity (p. 8).

Some people living in the 21st century, where all statements of truth and morals are often considered relative, have said apologetics is incongruous. However, Copan (2009) maintains that in the context of authentic relationships and Christians living grace-

filled lives of authenticity, there is hope to reach a relativistic world (p. 15). With prayer and thoughtful responses to challenges to faith, asking questions can open the door to further conversations. In most areas of everyday life, most people assume that truth is objective. No one is postmodern or relativistic when balancing a checkbook, reading a medicine bottle, or driving. Koukl (2007) states that even though we live in a postmodern world, inside each of us is a "common-sense realist."

The general objections to apologetics even applied to its use by youth and young adults. For example, Zacharias and DuRant (2007) testified that one concern parents mentioned was that they did not want their children to become arrogant in matters of faith. Parents expect excellence from students in sports, music, and academics, but they are unwilling to encourage them in matters of faith (p. 45).

Others have said that unless teens can make mistakes, they will not learn valuable lessons from those mistakes. God has helped individuals grow through their shortcomings, but youths should not be encouraged to live recklessly to learn from it. Youths may fall short, but they do not need help or encouragement to do so.

Another objection Zacharias and DuRant (2007) heard was, training the mind to think critically about faith undermines true faith. Dallas Willard contended that by following this idea, people are not honoring God but yielding to the anti-intellectualism of the western world (p. 46). Many books have helped teens in various ways, but few help youth and young adults think critically about their faith.

Many skeptics attack the Bible, stating that it has contradictions, but the experts demonstrated that many supposed contradictions came from imposing personal presuppositions upon the text. It is important to note that writing down history in the

ancient world was very different from the modern world in 2020. Craig Blomberg shared that people in biblical times did not feel "that a verbatim account of someone's speech was any more valuable or accurate than a reliable summary, paraphrase, or interpretation" (Wilkins & Moreland, 1996, pp. 34-35). The historian Ben Witherington brought additional insight when he shared, "The modern desire for precision must not be imposed on the ancient authors who often, though not always, preferred to write in a generalizing fashion" (Witherington, 2001, p. 18). Thucydides, a Greek historian, writing around the fifth century BC, shared the way that he handled history and eyewitness testimony,

And with regard to my factual reporting of the events of the war I have made it a principle not to write down the first story that came my way, and not even to be guided by my own general impressions; either I was present myself at the events which I have described or else I heard of them from eyewitnesses whose reports I have checked with as much thoroughness as possible. (Morrow, 2014, p. 113)

When we compared Thucydides' standard practice to that of the writer of the gospel of Luke, many similarities come to the surface. For example, the introduction to the book of Luke records the following:

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, 3 it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; 4 so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4 NASB)

After comparing these two accounts, it is clear that both authors were concerned about writing accurate history. However, neither took down quotes verbatim as we might expect from a modern historian. Jim Wallace, a cold-case detective, once shared when doing an investigation into an event, if all the stories matched up precisely the same, he would start to suspect something. There is the expectation that each person will see an

event differently than those around them, which feeds into how they share the events. These are some common objections to keep in mind when engaging with skeptics.

Apologetic Systems

Sweis and Meister (2012) assert that even with a cursory look at the history of Christian apologetics, it is easy to note that there are many approaches to the topic. The most common of the systems is the *Classical approach*, which breaks down into a two-step process. Boa and Bowman (2005) share that the Classical approach first used logical criteria to break down the views of other spiritual worldviews and built up and demonstrated a theistic worldview. Second, it demonstrated that God had revealed himself through the person of Jesus Christ and the Bible. The Classical approach used rational arguments for the existence of God. According to Potter (2010), the first step employed cosmological, teleological, and axiological arguments for the existence of God (p. 21). In the second step, apologists share historical evidence in defense of the reliability of the Bible. Prominent advocates for this system include C. S. Lewis, Stuart Hackett, Norman Geisler, William Lane Craig, J. P. Moreland, Peter Kreeft, and Winfried Corduan.

Boa and Bowman (2005) stated that the next primary system was the *Evidential approach*, where apologists base faith on empirical and historical verifiable facts. These facts demonstrated that belief in Christianity was not unreasonable. It presented evidence in the form of rational, historical, archaeological, and experimental facts, but at the same time, neglected rational arguments for the existence of God. Finally, Potter (2010) asserted that this approach worked to present undeniable evidence to the point that the skeptic, even from a non-theistic worldview, was persuaded about Christianity and the

existence of God (p. 22). Foremost advocates for this approach included William Paley, Bernard Ramm, John Warwick Montgomery, Josh McDowell, and Gary Habermas.

The following system was the *Experiential approach*, where apologists stated that only subjective Christian experience could be the truth. Experiences with God were not closed off to anyone but were available to everyone as an invitation to know God. Personal mystical and existential experiences with God were encouraged. Thus, the validity of Christianity was based not on facts or reason but personal experience. Some proponents of the Experiential approach went to the extent of Fideism. One study (C. Smith & Denton, 2005) also shared that because of the moral impairment of humanity, individuals were not able to morally reason. Some of the foremost proponents of the Experiential approach included Meister Eckart, Soren Kierkegaard, Rudolph Bultmann, and Karl Barth.

Potter (2010) referred to the *Presuppositional approach*, also known as the Reformed approach. He asserted that deductions concerning faith could not be reached apart from the revelation of God through the Bible. Oliphint (2013) believed the name should be changed to Covenantal apologetics to demonstrate God's continued connectedness to the world. According to Hindson and Caner, the two main subgroups of presuppositionalism (Hindson & Caner, 2008) are revelational and rational. Revelational stated that the Bible must be the center of any discussion, and without this agreement, the discussion cannot continue. Rationale holds that scriptures and the laws of rational thought must be accepted before any rational conversation can happen. While not directly connected to this approach, several authors, including Keller (2013), Zacharias (2012),

and Bethke (2013), saw a need to remind readers that Christianity was about the person of Jesus, and not just about another religion.

This review cannot mention every new approach to apologetics, but the following approaches were growing in acceptance among youth and young adults. Potter (2010) shared that the *Combinational approach* used all the strengths of the other approaches to develop a personalized approach. It found value in all the other approaches but did not accept any model as complete. The focus was to identify and incorporate a person's culture, ethnic and social needs to assemble what the individual needed to believe in Christianity.

Hindson and Caner (2008) mentioned an additional new approach, the *Incarnational approach*, popular among younger Christians. It emphasized the servant model of Christianity, in which through humbleness, one earned respect and receptivity of the individual. It is about "earning a hearing" and following the methodologies of the Moravian missionaries (p. 67).

According to Hindson and Caner (2008), global apologetics was another exciting approach that gained some attention. It did not assume that the presumed categories of Christianity are understood but made an attempt to understand the listener's worldview. This approach included a study of world religions and claims of truth. It then presented the Christian worldview in light of the systemic errors of other religious worldviews.

Modern Trends and Perceptions

Strobel (2009) asserted that apologetics in the 21st century has become more relational and incorporates more stories to better communicate with this generation. It has begun moving from the halls of academia to the streets, workplaces, and sidewalks of

modern culture. Brooks (2014) notes that Christian convictions must be presented in everyday language and incorporate artistic formats (p. 22). These changes, Sherrard (2015) says, have required a new methodology for communicating with skeptics and at the same time continued to have good relationships with them. When most people think about apologetics, they thought arguments or debates, but there is a need for more than just correct answers in a postmodern world. Conversations with others about faith need to look more like diplomacy than a frontal assault on an enemy compound. McDowell (2010) stated that one of the best defenses of the gospel is when Christians live a life of love and integrity, both among each other and in the world.

There has been a trend of authors from different backgrounds engaging with the evidence of Christianity from different perspectives and sharing the impact it had on their faith. In his seminal work, Strobel (2006) came at faith, using the tools he used in journalism. Collins (2006), head of the Human Genome Project and one of the world's leading geneticists, discussed God's evidence from a scientist's perspective. Once an atheist, Wallace (2013) used his skills as a homicide detective to investigate the gospel's claims, naturally from the perspective of a detective. Lanier (2014) challenged the reasonableness of Christianity as a trial lawyer and founder of the Lanier Law Firm. Most recently, another lawyer and political commentator, Limbaugh (2014), shared his intellectual journey to Christianity. This trend toward apologetics from a personal perspective and varied professional backgrounds brought a degree of genuineness and credibility to Christianity in the 21st century.

Since 2006, New Atheism has challenged leading apologists and stirred up the intellectual conversation between believers and atheists. Copan (2011) shared that New

Atheism was a move by atheists to aggressively attack belief in God, Christianity, and religion in general (p. 16). Stenger (2010) asserted that this new wave also claimed that faith in God is behind the terrible actions of extremist religious groups and the unreasonable actions of many community leaders (p. 1). McGrath (2010) shared that New Atheism has attracted much media attention to their cause and sold many books advocating their new stance. The leaders of this movement are Harris (2004) with the book *The End of Faith*, Dawkins (2006) with the book *The God Delusion*, and Dennett (2006) with *Breaking the Spell*. However, Zacharias (2008) testified that all atheists did not accept their ideas. Speaking about Harris' book, Ruse, a professor of philosophy and an atheist, remarked, "The God Delusion makes me embarrassed to be an atheist" (p. 23). Lennox (2009) shared that many atheists are frustrated by the open attacks and the dictatorial way New Atheism is coming across.

Since the birth of New Atheism, Christian apologists have had an aggressive response through books and media worldwide. In his *New York Times* Bestseller, Keller (2008) argues for a reason for belief in God in an age of skepticism. Spitzer (2010) brought together a significant amount of evidence for God through new evidence found in physics and philosophy. Brock (2013) published his book, *God's Not Dead*, and in 2014, the book was used as a resource to produce a movie with the same title, bringing attention to the growing number of young adults who struggle with their faith in college campuses. The response to the production surprised both the makers and the critics when the movie made over sixty million dollars in the United States. This success demonstrated that even in a postmodern and relativistic world, people seek answers concerning faith and are willing to listen to objective evidence.

Stages of Faith Development

Various authors have addressed the idea of stages of faith or moral development over the years. Some leading thought leaders will be explored and drawn from for further evaluation and application.

In one of his earliest books, *The Spiritual Life*, Coe (1900) wrote the following: "The religious processes taking place around us and within us must be observed with all the precision that modern psychological methods and tools render possible" (p. 5). In Coe's view, the pragmatic study of religion effectively counterbalances theological claims about the religious life expressed rigorously based on conceptual reasoning. It also allowed religious leaders to have a fuller appreciation of the tangible effects of religion on both the intellect and social relations (Osmer, 1989).

In the mid-1900s, Piaget focused on early childhood development and divided the stages of development into four periods. Some psychologists have found several of these stages helpful because of their relation to adult character structure (Malerstein & Ahern, 1979). The sensorimotor stage is from birth to age two. During this time, children process the world through movement and their senses; children are incredibly egocentric, meaning they cannot see their world from others' perspectives. Piaget's second stage, the preoperational stage, starts when the child begins to speak at age two and often continues to seven. During the preoperational stage of cognitive development, Piaget asserted that children do not yet understand concrete logic or rationally handle information. The Concrete operational stage is from ages seven to 11. Children can now communicate and reason logically, and they are no longer egocentric. Children become more aware of logic and conservation during this stage, topics previously foreign to them. The formal

operational stage from 11 to 16 and forward is when abstract reasoning begins. Along with this, these children often display more proficiencies orientated towards problem-solving (Piaget, 1975). It is also worth mentioning that Fowler's research is inspired indirectly by Piaget's pioneering work in developmental psychology (Csanyi, 1982). Every author and writer learns from those who came before them.

In 1950 Erik Erikson published *Childhood and Society*, which led those studying the religious dimension to a new phase. Most of the work to that point had not been developmental. Erikson paved the way for investigators to consider the religious implications of the various periods of the life span. Erikson himself was quite sympathetic with the religious dimension and spoke to the need for such a dimension for healthy development (Erikson, 1998). Following this, the mid-1960s to the early 1970s saw an interest in the sociology of religion. The work of Glock and Stark stand out as examples of this work. First, they attempted to assess the religiosity of people. In so doing, they found that merely describing the religious practices of individuals was inadequate. Other facets had to be considered. As a result, Glock and Stark developed a five dimension religiosity scale, including practice, devotion, experience, knowledge, and belief (Glock, 1977).

Around 1981, Laurence Kohlberg came up with his stages of moral development, which correspond to a series of progressively more inclusive social circles within which individuals attempt to operate proficiently. When those groups function well, focused on mutuality and respect, maturing individuals adjust to larger and larger circles of justice, care, and respect. Thus, each stage of moral cognitive development is the conscious thought of the relations of justice, care, and respect exhibited in the broader circle of

social relations, including narrower circles within the broader group (Kohlberg, 1971). Kohlberg claims that ethical principles can provide direction and assist in filtering claims in concrete situations based on the belief that the moral facts in the situation are determined within the social context. A significant problem arises with this view as perceived facts in the situation vary according to the individual's perspective (Grover, 1980). When moral development is evaluated based on an individual's adaptation to the group view, this leaves very little room for standing up for individual values and beliefs because this is seen as immaturity in one's moral development. However, in Kohlberg's view, one cannot be faulted for not conforming to the group view if nonconformity is simply a product of immature moral development. Although, according to this view, individuals could not be held accountable for their actions because it is merely immaturity, this view does not bode well for a system of justice, care and respect for all society. This is another reason why it is vitally important to have an objective standard of right and wrong which determines ethics and principles for evaluating different situations throughout life.

In the early years, the religious viewpoint was understood primarily as a negative aspect of the human personality. However, when social scientists gradually became more friendly to the idea of the positive contribution of religion to a healthy character, there was a renewed interest in the study of religion. Thus, over the years, the shift has been to view the religious dimension as a positive aspect of human development and explore the developmental aspects of religion itself. This brings us to today, in which we find most research being done to be in the area of spiritual development (Steele, 1989). It is incredible to see how far the positive study of spiritual growth and development has come

over the last hundred years. Of course, there remain many more obstacles and challenges in the minds of many thought leaders, but real progress is continually being made.

In his book, *Stages of Faith*, Fowler (1995) set the stage for this discussion back in 1981, and it has served as a seminal and foundational work ever since. Fowler believed that individuals changed and grew in their faith, similar to their development in learning or behavior. The challenge constantly faced making the developmental sequence prescriptive is that growth in faith reflects rather than improves the process in an achievement-obsessed society (Loder & Fowler, 1982). In his book *The Life Cycle Completed*, he drew ideas for this concept from men like Erikson and others (Loder & Fowler, 1982). Fowler (1981) defined faith as a system of images, values, and convictions that gave direction and purpose to a person's life. In *Life Maps* (Fowler, 1985), he shares that the stages are hierarchical, each successive stage carrying forward a revision and improvement from the previous stage and each stage building on the previous one so that none can be skipped. In his book, *Stages of Faith*, he broke down human development into six stages that a person may go through as they mature. Stage one was called the *Intuitive-predictive stage*, typical of children ages three to seven years old. At this stage is the birth of the imagination, and the child is generally emotionally egocentric.

Stage two, known as the *Mythical-literal stage*, was typical of ages six to 12. Individuals use logic to justify thoughts during this stage, and differentiation begins between real and make-believe. Concrete operational thinking began during this stage, but the child could not think abstractly.

The third stage, *Synthetic-conventional*, began around adolescence, but according to Fowler (1984), many adults got stuck at this stage. At this stage, the individual began to be aware of competing ideologies and ask questions. Their values, beliefs, and convictions are a blend of significant relationships and face-to-face dealings with others. Before this stage, beliefs were held more like traditions and were not the result of ones' analytical thought but based on the views of others. During this time, an individual's faith is challenged, and a faith group is needed to help answer questions and provide rational orientation amid competing ideas. Fowler (1981) also stated that religious institutions "work best" if the majority of their members stay in this stage (p. 164). During this stage, individuals asked questions and tried to make sense of what they believed. If individuals were not allowed or encouraged to ask questions at this stage, their level of belief remained shallow, and they were more likely to believe secular criticism. This knowledge had enormous implications for the importance of Christian apologetics being used at an early age to help individuals know what they believe amid competing ideologies and worldviews. Berger (1988) notes that moral development happened over time, in steady and gradual progress. Warren (1995) maintained that there will always be a need for adaptations in course material and teaching methods to match the individual's intellectual ability.

Fowler (1981) named stage four the *Individual-Reflective stage*. This stage was supposed to be made up of individuals from their late teens to early adulthood, yet as Fowler stated, many adults did not reach this point. During this period, the individual comprehended and accepted what they believed, with a high degree of personal commitment and responsibility. Individuals wrestled with who they were and what they

believed, apart from the various roles and relationships. Fowler (1984) asserted that objective decisions also must be made about what one believed and valued as part of a systematic whole. Harrison (2013) encouraged young people to think for themselves because their views and beliefs determined who they were and the people they would become in the future (p. 18). Most people do not reach this stage, which may have contributed to or helped explain why a small minority has often done most of the work in the church. Youth and young adults who did not reach this development point would disengage and have little personal responsibility toward their faith group. This disengagement at times resulted because they had not asked their questions and made their reflection.

Fowler (1981), Stage five, called the *Conjunctive stage*, was categorized for those 30 years of age and older. At this stage, there was an openness to engage individuals from other faith groups in a conversation about what they perceived as truth. Here Fowler's view of relativity toward absolute truth from any faith group was observed. Fowler shared that individuals learned how to participate with a degree of faith that was beyond their rational control at this stage. The individual was able to see partial truths in different religious groups and found a renewed importance of justice for all.

The last stage, stage six, for Fowler (1981) was also known as the *Universalizing stage*. Fowler stated that this stage was reached only by a few; Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mother Teresa were examples. The individual at this stage became the embodiment of love and justice for all. As a result, they were often more honored or respected after their death than before.

Fowler's model had its limitations; his definition of "faith" struggled to adapt to the postmodern worldview. Despite its shortfalls, it still had much to offer pastoral ministry as it explored how faith formed. There was a need for studies to address the limitations of Fowler's model and present an improved model for faith development.

Curriculum Development

Pew Research (Zickuhr, 2011) stated that the millennial generation was the most connected, optimistic, and open to change generation to date. They were also the most educated generation in American history. Howe (2009) pointed out that they were also more intelligent than one would think, with aptitude test scores rising during the 1990s in every racial and ethnic group. McCarthy (2012) shared that Millennials were born in 1982 and were the most racially and ethnically diverse generation America had seen (p. 6). Millennials are: Confident, team-orientated, achievement-driven, and believe that conventional rules and standards make life better. Monaco and Martin (2007) asserted that a recitation and lecture approach was no longer viable when teaching millennial learners. Werth (2011) added that de-emphasizing lectures for Millennial learners and maximizing the use of technology could add significant benefits. Garner (2007) stated that it is crucial to incorporate these elements in instruction for instructing Millennials: active engagement, hands-on experiences, and various formats for connecting with the learning process. Wiggins and McTighe (2005) maintained that these elements were important because they helped the learner connect to the material deeper. The goal was not only for the learner to hear and regurgitate the information, there was also the desire for them to understand what was studied.

Understanding had a lot to do with how the teacher or instructor-facilitated instructions based on different learning styles. To help individuals learn, the instructor needed to present the information in an easy way to perceive and process. McCarthy and O'Neill-Blackwell (2007) advocated for the *4MAT* approach to learning, which follows the learning pattern of the brain and engages all types of learners. This approach helped identify the different types of learners and took all learners through a process to help them better understand what they were learning. It is understood that the *4MAT* model is one of many models and does have its limitations in broad application. Slattery (2012) believed that educators should begin with each individual's experience and make a more comprehensive range of connections. Roberto (2013) also argued for an experiential aspect in learning that was part of a learning network rather than a simple linear learning process. He believed this was needed to meet an intergenerational church's personal and spiritual needs. Any curriculum developed for spiritual formation must consider that every individual and generation learns differently, and Millennials are no exception.

Conclusion

An apologetic-based curriculum is needed to help believers support their faith and answer skeptics' questions. It must be framed in terms of and drawn from objective sources of evidence. Despite the relativistic and postmodern world, apologetics is a valuable tool to help answer the questions of the 21st century. It also helps to build confidence in a theistic worldview. Apologetic conversations need to look more like diplomacy than a battlefield. All sharing should be in the context of authentic relationships and with Christians living grace-filled lives of authenticity.

Believers must begin to provide solid objective answers and evidence to support their views, beginning with the Synthetic-conventional or around adolescence. Youth begin to ask questions as they engage with competing ideologies. Individuals must move into the Individual-Reflective stage and are encouraged to wrestle with who they are and what they believe, apart from the variety of roles and relationships. They need to make objective decisions about what they believe and value as part of a systematic whole.

An apologetic curriculum is needed that considers both the strengths and weaknesses of millennial learners. The 4MAT approach to learning follows the learning pattern of the brain and is excellent for all types of millennial learners, helping them better understand and learn new ideas. More research and tools are needed in apologetic curriculum development to aid those engaged in ministry to students at the high school level. Spiritual leaders must address faith development and intellectual skepticism if there is any desire for success in youth and young adult ministry. A foundation for an apologetic-based curriculum for millennial learners grounded in relationships will now be explored.

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF THE APOLOGETIC INTERVENTION

Introduction

As mentioned in the literature review, Americans, in general, have become more skeptical of the Bible, and intellectual skepticism is one of the notable reasons youth have left the church (Smith & Denton, 2005). Apologetic-based curriculum can function as a means of pre-evangelism, addressing intellectual skepticism about the Bible (Groothuis, 2011). This curriculum can offer sound arguments and evidence that our secular society can understand and respect. However, question and answer bible studies do not consider the growing skepticism regarding the validity of the Bible. These studies use a proof text model, where the Bible is used primarily to defend itself rather than using extrinsic evidence. These studies also tell learners what they are supposed to believe rather than help them explore their own beliefs and why they believe them. As a result, this adds to queries of intellectual skepticism concerning the Bible rather than bolsters its credibility. The apologetic intervention described in this chapter attempts to bridge the gap between the intellectual skeptic regarding the Bible and question and answer Bible studies. The intention is to meet people in their faith development and engage them in conversation concerning their objections and concerns regarding the Bible. Then present apologetic evidence to help them move from a place of questions and doubt concerning the Bible to growing confidence in its reliability and trustworthiness.

This chapter has three major sections. The first section describes the development of the intervention incorporating the preliminary and current context from which the intervention was derived. The section also delineates how the principles of the theological review (Chapter 2) and the insights gained from the literature review (Chapter 3) were synthesized for the intervention. The second section describes the intervention process and the methodology, structure, and learning outcomes. It also highlights the pre-work and session structure along with follow-up surveys for the participant feedback and evaluation of the intervention. The last section closes with the conclusions and recommendations for further study.

Development of the Intervention

Context for the Intervention

The apologetic intervention grew out of the discussion and personal interactions with a small Bible study group in Pennsylvania. This Bible study group was called "The Barn Bible Study." The group members came from various backgrounds and experiences with Christianity. Some group members had little to no knowledge of the Bible, while others had a fundamental level. A question-and-answer Bible study series did not address many questions and concerns. The idea of using the Bible to defend itself was as problematic.

Along with that, the question and answer Bible study made various assumptions regarding one's level of faith in the Bible. These assumptions led to awkward discussions concerning the validity of the evidence or lack thereof regarding the integrity of the Bible. Through discussion and research (Millennials and the Bible: 3 Surprising Insights, 2014), many of those assumptions were flawed regarding the current postmodern and

post-Christian world we live in today (2015 Sees Sharp Rise in Post-Christian Population, 2015). In response to these experiences and challenges, extra-biblical resources were explored with the hope of helping others to defend the reliability and credibility of the Bible. The goal was to help those in the small group assemble resources that would help the group members as they shared their faith with others who had their doubts and concerns with the Bible. Not long after that, I began the Doctor of Ministry program and pursued apologetic curriculum development. Much was learned through writing the literature and theological review about current trends and challenges facing Christianity today. These current trends are not limited to any one place in North America. During my fifth year of doctoral studies, I took a job in Knoxville, Tennessee area. Through conversations with local pastors and further demographic studies (Towncharts Knoxville, 2020), I found that my current project was needed and transferable to my new ministry context.

The Current Approach

Question and answer Bible studies often begin by using a proof text methodology to defend the authenticity of the Bible. Proof texting is defined as using specific short passages, or at times only a single verse, pulled from the Bible, supporting a particular belief or doctrine. This method is problematic since the author of the study might integrate personally held assumptions that vary significantly from the original meaning and context of the author. Understanding the context provides a more reliable basis for interpreting and grasping the meaning of scripture. Therefore, any argument or doctrinal stand for the defense of the Bible that relies only on proof texts for its justification has a weak foundation for defense.

Skeptics and critics of the Bible often allege that Christians use circular reasoning to defend their biblical beliefs. The declaration "I believe the Bible is true because the Bible says it is true" may make perfect sense to a believer. It is a statement based and founded on faith, but it would be considered circular reasoning (Geisler & Turek, 2007). The assertion uses its assertion to prove its claim. Think of it this way, what if Muslims made the declaration "I believe the Koran is true because the Koran says it is true" and then went on to make references from the Koran the primary or only source for authentication. Most Christians would struggle with this assertion because they do not share the same credence of the Koran. Christians should consider this when defending and building a case for the acceptance of the Bible. We should be vigilant in using valid reasoning methods to defend scripture and beliefs. Helping Christians evaluate and defend their beliefs using a valid reasoning method is a great need in the discipleship process. It is also vital that we meet individuals where they are in their faith development process. Chapter 2 highlighted that Jesus, along with the writers of the Bible, met individuals at their level of understanding and cultural background. Proof texting and circular reasoning are not valid methods for meeting skeptical people at their place in faith development, nor helping others process and understand their beliefs.

The Need for an Apologetic Approach

An apologetic-based approach is needed to help believers reinforce their faith in the scriptures and address the challenges of skeptics. The approach must include objective evidence to meet secular society at their point of faith development. It is also advantageous for the approach when done in authentic relationships and with Christians living grace-filled lives of authenticity. As youth begin to ask questions while engaging

with competing ideologies, we must provide them with solid objective answers and evidence to support those beliefs and a way to process their views and ideas. Individuals need these resources to help them move from the Synthetic-conventional stage to the Individual-Reflective stage and are encouraged to wrestle with who they are and what they believe (J. W. Fowler, 1995). Individuals need to make objective decisions about their beliefs apart from their roles and relationships. The strengths and weaknesses of learners must be taken into account when developing an apologetic curriculum.

The 4MAT approach is a proven method based on the brain's learning patterns that have helped millennial learners and others process and adapts new information and practices (McCarthy, 2012). Using the 4MAT Learning Cycle design, the study integrated the principles of apologetics into the following areas: experiencing, critical thinking, collaborative problem solving, adaptation, and integration. The Learning Cycle is a template that allows people to teach anything based on how people perceive and process information. Through integrating these two means, learners will develop a strong foundation for their conclusion. The following is a breakdown of the four quadrants of the 4MAT Learning Cycle (See Figure 1).

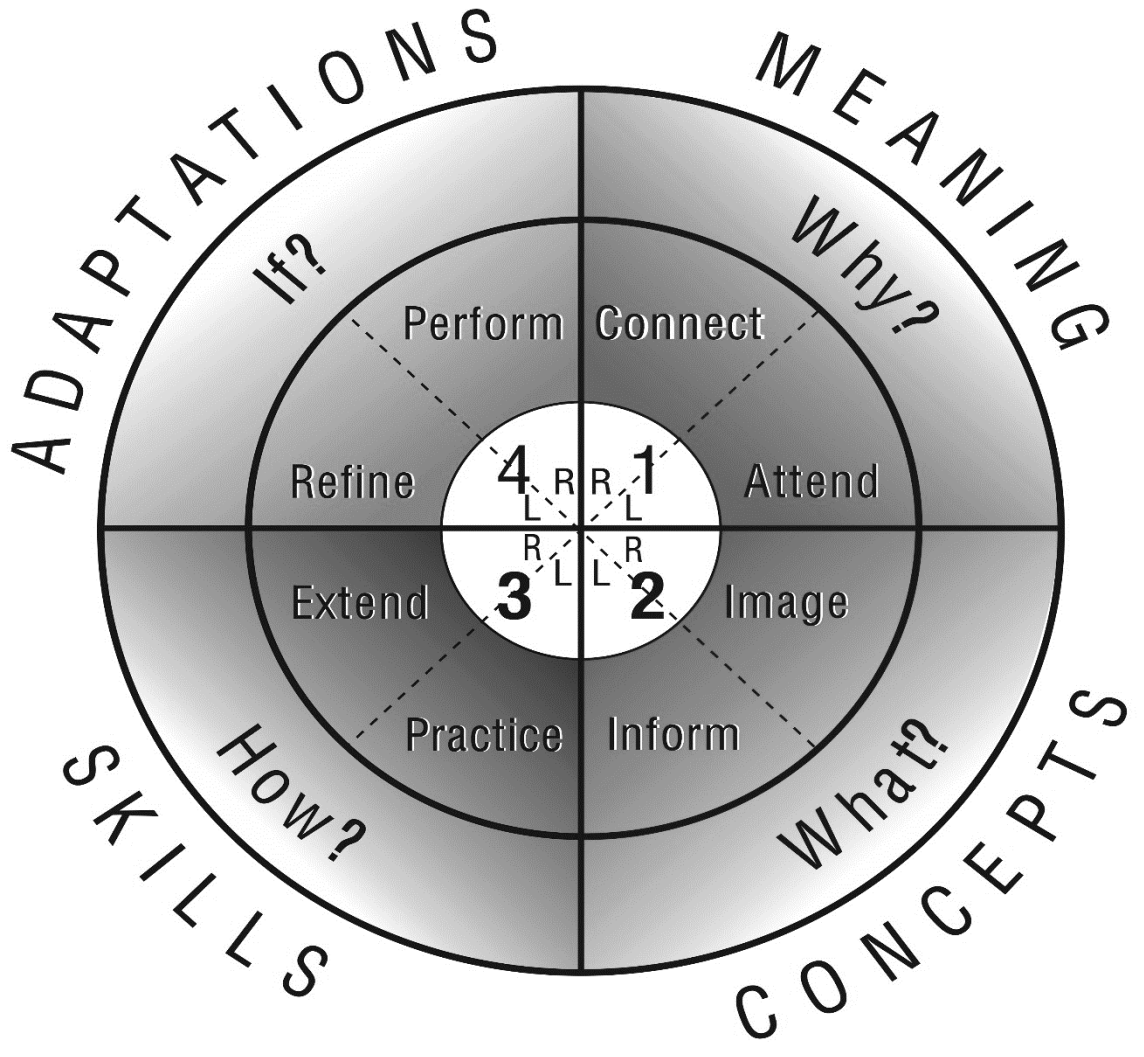


Figure 1: The eight-step learning cycle of the 4MAT Model (McCarthy, 2012).

Experiencing and Communicating Core Concepts

The first quadrant begins with exploring the feelings and experiences of learners. New feelings and experiences stimulate brain neurons, creating new connections within the brain. The experience of the feelings comes before the learner becomes aware of the feelings. This quadrant is specifically concerned with asking the question, "Why do I need to know this?" After this, learners begin to reflect on the purpose or meaning of these feelings or experiences.

Learning begins with an experience; something happens in the classroom, everyday life, or on the job. Explored feelings often lead to certain perceptions based on previous experiences and feelings. This process makes comparisons, including similarities and differences based on earlier experiences. Reflecting on experiences involves a variety of internal questions. "What just happened? Why is this affecting me this way? How am I feeling about what just happened? These lead us into an interpersonal conversation about our feelings" (McCarthy, 2012, p. 65). The ability to be aware of feelings brings a sense of freedom to explore perceptions without fear and the ability to question them. This exploration also lends itself to a deeper awareness of the perceptions of others based on differences and similarities.

The goal is to speak authentically about how one feels share questions and thoughts with oneself and others. It is also essential to listen attentively to the experience and feelings of others while maintaining a high level of respect for differing views and concepts. A facilitator needs to understand the underlying concept or idea to connect the learner to the content the instructor desires to communicate. This type of teaching and learning appears to be more about concept learning than strictly content learning.

Concepts are much more general and have a broader application leading to wider relevance than content alone.

For this reason, they enhance broader meaning and value transcending disciplines and other substantial concepts. Integration of this teaching and learning paradigm would drastically change the learning mechanisms previously employed. Instead of defending or building an argument against specific content, the effort would address the underlying concept impeding faith development. A concept-based apologetic curriculum supported by content would then have broader application and implementation to various aspects of life and practice (McCarthy, 2012).

Critical Thinking With Big Ideas

The brain synthesizes past feelings and experiences in quadrant two to form the big idea or concept. Once learners have visualized the big idea, the brain fills in additional details. This quadrant is specifically concerned with asking the question, "What do you want me to know?" The learners need to create in their mind the concept that they just experienced and worked through. The concept visualized is based on the responses to the experience and knowledge sharing from quadrant one. One perceives that the big idea must be explored and examined before moving to expert knowledge. Critical thinking must then be applied to uncover and clarify what is known. Critical thinking illuminates reasons, identifies unseen values, scrutinizes assumptions, questions evidence, and evaluates merit. Critical thinking must engage with both personal and expert knowledge and experience. The goal is to grasp the essence or big idea of the expert information to explore assumptions concerning the whole. The learners will critique and examine the evidence content, both personal and expert, to establish belief or

skepticism regarding the evidence. There will also need to be a point where the learners will agree or disagree with the expert thought process. Based on these steps, the learners must decide if they are willing to adjust their big-picture perspective and openness to new values or reinforce current values (McCarthy, 2012, p. 69).

Learners must examine and clarify their big-picture views to honestly examine them. Ideas and thoughts cannot be validated or revised until delineated and understood. Critical thinking occurs through the integration of objective-based apologetics with the currently held views of the learner. Through the process of wrestling with ones' understanding and expert knowledge, a learner arrives at the point of decision concerning the revision or acceptance of their big-picture view.

Collaborative Problem Solving

The third quadrant is all about allowing the brain to tinker and solve problems. This quadrant is specifically concerned with asking the question, "How does this work?" It starts with the big idea that was fleshed out in quadrant two and then through discovery and group work, finding the details and how they interrelate. The learners begin by solving problems alone and then cooperate with others when they are ready. At this point, the learners take over the learning process and begin to practice what they have learned and believe. Learning transitions from the teacher to the learners. At this moment, the learners ask, "How do we solve this problem?" How does what we have learned about help us address problems in the world around us? Practice activities help learners gain technical proficiency to use the knowledge in authentic problem-solving. The learners must clearly understand the experts' views and identify patterns and challenge assumptions. The learners should identify divergent teachings and thoughts. Finally,

learners should work toward solutions to answer critical problems preventing general agreement and forward movement (McCarthy, 2012, p. 73).

Through the collaborative problem-solving process, learners can explore the details of their big-picture idea. To do this, though, the learner must have a clear understanding of the view of the experts. The learners take what they have learned and apply it to problem-solving in everyday life. This application is the real test of an idea or concept. Does the argument stand up under pressure and challenges? This process also serves as a point of checks and balances for the learners. Surrendering previously held views may occur when closer scrutiny reveals that the view brings more problems to light rather than solving problems. Apologetics exposes the inability of ideas and concepts to function in the real world. Collaborating with other learners broadens the perspective of problems from various viewpoints and uncovers answers to previously unknown details. There are many benefits to exploring the aspects of any big idea concept held or taught.

Adaptations and Integration

In the last quadrant, the learners analyze their learning with the help of their teacher and other learners, then integrate these adaptations into their lives. Cognitively, here is where the brain integrates and adapts where it finds meaning. This quadrant is specifically concerned with asking the question, "If I learn this, what will I be able to do that I cannot do now? What will I be more able to become?" This process is constantly refining and improving based on theoretical learning and practice. The learners adopt the knowledge into their lives to meet them where they are and then move them into more profound experiences. The learners' refining process includes an assessment by the facilitator and other learners and being open to recommendations for improvement.

Learners should also be on the lookout for unintended outcomes, unforeseen at the beginning of the process. Impact on the learner and others can improve engagements and evaluate the experiences through the process (McCarthy, 2012, p. 77).

The fourth quadrant is about integrating learning into the everyday life of the individual learners, a group of learners, and finally, the community. This integration is part of the process that seems to always be in a state of reflection and adaptation based on current issues and concerns. Whenever learners engage and grow in their faith through the help of apologetics, they are better able to share and defend their faith. Furthermore, as a result, the learners can be true to who they are and what they believe. Many people feel peer pressure to believe or do things they disagree with during their teen years. They just went along with it so that others would accept them. Determining belief and putting it into practice in everyday life establishes the faith of learners and allows them to be true to what they believe.

The integration of apologetics and the Learning Cycle helped the learners understand and develop their faith. However, unless learners can process experiences and information holistically, they struggle with experiences and intellectual skepticism.

Description of the Intervention

Having recounted the development of the intervention established on both a theological foundation and the literature review, the ensuing is a detailed description of the intervention.

Methodology, Structure, and Learning Outcomes

This intervention aims to integrate apologetics and a proven learning cycle to increase knowledge and confidence in the Bible. Apologetics aims to give a rational defense or advocate for a specific position or view. In this case, the role of apologetics is to construct a case for faith and confidence in the Bible. According to Groothuis (2011), apologetics can function as a method of pre-evangelism. It addresses intellectual obstacles and helps create favorable conditions for the receptivity of the gospel (p. 28). Throughout the Bible, God uses various ways to communicate with people and help them to develop faith in Him and His word. Their faith and acceptance of God are established through different experiences and knowledge, shaping their view and understanding of God (2 Sam 12; Acts 17:22-24; Luke 24:15-27). The Learning Cycle (McCarthy, 2012) considers personal experiences and individual and expert knowledge to facilitate a clearer understanding of beliefs and views. This approach also followed the learning pattern of the brain and has been used for all types of learners to help them better understand what they are learning. Roberto (2013) also argued for an experiential aspect in learning that was part of a learning network rather than a simple linear learning process.

The intervention happened over five sessions. Before the sessions, the facilitator researched the arguments that were used most often against the trustworthiness and reliability of the Bible (Gilbert, 2015; Lutzer, 2015; MacArthur, 2015; J. McDowell & McDowell, 2010; Morrow, 2014). Sessions one through four addressed the underlying critical concepts of the following questions: "Is the Bible Anti-Intellectual?," "Has the Biblical Text been Corrupted over the Centuries?," "Are the Gospels full of Contradictions?" and "Is the Bible Unscientific?" (Morrow, 2014).

During session one, learners were welcomed and invited to sit at a table. Then, as a group, they went through the informed consent form (See Appendix) to answer any questions before signing. After all, learners had signed the consent form; they received an individual survey on their views relating to the Bible and intellectual skepticism (See Appendix).

Lessons one through four were done similarly with each group. Each session began with handing out or emailing the material addressing a critical concept that must be affirmed and understood in order to progress in ones' confidence in the scriptures. Making a statement and then building a case for that assertion gives the participant an insight into the thinking process and allows them to critique and learn as the concept is fleshed out. Next, the learners are asked to share their feelings and experience with that statement. There is no doubt that the person has heard things or believes things regarding the statement made. This process allows the participants to put their thoughts together and examine how they compare to the big picture statement. The learners need to think through what they have experienced and believe about a specific topic to engage with new information better.

The learners then combine feelings, experiences, and knowledge to form their big idea or concept about the statement. Critical thinking establishes and clarifies what is known and what questions remain. In the next section, the study continued to affirm the big picture concept via critical thinking using objectively verifiable evidence from expert apologists. The participants then critiqued and examined all the evidence to establish or alter their big-picture view. Finally, through grappling with the participants' views and

expert knowledge, they were brought to the point of decision concerning revision or acceptance of their big picture understandings.

For the next part of the process, the learners challenge the big picture concept with questions. The purpose behind this was to help the learner find out how their big picture idea worked when faced with challenging questions on that topic. First, the learner reviews the question or statement, and then the evidence supporting the primary statement is given. After the challenge, the learners responded to the question, "How their big picture understanding was altered by the challenge, or did it remain the same?" This part of the process helped further develop an understanding of the big picture and the essential details. Finally, learning a new idea or concept is compared and contrasted with previously held knowledge and assumptions. This part of the process helped address other concerns and issues that came to mind in the learning process that would have stood as inhibitors to full acceptance. Under closer scrutiny, some views revealed that they had more internal problems than had been formerly thought. Apologetics exposes ideas and concepts to challenges that the learners may not have known, but when views cannot function in the real world, those views must be re-examined or exchanged.

Lastly, learners scrutinized what they had learned and began examining how they would integrate their views into their lives. This progression was continually refined and established on both theoretical learning and practice. Finally, the learners took the big idea and applied that concept or what they had learned to other areas of their life. The learners, through this process, adapted the knowledge they had into their own lives in ways that met them where they were and then moved them into more profound experiences.

During session five, participants repeated the earlier individual survey taken in session one to understand participants' views relating to the Bible and intellectual skepticism. In addition, the individual survey was retaken to measure attitudinal shift including, but not limited to, confidence in the Bible. Lastly, a video-recorded group interview evaluated and facilitated a conversation concerning learning outcomes. All learners were thanked for their participation in the study.

Sampling and Sampling Strategies

The sampling strategy was to recruit groups of young adults from ages 18 to 35 born between 1985 and 2002 who are not currently attending any church and have skepticism concerning the Bible. These groups included a total of between ten to fifteen young adults. They were referred to the facilitator by church leaders and other church-going young adults living in Knoxville, Tennessee, and the surrounding areas. The intention was to have at least ten participants in the interview and intervention process. All group members signed an informed consent form (See Appendix).

Data Collection Methods

Young adults' participation and data collection occurred between August 2020 and August 2021. Group members chose to meet in person at the King Family Library or the Fellowship Hall of the Smoky Mountain Seventh-day Adventist Church or online via Zoom. The analysis took place through the following methods. During the first session, participants filled out an individual survey on their views relating to the Bible and intellectual skepticism (See Appendix). Patton (2015) conveyed that "interviews yield direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge" (p. 4). Seidman (2015) shared that "interviewing provides access to the context of

people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior" (p. 10).

During session five, the participants repeated the preliminary individual survey to measure attitudinal shift, including, but not limited to, confidence in the Bible. Lastly, a video-recorded group interview assessed and facilitated conversation regarding learning outcomes (See Appendix). The goal of each session was to be less than an hour in length.

Disclosure of the Researcher's Position and Bias

I served as a local pastor of the Smoky Mountain Seventh-day Adventist Church and the intervention facilitator at the research time. For this reason, I had to be conscious of my religious leanings throughout this intervention. I am also an American-born, Caucasian male, raised in a Seventh-day Adventist home and holding a bachelor's and master's degrees from Seventh-day Adventist universities. I know that these characteristics set me apart in unique ways from the participants from another cultural and spiritual upbringing.

CHAPTER 5

NARRATIVE OF THE INTERVENTION IMPLEMENTATION

Summary of the Project Manuscript

This intervention grew out of a conversation and personal interactions with a small Bible study group in Pennsylvania. This Bible study group was called "The Barn Bible Study." The group members came from a variety of different backgrounds and experiences with Christianity. Some group members had little to no knowledge of the Bible, while others had a fundamental level. As a result, the question and answer Bible studies did not address many questions and concerns participants brought up throughout the Bible study.

Additionally, the idea of using the Bible to defend itself was problematic. Question and answer Bible studies made various assumptions regarding one's level of acceptance of the Bible, which led to multiple awkward discussions concerning the validity of the evidence, or lack thereof, regarding the integrity of the Bible. In response to these discussions and challenges, I began researching extra-biblical resources to defend the reliability and credibility of the Bible. I desired to help those in my small group and assemble resources that would allow them to share their faith with others who also had doubts and concerns about the Bible. Not long after that, I chose to enter the Doctor of Ministry program and pursue apologetic curriculum development. Through writing the

literature and theological review, I learned about current trends and challenges facing Christianity in 2018. These recent trends are not limited to any one place in North America. In 2020, during my fifth year of doctoral studies, I took a call as a pastor in the Knoxville, Tennessee, area. Through conversations with local pastors and further demographic studies (Towncharts Knoxville, 2020), I found that my current project was needed and transferable to my new ministry context.

In the Knoxville community and the surrounding areas, young adults lacking biblical knowledge struggle to embrace the Bible without additional intellectual support. When young adults read the Bible, I have observed that it evokes feelings of alienation and distance from the spiritual conversation. One contributing factor is the lack of supporting materials from outside the Bible within question and answer study guides. Supporting this view, Smith, and Denton (2009) found that nearly one-third of Christian students leave the church because of intellectual skepticism and doubt.

An apologetic-based approach is needed to help believers reinforce their faith in the scriptures and address the challenges of skeptics. It must be built upon objective evidence to meet secular society at its point of faith development. It is also advantageous for the approach when done in authentic relationships and with Christians living grace-filled lives of authenticity. When young adults ask questions while engaging with opposing ideologies, spiritual leaders must provide solid objective answers and evidence to support Biblical-based views. Individuals need to decide what they believe apart from the variety of roles and relationships they have.

Using the 4MAT Learning Cycle, I incorporated the principles of apologetics to interconnect with the following areas: experiencing, critical thinking, collaborative

problem solving, and adaptation along with integration. The Learning Cycle is a template that allows you to teach anyone based on how people perceive and process information. By integrating these two means, learners will develop a stronger foundation for their conclusion.

The study included young adults from ages 18 to 35 born between 1985 and 2002 who were not attending any church and had skepticism concerning the Bible living in Knoxville, Tennessee, and the surrounding area. In groups of two, Ten young adults went through the intervention process. These individuals were referred to me by local church leaders or church-going young adults.

Description of the Project Process

The interventions were facilitated in five sessions over three to four week periods. Before the sessions, the facilitator took time to explore the arguments used most often against the trustworthiness and reliability of the Bible (Gilbert, 2015; Lutzer, 2015; MacArthur, 2015; McDowell & McDowell, 2010; Morrow, 2014). Session one served as a time for orientation and for learners to read and sign the informed consent form (see Appendix) and participate in the pre-intervention individual survey (see Appendix). Sessions one through four addressed the following questions: "Is the Bible Anti-Intellectual?" "Has the Biblical Text been Corrupted over the Centuries?," "Are the Gospels full of Contradictions?" and "Is the Bible Unscientific?"(Morrow, 2014). During session five, participants repeated the earlier individual survey taken in session one to understand better any changes in participants' views relating to the Bible and intellectual skepticism. Lastly, the facilitator did a video-recorded group interview to survey and facilitate a conversation concerning learning outcomes.

Session One of the Intervention

Recruitment, participation, and data collection occurred between August 2020 and August 2021. In 2020 and 2021, due to health concerns and the prevalence of the Covid-19 virus, individuals did not feel comfortable meeting in large groups or in-person, in some cases. As a result, each group had two participants, and some participated in groups online via Zoom. In addition, in-person participants were offered compensation in the form of a meal after each session for those interested. Unfortunately, about half of the participants did not participate in the meal due to health concerns.

Group members chose to meet in person at the King Family Library in Sevierville, Tennessee, or the Fellowship Hall of the Smoky Mountain Seventh-day Adventist Church, also in Sevierville, Tennessee. Online participants met via Zoom.

During session one, learners were welcomed and thanked for their participation in the study. The facilitator emailed documents earlier for online learners, allowing them to print their copies before the session. Individuals who participated online scanned and returned completed documents via email at the end of each session. Each group went through the informed consent form (See Appendix) to answer any questions before learners signed. After all learners had signed the informed consent form, they received a participant number instead of their name to be written on all documents. No names were to be written on the material to offer a higher level of confidentiality throughout the process. Next, learners received the pre-intervention individual survey to ascertain their views relating to the Bible and intellectual skepticism (See Appendix). After handing in the pre-intervention surveys, the facilitator gave directions for the first lesson. Lessons

were handed out or emailed before the session for online learners. The instructor kept all forms and lessons for security and to prevent the loss of materials between sessions.

The first concept addressed was "Is the Bible Anti-Intellectual?" (Morrow, 2014). This question was simplified to the concept statement: beliefs are based on reality. Concepts were used rather than questions because concepts can be used for broad application engaging both meaning and value. Essential support, both intellectual and experiential, were used to substantiate the statement. Experiences intrigued the learners and drew them into further thought and curiosity to achieve engaging dialogue and thoughtfulness during the process. Learners were then encouraged through questions to share their feelings and experiences with this concept. Through exploring feelings, experiences, and previous knowledge, learners are better equipped to write down and explain their big picture of the concept. They also explained their agreement or disagreement with the concept statement shared and the reason for their position. The lesson then asked additional clarifying questions further to elucidate their views as part of critical thinking.

In the next portion of the study, the lesson used expert apologetic evidence to defend the concept statement. The main argument surrounded the idea that faith and belief in the Bible are not limited to the realm of fairy tales. It is not blind faith, nor is it opposed to reason and evidence. Spiritual beliefs must be established in reality to be relevant and not make-believe. The study also shared various ways the God of the Bible did not expect people to follow him blindly, but time after time provided verifiable proof. After exploring the expert knowledge, learners went through a series of processing questions to ascertain their understanding and help them digest the information.

In the following section of the study, the concept statement exposed the learners to questions they may not have considered but are essential to address. This study section also demonstrated that the evidence and concept could withstand additional scrutiny and were not unchallenged. After this process, learners reflected on how their view of the big picture concept had changed or altered based on the expert knowledge or if it remained the same. If the learner's concept was unaltered and did not agree with the proposed concept statement, they shared what issues or questions remained, which prevented their views from being altered.

At the end of the first session, learners worked with the other participant to discuss their views and answer why they agreed or disagreed with the concept statement. The learners also reflected on what they had learned about the other person's views and their views through sharing. This section of the study was another opportunity for learners to clarify their beliefs by sharing them with others and possibly be exposed to additional questions that might affirm or challenge their previously held views.

Learners then worked with partners to write down how they would apply their beliefs in their everyday lives. The plan needed to be something they could do and evaluate in the coming week. This plan would include any life changes or decisions, understanding that there would be follow-up in the next session. All study materials were collected and filed for in-person participants. Online learners were to scan and email all completed documents. The facilitator expressed gratitude for the learners' participation, and the group set another date and time for the following session.

Session Two of the Intervention

During session two, the facilitator returned all study materials to in-person learners. Learners began by reflecting on how they had integrated the new or adapted view into their lives. Some found that they had trouble doing this in the time between sessions. The last part of the first concept statement study was to critique and refine one's view based on its' usage between sessions. Concepts were continually refined and established on both theoretical learning and practice. Finally, the learner took the big picture and applied the idea or what they had learned to other areas of their life. The learner, through this process, adapted the knowledge they had absorbed into their lives in a way that met them where they were and then moved them into more profound experiences. After the facilitator gave learners time to reflect, the learners moved on to the second concept for consideration.

The second concept discussed was "Has the Biblical text been corrupted over the centuries?" (Morrow, 2014). This question was simplified to the concept statement: beliefs are based on things that are reliable. Again, a concept was used rather than a question and then supported using intellectual and experiential processes to validate the statement. To connect on an experiential level, learners again shared their experiences that helped paint a big picture of the concept—using a concept allowed them to explore feelings, experiences, and knowledge connected with the concept statement. Learners used this part of the lesson to help process the idea and articulate their views and understanding. They shared why they agreed or disagreed with the concept statement to clarify their knowledge in the critical thinking process.

The lesson then brought expert apologetic evidence to light, supporting the reliability of the Bible. Apologists affirm that we do not have any of the original manuscripts of the Old or New Testaments. Scholars' manuscripts are copies handed down over the years, and it is the same situation for all other forms of ancient literature. There are no originals, but the more copies and the closer they are to the original date, the better it was for the practice of textual criticism (Morrow, 2014). Apologists addressed three critical questions concerning the reliability of the biblical text. The experts addressed the following questions: "How many manuscripts do we have to work with? How early are the manuscripts we have to work with? How important are the textual variants between these manuscripts?" Dan Wallace, the leading New Testament textual critic, said this regarding the number of reliable texts: "The wealth of material that is available for determining the wording of the original New Testament is staggering: more than fifty-seven hundred Greek New Testament manuscripts, as many as twenty thousand versions, and more than one million quotations by patristic writers" (Morrow, 2014, p. 96).

Compared with the average Greek author, the New Testament copies are well over a thousand times more plentiful. "If the average-sized manuscript or two and one-half inches thick, all the copies of the works of an average Greek author would stack up four feet high, while the copies of the New Testament would stack up to over a mile high. This evidence is indeed an embarrassment of riches" (Komoszewski, Sawyer, & Wallace, 2006, p. 82).

Apologists shared that because of the numerous manuscripts, we can have a high degree of confidence in the reliability of the text. Another essential way to establish the

reliability of the biblical text is to demonstrate the short time gap between the actual events and the earliest manuscript. The earliest portion of the New Testament is the John Rylands papyrus found in Egypt, dated to AD 117 – 134. If the apostle John wrote his gospel around AD 95 in Ephesus, the time gap between the original and our manuscript copy is only 35 years. The next smallest time gap between the events and the manuscript copy for all other ancient literature was a hundred years. Scholars Kostenberger and Kruger (2010) commented on the biblical time gap, saying,

The brief span of time between the production of the New Testament and our earliest copies gives us access to the New Testament text at a remarkably early stage, making it very unlikely that the textual tradition could have been radically altered prior to this time period without evidence for those alterations still being visible within the manuscript tradition. (p. 211)

The last expert piece of knowledge shared was on the number and type of textual variants and their impact on the reliability of the biblical text. Critics have pointed out that there are nearly 400,000 textual variants in the New Testament. Apologists address this challenge with the following definition of variants: "A variant is any place among the New Testament manuscripts where there is not uniformity of wording (Morrow, 2014, p. 98)." The number of variants can expand rapidly, with one word misspelled in one manuscript equating to more than 2,000 variants due to many New Testament manuscripts possessed. After exploring the variants of the Bible, apologists found that ninety-nine percent of all variants have no impact on our ability to reconstruct the text (Morrow, 2014). Ehrman commented on this in his book, *Misquoting Jesus*, saying, "Most of the changes found in our early Christian manuscripts have nothing to do with theology or ideology. Far and Away the most changes are the result of mistakes, pure and simple—slips of the pen, accidental omissions, inadvertent additions, misspelled words, blunders

of one sort of another” (Ehrman, 2009, p. 55). After considering the expert knowledge, learners explored a sequence of processing questions to follow their level of understanding and aid them in processing the information.

In the next section of the study, learners engaged with additional questions against the underlying query. These questions worked to solidify the learner's confidence in the concept statement by adding different challenges and strong rebuttals. After these questions, learners articulated how the expert knowledge had impacted their big-picture concept. Finally, learners whose views had not changed and disagreed with the concept statement answered the questions to help clarify their views. Through this process, learners' additional questions and any ulterior bias came to the surface.

After their reflections, learners verbally shared their views with the other participant and supported their thoughts concerning the concept statement. Learners then wrote down any clarifying ideas or questions they brought away from the process. Learners then worked with their partners again to develop a plan for practicing this concept in everyday life the following week. After the session, all materials were collected and filed for the next session for in-person learners. Online learners were to scan and email all completed documents. The facilitator expressed gratitude for the learners' participation, and the group set another date and time for the following session.

Session Three of the Intervention

At the beginning of session three, the facilitator returned study materials to in-person learners. Learners began by reflecting on how they had integrated the new or adapted view into their lives. Next, learners were encouraged to critique and write down what they learned through the process. It is important to remember that knowledge and

new experiences constantly refine one's views. The desired outcome for this part of the study was for the learner, through the process, to have more profound experiences and insight into themselves and what they believe. After reflection, the group continued to the third concept.

The third concept addressed was, "Are the Gospels full of Contradictions?" (Morrow, 2014). This question was developed into the broad concept statement: beliefs are based on things that are consistent. After apologists supported the concept statement, learners again engaged by sharing their understanding of the big picture concept based on their knowledge and experience. The learners also articulated their level of agreement with the concept statement as part of the critical thinking done throughout the intervention.

The following part of the process engaged expert knowledge and experience into the learning process addressing how the Bible demonstrates consistency. Historical references and concepts help the learner to understand consistency within the textual biblical account. An account of an event or something said is deemed consistent when all statements can be accurate at the same time (Morrow, 2014). It was also important to share the dynamics of history as they were seen and interpreted in the past. Bock (2006) shared the following,

History is not a static entity. Neither are the sayings that belong to it and describe its events. Historical events and sayings do not just happen and then sit fossilized with a static meaning. As events in history proceed, they develop their meaning through interconnected events that give history its sense of flow. Later events impact how previous events and sayings are understood, scene, and appreciated.... sometimes events and sayings are understood better after a reflection than when they first took place. The wording of a saying may not change, but what is perceived about it may change. (p. 81)

In the subsequent section, learners reflected on additional questions opposing the underlying query and reinforced rebuttals. Next, learners pondered how expert knowledge and reason had impacted their big-picture concept. Any remaining questions or challenges were written down and then verbally shared with their partner, helping each person articulate what they believed about the concept. At the end of this process, learners wrote down what they took away from the progression and began working with a partner to integrate this concept into their everyday lives. Lastly, all materials were collected and filed for the next session for in-person learners. Online learners were to scan and email all completed documents to the facilitator. The facilitator expressed gratitude for the learners' participation, and the group set another date and time for the following session.

Session Four of the Intervention

At the opening of session four, the facilitator returned study materials from the previous session back to in-person learners, and they began to evaluate the learning process. After putting the concept statement principles into practice, the learners integrated what they had learned over the past week. Then, after time for consideration and discussion, the group continued with the fourth concept.

The fourth concept addressed was, "Is the Bible Unscientific?" (Morrow, 2014). This question was developed into the broad concept statement: beliefs are based on things that are defensible. Both intellectual and personal experiences helped to validate this concept. After reflecting on the concept statement, learners again engaged in sharing their understanding of the big picture concept based on their knowledge and experience.

The learners also articulated their level of agreement with the concept statement as part of the critical thinking done throughout the intervention.

Next, learners examined expert knowledge on science and the Bible. It is important to note that even though the Bible is not a science book, it is accurate when describing scientific processes. An example of this is the hydrological cycle. Rain or snow falls on the ground and runs off into streams, rivers, and the sea. Water evaporates from the bodies of water across the earth and returns to the clouds, where it becomes rain and snow, which falls to the ground (MacArthur, 2015, p. 33). The hydrological cycle is considered a relatively recent discovery, but the Bible speaks of it in Isaiah 55:10. It says, "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth." Similar references can be seen in (Job 36:27) and (Ps 135:7).

Another example of the accuracy of the Bible concerning the scientific process is the science of geology. Geologists speak of a state called Isostasy, which can describe the balance of the earth as it orbits through space. The idea is that equal weights are necessary to support equal weights. Landmass must be balanced equally with water mass. For the earth to remain stable as it spins in orbit, it must be in perfect balance. The Bible says God "Measured the waters in the hollow of his hand" and that He "weighed the mountains on the scales and the Hills in a balance" (Isa 40:12). The Bible does not use the modern scientific language of today but continues to match up with contemporary discoveries of science (MacArthur, 2015, p. 33).

One of the strongest arguments for the defensibility of scripture comes from fulfilled Bible prophecy. Peter Stoner, a scientist and mathematician, utilized "the principle of probability." He applied his mathematical equation to calculate the

probability of the Bible prophecy concerning the destruction of Tyre, from Ezekiel 26:3-16, which claims seven actual events. The events included: Nebuchadnezzar would take the city, other nations would help fulfill the prophecy, Tyre would be flat, and like the top of a rock, the city would become a place where fishermen spread their nets, Tyre's stones and timbers would be put in the sea, other cities would fear because of Tyre's fall and the old city of Tyre would never be rebuilt. The odds of all seven events happening as described was one in 400 million, yet all seven occurred.

Biblical scholars did a similar study on the prophecy that predicted the fall of Babylon in Isaiah 13:19. The study calculated the chances of the Babylon prophecies occurring as outlined in the Bible as one in 100 billion, but everything predicted happened. Compare these predictions to the odds of winning the Mega Millions jackpot, which is one in 302.6 million, and the odds of winning the Powerball jackpot are one in 292.2 million (MacArthur, 2015, pp. 34-35).

Bible prophecies have predicted future events with astonishing accuracy greater than human knowledge or anticipation. Despite enormous odds, hundreds of biblical prophecies have become a reality, making one of the most defensible arguments for the Bible (MacArthur, 2015). After going through the knowledge and reasoning provided by experts, learners reflected on a series of questions to help them consider what they had learned and the impact of the information on their big picture concept.

Learners then were presented with additional questions others had asked on the topic. Following this, learners wrote down how the expert knowledge had impacted their understanding and views. Finally, those learners whose views had not changed or disagreed with the concept statement shared additional questions and perspectives to help

clarify their thoughts. This process aimed to discover any questions that were not being answered and provide a platform for further study.

Subsequently, learners shared their views with their partners and how they would put their knowledge and beliefs into action the following week. At the end of the session, the facilitator collected materials for the last session from those in person. Online learners were asked to scan and email all completed documents. The facilitator thanked learners for their willingness to participate, and the group chose a date and time for the last session.

Session Five of the Intervention

In session five, the facilitator returned study materials to in-person learners. Learners examined what they had learned and began reflecting on how they had integrated the new or adapted view into their lives. Concepts were constantly refined and established on both theoretical learning and practice. The learners, through this process, adapted the information they had engaged with into their lives in ways that met them where they were and then moved them into more profound experiences. After reflection, the group moved on to the post-intervention survey.

During session five, the participants repeated the pre-intervention survey from session one to measure biblical knowledge and attitudinal shift, including, but not limited to, confidence in the Bible. Lastly, the facilitator conducted a video-recorded group interview to survey (See Appendix) and facilitated a conversation regarding learning outcomes.

Conclusions

This study has been an engaging experience of meeting people where they are: cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually. Putting intellectual adaptation into the study materials was key to answering learners' questions from various backgrounds and levels of knowledge. In reviewing the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys, there was an increase in learners' confidence in the Bible. It was also exciting to listen to the conversation about the process during the video-recorded follow-up time. Many additional topics were brought to light, making it very instructive. Throughout this process, I also learned about myself and my views, but it was a blessing to understand the views of others better. This process allowed me to help others clarify their thoughts about the Bible and explore the currently available evidence.

There was an apparent deepening of understanding and knowledge regarding the Bible through the process. Learners were challenged in various ways and learned things they did not know about the topics and themselves. There is a need for additional work on an apologetic curriculum for engaging millennial learners. The 4MAT approach to learning and processing information has proved to be an excellent tool in helping millennial learners grow in their confidence and discussion of the Bible. Finally, to help youth and young adults progress in their faith, faith development problems and intellectual skepticism must continue to be examined to find better answers.

CHAPTER 6

PROJECT EVALUATION AND LEARNINGS

Summary of the Project

This project sought to develop, implement, and evaluate an apologetic-based curriculum to introduce biblical concepts to young adults and address intellectual skepticism. The undertaking of this project was to determine and assess the impact of the curriculum based on increased acceptance and intellectual confidence in the Bible. This project examined three topics in scripture: doubt and uncertainty, intellectual adaptation, and apologetics to develop a theological basis for an apologetic-based curriculum. The first step was to study and evaluate the biblical stance concerning doubt and skepticism, including apologetics in scripture. Second, current literature was reviewed, specifically for understanding and addressing the relevant questions of young adults. Third, study and evaluate curriculum formation, including experiential and inquiry-based learning. The 4MAT approach was valuable for helping young adults better comprehend and learn new ideas. This approach follows the brain's learning pattern and has been used for all types of millennial learners. Fourth, survey and interview young adults with doubt and intellectual questions about the Bible who do not regularly attend any church. During the last session, each group of learners participated in a recorded focus group which provided qualitative data included in this study. A pre and post-intervention individual survey also assessed quantitative data.

Description of the Evaluation

The following includes a description of how the data from the intervention was assessed and understood. Also included is the process of interpretation and drawing conclusions from that data.

Evaluation Method

A qualitative pre and post-intervention individual interview demonstrated an attitudinal shift and increased confidence in the Bible. Learners were asked several questions with an agree-disagree scale. The range of responses was assigned numerical values to quantify attitudinal shifts as a group—analysis and interpretation of the data aided in evaluating the apologetic-based curriculum. The higher the point value, the greater the overall confidence in the Bible. In addition, during the final session, learners participated in a recorded qualitative set of questions that allowed further conversation on their experience and the process. Evaluated and organized data through content analysis allowed for closer examination of all data, including my observations and notes. Common themes and patterns are drawn inductively from the data and findings, and conclusions.

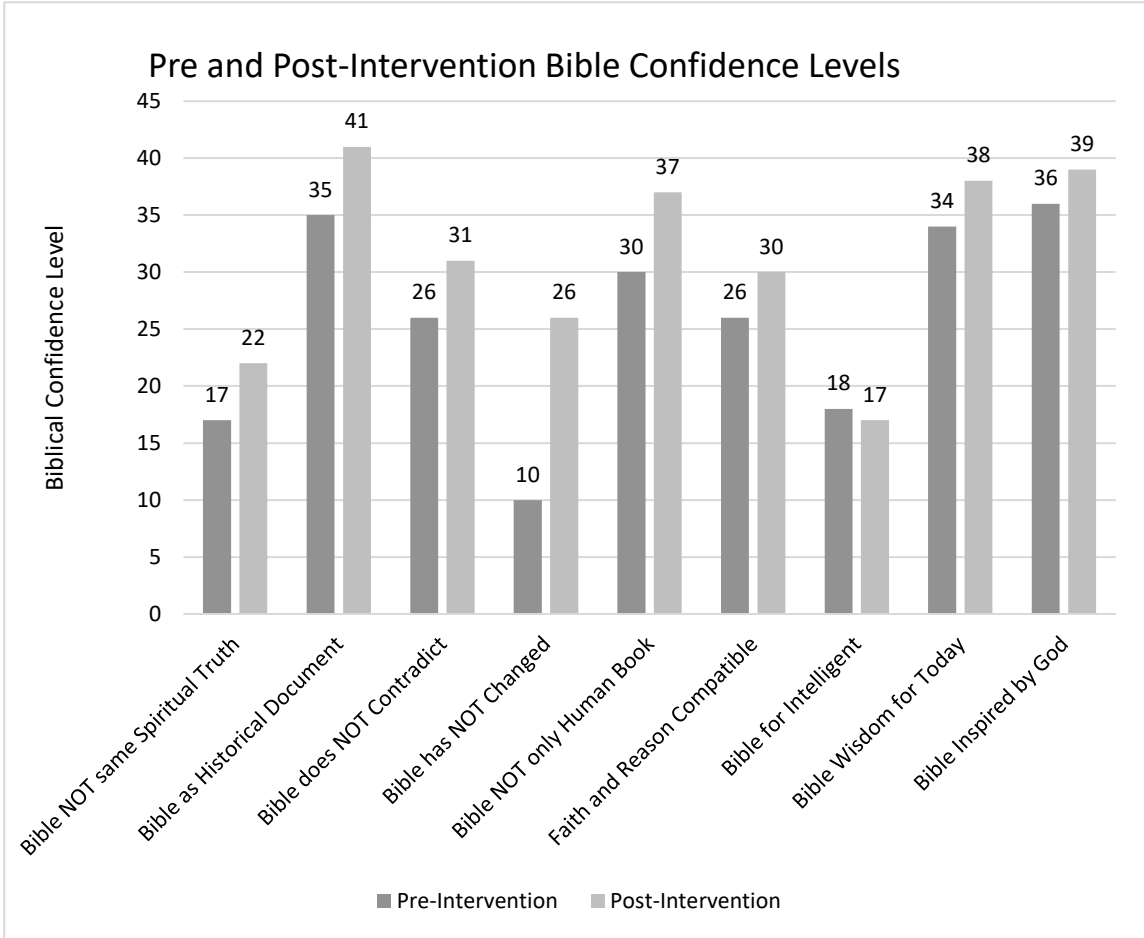


Figure 2: Pre- and post-intervention Bible confidence results for 10 surveyed young adults, 2020-2021.

Interpretation of the Data

The pre- and post-intervention individual survey results are displayed in Figure 2. The number above the pre-intervention bar for each belief signifies the overall confidence of learners concerning that specific question. The numeral above the post-intervention bar denotes the general trust of learners regarding that same belief post-intervention. The following are the results of each of the nine critical belief statements. For the first statement, confidence that the Bible, Koran, and the Book of Mormon are not all different expressions of the same spiritual truths grew from 17 to 22, a 29 % increase in Biblical confidence.

Statement two that the Bible can be trusted as a historical document also grew from 35 to 41, a 17 % increase. Confidence that the Bible does not have contradicting ideas in statement three grew moderately from 26 to 31, a 19 % increase.

The belief that the Biblical text has changed over the years saw a significant shift in confidence in the Biblical text from 10 to 26, a 160 % increase in confidence. Learners grew in their conviction that the Bible is not only a book of teachings and stories written by human beings moderately from 30 to 37, a 23 % increase. The statement that believing in the Bible requires faith, without supporting reasons from 26 to 30, is a 15 % increase in the need for reason and faith. A decline was noted on the statement that the Bible is for intelligent men and women, moving from 18 to 17, a 6 % decrease. The statement that the Bible contains wisdom valuable for living a meaningful life grew from 34 to 38, a 12 % increase. Furthermore, learners grew in confidence in the Bible as the inspired word of God from 36 to 39, an 8 % increase. The qualitative data from the individual survey denotes an overall growth in confidence in the Bible.

During the final session, learners took part in a recorded qualitative set of questions that highlighted their experience and the overall process. The process of exploring one's big picture view personally challenged learners as they reflected and examined whether their beliefs were fact-based or simply their opinion. Learners appreciated the inductive learning approach, which drew on their own experience rather than telling them what to believe. As a result, previously held views once perceived as unambiguous tended to shift to a more nuanced expression of ideas. In addition, individual learners appreciated different lessons as they engaged with overarching principles in their everyday lives. Each session encouraged learners to engage with a specific belief in their daily life that became part of their life story. As a result, learners became more conscientious about thoughts or ideas and why they held those beliefs in everyday life. A couple of learners mentioned that they would have appreciated it if the section concepts engaged more with the biblical defense paragraphs. The opportunity to break down concepts and ideas, put them back together and engage in dialogue about those beliefs greatly benefited the overall process for learners. As a result of the exchange, learners better understood their views and how others arrived at their conclusions. In general, the discussion of views did not change individual learners' opinions, but it made them more open to listening to other perspectives. Limiting groups to two participants or participating in discussion online via zoom due to the Covid-19 pandemic was challenging for some learners. Several learners thought that more than two group discussions would have benefited the process. When learners put principles into practice and follow up on those actions, they often reaffirm their views and grow in confidence to speak up about their beliefs. Putting their thoughts into practice created a

greater awareness of the needs in the community and a desire to make a difference. The necessitated accountability to the other learner and the facilitator prompted completion and short-term routines.

There was also an increased openness to studying the Bible and participating in a group Bible study. They were thankful that the study had provided evidence supporting the Bible to share with others. A few learners expressed that their views had not changed due to unanswered questions or previous negative experiences with Christians. Most learners asserted that preconceived ideas and willingness to examine those views significantly influence whether someone trusts the Bible even with significant evidence. Learners expressed interest and curiosity on various topics related to the Bible, including salvation for those who never know about Jesus and what level of certainty is necessary for belief. All learners appreciated the flow and depth of the lessons and felt they were very appropriate for young adults. The studies were intellectually challenging but not overwhelming. The overall length of each lesson, and the study, were seen as suitable lengths for the material covered, but several learners would have appreciated more time for group dialogue. Most learners felt they would be unlikely to participate in this study if the lessons were online for individuals due to a lack of accountability and interpersonal exchange. The study catalyzed deeper conversations about personal beliefs among participants and provided an easy-to-follow format for discussing their views with others.

Conclusions Drawn From the Data

A close analysis of the quantitative data revealed an overall growth in confidence in the Bible. Furthermore, learners grew overall in their belief that the Bible is a reliable and trustworthy source of wisdom and truth for everyday life. The most significant

change in thinking for learners was that the biblical text had not changed over the years. The negative response to the statement, the Bible is for intelligent men and women, seemed arbitrary in light of the other answers. The facilitator's intended meaning of “intelligent” could have been misunderstood, leading to a negative response.

Two central themes emerged through the qualitative analysis of the post-intervention group interviews. First, there was an appreciation for the process, which helped learners better understand their views and the evidence, along with tools for evaluating beliefs. For example, one learner shared, “This process made me wonder what I took into consideration when I thought about something and believed it.” Another learner remarked that “I previously saw most things as black and white, but this process helped me to understand the nuances of my faith better.” Second, there was a greater interest and openness to hearing the beliefs of others. For example, one learner shared, “This study served as a catalyst to talk deeper about personal religious beliefs within my marriage. It also gave us a way of discussing our religious views and beliefs with each other and with others.” Another learner shared, “Instead of zoning out when people talk about religion, this process has made me listen more attentively.” Still, another learner shared, “Listening to others in the study made me more open to hearing and listening about others' beliefs.” These two themes were prominent throughout the responses in the post-intervention group interviews.

In the post-intervention group interviews, learners were asked several questions about their confidence in the Bible to evaluate the acceptance and attitudinal shift in favor of the Bible. First, when learners were asked to describe their attitude toward the Bible post-intervention, there was an increase in openness and confidence in the Bible. For

instance, one learner shared, “My confidence in the Bible has increased because of a better understanding in the area of the Bible’s consistency.” Another learner shared, “It made me want to go back and look at the Bible and see what it really says.” Second, when learners were asked if they were more likely to participate in a Bible study, the group was generally more likely to do so. One learner shared, “I am more willing to participate in a weekly Bible study where we talk and share our beliefs in a group.” Another learner shared, “Yes, this process has increased my interest in studying the Bible and learning more, but not necessarily about going to church because of some negative experiences.” One learner did remark, “I do not see myself joining a Bible Study, but that has more to do with my personality than the content.” Thirdly, when learners were asked why some people may choose not to trust in the Bible even after going through these lessons, the general themes were preconceived ideas and thoughts, in addition to negative experiences with Christians. For example, one learner said, “Some people are very set in their ways and just stubborn.” Another learner said, “There can be a reluctance connected with the Bible based on a person’s experience or having had a negative experience with Christians or no exposure to the Bible at all.” Finally, another learner mentioned, “Some do not like religious people saying, ‘here is what you need to do’ rather than letting them look through the Bible and walk through the topic.” The importance of positive relationships with Christians in spiritual growth cannot be overstated.

Outcomes of the Intervention

This study's qualitative and quantitative insights are encouraging and warrant further exploration of apologetic-based curriculum development. The data suggests that using an apologetic-based curriculum in this intervention allowed learners to reflect on

their beliefs and understandings and have meaningful conversations with others. One of the outcomes of this intervention was that learners expressed growth in their confidence in the Bible. The learners also expressed a greater willingness to learn more about the Bible. Another outcome of this intervention was that several learners mentioned they would use this apologetic-based methodology when processing and evaluating ideas or the views of others in the future. They found it very helpful for processing and understanding their beliefs and gave them marked confidence when sharing those views with others. It was very encouraging to see young adults who had not thought about spiritual topics, some for many years, engage with the subject of the Bible. Consequently, a secondary outcome of this intervention has been to strengthen my commitment to developing an apologetic-based curriculum.

Summary of Other Conclusions

In addition to the conclusions reached from the intervention data, a summary of the theological, theoretical, and methodological findings reached in previous chapters will prepare the way for overarching conclusions.

Theological Conclusions - Chapter 2

Doubt and uncertainty are nothing new. People considered champions of faith in the Bible had and expressed doubts and uncertainty. However, they did not dwell on doubts but looked for answers based on reliable evidence when faced with doubts. Questions and doubts were not looked down upon but provided answers and evidence while being encouraged to develop their faith. Throughout the Bible, God communicated with people where they were: cognitively, emotionally, and spiritually. Intellectual adaptation was incorporated when addressing the questions and concerns from diverse

multigenerational, cultural, or cognitive backgrounds. Jesus never intended people to follow him absent-mindedly. He engaged in apologetics, using his miracles and prophecy as evidence. Jesus regularly asks open-ended questions, not because he did not know the answer, but because he wanted people to examine their views and understanding. People need to be met in the 21st century where they are in their faith development and through conversation, using objective evidence and reason; help them move from questions and doubt into an ever-deepening faith.

Theoretical Conclusions - Chapter 3

An apologetic-based curriculum is needed to help believers support their faith and answer skeptics' questions. It must be framed in terms and drawn from objective sources of evidence. Despite the relativistic and postmodern world, apologetics is a valuable tool to help answer the questions of the twenty-first century. It is also helpful in building confidence in a theistic worldview. Apologetic conversations need to look more like diplomacy to help learners discover what they believe based on solid evidence rather than a battlefield. People in the Individual-Reflective stage, individuals from their late teens to early adulthood, need to be encouraged to wrestle with their beliefs, apart from their various roles and relationships. Young adults need to make objective decisions about their beliefs and values as part of a systematic whole. There need to be times, places, and tools that aid young adults in answering their questions and processing their beliefs. Young adults need resources to help them process the immense amount of data they come across regularly. The 4MAT approach to learning follows the learning pattern of the brain and has been used for all types of millennial learners, helping them better understand and learn new ideas. Interconnecting apologetics with the 4MAT approach should enable the

learner to process and better understand their views and understandings of others. For these reasons, it is the primary theoretical approach selected for this apologetic-based intervention.

Methodological Conclusions – Chapter 4

The use of a pre and post-intervention survey to measure the quantitative impact of the apologetic curriculum was revealing—the survey detailed specific movements in faith development. In addition, assigning value to the agree-disagree responses from learners allowed the data to be analyzed and compared to understand the findings better. The group interviews during the last session measured the qualitative growth, highlighting detail and nuances of the learners' experiences through the study process. Adjustment to the current questions and uncertainties is vital to communicate the gospel and establish confidence in the Bible. Learners must be met where they are in their faith development and through conversation, using objective evidence and reason; help them move from questions and doubt into an ever-deepening faith.

Overarching Conclusions

Understanding the conclusions from preceding chapters and the deductions in this chapter drawn from the interpretation of the data makes it feasible to make some overarching conclusions from the entire project.

First, the assumption in the past was that society had a fundamental level of biblical knowledge and generally accepted the Bible as truth. As a result, Bible instruction often assumed learners' belief in the Bible as a reliable and inspired word of God. However, society is drastically different from fifty or one hundred years ago. Postmodernism, with its deconstructionism, absence of moral absolutes, and relativity of

truth, has brought difficulties that have challenged believers and shaken the faith of many (Dyck, 2010). Smith and Denton (2005) state that Americans, in general, have become more skeptical of the Bible, and young adults who have left the church mention intellectual skepticism as one of the main rationales for leaving the church. In addition, there is a plethora of cultures and religious views in North America. Therefore, spiritual leaders need to let go of the assumptions of the past and engage in dialogue and asking questions about where individual learners are in their faith journey. There is a great need to understand the questions in learners' minds and how they arrive at their beliefs and views. This approach will set up spiritual leaders for higher engagement and relevance when leading learners in their faith journey.

Second, spiritual leaders need to provide objective evidence to address the intellectual skepticism of learners. Questions and doubts not addressed, or learners told to “Just Believe” get stuck at the synthetic-conventional stage of faith development (J. W. Fowler, 1995). If individuals were not allowed or encouraged to ask questions at this stage, their level of belief remained shallow, and they were more likely to believe secular criticism. However, Jesus never told anyone to “just believe” when they have a legitimate question or do not understand. Instead, he asked questions, listened to them, presented them with evidence and answers, and encouraged them to move toward faith and belief in him and his ways. This knowledge had enormous implications for the importance of addressing questions and skepticism to help individuals know what they believe amid competing ideologies and worldviews.

Lastly, an apologetic-based process is essential to help learners understand their beliefs and evaluate new ideas. Changing or adapting one's belief is not simply a matter

of introducing new cognitive information. Instead, by writing down one's beliefs on a specific topic or area, the individual can better understand what they believe and what questions remain. Exploring additional resources on the topic and intellectual challenges provides a broader scope of understanding. Talking over the topic with a trusted friend about their views and conclusions adds additional insight into personal conclusions before taking a stand. In a society of so many beliefs and teachings, learners need tools to help them know what they believe and why they believe it. This knowledge creates confidence in their beliefs and a greater willingness to share them with others.

Recommendations

The recommendations for additional action and research have arisen from this limited intervention and research project.

1. The literature review noted a scarcity of Adventist scholarship engaged in the field of apologetics. In the face of postmodernism, with its deconstructionism, absence of moral absolutes, and relativity of truth, there is a significant need in North America for more pastors and teachers to be engaged in it.
2. Further research and action are needed in the area of apologetic-based curriculum development. Young adults and adults need tools to help them better understand their views and filter the plethora of information in society.
3. In addition, research on how to create safe spaces for the unchurched and others to ask questions and not be intimidated by others who know so much more. The conventional church service is often not a time or space to answer attendees' questions.

4. I also intend to explore and develop additional apologetic-based lessons for young adults to explore and discuss their views and beliefs.
5. In response to the growing need for apologetics in recent years, I recommend that the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary offer a course in apologetics.
6. Any case study is an invitation to others to produce their case studies and provide additional insights. I recommend that other pastors and theological educators interested in faith development and apologetics facilitate interventions and report their findings.

Personal Transformation

Another way to assess this project is to consider its influence on my life as a researcher and pastor. Three areas deserve specific mention. First, I have a whole new appreciation for the importance of relationships as part of the faith development process. Learners talk to people they know and trust about essential topics in their life, and they are much more likely to listen and trust when there is a relationship. The importance of a relationship with individuals when having spiritual conversations was a value I had before, but this study reaffirmed that belief. As I searched for participants for this study, finding people willing to commit to being part of a five-session study was challenging. About ten other people had no personal relationship with any church members before this study that began the study process, but none of them finished the study. Some well-meaning people wanted to help, but it hit me that only those who had a personal relationship with a church member committed and completed the study sessions.

Another thing that surprised me regarding relationships was how few church members had a personal relationship with individuals that did not attend church regularly, were between the ages of 18 and 35, and had doubts about the Bible. In Knoxville, Tennessee, and the surrounding area, very few church members had personal connections with this group, including the campus ministry program at the University of Tennessee. As Christians, members are supposed to be salt and light to society, but it is impossible if church members live isolated from those who need to know about Jesus. These observations about the importance of relationships have reinvigorated my desire to encourage local church members to build lasting relationships with the people they interact with daily.

Second, the process of research, writing, and working with learners has created a greater desire to help others understand and process through their faith with reliable methods that will help filter out all the fake news and sophistry in society. Learners need tools to examine what they believe and hold on to what is correct and accurate. There are way too many people who take what they hear at face value without checking the sources. I have also found that people draw from one source for all their information without cross-referencing it with other sources to determine if what they are hearing is accurate. People lack tools to help them process what they believe and why they believe it. Often, beliefs have been based solely on what they have been told or previous experiences. Exploring what someone believes often gets neglected due to a variety of reasons. It is not so much that people do not want to explore their beliefs and spirituality as having a time and an opportunity to do it. There is an interest and willingness to explore beliefs in a safe setting, hear and understand where other people are coming

from, and know how they arrived at those beliefs. Through this study, I have seen a great need to help people process their beliefs and views and a tool to help them evaluate the massive amount of information coming in their direction. Without practical tools, spiritual leaders cannot assume that learners or church members will filter through excessive ideas and beliefs constantly being shared and promoted.

Third, working with young adults in this process and studying faith development has made me very aware of my children and their faith development. After serving as a pastor in the Seventh-day Adventist church for over fifteen years and involvement in multiple elementary schools, teaching at an Adventist Academy, and pastoring the Academy church, I have gained broad exposure to faith development. I have observed a high level of isolation among Adventist Christians from people in everyday society. This isolation was explicitly noted on the Adventist Academy campus as my children spent the week playing with other children who believed the same as they did and also went to the same school and church. My children immensely enjoyed their experience living on the campus. However, when everyone around a person thinks and believes the same things, people are less likely to ask questions to understand faith and belief apart from their parents and spiritual leaders. As a result, preadolescents and adolescents often do not become aware of competing beliefs or ask deep essential questions. Their values, beliefs, and convictions are a mixture of relationships and interactions with others. The ability to positively influence children's beliefs is another reason why having a personal relationship with them is so important. Isolation, though, from people who think, believe, and act differently impairs faith development and keeps faith for many at the level of traditions and ends up not being the result of personal study and reflection but based on

the views of others. If people are not allowed or encouraged to ask questions, their level of belief remains superficial, and they are more likely to believe secular criticism. I have observed this happening throughout my life, and in this study, I have watched some of the results. As a parent, this has caused me to be intentional about our family spending time with people who do not believe the same as our family does. This choice has been the catalyst for many conversations with my children about beliefs and living them out in society. By God's grace, I am very intentional about asking questions about their day at school and what they are learning, addressing the views and ideologies prevalent in our society. This study has been an incredible journey, and I look forward to God's leading in the future.

APPENDIX A

PRE AND POST INDIVIDUAL INTERVENTION SURVEY

**Participant
Number:**

Individual Survey Questions

Circle the answers to the following questions that best reflects your understanding of the statement:

1. What books, if any, do you consider sacred literature or holy books?

| | | | | | | |
|-------|-------|----------------|-------|-------|----------|------|
| Bible | Koran | Book of Mormon | Torah | Other | Not Sure | None |
|-------|-------|----------------|-------|-------|----------|------|

2. The Bible, the Koran, and the book of Mormon are all different expressions of the same spiritual truths.

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Agree Strongly | Agree Somewhat | Neutral | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly | Not Sure |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|

3. The Bible can be trusted as a historical document.

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Agree Strongly | Agree Somewhat | Neutral | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly | Not Sure |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|

4. The Bible has contradicting ideas.

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Agree Strongly | Agree Somewhat | Neutral | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly | Not Sure |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|

5. The Biblical text has been changed over the years.

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Agree Strongly | Agree Somewhat | Neutral | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly | Not Sure |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|

6. The Bible is ONLY a book of teachings and stories written by human beings.

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Agree Strongly | Agree Somewhat | Neutral | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly | Not Sure |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|

7. Believing in the Bible requires faith, without supporting reasons.

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Agree Strongly | Agree Somewhat | Neutral | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly | Not Sure |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|

8. The Bible is for intelligent men and women.

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Agree Strongly | Agree Somewhat | Neutral | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly | Not Sure |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|

9. The Bible contains wisdom valuable for living a meaningful life.

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Agree Strongly | Agree Somewhat | Neutral | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly | Not Sure |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|

10. The Bible is the inspired word of God.

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Agree Strongly | Agree Somewhat | Neutral | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly | Not Sure |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|

11. The Bible encourages serving the poor.

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Agree Strongly | Agree Somewhat | Neutral | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly | Not Sure |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|

12. The Bible encourages generosity.

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Agree Strongly | Agree Somewhat | Neutral | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly | Not Sure |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|

13. There are universal moral truths, things that are right and wrong.

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Agree Strongly | Agree Somewhat | Neutral | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly | Not Sure |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|

14. The principles of the Bible are reliable and trustworthy.

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Agree Strongly | Agree Somewhat | Neutral | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly | Not Sure |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|

15. The Bible teaches principles that are practical for everyday life.

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Agree Strongly | Agree Somewhat | Neutral | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly | Not Sure |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|

16. My personal beliefs about morality make the Bible irrelevant to me.

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Agree Strongly | Agree Somewhat | Neutral | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly | Not Sure |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|

17. My personal beliefs about women's equality make the Bible irrelevant to me.

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Agree Strongly | Agree Somewhat | Neutral | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly | Not Sure |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|

18. My personal beliefs about LGBT equality make the Bible irrelevant to me.

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Agree Strongly | Agree Somewhat | Neutral | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly | Not Sure |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|

19. My personal beliefs about racial equality make the Bible irrelevant to me.

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Agree Strongly | Agree Somewhat | Neutral | Disagree Somewhat | Disagree Strongly | Not Sure |
|----------------|----------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|----------|

Biblical Knowledge

Answer the following question to the best of your ability and knowledge:

20. Does your household own a Bible?

| | | |
|-----|----|--------------|
| Yes | No | I don't know |
|-----|----|--------------|

21. In what format do you prefer to read the Bible? (You may choose more than one)

| | | | | | |
|-------|-------------|-------|----------|-------|----------|
| Print | Smart Phone | Video | Computer | Audio | Not Sure |
|-------|-------------|-------|----------|-------|----------|

22. How often do you read the Bible, not including times you are at a church function or event?

| | | | | | |
|----------|-----------|---------|--------|------|----------|
| Everyday | Most Days | Monthly | Yearly | None | Not Sure |
|----------|-----------|---------|--------|------|----------|

23. How much of the Bible have you personally read?

All of it Almost all of it Half of It Several passages or stories Only a few sentences
None of it

24. How knowledgeable do you feel about the Bible?

Highly knowledgeable
Moderately knowledgeable
Somewhat knowledgeable
Not too knowledgeable
Not at all knowledgeable
Not Sure

25. In the Bible, which disciple denied knowing Jesus?

Peter Paul John James Not Sure

26. In the Bible, who was the first person to see Jesus after he was resurrected?

Peter Mary
 Magdalene Paul Thomas Not Sure

27. In the Bible, who was thrown into a lion's den and lived?

David Paul John Daniel Not Sure

28. What is the last book in the Bible?

Jude 2 Peter Revelation John Not Sure

29. Which disciple of Jesus betrayed him with a kiss?

Jude Judas Paul Peter Not Sure

30. Choose one of the following topics you would be interested in studying further.

- a. If God is so good, why is there so much pain and suffering in the world?
- b. Is the Bible Unscientific?
- c. How can Jesus be the only way to God?
- d. It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere.
- e. Will those who never hear of Jesus or the Bible be saved?

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Andrews University

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I am conducting a research study as part of my Doctor of Ministry project, in partial fulfillment for my Doctorate of Ministry at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

Research Title: Apologetic-based curriculum addressing intellectual skepticism among young adults in Knoxville, Tennessee and the surrounding areas.

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study is to develop, implement, and evaluate an apologetic-based curriculum to introduce biblical concepts to young adults and address intellectual skepticism.

Duration of participation in study: I understand that I will be requested to complete two individual surveys, one video-recorded group interview and fill out all participation materials during five sessions. Sessions will occur for three consecutive weeks on Mondays and Thursdays at six in the evening. The total hours of subject participation is approximately eight hours.

Benefits: Participants may have a clearer understanding of their own views of the Bible in light of objective evidence. However, we can't guarantee that you will personally experience benefits from participating in this study. Others may benefit in the future from the information we find in this study. Participants will receive a meal after each of the meetings.

Risks: There is no more than minimal risk associated with participating in this study.

Video Recording: Do you consent to be video recorded during the interview session of this study. (a) Yes ____ (b) No ____ (Initial your name next to your response).

Voluntary Participation: I have been informed that my participation in this study is completely voluntary. I am aware that there will be no penalty if I decide to cancel my participation in this study. And that there will be no cost to me for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: I understand that my identity in this study will not be disclosed in any published document and that researcher will keep the records secured.

Contact: I am aware that I can contact the supervisor, Dr. Gaspar Colon at (301) 452-5680 or Bryan Laue at (865) 548-9646 for answers to questions related to this study. I can also contact the Institutional Review Board at Andrews University at (269) 471-6361 or irb@andrews.edu.

I have read the contents of this consent and received verbal explanations to questions I had. My questions concerning this study have been answered satisfactorily. I hereby give my voluntary consent to participate in this study. I am fully aware that if I have any additional questions I can contact Bryan Laue at (865) 548-9646.

Signature (Subject)

Date

Researcher Signature Phone

Date

APPENDIX C

STUDY LESSONS

“Beliefs and Reality”

Please read the following and answer the questions.

Beliefs should be based on reality.

Belief is accepting that a statement is true or that something exists. Reality is something that is actual or a fact. There are reality television shows and videos that show things that happened in real life. Reality is a traffic jam. It’s also an unexpected accident. The opposite of reality is fantasy. Fantasy is based on imagination. Fake news, legends and fairy tales are made up, and not based things that have occurred in real life. The belief, the earth is flat, has been shown not be based in reality, because of many observations and experiments over the years. Individuals are entitled to their own beliefs, but just believing something, does not make it true or a reality.

- 1. As you think about the statement that was made. (a) What has been your life experience with beliefs being based on reality? What are your thoughts and feelings about the statement? (b) Do you agree or disagree and why? Please describe your view.**

Reality can be distinguished as true or false. If you believe that it is raining outside, and it is actually raining outside, then that belief is true. If something cannot be false, then it cannot be true either.

If you read, "All beliefs are basically the same." Is that objective reality? No one would argue that economic systems, such as capitalism and socialism are the same. Likewise, no one would argue that a democracy and a monarchy are the same. Yet some claim that the four major religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Judaism, all teach basically the same thing. As you examine the evidence, you find that faith groups have similar teachings on ethics, but have very different, and sometimes opposing beliefs.

Beliefs should be based on reality. To know if a belief is based on reality, the evidence for the belief must be examined and verified.

- 3. (a) Has your understanding and feelings about the statement, "Beliefs should be based on reality" changed or remained the same? (b) What issues or questions do you still have about the statement? Please describe your views.

- 4. Pair up with someone else and share your views along with why you agree or disagree with the statement, "Beliefs should be based on reality." (a) Reflect below on what you learned about the other person's views and about your own views through sharing.

5. (a) Pair up with someone and decide how you can put your views on the belief statement into practice in the next couple of days. (b) How will you decide if you need to maintain your view, modify, or change it?

Example: My beliefs should be based on reality. Helping others is important to me. I have heard that there is a need at the soup kitchen for volunteers. The way to find out the reality, is to call the soup kitchen and see if they need volunteers. If they do, then I will sign up to volunteer soon.



REFLECTIONS: Please fill this out after you have put your plan into practice.

(a) How did your plan work? Is there something you would do differently? (b) Is there anything you are going to modify or change about your view? Please explain.

“Beliefs and Reliability”

Please read the following and answer the questions.

Beliefs should be based on things that are reliable.

Reliable by definition is something that can be relied on, is dependable or trustworthy. It is important to have reliable transportation to maintain employment on a regular basis. The opposite of reliable can be described as inconsistent, fickle, or undependable. Many students struggle to stay engaged in online courses because of unreliable internet connections. Not having a reliable source of internet or reception with your cell phone can be very frustrating. Establishing beliefs on things or people that are inconsistent will lead to problematic outcomes.

- 1. As you think about the statement that was made. (a) What has been your life experience with beliefs established on things that are reliable? What are your thoughts and feelings about the statement? (b) Do you agree or disagree and why? Please describe your view.**

Reliability should be tested. How do we test the reliability of the Bible? There are no surviving original copies of the New Testament. So how do you know that the copies we have today, in anyway resemble the original? The same is true of other ancient writings. There are only copies. How do we know if they are authentic? One way you can test the reliability of a document is to compare many copies from different geographical locations. The more copies you have, the more you can cross-check to find out what the original was like.

In addition to the Greek copies of the New Testament, the original language of the New Testament, manuscript copies exist in other languages. Currently there are about 24,000 manuscript copies of the New Testament. By comparison, Homer’s *Iliad*, composed around 800 B.C., has the next most manuscripts with fewer than 650 copies. There are only nine Greek manuscript copies of *The Jewish War* by the historian Josephus. When you compare the ancient writings routinely accepted by scholars as reliable, with the Biblical New Testament, the New Testament is shown to be extremely reliable (Strobel, 2006).

- 2. (a) How would you go about testing the reliability of a document? Please explain. (b) How do you see the relationship between belief and reliability? Please share an example.**

Does the Bible have contradictions? Does that make it unreliable?

The Law of Noncontradiction states that “A” cannot equal “A” and equal “Non-A.” That means that a statement cannot be both true and false at the same time, in the same regard. A person who says that “the declaration of Independence was adopted on July 4, 1776” and “the declaration of Independence was **not** adopted on July 4, 1776” contradicts himself. It is logically impossible to claim both. Both cannot be true. According to this law, two or more statements are consistent when it is possible for them all to be true at the same time.

A typical example used to say that the Bible has contradictions is in the book of Matthew chapter sixteen and verse sixteen. Jesus here asks Peter, one of his followers, “Who do people say that I am?,” how did Peter respond? The book of Matthew responds, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” The book of Mark in chapter eight and verse twenty-nine, records Peter’s statement as, “You are the Christ.” Then in the book of Luke chapter nine and verse twenty, Peter’s statement is again recorded as, “The Christ of God.” According to the Law of Noncontradiction each of these statements are consistent because they can all be true at the same time (Morrow, 2014).

Imagine there was a car wreck and a police officer asks three honest witnesses what happened. What are the chances that all three witnesses are going to use the exact same words to describe the event? The chances are very low. There should be similarities, but people see and hear things differently, if the reports are exactly the same, you wonder about coelution or that the witnesses that got together and agreed on the report. This would make the report unreliable.

- 3. (a) Has your understanding and feelings about the statement, “Beliefs should be based on things that are reliable” changed or remained the same? (b) What issues or questions do you still have about the statement? Please describe your views.**

4. Pair up with someone else and share your views along with why you agree or disagree with the statement, “Beliefs should be based on things that are reliable.” (a) Reflect below on what you learned about the other person’s views and about your own views through sharing.

**5. (a) Pair up with someone and decide how you can put your views on the belief statement into practice in the next couple of days. (b) How will you decide if you need to maintain your view, modify or change it?
Example: My beliefs should be based on things that are reliable. If I weigh myself during the day, I expect to see a similar weight. If the weight on the scale goes up and down considerably each time, I am going to question the reliability of my scale. I am going to reset the scale, change the batteries or possibly buy a new scale, because an unreliable scale is not worth much to me.**



REFLECTIONS: Please fill this out after you have put your plan into practice.

(a) How did your plan work? Is there something you would do differently? (b) Is there anything you are going to modify or change about your view? Please explain.

Morrow, J. (2014). "Questioning the Bible : 11 major challenges to the Bible's authority."

Strobel, L. (2006). The case for Christ ; The case for faith. Grand Rapids, Mich., Zondervan.

LESSON 3

Participant Number: _____

“Beliefs and Consistency”

Please read the following and answer the questions.

Beliefs should be based on things that are consistent.

Consistent, by definition, is something marked by harmony and free from variation or discrepancy. It is important when making a statement to the police, that it is consistent with the evidence. The opposite of consistent can be described as incompatible or contradictory. The statement, “Nobody goes there anymore. It's too crowded." is an example of an incompatibility. If "nobody" went there, then it could not possibly be crowded, since "crowded" implies too many people are there. The assertion, “There is no absolute truth.” is also inconsistent since the statement itself is attempting to define an absolute truth or something that is true all the time. Establishing beliefs on people or things that are inconsistent will leave you and frustrated and looking for someone or something more dependable.

1. **As you think about the statement that was made. (a) What has been your life experience with beliefs established on things that are consistent? What are your thoughts and feelings about the statement? (b) Do you agree or disagree and why? Please describe your view.**

Is the Bible consistent with archeology? Archeology is the study of human history through the excavation of sites and the examination of artifacts and other physical remains. Critics of the Bible long doubted the biblical description of King Solomon's wealth. But between 1925 and 1934, archaeologist Henry Breasted, excavated the remains of One of Solomon's chariot cities at Megiddo in Palestine. He excavated stables capable of holding over four-hundred horses along with the remains of a large barracks which was positioned to guard the strategic path to Megiddo. Another archaeologist, Nelson Glueck, discovered the remnants of a massive refining factory for copper and iron. These two metals would have been used when bartering for gold, silver, and ivory. These discoveries along with others are consistent and substantiate the biblical description of Solomon's wealth.

Critics of the Bible also doubted the existence of the Hittites, a group of people referred to in the Bible more than forty times. Hugh Winckler, an archaeologist unearthed the Hittite capital of Boghaz-Koi and retrieved thousands of Hittite texts including the most well-known, the Hittite code. These archaeological discoveries and many more demonstrate the consistency of the Bible with human history and archaeology. (MacArthur, 2015)

2. (a) People make statements about what they believe is truth. How would you go about testing the consistency of what they say? Please explain. (b) How do you see the relationship between belief and consistency? Please share an example.

Isn't the Bible full of errors and inconsistencies?

The Dead Sea scrolls, a collection Of Old Testament manuscripts dated to around 125 BC, were discovered in caves by Bedouin shepherds in March of 1947. These manuscripts were a thousand years older than any previously known manuscripts. Once the Dead Sea scrolls were compared with later manuscript copies, the current Hebrew Bible was shown to be identical in more than 95% of the text. The remaining 5% consisted mainly in variations of spelling.

For example, of the one hundred and sixty-six words in Isaiah 53, only seventeen letters were in question. Ten of the letters were matter of spelling, four were stylistic changes and the remaining three letters comprise the word *light*, which was added in verse eleven. The discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls showed that after one thousand years of copying the Old Testament by hand, there were only a few minor variations. And none of the variations altered the consistent meaning of the text or brought the manuscripts reliability into question.

Because there were no printing presses when the scripture was written, scribes had to hand write copies to preserve the manuscripts from one generation to another. And while those scribes did the best to copy accurately, copying mistakes were made. This does not mean that the Bible is full of contradictions and errors. When you examine the discrepancies, it is clear how they were made and that they do not change the intended meaning of a text. (J. M. S. McDowell, 2012)

- 3. (a) Has your understanding and feelings about the statement, “Beliefs should be based on things that are consistent” changed or remained the same? (b) What issues or questions do you still have about the statement? Please describe your views.**

4. Pair up with someone else and share your views along with why you agree or disagree with the statement, “Beliefs should be based on things that are consistent.” (a) Reflect below on what you learned about the other person’s views and about your own views through sharing.

5. (a) Pair up with someone and decide how you can put your views on the belief statement into practice in the next couple of days. (b) How will you decide if you need to maintain your view, modify or change it?

Example: My beliefs should be based on things that are consistent. I want others to believe that I am consistent and trustworthy. So, the next time I read something online that sounds interesting, instead of forwarding it to all my friends without checking it out. I will do some research to find out if the information is accurate and consistent.



REFLECTIONS: Please fill this out after you have put your plan into practice.

(a) How did your plan work? Is there something you would do differently? (b) Is there anything you are going to modify or change about your view? Please explain.

MacArthur, J. (2015). Why believe the bible? Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Books.

McDowell, J. M. S. (2012). 77 FAQs About God and The Bible: Your Toughest Questions Answered. Eugene OR, Harvest House.

“Beliefs and Defensible”

Please read the following and answer the questions.

Beliefs should be based on things that are defensible.

Defensible, by definition, is something that is capable of being defended with good reasoning and evidence against opposing views. It is important for students to become responsible for thinking about a disagreement and reaching a reasoned and defensible conclusion. Not everyone has to agree with your beliefs, but there should be defensible evidence for those beliefs. The opposite of defensible can be defined as indefensible or untenable. It is indefensible when drug companies demand exorbitant prices for lifegiving drugs in which they have very little investment. It is also untenable to continue adding to the national debt year after year, and not expect it will affect future expenditures. Knowing your belief is defensible will leave you more confident and willing to engage in discussion on those topics.

- 1. As you think about the statement, (a) what has been your life experience with beliefs established on things that are defensible? What are your thoughts and feelings about the statement? (b) Do you agree or disagree and why? Please describe your view.**

Is the Bible unscientific?

While the Bible is not a science book, it is accurate when describing scientific processes. An example of this is the hydrological cycle. Rain or snow falls on the ground and runs off into streams, which then runs into rivers, and then onto the sea. Water evaporates from the bodies of water across the earth and returns to the clouds, where it becomes rain and snow, which falls to the ground. The hydrological cycle is considered a fairly recent discovery, but the Bible speaks of it in Isaiah 55:10. It says, “ As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth...” Similar references can be seen in Job 36:27 and Psalms 135:7.

Another example is found in the science of geology. Geologists speak of a state called *Isostasy*, which can be used to describe the balance of the earth as it orbits through space. The idea is that equal weights are necessary to support equal weights. Landmass must be balanced equally with water mass. For the earth to remain stable as it spins in orbit, it must be in perfect balance. The Bible says that God, “Measured the waters in the hollow of his hand” and that He “weighed the mountains on the scales and the Hills in a balance” Isaiah 40:12. The Bible does not use modern scientific language of today, but continues to match up with contemporary discoveries of science. (MacArthur, 2015)

- 2. (a) How would you go about testing whether a document or what someone says is defensible? Please explain. (b) How do you see the relationship between belief and something that is defensible? Please share an example.**

One of the strongest arguments for the defensibility of scripture comes from fulfilled Bible prophecy. Peter Stoner, a scientist and mathematician, utilized what he called “the principle of probability.” He applied his mathematical equation to calculate the probability of the Bible prophecy concerning the destruction of Tyre, from Ezekiel 26:3-16, which claims seven definite events. The events included: Nebuchadnezzar would take the city, other nations would help fulfill the prophecy, Tyre would be flat and like the top of a rock, the city would become a place where fishermen spread their nets, Tyre’s stones and timbers would be laid in the sea, other cities would have great fear because of Tyre’s fall and the old city of Tyre would never be rebuilt. It was estimated that the odds of all seven events taking place as described was one in 400 million, yet all seven happened.

A similar study was done on the prophecy that predicted the fall of Babylon in Isaiah 13:19. The study calculated the chances of the Babylon prophecies occurring as outlined in the Bible as one in 100 billion, but everything that was predicted happened. Compare these predictions to the odds of winning the Mega Millions jackpot which is one in 302.6 million and the odds of winning the Powerball jackpot are one in 292.2 million.

Bible prophecies have predicted events of the future with amazing accuracy that is greater than human knowledge or anticipation. In spite of enormous odds, hundreds of biblical prophecies have become reality, and they make one of the most defensible arguments for the Bible. (MacArthur, 2015)

- 3. (a) Has your understanding and feelings about the statement, “Beliefs should be based on things that are defensible” changed or remained the same based on the information you have read? (b) What issues or questions do you still have about the statement? Please describe your views.**

4. Pair up with someone else and share your views along with why you agree or disagree with the statement, “Beliefs should be based on things that are defensible.” (a) Reflect below on what you learned about the other person’s views and about your own views through sharing.

**5. (a) Pair up with someone and decide how you can put your views on the belief statement into practice in the next couple of days. (b) How will you decide if you need to maintain your view, modify or change it?
Example: My beliefs should be based on things that are defensible. My wife and I paid to have a painting reframed. When we went to pick up the painting, the frame was damaged, and the frame color was not the same as the one we had chosen. I believe that it is defensible, to ask for the work to be redone or at least to receive a discount on the work**

MacArthur, J. (2015). Why believe the bible? Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Books.

APPENDIX D

GROUP EXIT SURVEY

GROUP INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

1. First, let's talk about the program overall.

Tell me about what you learned from the lessons?

- a. Which topics/lessons were the most interesting for you?
- b. What made the topic/lesson that you liked more interesting than the others?
- c. Are there any other lesson topics you would like to learn more about?

2. What did you like most about the overall process or cycle?

- a. Was understanding the big picture helpful in evaluating your own beliefs/views of others? Why or why not?
- b. How did the information that was shared in the lessons impact your understanding or views?
- c. Did the discussion with others affect/change your beliefs/views toward the principle or the Bible?
- d. What impact, if any, did putting the principle into action and follow up have on your beliefs/views?

3. What are some of things that were challenging to you in this study? Were there any unexpected consequences of participating in this study?

4. What are the things that you did not like on this study? What made you not to like these things?

5. What are some of the things (like skills, or strategies) from these lessons that you will use in the future?

- a. How useful was this process to better understand your own beliefs? Beliefs of others? Challenging your own beliefs or views?

b. How would you describe your attitude toward the Bible now that you have gone through these lessons? Did your confidence increase, decrease or remain the same?

c. Are you more likely to participate in a Bible study as a result of participating in these lessons? Why or why not?

d. What are some reasons you think some may choose not to trust in the Bible even after going through these lessons?

6. What are some of the things that you learned from the study about evaluating your own beliefs/views?

a. How useful are these lessons for young adults? Are there any strategies or ideas that did not seem realistic?

b. Do you have questions or doubts about the Bible after going through this study? If so, what are they and why do think you are still struggling with them?

7. Now I want to shift away from the content of the program and talk a bit about your experience going through the study. What are your thoughts about how easy or difficult the lessons were?

a. What did you think about the length of each lesson? Was it too long, too brief, or just the right length?

b. What did you think about the overall length of the study? Did four lessons seem like too many, too few, just about right?

8. If the study was available to everyone online, how easy or difficult would it be for you to use it? How likely or unlikely would it be that you would use it?

9. Finally, is there anything else about your experience that you would like to share with me?

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VITA

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Background: I was born on December 13, 1979, in Houston, TX, and raised in San Antonio. I have three younger siblings and was raised in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I was baptized into the body of Christ and became a Seventh-day Adventist at the age of 12 (1982). I attended a non-denominational Christian school through middle school and public school for high school.

Family: I was married on June 2, 2004, to April Laue from Medford, OR. We have three children, Levi Laue (Born in 2008), Sydney Laue (Born in 2009), and Isaac Laue (Born 2014).

Education:

2015-2022 Doctor of Ministry: Missional Church through Andrews University.

2006-2008 M.Div. from Andrews Theological Seminary.

1998-2003 Bachelor of Arts in Theology (Keene, TX)

1994-1998 High school diploma from Smithson Valley High school, TX.

Ordained:

2010- Ordained by Arkansas-Louisiana Conference of Seventh-day Adventist and currently hold ministerial credentials from Georgia-Cumberland Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Experience:

2020 - District Pastor of the Smoky Mountain and Newport TN SDA Churches

2017 - 2020 District Pastor and Bible Teacher at Upper Columbia Academy Church (Spangle, WA)

2012-2017 District Pastor of the Gettysburg and Hanover Churches SDA Church (Southcentral, PA)

2009-2012 District Pastor of the Westlakes and Jonesboro SDA Churches (Northeast, LA)

2004-2006 District Pastor of Lafayette and New Iberia SDA Churches (Southcentral, LA)

