YOUNG LIFE CAMPAIGNERS, THE BIBLE, AND PEDAGOGY: EXPLORING STRATEGIES OF BIBLICAL ENGAGEMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

"Young Life Campaigners, the Bible, and Pedagogy: Exploring Strategies of Biblical Engagement"

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In the twenty-first century, the Bible is more accessible to North American Christians than ever before, yet a problem exists, in that youth are struggling to read it and understand how it applies to their life. As a youth worker with an organization called "Young Life," I routinely witness Generation Z's challenges in engaging with Scripture. This is concerning, as Young Life places a high value on teaching the Bible to adolescents and is an organization dedicated to mentoring and discipling Christian teenagers (called "Campaigners") as they grow into resilient and missional followers of Jesus.

In this practical theology dissertation, I focus on one element related to youth discipleship: the practice of Bible teaching. Through working with Young Life, I have seen the important role of teaching Scripture in teenagers' faith formation. As such, I conducted this qualitative research study to learn how my colleagues in Young Life instruct the Bible to Campaigners. My intention in doing this is to develop a pedagogical theory to present to Young Life about how to conceptualize Bible studies and effectively teach Scripture to students. More specifically, the primary research question I address in this dissertation is: What pedagogical strategies would help better train Campaigners to read and engage with the Bible as they grow into resilient disciples? To address and

answer this primary question, I ask three secondary questions: (1) What current methods of teaching the Bible do Young Life staff use?; (2) Which of these methods are effective or ineffective and why?; and (3) What are effective pedagogical techniques to assist adolescents in learning?

In theologically reflecting on my findings, I argue that method should not be the only consideration when teaching Scripture. For Bible studies to connect well with Campaigners, I hypothesize that they must be rooted in a framework of teaching that takes seriously students' worldviews. By drawing attention to the role of epistemology vis-à-vis method, this project provides an extensive layer of depth to the theoretical and theological foundation that pedagogy is built upon. I do this by developing a concept I call "worldview apologetics," which is a way of teaching the Bible that takes seriously the cultural lenses through which teenagers see and interpret the world.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving wife, Michelle. Thank you for standing by me and supporting me as I wrote this dissertation. Thank you for your encouragement and for believing that this research would benefit those around me. Thank you for the sacrifices you made to allow me to work. Thank you most of all for following Jesus. You inspire me and I love you!

This dissertation is also dedicated to Young Life leaders, past, present, and future. Thank you for believing in the dignity, value, and worth of teenagers. Thank you for the love that you show them. Thank you for modeling Jesus to a generation in desperate need of hope!

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Writing a dissertation is a difficult process. Writing one during the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be more challenging than I could have imagined! If not for the wonderful community of people who encouraged me, prayed for me, and spurred me on, it is doubtful whether I would have finished this project.

To my parents Bob and Sharon, thank you for the endless amount of time you spent editing my work and offering feedback. Throughout my entire education you have uplifted me, believing that God has led me to the places in life that he has. I am so grateful for both of you.

To my wife Michelle, thank you for everything you did to help me complete this work. You have not known a time in our relationship when I have not been working on this dissertation, and I am sure you are just as excited as I am for it to be over. You continually encouraged me to keep pushing forward, no matter how hard it seemed. You also showed incredible amounts of patience to allow me to work during evenings and weekends. Thank you!

Thank you to Young Life, and in particular, Ontario Regional Director Brent Klinck for giving me the time needed to finish this research. I am grateful for your leadership, but more importantly, your friendship.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH

Introduction

How are high school students being taught to engage with the Bible, and what is the role of pedagogy in the spiritual formation and vitality of teenagers?[1] Questions such as these have arisen through my ministry practice as someone involved in the discipleship and mentoring of teenagers and are the source of theological reflection throughout this dissertation.[2] Literature regarding youth spirituality generally agrees that, by-and-large, North American adolescents are struggling to remain committed to their Christian faith, and often fail to know what role Scripture plays in drawing them closer to God.[3] In a post-Christendom context, the Western Church frequently finds its influence lacking amidst a society that has largely rejected a Christian worldview and the Christocentric lives that Christians are called to live.[4] Despite Western culture living in a state of "functional Christendom" for much of the twentieth century, the rise of Generation Z[5] has largely erased the notion of Christianity being the default religion of the West.[6] As James White notes, a defining characteristic of today's youth culture is that they are the first generation born into a post-Christian society. If Millennials were the first generation to leave *en masse* from the Church, today's teenagers are "arguably the

[1] See World Health Organization, "Adolescent Health." The typical range of high school students is between 14–18, which places them within the World Health Organization's classification of "adolescents" (those between 10–19). Academic literature often uses terms such as "students," "teenagers," "youth," and "adolescents" interchangeably. For the sake of variety, I follow suit.

[2] As explained below, this project is rooted in practical theology and the notion that ministry is a viable "text" for theological analysis.

[3] See, for example, White, *Meet Generation Z*; and Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age.*

[4] Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 6.

[5] There are no exact dates to define a generation but those born between 1995 and 2010 is a generally accepted parameter (Seemiller and Grace, *Generation Z*, xviii–xix).

[6] Guder et al., eds., *Missional Church*, 6.

first generation in the West . . . [who] do not even have a memory of the gospel."[7] If statements such as White's are correct, it raises the questions: What can be done about this issue of youth spirituality? And: What practices are advantageous for keeping students involved in their faith?

As a youth worker with an organization called "Young Life" (YL), I regularly see Generation Z's struggle in living a Christ-centred life amidst a secular world. Particularly, I see the lack of prominence teenagers give the Bible in their spiritual formation and how puzzled many are as to why adults (i.e., parents, youth pastors, etc.) expect them to read it. These observations have prompted me to ask questions regarding the role of the Bible within YL. More specifically, in this practice-led research dissertation, I critically analyze the state of Bible teaching within YL in order to develop a pedagogical hypothesis which I hope will lead to staff more effectively instructing Christian high school students (called "Campaigners") on how to engage with Scripture.[8]

The Ministry of Young Life

Started in Texas in 1941 by evangelist Jim Rayburn, YL is a "Christian mission loving teens in their world [and] encouraging them to know Jesus Christ."[9] During the Second World War, organizations like YL found fertile ground throughout the United States to grow. A large part of these organizations' success was in providing spiritually curious

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[7] White, *Meet Generation Z*, 64.

[8] Former YL staff member Bob Perkins defines a Campaigner as being a Christian student "who is committed to Christ and to reaching others in his or her . . . school through the tool of Young Life" (*No Banana Splits*, 32). In essence, Campaigners are Christian teenagers involved in YL who are dedicated to growing in discipleship and learning the value of being missional.

[9] Young Life, "About Us."

youth with an opportunity to enjoy fellowship and to grapple with existential questions surrounding life and faith.[10] Coming to Canada in 1954, YL currently operates in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario. Divided into several branches, YL in Canada has approximately 130 staff members, 500 volunteer leaders, 600 Campaigners, and is engaged in the lives of thousands of non-Christian students.[11]

Rayburn began YL from a conviction he called the "Big Dream." As he explained in a conference shortly before his death:

> Everyone has a right to know the truth about Jesus Christ." They [youth] have a right to know *who* He is; they have a right to know *what* He's done for them. They have a right to know *how* they relate to that. They have a right to know Him personally. Furthermore, they have a right to make their own choice about Him . . . That's not just what Young Life's all about; that's *all* that Young Life is about—Jesus Christ . . . There's no price too high to pay to see to it that young people have a chance to know the Savior. It's part of their God-given heritage.[12]

Building Healthy Relationships

Young Life is an organization that practices incarnational ministry. As a Christian missional practice, Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost define incarnational ministry as seeping "into the cracks and crevices of society in order to be Christ to those who don't yet know him."[13] In YL's context, this means staff members and volunteer leaders

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[10] Other influential organizations started during this period include Youth for Christ and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (Pahl, *Youth Ministry in Modern America*, 58).

[11] In Canada, these branches include YL's primary ministry, which is an outreach to high school students (called "Young Life"). There is also "WyldLife," a ministry to junior high students; "Capernaum," a ministry to students with special needs; and "Skatelife," a ministry to youth who enjoy skateboarding. The numbers presented here refer to the Canadian organization as a whole, but subsequent data is devoted entirely to YL's primary high school ministry in Canada. Globally, YL operates in 110 countries and is involved in the lives of over two million students (see Young Life, "Young Life International." All references in this dissertation to "Young Life" refer to the Canadian chapter, which operates autonomously from other countries.

[12] Cited in Sublett, ed., *Diaries of Jim Rayburn*, 527–28 (emphasis original).

[13] Hirsch and Frost, *Shaping of Things to Come*, 12. Elsewhere they define it as "*going* to a target group as opposed to merely making the invitation for unbelievers to come to our culture group (the Church) in order to hear the gospel" (228) (emphasis original).

partnering with Campaigners at local high schools and relationally investing in their lives and in the lives of their non-Christian friends.[14] In terms of organized "formal" events, this is done through a weekly gathering called "Club," as well as through bi-yearly trips to resort-style camps. The discipleship of Campaigners happens at a weekly meeting also called "Campaigners," where staff and volunteer leaders disciple students in their faith. Most of YL's ministry, however, is done informally, where staff and volunteers walk alongside students through everyday life as they navigate the complexities of the teenage years (this is called "Contact Work").[15] The motivation for such incarnational living is rooted in Paul's words to the Thessalonians: "Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well" (1 Thess 2:8; cf. John 1:14, NIV). By building and nurturing healthy relationships and living life in proximity to adolescents, YL leaders "understand there is a loving God and want to help teens know that same love."[16] This is a deeply engrained philosophy within YL, and the organization operates under the conviction that mentoring relationships are a key component in an adolescent's faith journey.[17]

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[14] Young Life leadership teams look different in each city, but they are typically composed of staff (both full and part-time) and volunteer leaders. Usually, there is one staff member for every five or six volunteer leaders. Although volunteer leaders play an invaluable role in the organization, the work of staff is my primary focus in this dissertation. As will be explained, I conducted field research among my staff colleagues to learn how they teach the Bible to Campaigners. As such, throughout the remainder of this project, I rarely mention volunteer leaders. In many cases, however, they are doing similar work as staff.

[15] Club, Camp, Campaigners, and Contact Work comprise what YL calls "the Four C's."

[16] Young Life, "What We Do."

[17] The conversation that follows throughout the remainder of this dissertation is framed within the context of the relationships that exist between staff members and their students.

A Problem to Address

My role within YL is as the area director in Burlington, Ontario, which involves overseeing all YL activity within the city. My responsibilities include the weekly discipleship of approximately forty Campaigners, supervising multiple Clubs, and leading a team of volunteer leaders.[18] A large proportion of my time is spent investing in Burlington's Campaigner team and teaching them the importance of being missional in their circle of influence. This training primarily happens through a weekly Bible study. The specific elements of these meetings vary, but always include an aspect of leadership training, Bible study, prayer, and fellowship.

My ministry experience has led to two troubling observations. First, Campaigners rarely read the Bible outside of organized settings. Second, they have significant difficulty in understanding how Scripture impacts their lives. After discussing these observations with my colleagues, it became apparent that Campaigners throughout YL are struggling to recognize how the Bible is pertinent to their faith.[19] Contributing to this observation is that Campaigners rarely come into YL knowing *how* to understand the Bible or *why* they should even attempt this endeavour. My experience has suggested that the grim words of David Olshine ring true: whether a teenager "attends Sunday school, youth group, Young Life, Youth for Christ, Fellowship of Christian Athletes . . . adolescents do not know their Bibles."[20]

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[18] Burlington also has an active WyldLife and Capernaum ministry which I oversee. These ministries are not the focus of this dissertation, however, and are not addressed throughout.

[19] This is not a problem solely within YL. Christians throughout the West are facing difficulties in knowing how to read the Bible and apply it to their lives (Francis, "Who Reads the Bible?" 165–72).

[20] Olshine, *Youth Ministry*, 112.

In a society where teenagers have a statistically high chance of leaving Christianity upon graduating high school, YL is concerned with developing Campaigners who will become life-long followers of Jesus.[21] Experience has suggested, however, that few Christian teenagers have an adequate understanding of who Jesus is or how deeply loved they are by God. I frequently encounter students who have been actively involved in Sunday school and youth groups yet cannot articulate what they believe or why they believe it. Instructing teenagers to spend more time "in the Bible" is not helpful if they are unsure how to or why it matters. Likewise, reading Scripture will be of little benefit if they do not understand the purpose of such a discipline. If youth are unsure of the Bible's significance, they will face immense challenges in remaining committed to Christ amidst the secular society surrounding them.

This project was born out of my experiences. In reflecting on the challenges that Campaigners face, I began asking questions about the role of biblical pedagogy within YL and the value it has in the spiritual vitality of adolescents. I hypothesized that by examining the teaching practices of YL staff, I might be able to collect, organize, and disseminate their experiences. I theorized that by doing so, I could reflect on the wisdom of my co-workers and learn helpful ways of teaching the Bible to Campaigners in a way that assists them in better reading it. The results of this inquiry are the findings presented in this dissertation.

[21] Percentages vary, but they commonly fall between 40–60 percent. See, for example, Powell et al., *Growing Young*, 17–18, 318–19; and White, *Meet Generation Z*, 17–33.

Young Life's View of Scripture

Although YL is a missionary organization that seeks to introduce non-Christian teenagers to the gospel, an essential component of its ministry is to disciple Campaigners (who are already Christians). In essence, staff share the gospel with non-Christian teenagers *through* Campaigners and the relationships they have with their friends.[22] As such, a core assumption prevalent throughout this project is that for Campaigners to be missionally minded, *the way they are discipled and trained in their own faith is critically important*.[23] As Hirsch and Deborah Hirsch claim, "The fact is that you can't be a disciple without being a missionary: no mission, no discipleship. It's as simple as that."[24] While the correlation between mission and discipleship is more complicated than this, YL's philosophy is grounded in the notion that mission stems from discipleship. Furthermore, there is a view that biblical engagement is a core component of discipleship and is an essential element in teenagers' spiritual growth.[25]

Young Life was born in an era where the influence of parachurches formed "an institutional infrastructure of impressive magnitude and strength."[26] Young Life found common ground alongside other evangelical organizations through the Protestant Reformation rallying cry of "*Sola Scriptura*," with a principle theological belief being that Scripture is the primary revelation from God through which Jesus is best known.[27] For example, former YL USA president Bob Mitchell writes, "The mission of Young

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[22] See Meredith, *It's a Sin to Bore a Kid*, for an explanation of YL's ministry philosophy.
[23] See Beard, "Missional Discipleship," 175–94.
[24] Hirsch and Hirsch, *Untamed*, 29.
[25] Yaconelli, *CORE Realities*, 8–17.
[26] Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 13.
[27] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 224.

Life has its roots in the Scriptures. Its method and message are biblical in their essence and practice." He then challenges YL leaders with these questions:

> Where's your Bible? Do you hold it in your hand, but also in your mind and heart? Are the Scriptures an everyday-guide to who you are, and how you live out your faith in a needy world? Are you memorizing the words of Holy Scripture? Are you praying Scripture? Do kids see how important is the Word of God to you?[28]

Young Life does not have an extensively articulated doctrine of Scripture. As a result, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly how it views the Bible as being authoritative.[29] It is observable, however, that the organization places a particularly high value on Scripture in the life of a Christian. As the organization's statement of faith explains:

> The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, being given by divine inspiration, are the Word of God, *the final and supreme authority* in all matters of faith and conduct [Article I] . . . In the Scriptures, God reveals Himself as the living and true God, Creator of all things. Perfect in love and righteous in all His ways this one God exists eternally as a Trinity of persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [Article II].[30]

As a way to conceptualize YL's view of Scripture, especially regarding how the Bible is the "final and supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct," I have found the work of Donald McKim in *The Bible in Theology and Preaching* particularly helpful. McKim outlines fourteen different ecclesiastical traditions and theological positions from which to view the Bible.[31] As he writes, "What a Christian theology says about the Bible will significantly affect its concerns and the rest of its approach [to

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[28] Mitchell, *Letters to a Young Life Leader*, 24–25.

[29] Tanis, *Making Jesus Attractive*, 99.

[30] Young Life, "Young Life's Statement of Faith" (emphasis added).

[31] Within the fourteen approaches, McKim considers two ecclesiastical traditions (Roman Catholicism and Protestantism) and twelve theological positions (Liberal Theology, Fundamentalist Theology, Scholastic Theology, Neo-Orthodox Theology, Neo-Evangelical Theology, Existential Theology, Process Theology, Narrative Theology, Latin American Theology, Black Theology, Asian Theology, and Feminist and Womanist Theologies).

biblical interpretation] in general."[32] As such, he outlines different positions to explain the various ways in which Christians view Scripture.

Using McKim's list as a guide, YL is situated under the ecclesiastical tradition of Protestantism, with my observations suggesting that its theological positions are a rough combination of scholastic theology and narrative theology. This designation is not to label YL as falling exactly within these positions, but instead, offers a framework for discussing the organization's theology regarding Scripture.

Despite being non-denominational, YL is a Protestant organization and shows alignment with the basic tenets of a Protestant utilization of Scripture. McKim lists six points of agreement that are typically held between Protestant denominations: (1) The Bible holds a place of authority in the Church; (2) The Bible is meant to be understood and is understandable; (3) Scripture has passages that are difficult to understand; (4) Special techniques (i.e., hermeneutical methods) are necessary for interpretating difficult passages; (5) Biblical interpretation should take place in freedom from those who seek to restrict interpretation (i.e., Church authorities); and (6) Scripture should be obeyed.[33]

Within YL's particular theological positioning, it is more difficult to isolate exactly where the organization stands on what Scripture *does and is meant for.* Upon reflection, however, my best estimation is that scholastic theology (also referred to as "old Princeton" theology) and narrative theology provide the most helpful ways of perceiving YL's theological position on the Bible.

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[32] McKim, *Bible in Theology and Preaching*, 15.
[33] McKim, *Bible in Theology and Preaching*, 38.

First, as explained by McKim, scholastic theology is the right-wing offshoot of neo-evangelicalism and represents a conservative evangelical utilization of Scripture.[34] This is evident in the affirmation of biblical inerrancy and the notion of the Bible being God's special revelation to humanity regarding his characteristics and nature.[35] In this sense, Scripture is authoritative because "God has spoken through the biblical writers."[36] This characterization closely aligns with YL's philosophy of Scripture being a book that inspires and provokes belief. McKim further outlines this notion of authority by citing Benjamin Warfield, who writes:

> The authority of Scripture rests on the simple fact that God's authoritative agents in founding the Church gave them as authoritative to the Church which they founded. All the authority of the apostles stands behind the Scriptures, and all the authority of Christ behind the apostles. The Scriptures are simply the law-code which the law-givers of the Church gave it.[37]

McKim then summarizes the scholastic view of the Bible by writing, "God through the Scriptures has revealed certain doctrines to be believed."[38] In this view, the importance of Scripture is based on the content of the doctrine contained within in it. This doctrine is seen as providing Christians with the substance of their belief in God.

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[34] Theologians define denominations differently, so clarity is important. Within neo-evangelicalism, there are two strands. First, there is a more conservative ("right wing") approach that is best defined as neo-fundamentalism. Neo-fundamentalism adheres fairly closely to traditional fundamentalist beliefs about the inerrancy of Scripture, while also recognizing the importance of social consciousness and responsibility. Second, there is a more progressive ("left wing") approach to evangelicalism that is flexible on its position of inerrancy, while still retaining the evangelical label. McKim centres his neo-evangelical discussion around the progressive left wing branch of its theology, writing, "The views of those on the right wing are encompassed in scholastic theology, which shows the link between fundamentalism and the scholastic view of Scripture" (*Bible in Theology and Preaching*, 92). See also Bloesch, *Future of Evangelical Christianity*, 22–24.

[35] McKim, *Bible in Theology and Preaching*, 67.

[36] McKim, *Bible in Theology and Preaching*, 68.

[37] John Meeter, ed., *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, 537 (cited in McKim, *Bible in Theology and Preaching*, 68).

[38] McKim, *Bible in Theology and Preaching*, 71.

Young Life's second theological position aligns with McKim's explanation of narrative theology. Similar to how scholastic theology is a broad umbrella term to define conservative evangelicalism, narrative theology is an equally broad categorization of Scripture in which *story* is a useful medium for discussing theology.[39] Narrative theology takes seriously the notion that stories are an integral component of humanity's personal and corporate identity. Stories inspire action, stimulate contemplation, and comprise an integral component of human experience.[40] As McKim explains:

> The Scriptures are the stories that shape existence and human community in the church . . . Scripture as "God's story" invites readers to set their life "story" in relation to its "story." The Scriptures provide a new grid or set of images by which one may "come to belief" and interpret one's own life experience.[41]

It is noteworthy that narrative theology has components to it that initially appear at odds with other elements of YL's theology. By focusing extensively on the "story" element of the Bible, narrative theology can lean heavily towards a reader-centred hermeneutic, where the reader is more concerned with developing their own meaning of a text than they are exegeting the meaning the author originally had for it.[42] When this occurs, the role that disciplines such as systematic theology play in formulating doctrine are largely neglected.

At the outset, this seems to contradict what would be expected from an evangelical organization such as YL and its emphasis on scholastic theology. While there are undoubtedly elements of narrative theology that risk replacing the role of

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[39] McKim, *Bible in Theology and Preaching*, 125.
[40] McKim, *Bible in Theology and Preaching*, 126–27.
[41] McKim, *Bible in Theology and Preaching*, 131.
[42] For a robust discussion of this notion, see Comstock, "Truth or Meaning," 117–41. As noted in Chapter 4, even the concept of a passage's "original meaning" is a highly debated subject among biblical scholars.

doctrine, this does not necessarily need to be the case. As Alister McGrath notes, narrative and doctrine are not unavoidably at odds with one another; instead, they are interconnected. As he writes, "the interconnection of narrative exposition and theological interpretation . . . [allows] evangelicals to affirm the importance of narratives while still reiterating the need to establish a secure biblical theological framework for the interpretation of such narratives."[43] Within YL, without disavowing the need for doctrine and systematic theology, narrative theology is most prominently seen in the organization's emphasis on storytelling and how its gospel proclamation at Club and Camp is done extensively through stories and metaphors. Young Life values narrative as a teaching and communication tool but not in an orientational way that discounts *truth* in favour of *personal meaning*.[44] Rather, YL views disciplines like systematic theology as something which helps *build* doctrine, but then uses narratives and stories to *communicate it.*

Summary of Young Life's Biblical Positioning

The above descriptions are both general and brief but provide a glimpse into YL's ecclesiastical positioning in terms of Scripture and its theological positioning regarding how it is used. In YL's view, the Bible does more than teach its readers how to know *about* God; it nourishes the readers' spiritual life by teaching them how to *know* God and *respond* to him.[45] Young Life's statement of faith does not claim that the Bible itself

[43] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 41.

[44] See Clark, "Narrative Theology and Apologetics," 499–515 for a more detailed discussion of the challenges but also opportunities that narrative theology provides an evangelical reading of Scripture.

[45] For example, after teaching students about the incarnation, Rayburn wrote, "Most people don't know the simplest things, there is a Creator God, He is personal! He made you for Himself, He loves you as you are! He CAME HERE!" (cited in Sublett, ed., *Diaries of Jim Rayburn*, 425) (emphasis original).

changes or transforms lives; instead, it contends that through Scripture, a showcase of God's identity is presented in a way that is worthy of a response (2 Tim 3:16–17).[46] Although YL must guard against slipping into biblicism, the organization affirms that the Bible is Christocentric (i.e., its purpose is to bear witness to Christ) in a way that invites its reader into an experiential knowledge of God.[47] Young Life does not discount the three other traditional methods of revelation largely accepted within Church history (tradition, reason, and experience), but asserts that Scripture is the specific revelation through which God has revealed himself to humanity.[48]

This view of Scripture is hardly unique among evangelical ministries and most organizations share the assumption that the Bible is critically important in the discipleship journey of Christians. As an example of this, between 2008 and 2010, Chicago's Willow Creek Community Church surveyed over 1000 churches to discern elements necessary for spiritual growth. The study concluded:

> Nothing has a greater impact on spiritual growth than reflection on Scripture. If churches could do only one thing to help people at all levels of spiritual maturity grow in their relationship with Christ, their choice is clear. They would inspire, encourage, and equip their people to read the Bible—specifically, to reflect on Scripture for meaning in their lives.[49]

Despite a lack of formal documentation, I hypothesize that YL would agree with this statement. Scriptural engagement has the biggest single impact on a Christian's spiritual growth, and as such, how it is taught to Campaigners matters immensely.

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[46] A showcase that is illuminated and brought alive by the Spirit.

[47] Biblicism refers to a view of Scripture where it is uncritically accepted as being the literal word of God and carries unquestionable authority over every matter of life and faith (see Smith, *Bible Made Impossible*, 4–5). One of the problems with biblicism is that it can elevate the authority of the Bible to that of the Trinity and removes the influence of other forms of theology.

[48] Taken together, these four elements comprise what is called the "Wesleyan quadrilateral." For more information, see Young Life, "Scriptural Basis for Young Life."

[49] Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move*, 19.

The Hope for Discipleship

David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock from the Barna Group provide a helpful definition of discipleship that YL has recently adopted and that I use throughout this dissertation. In their book *Faith for Exiles*, Kinnaman and Matlock explain that the purpose of discipleship is to "*develop Jesus followers who are resiliently faithful in the face of cultural coercion and who live a vibrant life in the Spirit*."[50] The authors call this ongoing process of sanctification "resilient discipleship." After reading *Faith for Exiles* in a staff book study during the summer of 2020, the term "resilient discipleship" has become a frequently used phrase throughout YL in reference to who the organization hopes Campaigners will become.

High school is a significant and formative period for youth, however, it is also temporary. As the progressive verbs in Kinnaman and Matlock's definition imply, resilient discipleship is a life-long process that extends beyond the teenage years. The goal of YL is not solely that Campaigners will love and care for their friends *during* high school but that they will passionately follow Jesus and live a Spirit-filled life *upon* entering adulthood. Kinnaman and Matlock expand their definition and explain how resilient disciples are Christ-followers who:

> (1) attend church at least monthly and engage with their church more than just attending worship services; (2) trust firmly in the authority of the Bible; (3) are committed to Jesus personally and affirm he was crucified and raised from the dead to conquer sin and death; and (4) express desire to transform the broader society as an outcome of their faith.[51]

As YL staff disciple Campaigners, the concept of resilient discipleship provides a benchmark for what a "vibrant life in the Spirit" entails. The sad reality is that among

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[50] Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 30 (emphasis original).
[51] Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 33–37.

North American young adults who grew up attending church, only 10 percent currently fit Kinnaman and Matlock's definition of resilient disciples.[52] This number does not bode well for the spiritual vitality of the Western Church and is a statistic that YL is striving to improve among its Campaigners.[53]

Objective and Research Questions

To summarize the content thus far, this dissertation stems from several observations I have made within my ministry practice: (1) Campaigners seldom read the Bible; (2) Campaigners struggle in understanding Scripture's role in their lives; (3) YL places a high value on teaching Campaigners the Bible and considers scriptural engagement a necessary component of resilient discipleship; (4) How staff teach Campaigners the Bible impacts how they read it; and (5) The relationship between staff and student is a central component of students' discipleship.

When considering these observations, a dichotomy appears between the organizational desires of YL on one hand and the operational outcomes on the other. Young Life wants Campaigners to be engaged in the Bible, but observational evidence suggests they seldom are. Put simply, Campaigners frequently lack biblical literacy. This

[52] Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 33. The Barna Group examined the faith of young adults (ages 18–29) and not high schoolers, but their research provides a disappointing picture of what teenagers are heading towards as they enter adulthood.

[53] A 2020 survey within YL sought to determine what percentage of former Campaigners classify as resilient disciples. Based on the Barna Group's criteria, YL surveyed Campaigners who served as volunteers at the organization's camp in British Columbia (called RockRidge Canyon) within the last ten years. The results indicated that 57 percent (74 out of 130 respondents) classify as resilient disciples. Campaigners typically only serve at RockRidge Canyon if they show a high level of spiritual maturity, therefore, 57 percent is not an entirely accurate picture of its alumni. Still, the results provide insight into how a subsection of former Campaigners are persevering in their faith upon graduation.

dichotomy does not reflect YL's passion for discipleship; instead, it is an unfortunate reflection of the post-Christendom context in which Generation Z lives.[54]

As I considered the contrast between students' low biblical literacy and the desire that YL has to see youth grow and mature in faith, I began asking questions about the role of Bible teaching in Campaigners' spiritual formation. In particular, I started to critically reflect on the role that teaching has in an adolescent's faith development. What began as an inquiry into my own practice expanded into this broader research project where *my objective is to investigate and analyze the current state of Bible teaching within YL*. In exploring this, I conducted a participatory action research study consisting of a survey and interviews to learn how staff in YL teach Scripture to Campaigners and what they have found helpful in leading their students towards biblical engagement. A more important inquiry in starting this research, however, was to understand *why* some forms of teaching seem to have a better effect on students than others.[55]

The primary research question I am addressing in this dissertation is: *What pedagogical strategies would help better train Campaigners to read and engage with the Bible as they grow into resilient disciples?* To answer this question, I am asking three secondary questions: (1) *What current methods of teaching the Bible do YL staff use?*; (2) *Which of these methods are effective or ineffective and why?*; and (3) *What are*

[54] I define biblical literacy here as the ability to properly apply hermeneutical tools to read the Bible in a way that remains true to the intention of the text. It is not *knowing about* the Bible, but instead, *knowing* the Bible, and more importantly, the God who inspired it (Stack-Nelson, "Beyond Biblical Literacy," 293).

[55] As will be explained, there are many reasons why adolescents struggle with biblical literacy. At the beginning of this research, I knew that pedagogy is only one factor influencing a youth's faith development. With the focus of this dissertation being my own practice, however, my intention was to narrow the research focus to a *single* element of my ministry that contributes to the discipleship of teenagers while also remaining aware that there are other influencers as well.

effective pedagogical techniques to assist adolescents in learning?[56] By exploring these questions, I am seeking to better understand the role of Bible teaching within YL. Important language used here and throughout is "deeper/better understanding." Nowhere do I assume that total objective knowledge can be uncovered. My intent, rather, is to comprehend a practice well enough to develop a hypothesis about how to improve it. Through this study, I hope to initiate a conversation within YL about the importance and value of Bible teaching and draw attention to the place of pedagogy in helping youth become more competent readers of Scripture. More particularly, based on the input of staff, my objective is to offer suggestions to YL about how to conceptualize Bible teaching in a way that will empowers relevant stakeholders within the organization to lead both current and future generations of Campaigners forward in biblical engagement.

My goal in this dissertation is modest. I am not seeking to revolutionize YL's pedagogy or to negatively critique my colleagues. Instead, my objective is to learn from my co-workers about how they instruct the Bible, highlight what their experience has shown them, present their feedback, and theologically reflect on their insight. Furthermore, this dissertation is not meant to "end the conversation" on matters related to Bible teaching but instead, to initiate one. As YL (and the Western Church) forges deeper into the unknown territory of post-Christendom, my goal is to provide theoretical

[56] My use of language surrounding "effectiveness" and "ineffectiveness" deserves more nuance here. Measuring effectiveness is a difficult task and requires the use of specific standards and tools in order to gauge it. In asking YL staff what they have found to be effective, I had them reflect on their experience and communicate what they have seen connects well with their students in helping them engage with the Bible. As explained in Chapter 6, I hope the findings I present in this dissertation will assist in leading Campaigners forward in effective biblical engagement. In completing this stage of my research, however, I am unsure if they actually will. Time is needed for staff to implement my suggestions and determine how well they work. This dissertation is only part one of what I suggest needs to be a three-part project where "effectiveness" can be better measured.

and theological depth to an important topic that can be continually reflected on as new generations of students enter high school.

I conceptualize this dissertation as being part one of a three-part research project. My primary goal in this current work is to propose a pedagogical hypothesis based on the input of my co-workers (part one). Part two will be to implement my suggestions. Part three will be to then evaluate, update, and refine my suggestions once time has been given to observe their impact. As John Swinton and Harriet Mowat write, "the important thing is that the practice bears faithful witness to the God from whom the practice emerges, and whom it reflects, and that it enables individuals and communities to participate faithfully in Christ's redemptive mission."[57] In the context of this project, Campaigners are the "community," the practice is "biblical pedagogy," and participating "faithfully in Christ's redemptive mission" means for Campaigners to grow in resilient discipleship.

Addressing pedagogy will not guarantee a lasting faith in Campaigners, but I contend that it will at least help. Christian students are accustomed to adults telling them to "read the Bible." This instruction has little benefit, however, if they are not taught how to. By delving behind this issue to address teaching strategies, I recognize that simply saying "go read" is not enough to solve the problem.[58] If youth are to grow into resilient disciples, more is required to teach them *how* to read. Without proper teaching, biblical engagement will perpetually succumb to the countless cultural influences competing for a student's attention, with the result being that their faith will suffer. For students to view the Bible as relevant amidst mental health struggles, addictions,

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[57] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 22.
[58] Avest et al., "Provocative Pedagogy," 356–70.

relationship problems, and the rigours of high school, I argue that pedagogy matters. Without it, Campaigners cannot be expected to see Scripture as living and active (Heb 4:12); a lamp for their feet and a light for their path (Ps 119:105); the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17); and a source of truth about Jesus in an increasingly relativistic society.

Research Design[59]

To approach this complex phenomenon, I conducted a survey and interview study to learn as much as I could about how Bible teaching within YL occurs. Specifically, I sought to better understand the demographics and biblical literacy of Campaigners, the goals staff set as they prepare to teach the Bible, the methods in which they teach, and the impact their teaching has on students. The results (presented in Chapter 4), provide an overview of the current state of Bible teaching within YL and give insight into various teaching strategies that I reflect on in Chapter 5. There are five "voices" at play in this discussion that are all relevant to the conversation. First, there is the voice of staff, who are the main participants in this study. Second, there is the voice of Campaigners. Campaigners did not contribute directly to this research, but their voices are heard by proxy through the staff who did. Third, there is my voice as both a researcher and YL practitioner. Fourth, there is the voice of the Holy Spirit, who speaks through the pages of Scripture. Fifth, there is the voice of academics, whose work provides invaluable conversation partners to engage with throughout this project.

[59] Chapter 3 is devoted entirely to research design; what follows is a brief overview.

Practical Theology

This project is an exercise in practical theology. Swinton and Mowat provide a helpful definition of practical theology when they define it as being a "critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world."[60] This definition is advantageous because it accentuates the role of practice (i.e., experience) and its relation to the lives of Christians. At its core, practical theology is concerned with how the Church partners with Christ and faithfully lives as disciples (2 Cor 5:19). Being mindful of Swinton and Mowat's definition, in this dissertation, I critically reflect on a core component of Christian discipleship (Bible teaching within YL), to determine what new steps (improved pedagogical practices) are needed to assist members of the Church (Campaigners) as they participate in God's redemptive practices (become resilient disciples).

Methodology

The overarching methodology that contextualizes this research is practice-led research. Practice-led research is a sociological form of inquiry that takes seriously the notion that knowledge is learned from practice.[61] By critically analyzing real problems that arise through experience (i.e., ministry), practical theologians engaging in practice-led research search for solutions through theological reflection. Questions and problems

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[60] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 6.

[61] Alasdair MacIntyre helpfully defines practice as being any "coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity" (*After Virtue*, 187). This definition fits well with this project and my work with YL. See also, Bass, "Ways of Life Abundant," 28–34; and Barrett, "Introduction," 1.

related to *practice* are what drive the researcher's inquiry, and through reflection, the researcher creates new knowledge to address the issue. With practical theology being an inherently interdisciplinary field, the social sciences play an integral role. Sociological methodologies like practice-led research do not replace theology, but rather, inform it.[62]

Method

To collect the data needed to address the research questions, I utilize participatory action research (and more specifically, a survey and interviews). Participatory action research is a qualitative research method that prioritizes learning *from* participants rather than *about* them. It is rooted in the conviction that the community being impacted by the research findings should also be the one to take an active lead in assisting with the research process.[63] As such, throughout this project, I view my colleagues who contributed to my research as "experts" in teaching Campaigners. The survey and interviews that I conducted allowed me to learn from their wisdom, insight, and experience. My role as the researcher was to collect, code, analyze, and share their thoughts while comparing them with my own ideas.

Furthermore, as much as this project began out of my personal questions and concerns in teaching Campaigners, my hope in starting this research was not simply to improve my own practice but to develop a theory to share with YL, which can be used to empower its staff to teach well within their own contexts. The goal of participatory

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[62] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 28–72. See also Osmer, *Practical Theology*, where he gives the helpful reminder that practical theology is still "a form of theology. It is not social science 'lite'" (163). As much as the social sciences are related to practical theology, they do not cease practical theology from first and foremost being a theological discipline.

[63] Smith, "Deepening Participatory Action-Research," 173–263.

action research is not for the researcher to enter a situation, conduct their study, and then take their learned knowledge and leave, but to work collaboratively with participants to set them up for long-term vitality. The collaborative nature of participatory action research also recognizes that I am not a neutral and objective outsider in this project but have a vested interest in its outcome as I seek to lead my own group of Campaigners.

Project Outline

This dissertation contains six chapters. Chapter 1 has been an introduction to the topic and research questions. In it, I have provided background context about my ministry and explained my research questions. In Chapter 2, I discuss the role of theory and theology in practical theology. In doing so, I lay a foundation to build from as I explore the practice of Bible teaching in later chapters. I do this by examining the worldview of Generation Z and the implications this has on how they approach Scripture. In Chapter 3, I overview the research design used to complete this project. In it, I explain how I conducted the survey and interviews and discuss this study's place within practical theology. In Chapter 4, I explain the findings of the field research. In it, I present the data findings, as well as the themes and patterns I created from the collected information. In Chapter 5, I answer the research questions based on the findings presented in Chapter 4 and theologically reflect on their significance. Here, I discuss how the findings of this dissertation become "practical," and how the new knowledge obtained becomes operationally significant. In Chapter 6, I conclude the dissertation by summarizing the findings, discuss their implications, and suggest areas for future study.

As mentioned, this dissertation is not presenting the final word in biblical pedagogy. Instead, I hope to initiate a conversation that will lead to future projects within YL.

Chapter Conclusion

In conducting this study, I recognize that YL staff are not agents of change but instead, are vessels used by the God who is. Although staff are only one element of a teenager's spiritual journey, they are important nonetheless. Through Scripture, YL desires for Campaigners to experience Christ, where they will develop an understanding of their faith, identity, and how God is at work within them. By growing in biblical literacy, YL hopes that Campaigners will mature into resilient disciples and become life-long followers of Jesus who are missional in the spheres of responsibility that God has placed them. This is not an immediate process but a long-term journey of faith.

Thomas Long notes that the *telos* of practical theology is to better understand ministry practices to reform them into ones of "deeper faithfulness."[64] Long's statement helpfully identifies the ultimate objective of this project: *deeper faithfulness to Christ.* Teaching strategies may be improved, research questions may be answered, but this project is primarily an act of worship to Christ. For the researcher (myself), the research participants (staff), and those whom I intend this research to benefit (Campaigners), loving devotion to Christ is the *telos* of ministry. As the Church awaits Jesus's return, its mission is to represent Christ to the world and to point others to him.[65] Scriptural engagement is central to this, however, where through the Bible, the crucified and resurrected Christ is encountered and deeper love for him is the result.

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[64] Long, "Practical Theology on the Quad," 252.
[65] See Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 197; and *Day the Revolution Began*, 362–81.

CHAPTER TWO: EXPLORING THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

In Chapter 1, I outlined the purpose of this dissertation and introduced my practice-led research with YL. To reiterate, YL is a youth organization that aspires for Campaigners to develop into resilient disciples who understand the value of Scripture and engage in mission amidst the influences of a post-Christendom society. The problem, however, is that Campaigners struggle with reading the Bible. Experience has shown me that Campaigners are often aware of the expectation that they "should" read Scripture, but a disconnect exists in them knowing *why* they should read it, *how* to read it, or the *role* it plays in their faith.

Before addressing the research questions, it is necessary to first explain this project's theoretical and theological elements that future chapters build upon. Practical theology is a practice-centred discipline shaped by the integration of theory and theology. Thus far, I have stated that a problem within YL exists. What I have not addressed, however, are the reasons behind this problem. As a result, my purpose in this chapter is twofold. First, I discuss the integration of theory, theology, and practice within practical theology. Second, I outline the religiosity of Canadian youth and explain where the root of the problem surrounding low biblical literacy in Campaigners stems from. In doing so, I present the necessary background context from which to explore the practice of Bible teaching in future chapters.

Theory, Theology, and Practice

Literature surrounding youth ministry can generally be divided into three categories: quantitative research regarding religious vitality,[1] discourses on the need for youth ministry and its value in the lives of adolescents,[2] and practical steps for building and growing a youth ministry.[3] Although there is value to each of these categories, what tends to be under-represented in the literature are qualitative expositions on how youth see and interpret the world, how they view the Bible, how they learn, how to teach them more effectively, and why this is the case.[4] In addition, a scan through the indexes of youth ministry monographs reveals a disappointing lack of terms such as "worldview," "cultural engagement," "theory," and "postmodernism." It is not difficult to find handbooks that have chapters about pornography, relationships, and gaming, but it is challenging to find treaties that take seriously the philosophical foundation of the world teenagers live in.[5]

Theoretical, Theological, and Practical Contributions of this Dissertation

An assumption guiding me in this dissertation is that effective youth ministry stems from integrating theory and theology with practice. To analogize this, I contend that

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[1] See Reimer and Wilkinson, *Culture of Faith*, 158–81.

[2] See Penner, *Help!*; and Yaconelli, *CORE Realities*.

[3] See Fields, *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry*; and *Your First Two Years in Youth Ministry*; McKee, *Do They Run When They See You Coming?*; and Wilkinson, *Youth Ministry*.

[4] There are, however, exceptions to this. For example, see Newton, *Heart-Deep Teaching*; and Root, *Unpacking Scripture in Youth Ministry.*

[5] There is a growing body of research within youth ministry, however, that affirms the importance of this philosophical foundation. See, for example, Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry*; Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*; Benson and Senter, eds., *Complete Book of Youth Ministry*; Clark, ed., *Youth Ministry*; McGarry, *Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*; Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*; Root, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry*; and Root and Dean, *Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*.

youth ministers must be *trilingual.* By this, I mean they must be comfortable navigating their discipline's theoretical, theological, *and* practical elements. For example, without understanding the worldview of teenagers (theory), how this relates to their faith (theology), and how to engage them in light of this (practice), youth workers will inescapably lack the substance and depth needed to navigate the quagmire of a rapidly changing youth culture.[6] There appears to be a frequent inclination among youth workers to be *action-oriented.* In the fast-moving world of youth ministry, intentionally creating space to think theologically often takes a "back seat" to ministry's more pressing day-to-day requirements. Therefore, before discussing pedagogy, I find it prudent to first outline the theoretical and theological implications of this research and how it relates to practical theology.

From a theoretical position, there is a need for research into how Christian teenagers are taught to read and understand Scripture. Quantitative studies can provide insight into how often teenagers read the Bible, but there is also value in research that asks qualitative questions like: How do teenagers view Scripture? And: What strategies are in place for teaching students the "whys" and "hows" of Bible reading?[7] From a ministry standpoint, YL has not conducted any formal research of this kind, yet I suggest that such insight has the potential to significantly benefit the discipleship of its Campaigners. This dissertation contributes to this need by critically evaluating this topic and developing a hypothesis about how to approach it while also grounding it within Generation Z's theoretical worldview.[8]

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[6] McGarry, *Lead Them to Jesus*, 2.

[7] For an example of this qualitative analysis, see Hildebrandt et al., "Personal Bible Reading and the Faith Formation of Teenagers in a Digital Age," 165–90.

[8] This worldview is explained below.

From a theological perspective, this dissertation is concerned with spiritual formation (particularly discipleship) and the mandate of the Church to make followers of Christ who will participate in the Great Commission (cf. Matt 28:16–20; Mark 16:16; 2 Cor 5:20; Eph 4:11; 2 Tim 2:15; 1 Pet 3:15). The topic at hand is about more than teaching youth the contents of the Bible. Although such an endeavour is valuable, youth must be taught how to read Scripture for themselves. Young Life's purpose is not only to assist in growing the faith of Campaigners during high school but to develop critically thinking disciples who will fervently follow Christ after they graduate. By training staff in how to better teach Scripture, my hope is that this research will contribute to the discipleship of Campaigners as they learn the value of scriptural engagement.

From a practical theological standpoint, I aspire for this dissertation to benefit the work of YL as its members strive to live faithfully in a post-Christendom world. As Lee Beach argues, there is a pressing need for "spiritual entrepreneurs" to arise and cultivate ways forward for the Church amidst the spiritual apathy of the present era.[9] A way to contribute to this need for spiritual entrepreneurship is to theologically reflect on prevalent needs arising from ministry experience and to propose tangible solutions. If the Bible is a source of God's revelation to humanity (which YL contends that it is), then attention must be placed on how it is taught. Doing so from a YL context and disseminating the findings is the practical contribution of this research.

A core assumption underlying this dissertation is that discipleship cannot exist without the Bible. As N. T. Wright says, Scripture "continues to be both a central way in which God addresses his people and a central way in which his people respond."[10]

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[9] Beach, *Church in Exile*, 147.
[10] Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 3.

Urging Campaigners to read the Bible, however, is not the same as teaching them how to. Not reading or understanding Scripture is a *consequence* of a lack of pedagogy, not the *cause* of it. As Paul writes to the Romans, "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?" (10:14–15). By analogy, a similar analysis might apply to Campaigners engaging with Scripture: How can God be called on if students do not know who he is? How can they find out who he is without the Bible? How can they read the Bible without being taught? How can they share their beliefs unless their faith is built on a solid foundation? Through my practice-led research, these questions have sparked the need to explore and analyze this topic.

Background Context: Decreasing Religiosity Among Canadian Youth

Canadian society is one where religion is rapidly decreasing in relevance.[11] Few teenagers are reading Scripture regularly and even fewer are actively living a biblical worldview that prioritizes traditional Christian values.[12] Empirical research abounds on how often Canadian Christians read the Bible. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, studies done by Reginald Bibby (2008),[13] Ipsos (2008),[14] the Evangelical Fellowship of

[11] In 2001 Robert Fuller wrote *Spiritual, but Not Religious*, explaining how many people claim to have some form of spirituality in their life, even if they do not adhere to an organized religion. Current data, however, suggests that Generation Z is better classified as neither spiritual, nor religious (see Twenge, *iGen*, 119–42).

[12] What follows is a generalization of Canadian youth. For insight regarding youth around the world, see Linhart and Livermore, eds., *Global Youth Ministry*.

[13] Bibby, *Emerging Millennials.* This project is part of a wider body of research, updated every five years (starting in 1975) called "Project Teen." Unfortunately, 2008 was the final year that the project was updated.

[14] Wright, "More Americans (73%) than Canadians (69%) Have Read a Book in the Last Year."

Canada and Canadian Bible Forum (2013),[15] the Canadian Lutheran Society (2014),[16] the Canadian Bible Society (2021),[17] and the Angus Reid Institute (2022)[18] have all drawn attention to a decrease in biblical literacy amongst Canadian Christians, particularly among youth.[19]

Further studies, including James Penner et al's., *Hemorrhaging Faith* (2011),[20] Jamie Scott's *The Religions of Canadians* (2012),[21] Lori Beaman's *Religion and Canadian Society* (2012),[22] Sam Reimer and Michael Wilkinson's *A Culture of Faith* (2015),[23] Joel Thiessen's *The Meaning of Sunday* (2015),[24] Brian Clarke and Stuart Macdonald's *Leaving Christianity* (2017),[25] Catherine Holtmann's *Exploring Religion and Diversity in Canada* (2018),[26] and Mark Noll's *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (2019)[27] all provide a comprehensive snapshot of the increasing agnosticism and atheism within Canada.

Statistics Canada recently revealed that in 2022, 53.3 percent of Canadians identified as being a Christian, which is a 23.8 percent decrease from the 77.1 percent who did in 2001.[28] Since 1984, there has been a 50 percent decrease among adolescents

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[15] Hiemstra, *Confidence Conversation and Community.*
[16] Block, "Most Canadian Christians Never Read the Bible."
[17] Canadian Bible Society, "Christian Faith and the Role of Scripture in Canada," 1–17.
[18] Angus Reid Institute, "Sacred Texts," 1–16.
[19] Only around 14 percent of Canadian Christians (of any age) read their Bible weekly. Out of the Canadian Christian population, only 23 percent strongly believe that the Bible is relevant to modern life, and 60 percent agree that Scripture is not unique among the teachings of other world religions (Hiemstra, *Confidence, Conversation and Community*, 1–32).
[20] Penner et al., *Hemorrhaging Faith*.
[21] Scott, *Religions of Canadians.*
[22] Beaman, ed., *Religion and Canadian Society*.
[23] Reimer and Wilkinson, *Culture of Faith.*
[24] Thiessen, *Meaning of Sunday.*
[25] Clarke and MacDonald, *Leaving Christianity.*
[26] Holtmann, ed., *Exploring Religion and Diversity in Canada*.
[27] Noll, *History of Christianity in the United States and Canada.*
[28] Statistics Canada, "Canadian Census."

who identify as Protestant or Catholic, and religious nones (those who are religiously unaffiliated) now comprise North America's fastest-growing "religious" group.[29] After surveying Canadian religiosity, Joel Thiessen explains:

> For every indicator of adult or teen religious affiliation, belief in God, and attendance at religious services over the past 30 to 40 years, the "religious" end of each continuum decreased and the "non-religious" end increased. That is, fewer Canadians claim to identify with a religion, to believe in God, or to attend religious services regularly, while more Canadians say they have no religion, they do not believe in God, and they never attend religious services. *These trends are particularly evident among Canadian teens*.[30]

This religious snapshot reveals the widespread struggle churches face in raising dedicated followers of Christ. Generation Z has never known a time where religion plays a prominent societal role and, consequently, are struggling to see the need for God in a culture that does not value faith. As Brian Clarke and Stuart Macdonald lament, "Canada has become a post-Christian society, and churches can no longer act as though Canada's culture is a Christian one."[31] The society that Campaigners live in is sobering but clear: culture no longer views Christianity as a viable belief system on par with secularism. Instead, it sees Christianity as being profoundly inferior to it.[32] As such, Campaigners live within a religious landscape in which their faith is quickly becoming an ostracized minority.

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[29] Bibby, *Emerging Millennials*, 162–87; White, *Meet Generation Z*, 35–50; and *Rise of the Nones*, 11–20.

[30] Thiessen, *Meaning of Sunday*, 168–69 (emphasis added). As a sobering realization, among Canadian evangelical churches that are growing numerically, having children and keeping them in the congregation impacts church attendance more than evangelism (see Reimer and Wilkinson, *Culture of Faith*, 158).

[31] Clarke and Macdonald, *Leaving Christianity*, 197.

[32] See Crain, *Faithfully Different*, 47.

Cultural Context: Understanding Campaigners in their World

For anthropologists studying a unique culture, their task is to immerse themselves in that culture and study the habits and traits that make it distinctive.[33] For example, cultures have certain customs, languages, symbols, beliefs, leadership hierarchies, and socially acceptable and unacceptable practices. The researcher's role is to learn about and disseminate these characteristics. Similarly, Generation Z is a unique culture that YL staff must understand if they are to helpfully participate in their spiritual formation.

The world of high school students consists of leadership structures (e.g., teachers, popular students, and unpopular students). There are socially acceptable and unacceptable practices (e.g., things that are "cool" versus "not cool"). There is a unique language (e.g., the use of emojis, slang, and innuendoes). There are student groupings (e.g., athletes, musicians, gamers, artists, and intellectuals), and an inevitable ebb and flow to a youth's routine. Importantly, the teenage years are one of identity formation, where students are actively attempting to discover life's meaning and purpose. As Michael Nakkula explains:

> Identity is not the culmination of a key event or series of events . . . It is, rather, the lived experience of an ongoing process—the process of integrating successes, failures, routines, habits, rituals, novelties, thrills, threats, violations, gratifications, and frustrations into a coherent and evolving interpretation of who we are.[34]

As identity forms, faith must integrate within the developing worldview of an adolescent. If it does not, the various factors impacting the development of their worldview will likely extinguish faith as a primary value.

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[33] See Clark, *Hurt 2.0*. In reflecting on his time researching teenagers, he writes, "My intent is to try to understand them in order to care about them more effectively" (xviii).

[34] Nakkula, "Identity and Possibility," 7.

Worldview

My specific focus in this dissertation is on Bible teaching within YL. Still, the broader topics of youth spirituality and the declining religiosity of the West contextualizes this focus within a larger framework. Youth ministry does not exist in a "vacuum," and it is unavoidable that Campaigners are a by-product of their twenty-first century, high school, Canadian environment. To utilize Edward Farley's terminology, "situations occur within situations."[35] Practical theology happens within a particular context. Failing to understand this context hinders the researcher from proposing strategies that lead to lasting change. As Pete Ward says, "The practice of faith always takes place in a cultural context. Culture is, therefore, a key issue in practical theology."[36]

As the researcher in this project, my role is to address Bible teaching and assist YL in developing pedagogical strategies. To do this, however, it is important to first understand the culture of Campaigners and to better grasp why they struggle. These objectives are not mutually exclusive. To improve *how* YL teaches, it is essential to first understand the ones *whom* they teach. There are numerous theoretical frameworks through which to do this. For example, the framework could be psychological: How do teenagers think? It could be educational: How do teenagers learn? Or ecclesial: What has the Church done right or wrong in training youth? In my experience, however, a more encompassing essence appears to be *worldview*: How do teenagers see and understand the world around them?[37] The essence of worldview encapsulates others

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[35] Farley, "Interpreting Situations," 13.

[36] Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 133.

[37] In discussing the topic of worldview, I am grateful for the advice and wisdom of my primary academic supervisor, Dr. Michael Knowles. Our many conversations about the topic assisted me as I worked out the implications of the term, especially in relation to Generation Z.

within it and seems to provide a more comprehensive way of understanding Campaigners and their view of the Bible.[38]

What is Worldview?[39]

Philosopher Immanuel Kant first used the term "worldview" in 1781, and it has since gained widespread use as a continually evolving way to understand how people interpret culture.[40] In his early study of worldview, James Sire defined it as "a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world."[41] He has since changed his definition, however, to:

> A commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) that we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.[42]

Sire updated his definition to ontologically present worldview as a commitment, yet not one that people necessarily choose. It is also not solely an intellectual predisposition. Instead, worldview is an attitude of the heart so deeply rooted in each

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[38] The following conversation about worldview is purely *diagnostic.* I am not seeking to answer the research questions or discuss how pedagogical strategies fit within Campaigners' worldview. My focus here is on *description* and explaining why worldview effects Campaigners' biblical literacy.

[39] In discussing worldview, I am indebted to the works of James Sire, particularly his books *Naming the Elephant* and *Universe Next Door.* The depth in which he exegetes the concept makes him an adept conversation partner throughout this chapter.

[40] See Naugle, *Worldview*, for an overview of the history of the term.

[41] Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, 19.

[42] Sire, *Universe Next Door*, 6. Two other definitions are worth noting. First, Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew define worldview as "an articulation of the basic beliefs embedded in a shared grand story that are deeply rooted in a faith commitment and that give shape and direction to the whole of our individual and corporate lives" (*Living at the Crossroads*, 23). Second, Albert Wolters defines it as "the comprehensive framework of one's basic beliefs about things" (*Creation Regained*, 2). By using language like "grand story" and "framework," these authors helpfully identify the encompassing nature of worldview.

person that it affects their every thought and decision.[43] Worldviews are not entirely composed of how people *think*; they are also exemplified by how they *speak* and *act*.[44] All humans have a worldview: "we think *with* our worldview and *because of* our worldview, not *about* our worldview."[45] Each individual's worldview comprises the assumptions and beliefs they have about the world as embedded in the story of their lives.[46] As Natasha Crain writes, these assumptions are so entrenched that "to live is to have a worldview."[47]

Components of a Worldview

There are various components of a worldview. Wright, for example, lists five central questions that every worldview seeks to answer: (1) Who are we?; (2) Where are we?; (3) What is the problem?; (4) What is the solution?; and (5) What time is it?[48] In a similar vein, Sire lists eight: (1) What is prime reality—the really real?; (2) What is the nature of external reality (that is, the world around us)?; (3) What is a human being?; (4) What happens to a person at death?; (5) Why is it possible to know anything at all?; (6) How do we know what is right and wrong?; (7) What is the meaning of human history?; and (8) What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?[49]

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[43] Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, 142–43. This concept is so ingrained in each person that Sire also calls it "a spiritual orientation" (*Universe Next Door*, 6).

[44] Sire, *Universe Next Door*, 8.

[45] Sire, *Naming the Elephant*, 143 (emphasis original).

[46] Goheen and Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, xiv.

[47] Crain, *Faithfully Different*, 9.

[48] Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 26.

[49] Sire, *Universe Next Door*, 9. Sire's list originally included only the first seven questions but has since been updated to add the eighth.

As Sire explains, everyone is seeking to either implicitly or explicitly answer these eight questions. As he clarifies, "Refusing to adopt an explicit worldview will turn out to be itself a worldview."[50] Each person answers these questions differently, but broad generalizations distinguish worldview groupings from one another.[51]

Postmodernism: The Worldview Influencing Generation Z[52]

It is impossible to label every person in a society as having the same worldview.[53] Furthermore, it is unavoidable that overlap between worldviews exists.[54] To speak of Generation Z's "worldview" is to paint broad strokes of generality that point instead to a dominant cultural milieu, rather than individual beliefs. Currently, this cultural milieu seems to be that of postmodernism.

Postmodernism is a worldview that arose in the late twentieth-century as a counterbalance to modernity and its emphasis on objectivity, progress, and grand narrative. Commonly associated with the works of French philosophers like Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and Michael Foucault, postmodernism originated as an architectural term that is now used for cultural analysis.[55]

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[50] Sire, *Universe Next Door*, 10.

[51] In *Universe Next Door*, for example, Sire addresses nine major worldviews and discusses the unique characteristics of each: Christian Theism; Deism; Naturalism; Nihilism; Existentialism; Eastern Pantheistic Monism; The New Age; Postmodernism; and Islamic Theism.

[52] The following discussion of postmodernism is brief. My objective is to identify the primary features of postmodernism as they pertain to Generation Z. A more comprehensive overview of postmodernism and its relation to Christianity can be found in the sources cited throughout this chapter.

[53] Think, for example, of the denominations within evangelicalism. Most evangelicals would claim to hold a Christian worldview, yet have different opinions on issues related to politics, war, LGBTQ, etc.

[54] For example, a Christian can hold a Christian theistic worldview and simultaneously be influenced by postmodernism. Such an overlap points to the difficulties in isolating worldviews and placing them into "exact" categories. No two worldviews are identical, and are built on a combination of factors related to one's life experiences, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, upbringing, education, political ideology, etc.

[55] As a sampling of their work, see Derrida, *Of Grammatology*; Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*; and Foucault, *History of Sexuality.*

Postmodernism is not easily categorized as a worldview. As Sire acknowledges, it is "both more than and less than a worldview."[56] Postmodernism fits Sire's worldview definition of being an orientation of the heart that contains presuppositions about reality. It differs, however, in that it cannot be expressed as a "story" (i.e., metanarrative), since it inherently rejects metanarrative in favour of *language.* Postmodernism can stand alone as a worldview, but it can also be a worldview contained within other worldviews (i.e., naturalism or deism). My purpose here is not to over-evaluate postmodernism's minute details but to describe its broad characteristics in relation to my focus in this dissertation. Postmodernism is perhaps best viewed as a thread weaving through Canadian society, impacting Generation Z, and specifically, Campaigners. In terms of religiosity, postmodernism does not necessitate atheism or agnosticism, however, its rejection of metanarratives generally leans in a non-religious direction. Based on experience, the influence I have seen postmodernism have on Campaigners is that it leads them more towards deism (the belief in a supernatural being who does not interfere with the world) than it does an outright rejection of God.[57]

Postmodernism represents the latest societal shift that has taken place over the past 400 years. From the beginning of recorded history until the mid–1600s (leading up to the Enlightenment/Age of Reason), the philosophical underpinning of the Western world was that of "premodernity," where religiosity was the dominant milieu. As Joshua Chatraw explains, "most people assumed an enchanted world. They lived with an awareness that some kind of transcendent being or beings existed, as did a realm beyond

[56] Sire, *Universe Next Door*, 206.

[57] It is also important to note that YL staff are no more immune to the influence of postmodernism than Campaigners are, since they live under the same societal influences.

or above nature. It was also assumed there was a high meaning to life."[58] In premodernism, people largely accepted the authority of religious institutions (like the Church), and society generally considered religion an objective source of truth.

The rise of the Enlightenment in the seventeenth century led "modernity" to replace premodernity as the preponderant cultural philosophy. The scientific method was developed during this period, and an added emphasis on the use of logic and reason became commonplace. Rather than trusting religious texts like the Bible *a priori* as a source of truth and authority, modernity is characterized by the turning to science and reason for answers to questions about life, the universe, and truth.[59] Chatraw depicts modernity as being an era where people "attempted to discover truth by believing only what could be logically deduced from what was self-evident."[60] The result of this was the beginning of the break between Church and state and the increased promotion of faith and reason over Scripture as a source of objectivity.[61]

As the twenty-first century neared, postmodernism developed as a response to modernity. Postmodernists claim that science alone cannot answer all of life's questions and that human reason cannot create the utopian society that modernists anticipated it would (especially considering the world wars). In numerous ways, postmodernism is not simply a counter to the philosophical epoch that came before it, it is the *deconstruction* of it.

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[58] Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story*, 27.
[59] Sire, *Universe Next Door*, 37.
[60] Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story*, 28.
[61] Sire, *Universe Next Door*, 39.

Perhaps the most recognizable characteristic of postmodernism is Lyotard's definition of an "incredulity toward metanarrative."[62] "Metanarrative" refers to an all-encompassing story "that claims to describe the main elements of reality in one big story."[63] Rather than holding a single metanarrative, postmodernists cling instead to the primacy of "language."[64] By this, postmodernists argue that various worldviews are all dialectal interpretations of reality, of which none are universal.[65] Chatraw helpfully explains this notion by saying, in postmodernism "there is no universal Truth (with a capital 'T') that we can know; we can only know what the truth (little 't') is for ourselves."[66] In a postmodern view of society, no metanarrative can have primacy over another since there is no "capital T" Truth; instead, all metanarratives are social constructs.

Implications of Postmodernism on Campaigners

The postmodern society in which Campaigners live is one where, as Crain writes, "feelings are the ultimate guide, happiness is the ultimate goal, judging is the ultimate sin, and God is the ultimate guess."[67] To say that Campaigners live in a postmodern world is not to argue that each one is a postmodernist. I have carefully selected the language throughout this chapter to denote the societal worldview that Campaigners *live within* and are *influenced by.* Postmodernism is the cultural milieu that surrounds them as they navigate the complexities of a secular society, while also seeking to grow in

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[62] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, xxiv.
[63] Kelly, *Understanding Postmodernism*, 8.
[64] Goheen and Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, 109.
[65] Goheen and Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, 109.
[66] Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story*, 31–32.
[67] Crain, *Faithfully Different*, 52.

faith. Even though Campaigners are Christians who have expressed a desire to grow in discipleship, they are not necessarily *mature* Christians and are not immune to the influence of the ideologies around them.[68]

Through my role in YL, I have observed that low biblical literacy is one implication of Campaigners living in a postmodern culture that has largely ignored spiritual matters. What Campaigners see at home, among friends, on television, on social media, and in school impacts their perception of God, faith, and Scripture. Simply put, secular culture is an undeniably important influencer in the faith formation of students.

Relativism and "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism"

There are numerous repercussions for Campaigners stemming from the culture in which they live, but one in particular is *relativism*. When considering Bible teaching, I have observed that relativism and the struggle it creates for YL staff to present Jesus as the *only way* to salvation is a stumbling block for youth. Under the influence of relativism, my experience has shown that Campaigners often presume Jesus as *a way* to truth and life but not *the only way* (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

Empirical research affirms the prevalence of relativism in Canadian society. For example, a 2020 Angus Reid Institute study revealed that only 16 percent of Canadians believe in moral absolutes, with the remaining 84 percent adhering to some form of

[68] There is also much to say about the benefits that postmodernism brings and the new avenues it opens for presenting the gospel (see Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?*). As already stated, postmodernism does not necessitate atheism.

moral relativism.[69] Arising from a postmodern worldview, relativism postulates that truth is not universal. Instead, it is subjugated to particular times, places, and societies, and there is no possibility of objectively determining what is "true" or "false."[70] Relativism is largely the result of society rejecting God and the Christian belief that places Jesus's commandment to love God with our entire being and to love other people as the Greatest Commandment (Matt 22:36–40; cf. Mark 12:29–31; Luke 10:27–8).[71] As John Stott notes, contemporary society has a "fetish of keeping their minds open."[72] By this, Stott means that the exponential growth of relativism has sapped Western society's view of Scripture having authoritative value. Youth today are caught in a struggle between orthodox Christianity and secular society where the former tells them that Scripture points to Christ as the only way to salvation, and the latter tells them that such a claim is "nonsense," and that objectivity does not exist.

For Campaigners living in a relativistic world, I have observed their hesitancy in placing authoritative significance in the Bible, which points to God as the source of objective truth (Ps 25:5; 119:160; John 1:14, 17; 4:6; 8:32; 14:6; 16:13; 17:17; 2 Tim 2:15; Jas 1:18; 1 John 3:18). This hesitancy presents an obstacle for YL staff as they seek to relationally shepherd students in their faith and help them grow in their biblical literacy. According to a biblical worldview, God's character is absolute and unchanging (Job 23:13; Mal 3:6). He created the world and made people in his image (Gen 1:27). As the perfect example of love, holiness, justice, and truth, God has made his character and

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[69] Kurl and Korzinski, "Modern Morality." The same study revealed that more Canadians (46 percent) believe that using someone's video streaming account without paying is a greater moral wrongdoing than doctor-assisted suicide (20 percent) and abortion (26 percent).

[70] Such a worldview ultimately leads to statements such as, "true for you but not for me."

[71] In Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, for example, he claims that seeking the will of God in light of this commandment is the greatest ethical good (186).

[72] Stott, *Contemporary Christian*, 165.

nature known through the general revelation of nature and human intuition (Ps 19:1; 147:4–5; Rom 1:20; 2:15), the specific revelation of Scripture (2 Tim 3:16–7), and the personal revelation of Jesus (John 1:1–3, 14; 6:38; 10:30; Heb 1:1–4; Rom 1:2–5; Col 1:15–20; 2:9). In many ways, postmodernism contradicts a Christian worldview by encouraging Campaigners to create their own meaning, purpose, and truth. Under this influence, it is difficult for Campaigners to see their need for a saviour, because they are unsure if God is "right" for them. In a world heavily impacted by a lack of objectivity, the danger influencing Campaigners is the freedom they feel to use the Bible to construct God in their image. This leads to a concept developed by sociologist Christian Smith called "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism."[73]

After studying religiosity among American teenagers, Smith concludes that many perceive God as a creation of what they think or hope to be true about him. Smith identifies three characteristics of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. First, adolescents view God as being moralistic. This means he desires his creation to be "good" and to live a life that avoids harm to others. Second, God is therapeutic. This means he wishes for people to be happy and will therefore meet their requests like a genie. Third, God is deistic. This means he has little to no bearing on the day-to-day activities of his creation. To summarize his findings, Smith writes, "In short, God is something like a combination Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist: he is always on call, takes care of any problems that arise, professionally helps his people to feel better about themselves, and does not become too personally involved in the process."[74]

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[73] Smith, *Soul Searching*, 162.
[74] Smith, *Soul Searching*, 165.

Through working with Campaigners, I have seen Moralistic Therapeutic Deism's impact in shaping students' perception of God and giving them the perceived flexibility to use Scripture to create a version of him that suits their liking. This concept fits well with how Campaigners approach faith, and in particular, Scripture. The result of this is a deistic conception of God mixed with the notion that happiness is the ultimate goal of life. What underlines this paradigm, however, is a lack of objectivity and the supposed liberty to use Scripture to create a version of a deity that suits their particular purposes.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the theoretical and theological underpinnings that address the heart of Campaigners' low biblical literacy. In it, I have sought to show that in order to address pedagogy (practice), a deeper understanding of theory and theology is needed.[75] In providing this understanding, a clearer image emerges of the challenges YL staff face in their teaching. Because of decreasing religiosity amidst a secular society, Campaigners often fail to see the Bible as answering fundamental questions about their meaning, identity, purpose, and vocation. Instead, society influences them in a way that is diametrically opposed to an orthodox Christian worldview.[76]

Stemming from a postmodern cultural milieu, relativism often influences Campaigners by hindering their understanding of why the Bible is uniquely meaningful for their lives. Like Smith's concept of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, many

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[75] See Miller-McLemore, "Toward Greater Understanding," 117–23.

[76] My goal in this chapter has not been to negatively critique postmodernism or to suggest ways for Christians to live within it. Much has already been written on this topic and there is debate on whether postmodernism is actually beneficial for the Church (see, for example, Raschke, *Next Reformation*). My goal here is simply to state the primary features of postmodernism and identify the impact it has on the way Campaigners approach the Bible and faith.

Campaigners feel the freedom to use Scripture to create an image of God that suits their liking. This is ironic, since rather than recognize that they have been made in God's image, Campaigners often attempt to manufacture God in theirs. Because of this, they often believe there is no *one way* to encounter God and thus no logical reason to pursue Jesus (through Scripture) as the *only way* to salvation. If there is no objective truth, then no person has the right to tell another that their belief system (i.e., their Story) is wrong.

There appears to be a backwards paradigm at work among Campaigners in terms of their scriptural engagement: rather than the *Bible shaping their worldview, their worldview is shaping the Bible*.[77] This is not the case with every student, but it seems to be an accurate assessment of large portions of modern youth culture. As Wolters notes, "What, then is the relationship of worldview to Scripture? The Christian answer to this question is clear: our worldview must be shaped and tested by Scripture."[78] Although this might be the "clear" answer for how Campaigners *ought* to live, it does not always reflect the *actuality* of their lives. As attention turns to addressing the role that staff play in teaching the Bible (the practical component of this dissertation), keeping this framework of relativity in mind is paramount. As I discuss and reflect on my research findings in future chapters, this worldview discussion provides important context for discussing the data's implications.

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[77] This conversation reappears in Chapter 5. As Kinnaman and Matlock argue, in current society (what they call digital Babylon), "the Bible is one of many voices that interpret human experience; it is no longer viewed as the central authority over people and society. Today, if someone unironically drops 'the Bible says' in a media interview, they sound as if they have just disembarked from a time machine" (*Faith for Exiles*, 21).

[78] Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 7.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

The previous chapter followed my investigative process in answering the question: Why does YL's problem in biblical pedagogy exist? The problem of biblical literacy has roots that are deeper than the symptoms, and there are many reasons for this struggle. In particular, the worldviews held by Campaigners appear to be leading them away from traditional biblical theism, and they live in a society that rejects Christian orthodoxy and encourages youth to manufacture individual truth. In such a world, adolescents are inclined to create God in their own image rather than recognize they have been made in his. This relativistic notion frequently contradicts traditional Christian theism and deviates from the core understanding of God outlined in Scripture. The problem is not that the Bible is irrelevant or outdated, but that Campaigners fail to understand why it is significant and meaningful in their lives. Too often, Scripture has become "another book" that adults are pressuring youth to read (with the reality being that they do not). The resulting outcome is that many teenagers miss the relationship that Jesus offers and instead seek to create their own truth based on the influence of culture around them.

Because of this, my objective in this dissertation is to gain a deeper understanding of biblical pedagogy within YL and to discuss ways of teaching the Bible *in light of* the cultural influences that Campaigners face. Now that I have provided context, attention turns to outlining the methodology, method, and steps used to complete this research. What follows is a description of how I conducted this project and acquired the necessary information to answer the research questions.

Practical Theology

This project is an exercise in practical theology. As cited earlier, practical theology is a "critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world."[1] Practical theology is a broad and complex field but is united around the notion that human experience is a viable "text" for theological analysis. I agree with Bonnie Miller-McLemore who argues that practical theology "engages personal, ecclesial, and social experience to discern the meaning of divine presence and to enable faithful human response."[2] More than that, practical theology is a "*discipline* among scholars and an *activity of faith* among believers . . . it is a *method* for studying theology in practice and it is a *curricular area* of subdisciplines in the seminary."[3] Ward furthermore suggests that practical theology is "any way of thinking that takes both practice and theology seriously."[4] Ward's definition is a helpful addition to Miller-McLemore's explanation because he accentuates how practical theology is the conscious attempt to blend theology into the everyday life of the Church.[5] In essence, practical theology is a form of theological reflection that considers the actions of the Church as they pertain to the world, with the goal of developing and improving practices that lead to deeper faithfulness to Christ.[6]

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[1] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 6. See also Kathleen Cahalan and James Nieman's emphasis on "faithful discipleship" within practical theology ("Mapping," 67).

[2] Miller-McLemore, "Contributions of Practical Theology," 14.

[3] Miller-McLemore, "Five Misunderstandings about Practical Theology," 20 (emphasis original).

[4] Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 5.

[5] Veling, *Practical Theology*, 3. Veling explains that practical theology is more of a verb than a noun. It is arguably more proper to say "practicing theology" than "practical theology" (4–5).

[6] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 6.

In conducting practical theology, human activity is a *living document* through which critical reflection and insightful theological learning occurs.[7] As Lewis Mudge articulates, "there is such a thing as lived, and not merely discursive exegesis."[8] Just as there are methodologies to exegete texts in a field such as biblical studies, practical theology is a way to *exegete human lives*, with the objective being a greater understanding of and devotion to Christ.

Theological Reflection

Practical theology is an act of theological reflection. In its most basic form, theological reflection entails Christians learning from experience.[9] It means thinking through a practice and asking questions about where God is, what God is doing, and how to amend or change practices to partner alongside him. In such a reflection, the researcher moves through a three-step paradigm that goes from: (1) practice; to (2) theory; and then to (3) renewed and improved practice. Don Browning describes this pattern as going from "present theory-laden practice to a retrieval of normative theory-laden practice to the creation of more critically held theory-laden practices."[10] This is not a linear motion, whereby the project is done after the three stages are completed. Instead, practical theology is a continually repeating cycle. Practical theologians recognize that practice (i.e., ministry) is the starting point of theology and that how one thinks and reflects on faith is intimately and unequivocally connected with how it is lived.[11]

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[7] Anton Boisen is often credited with pioneering the phrase "human document," referring to how spiritual meaning and theological significance can be drawn from how people live. Practical theology has grown out of this conviction (*Exploration of the Inner World*, 185).

[8] Mudge, "Thinking in the Community of Faith," 104.

[9] Kinast, *Let Ministry Teach*, vii.

[10] Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, 7.

[11] Root, *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry*, 55.

Terminology

As attention shifts to discussing the role of methodology and method, it must be noted that they are not identical terms. Because practical theology is a broad discipline that inevitably combines aspects from various sociological fields, it is imperative to differentiate between the two. "Methodology" refers to the parameters regarding *what type* of research is conducted.[12] It provides reasoning and rationale for the kind of data collection used to answer research questions. "Method," by contrast, refers to the specific techniques and ways data is collected and analyzed.[13] It addresses the question: How did the researcher collect their information?[14] As explained by Swinton and Mowat, "methods are carried out within a particular set of methodological assumptions."[15] In essence, the parameters set by the methodology guide the selection of the most suitable method for gathering data. The methodology provides the overarching framework that dictates the research boundaries, whereas the method serves as the specific approach for collecting information.

Methodology

My methodology in this dissertation is practice-led research.[16] Practice-led research first gained popularity in Australia in the 1980's, particularly in the performance arts, but has

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[12] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 74.

[13] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research,* 74–75, 98.

[14] Richard Osmer writes that methods of research "are the specific procedures used to gather and record data" (*Practical Theology*, 54). If the same research problem is approached using different methods, the data and conclusions will vary.

[15] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 75.

[16] Different authors use various terms to describe practice-led research. Brad Haseman, for example, uses "performative research" ("Manifesto," 98–106), whereas Hazel Smith and Roger Dean propose "conceptual research" ("Introduction," 4). For continuity, practice-led research is used throughout.

since become a useful methodology within practical theology.[17] Carole Gray defines practice-led research as being a form of "research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners."[18] Linda Candy furthermore notes that practice-led research is "concerned with the nature of practice and leads to new knowledge that has operational significance for that practice."[19] Similar to practical theology, in practice-led research, a question having arisen from practice is asked, research is undertaken, and the newly acquired knowledge is applied back to the practice. Practice-led research is a close companion to practical theology in that it too starts and ends with practice. If "lived exegesis" is to be conducted on "living human documents," then researchers must adhere to a methodology that takes seriously the way humans live. The primary difference between the two is that practical theology is by nature a theological discipline that strives for improved practice leading to spiritual growth. In contrast, practice-led research is a sociological methodology that ends with improved practice. Additionally, in a typical setting, someone doing practice-led research is reflecting on their own experience, whereas this is not necessarily the case with practical theology in general.

As Farley explains, "All human beings exist and act in situations and engage in interpretations of situations."[20] When a researcher's situation is examined, it becomes complexified, and its unique features and nuances become apparent. When this occurs, the layers of a situation can be peeled back to better understand them. These features

[17] For an in-depth review of practice-led research and its implications for academia, see Barrett and Bolt, eds., *Practice as Research*; and Smith and Dean, eds., *Practice-Led Research.*

[18] Gray, "Inquiry through Practice," 3.

[19] Candy, "Practice Based Research," 3.

[20] Farley, "Interpreting Situations," 11.

and nuances cannot become apparent, however, unless "experience" is given consideration and respect. The value of practice-led research (and qualitative research as a whole) is that they allow for this outcome.

Although still a relatively new methodology, practice-led research is rapidly gaining popularity in academia as a viable form of research for advanced degrees. It partners well with practical theology, and I utilize it in this dissertation to critically reflect on my ministry in order to suggest practical ideas for how to improve it. In short, practice-led research promotes a hermeneutical paradigm where the researcher's practice is not simply reflected on, but also interpreted. This is all framed within practical theology, which provides a theological lens to discuss how God is a part of the equation.[21]

Practical Theology and Practice-led Research

Practical theology is, in various ways, a theological form of practice-led research. In this project, the two allow me to sociologically reflect on my work with YL, while recognizing that this project is firstly about God. The answers to my research questions revolve around practice, however, they are also theological.[22] Practice prevents theology from dwelling in the sphere of rhetoric and abstract concepts and takes seriously the notion that God continues to reveal himself through the day-to-day lives of people.[23] Theology, however, grounds practice in the work of God. The two work together in that

[21] See Farley, "Interpreting Situations," 1–26.

[22] They are also theoretical. The conversation here is situated around the social sciences' relation to theology, however.

[23] See Root, *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry*, 66.

what Christians *believe* only has significance and meaning when it is reflected in what they *do* (i.e., when faith becomes practical).[24]

Method

Practice-led research is the overarching methodological framework for this dissertation. What it does not provide, however, is an explanation of how I collected and analyzed the data. For this, a discussion of method is needed. My research questions are theological, but they find their answers in the social sciences. In selecting a method, I asked myself two questions: (1) What will count as evidence?; and (2) How will the data be collected? After reflecting, I deemed a qualitative survey and interview approach using participatory action research to be the most useful.

Qualitative Research[25]

The purpose of qualitative research is to develop a deeper understanding of how humans act, react, and interpret the world.[26] As defined by John Creswell:

> Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data.[27]

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[24] Barbra Bolt is an art theorist, but note the similarities between her explanation of practice-led research and what has already been said about practical theology. In practice-led research there is a "double articulation between theory and practice, whereby theory emerges from a reflexive practice at the same time that practice is informed by theory" ("Magic Is in Handling," 29). Practice and theory are not mutually exclusive; instead, they inform one another.

[25] Qualitative research is a methodology (not a method), as it deals with the overarching framework of how research is done. It is described here under the method section, however, in order to explain the specific type of qualitative research (the method) I used.

[26] Gaikwad and Gaikwad, "Overview of Research," 20.

[27] Creswell, *Research Design*, 4.

Qualitative research is exploratory and inductive in nature, using "words" (as opposed to "numbers") to address a problem or develop a theory. In most quantitative research, theory belongs at the beginning of a proposed study as something to test. In qualitative research, however, theory may appear in any place as something to test or develop. In some cases, theory plays no role at all. Qualitative researchers typically follow a pattern of collecting and analyzing non-empirical data to draw conclusions.[28] By studying this type of data, the goal of qualitative researchers is to develop a deeper understanding of phenomena related to human experience. Such research is by nature *descriptive* and aims to address questions related to "why" something is the way it is.

As identified by James Chesebro and Deborah Borisoff, qualitative research comprises five characteristics. First, qualitative research occurs in a natural setting.[29] Unlike a laboratory where experiments can be reproduced, qualitative research occurs in common, everyday life. The researcher's environment is not static and continually changes based on factors like geography, time, and people. Second, the researcher is an essential participant in the project.[30] Despite attempts to remain objective, researchers are inevitably influenced by their own philosophical assumptions and biases. Rather than denying this, it is preferable to state one's philosophical position and reflect on its

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[28] See Creswell, *Research Design*, 49–71 for more information regarding the role of theory. Ultimately, the place of theory in qualitative research depends on the author's objective for their project. In this case, as explained in Chapter 5, I develop a theory (explained through the lens of epistemology) as a framework through which to answer my research questions. Creating a theory is my primary goal for this dissertation, but not my ultimate goal for the project this dissertation is a part of. My long-term objective is to develop practical and effective teaching strategies, but developing a theory for "how to get there" is the first step. To a certain extent, this project also involves me testing several preconceived theories. I began this research with certain hypotheses and ideas about the role of Scripture in the faith formation of students and how it can best be communicated. Although this project does not involve me directly testing these theories, I will occasionally reference the hypotheses and ideas that I had while completing the research.

[29] Chesebro and Borisoff, "What Makes Qualitative Research Qualitative?" 9.

[30] Chesebro and Borisoff, "What Makes Qualitative Research Qualitative?" 9.

significance in the study. Third, qualitative research is dependent on subject communication.[31] Data stems from sources outside the researcher, and it is the participants who set the tone and objective for what topics are discussed. Fourth, qualitative research is subject-dependent.[32] The role of the researcher is to collect and properly interpret information from the stakeholders. The participants answer the questions and the researcher's role is to organize and communicate their responses. Fifth, qualitative research is pragmatic. It addresses real-life problems and produces tangible solutions.[33]

All five of these research components are on display in this study. I collected data in a natural environment from my colleagues who are actively engaged in teaching Campaigners. As the researcher, I am also a YL staff member. As such, my personal experience and reflection was central to how the project was approached. To collect and analyze data, I was entirely dependent on my research participants articulating their experiences. After recording their responses, my job was to analyze, evaluate, and interpret what they said. Lastly, this project addresses a pressing need within YL, the results of which are meant to have a direct impact on how staff within the organization teach.

[31] Chesebro and Borisoff, "What Makes Qualitative Research Qualitative?" 9.
[32] Chesebro and Borisoff, "What Makes Qualitative Research Qualitative?" 9.
[33] Chesebro and Borisoff, "What Makes Qualitative Research Qualitative?" 9.

Participatory Action Research

Explanation

The qualitative method I used to collect data is participatory action research. Participatory action research is a method that prioritizes learning from research participants to solve a problem.[34] It falls under the broad umbrella of action research but places an added emphasis on subject participation and expertise.[35] As a broader method, action research emphasizes the need for researchers and stakeholders to work together to solve a problem that is pertinent to the stakeholders.[36] As its pioneer Kurt Lewin writes, transformation within a community must be done through research that is "closely guided by the needs of that organization."[37] The emphasis in action research is on working *together* for a solution and not the researcher proposing something *without* the stakeholders' feedback. This means that stakeholders have a critical voice in a scholar's work and largely dictate the answers to the research questions. Within the phrase "participatory action research," "participatory" denotes the desire to include a wide range of voices in the search for new knowledge. "Action" refers to how the research contributes applicable changes to the participants. And "research" indicates the scholar's aspiration to produce new knowledge.[38] Peter Reason and William Torbert summarize this method well in saying that participatory action research aims to "contribute *directly*

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[34] Participatory action research can also be defined as a methodology in that it provides a parameter of researcher and participant interaction and mutual dependability. I define it here under method, however, because of the survey and interviews I used to collect the data.

[35] Schubotz, *Participatory Research*, 102.

[36] The term "stakeholder(s)" refers to members of a community who have a vested interest in the problem being addressed by the researcher. In this case, stakeholders are YL staff who teach the Bible to Campaigners. A synonym to this is "participants."

[37] Lewin, "Frontiers in Group Dynamics," 150.

[38] Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research," 236.

to the flourishing of human persons, their communities and the ecosystems of which they are part."[39]

Although commonly used to bring social change to marginalized and oppressed communities, participatory action research has grown in popularity across a wide spectrum of disciplines, including theology.[40] As outlined by Dirk Schubotz, participatory action research has three primary characteristics. First, research subjects are elevated to the role of co-researchers.[41] Participants are experts in their respective contexts, and the goal of the researcher is not to teach, but to learn from their wisdom. Second, participatory action research dismantles the hierarchy of power that traditionally exists within research projects.[42] The exchanging of power from researcher to stakeholders is not only a methodological principle, it is a central component of the method itself.[43] Third, participatory action research is both practical and change focused.[44] Researchers use it to address real problems that exist within a community and work with the community to produce tangible solutions.

Selection of Method

Selecting a method is no small task. As Swinton and Mowat write, "the choice of method and the mode of analysis are deeply tied in with the epistemological positions

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[39] Reason and Torbert, "Action Turn," 6 (emphasis original). Collaboration here is important because it emphasizes how participatory action research can only be conducted with stakeholder involvement.

[40] A history of action research and its close relation to participatory action research can be found in Herr and Anderson, *Action Research Dissertation*. As the authors note, Lewin developed this method out of a belief that "knowledge should be created from problem solving in real-life situations" (11). This conviction makes action research widely applicable to various fields of study.

[41] Schubotz, *Participatory Research*, 105.

[42] Or at least, attempts to. See Schubotz, *Participatory Research*, 105.

[43] Schubotz, *Participatory Research*, 102.

[44] Schubotz, *Participatory Research*, 105.

that are assumed within the general outlook of the researcher and reflected in the research question."[45] In essence, one's method must be selected in conjunction with the research questions being asked, as the method chosen directly impacts the type of data collected.

Five methods are most frequently utilized in qualitative research: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies.[46] Note that participatory action research is not one of them.[47] Although each method is widely used within practical theology, none seemed appropriate for addressing the questions that arose from my ministry experience. In selecting participatory action research, the problem I was experiencing and the questions I was asking indicated what method would be most helpful for arriving at a solution. Several factors led to participatory action research. First, my research context was within my own ministry.[48] I required a method to assist me in answering the questions I was asking but also one that would not create a power dynamic between my co-workers and me. As such, selecting a method where stakeholders are the experts seemed preferable. Second, I conceived this project through conversations with co-workers who experience similar problems as me. This research was collaborative from the beginning, and it logically followed that it should

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[45] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research,* 55.

[46] Depending on context, and as explained above, each of these can also be viewed as a methodology. Phenomenology, for example, is a method when it denotes a specific way of detailing and describing lived experience. It is a methodology when, in a broad sense, it refers to the generic and theoretical study of lived experience (see Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 75–80).

[47] For example, see Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*. The subtitle of the book is "Choosing among Five Approaches."

[48] There are six ways that a scholar using participatory action research may relate to their research participants: (1) Insiders studying their own practice; (2) Insiders collaborating with other insiders; (3) Insiders collaborating with outsiders; (4) Insiders and outsiders reciprocally collaborating with each other; (5) Outsiders collaborating with insiders; and (6) Outsiders studying insiders (see Herr and Anderson, *Action Research Dissertation*, 31). As an insider within YL, my approach is the second option.

remain so. Third, there is a broad pool of experienced YL staff who have knowledge, wisdom, and expertise to share. To answer my questions, I required an emic (insider) perspective on the topic from participants who understand YL and youth, not an etic (outsider) one from those who do not. Fourth, a process of elimination led me to participatory action research. The research questions could not be adequately answered using any of the five methods noted above, so I needed to look elsewhere. Fifth, participatory action research is not uncommon within practical theology.[49] With its emphasis on improved practice being so prevalent, utilizing a method based on that same conviction is a valid option.

Limitations of Participatory Action Research

Although useful in many ways, participatory action research is not a perfect method. First, its findings are not necessarily applicable outside their immediate context.[50] It solves a unique problem that may not exist elsewhere, and in different contexts, others may not find the solutions relevant. Second, participatory action research risks elevating the role of enhanced practice over morals and values.[51] As Helen Cameron et al. explains, action research faces the potential of becoming "purely interested in 'what works' and ignores the espoused value base of the organizations taking part."[52] Addressing a problem is important, but if the solution comes at the expense of morals or values, the question of whether the ends justify the means must be asked. Third,

[49] See, for example, Cameron et al., *Talking about God in Practice*.
[50] Cameron et al., *Talking about God in Practice*, 42.
[51] Cameron et al., *Talking about God in Practice*, 43.
[52] Cameron et al., *Talking about God in Practice*, 43.

participatory action research can be time-consuming and resource-draining.[53] Researchers are limited by what they have at their disposal and may lack the time or money to fully invest in a study. Lastly, participatory action research is dependent on the availability and willingness of stakeholders to participate.[54] If the researcher is attempting to gain entrance to a closed community or one in which no pre-existing relationship exists, they may face obstacles in earning the trust of the people they are dependent on learning from.

Due to the nature and scope of this project, I took heed of these limitations but found the overall benefits of participatory action research still preferable. Using this method allowed me to succinctly address the topic at hand and provide answers to the research questions. Participatory action research values the knowledge of a local population regarding the issues and problems they face.[55] Proceeding with this notion allowed me to compare participants' insights with my own thoughts and experience.[56] Doing so created a holistic approach to the problem while keeping the central focus on the expertise of YL stakeholders. By learning from them, I, as the researcher, could gather and organize their thoughts while offering my own insight about how to best communicate Scripture to Campaigners.

Participant Selection

In conducting this project, I considered whether it would be most beneficial to make staff or Campaigners the participants. Ultimately, I determined that learning from the

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[53] Gaikwad and Penno, "Overview of Qualitative Research Designs," 80.
[54] Gaikwad and Penno, "Overview of Qualitative Research Designs," 81.
[55] Herr and Anderson, *Action Research Dissertation*, 10.
[56] Presented in Chapter 5.

former would be a more prudent way of gaining the information needed to answer the research questions and develop a "rich, thick description of the data."[57] Each YL staff oversees a Campaigner team (or is seeking to build one) and my decision to make them the participants allowed for my colleagues to speak on behalf of their students. Doing so allowed me to hear more voices than I otherwise would have and assisted me in better generalizing the state of Bible teaching in YL. Power dynamics were also a potential concern to account for. If I surveyed and interviewed students, this may have presented an awkward hierarchy where they might have felt pressured to say the "right" answer as opposed to the "truthful" one. I thought that this dynamic would at least be minimized among my colleagues.

I collected data for this project in two stages. First, I sent out an organizational-wide survey to learn how staff teach Scripture to Campaigners. Doing so allowed me to hear the collective voices of participants and navigate vast amounts of data. The second stage involved conducting interviews. Surveys are useful for outlining correlations between different variables, however, they cannot explain why these variables exist. By speaking directly to staff in an unobstructed environment, interviews allowed me to follow-up on questions asked in the survey and gain deeper insight into the topic at hand. Each step is explained below.

[57] Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 263.

Data Collection Process

Survey

To begin the research, I distributed an electronic survey in order to gain insight and understanding into how staff teach Campaigners.[58] Surveys are advantageous for quickly and effectively uncovering the attitudes of a wide populace, while gathering rich and meaningful data to analyze and interpret.[59] Following Earl Babbie's description of surveys, my purpose was to anonymously sample a percentage of stakeholders to make inferences, assumptions, and generalizations about their thoughts and actions regarding a topic.[60]

My criterion for participant selection was that staff needed to be actively involved in teaching the Bible to high school Campaigners. As previously mentioned, there are different ministries within YL. For the consistency of data collection, I only asked staff who are involved in the high school ministry of YL to participate.[61] The organization employs approximately 130 staff, but with the participant restrictions in place, roughly 60 were eligible for participation.

In partnership with YL's human resources department and senior leadership team, I attached the survey link to a staff newsletter which was sent out five times over several months.[62] Regional administrators also included the survey link in their

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[58] The survey was built and distributed through www.SurveyMonkey.com.

[59] Creswell, *Research Design*, 146.

[60] See Babbie, *Survey Research Methods*. Such approaches are useful for sampling general populations because they minimize sampling errors.

[61] As opposed to WyldLife, Capernaum, or Skatelife.

[62] An important aspect of participant selection is working alongside "gatekeepers" in a community to ensure permission for the project is given (see Marshall and Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 76–80). In this case, YL's gatekeepers are the national senior leadership team (president, regional directors, and human resource department). In starting this project, I held discussions with all relevant gatekeepers to attain permission. I did not experience any resistance and their attitude was one of encouragement and excitement.

communication to specific YL areas for several weeks. Attached to the survey was a participation recruitment script, outlining the purpose of the research and why I was conducting the project. The survey consisted of forty questions and took approximately thirty minutes to complete. Ultimately, it was completed by twenty-two staff, which is roughly a third of the population pool.

There were four parts to the survey, each designed to accumulate various forms of information pertaining to the primary and secondary research questions. Part one was centered around demographics and biblical literacy. In it, I collected data related to the size of Campaigner teams, the tenure of staff, and what Bible translation they use in teaching. In this section, I also sought to understand how often Campaigners read the Bible and what obstacles stand in the way of them understanding and applying it. Part two asked questions regarding the goals staff set as they prepare to teach. It uncovered awareness into what staff wish their students would learn and how this compares to students' goals. Part three discussed method, and asked questions concerning how staff seek to meet their goals. Part four finished the survey by asking staff to gauge the impact their teaching is having. I also provided space if participants wished to add further thoughts or comments on how YL could better equip them to teach Scripture.

I designed the survey to consist of multiple-choice, rankings, and short answer questions. Although survey information is usually classified as quantitative (i.e., numerical) data, it can also be qualitative. In this case, I used numbers (e.g., how often students are reading the Bible) to establish a baseline of information from which to address qualitative questions.[63] Developing quantitative models and predictions was not

[63] Tracy, *Qualitative Research Methods*, 24.

my focus or goal; instead, my motivation was to better understand a particular practice (Bible teaching) and develop a robust description of its context.[64] For this reason, this project should still be considered qualitative.[65]

Interviews

Although the survey was useful for drawing attention to certain trends, I required more data to *evaluate* its significance. To gather this data, I also conducted interviews. Interviews allowed me to follow up on the survey's questions and gain a deeper perspective into the topic at hand. They enabled the interviewees to explain in more descriptive detail how they teach the Bible, what has worked well, and what has not. Interviews also allowed me to ask for clarification on certain topics, uncover nuances, and hear tones of voices, all aspects of communication that are not possible through written answers.

The interviews were semi-structured and consisted of open-ended questions designed to create free-flowing conversation. Similar to the survey, I divided the interview questions into four parts and addressed demographics and biblical literacy, teaching goals, method, and impact. I conducted each interview over ZOOM and they lasted for approximately one hour.[66] Although I had a prepared list of questions to ask, the structure was flexible. As Sarah Tracy explains, having an interview guide "is meant to stimulate discussion rather than dictate it."[67] As a result, each interview differed

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[64] Tracy, *Qualitative Research Methods*, 21.

[65] For an example of a mixed-methods study related to youth spirituality, see Smith, *Soul Searching*.

[66] I originally intended to conduct interviews face-to-face during a conference when all staff would be present. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, led to them being conducted online.

[67] Tracy, *Qualitative Research Methods*, 139.

slightly. Taken together, however, the data provided comprehensive answers to the questions I sought to address.

In terms of participant selection, I used "purposeful sampling." In this approach, the researcher "actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question."[68] In doing so, the researcher forgoes sampling a wide population in favour of stakeholders who can expertly provide insight into a problem. In their book *Qualitative Data Analysis*, Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman identify sixteen different ways that a qualitative researcher can use purposeful sampling. Space here does not permit a description of each, but the most helpful method for my research was a combination of the "maximum variation approach" and the "snowball approach."[69]

In a maximum variation approach, the researcher samples data from various perspectives to gain a comprehensive and rounded understanding of a topic.[70] In doing so, the researcher limits biases and prevents voices from being lost that would otherwise have invaluable information to contribute to a topic. In my case, I interviewed staff from every province where YL operates and purposefully reached out to participants with varying degrees of experience. My objective was to learn from a wide range of participants and to note where their answers intersected or differed from one another.

Combined with this method is the snowball approach, which entails asking participants who they think would make excellent future participants. In doing so, the researcher builds a participant list that is supplied and validated by the stakeholders. Although I am on YL staff, I do not have regular contact with co-workers from other

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[68] Marshall, "Sampling for Qualitative Research," 523. This is opposed to the random sampling matrix I used in the survey.

[69] See Miles and Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 28.

[70] Miles and Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 28–29.

provinces and had little prior knowledge about who might be an effective participant to interview. By asking interviewees if they had anyone to recommend, I compiled a list of staff to contact who had valuable information to offer.

In combining these two approaches, I followed Mats Alvesson's suggestion that researchers adhere to two principles in participant selection. The first is "representativeness."[71] By this, Alvesson claims that projects are strongest when participants represent a wide variation of the "social category" being explored.[72] The second is "quality."[73] A participant's quality is found in their ability to help the researcher understand and approach the problem. In conducting research, I approached staff who I thought would offer variety, but also quality in their responses. In total, I emailed approximately twenty staff asking them to participate in the study, and ultimately interviewed eight.

Type of Data Collected and Saturation Point

Qualitative researchers typically collect four different types of data: observations, interviews, documents, and audio/visual material.[74] Each type has its own strengths and weaknesses and is selected based on the style of research being done. As explained above, interviews were my preferred way to collect data.[75] Although preferable in this case, they are not a perfect form of data collection, and several limitations exist. First,

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[71] Alvesson, *Interpreting Interviews*, 48–49.
[72] Alvesson, *Interpreting Interviews*, 49.
[73] Alvesson, *Interpreting Interviews*, 50.
[74] Creswell, *Research Design*, 179–80.
[75] The answers from the survey are still classified as interview data (see Aurini et al., *How To of Qualitative Research*, 103–6). In it, I asked respondents to give their opinions and provided numerous open-ended questions. Doing so allowed participants to tailor their answers in a way that was unobstructed by the researcher (me).

the researcher is dependent on participants articulating a response accurately and perceptively.[76] If the participant cannot do so, the quality of the information is limited. Second, the researcher is dependent on participant assistance. If a relationship has not been built with relevant stakeholders, participants may be less willing to engage. Third, there is the potential of spending vast amounts of time interviewing the wrong people and not gathering the right type of insight into a problem. I considered these limitations but did not find they inhibited my ability to successfully collect data. By following Alvesson's advice of searching for representativeness and quality, attaining permission from YL gatekeepers, and asking interviewees for participant recommendations, I avoided or minimized the primary limitations that exist with interviews.

A question faced by sociologists is discerning how many interviews to conduct. It is generally accepted that the typical number in a qualitative study is small.[77] This is because *quality* is more important than *quantity.* As stated by Janice Morse:

> There has been much discussion in the literature recently about the possibility of developing rigid rules rather than guidelines for qualitative inquiry. The number of participants required in a study is one area in which . . . too many factors are involved, and conditions of each study vary too greatly to produce tight recommendations.[78]

Factors influencing participant numbers include the researcher's timeline, resources, finances, and participant availability. The more important consideration is not how many interviews to do, but rather, to discover the saturation point.[79] The saturation point refers to the moment in a project where the researcher ceases to learn new

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[76] Creswell, *Research Design*, 179.
[77] Hennink et al., *Qualitative Research Methods*, 88.
[78] Morse, "Determining Sample Size," 5.
[79] Morse, "Determining Sample Size," 5.

information.[80] When participant answers begin to overlap and become repetitive, the researcher can cease collecting data and move into the coding and interpreting part of the study.[81] During the proposal stage of this dissertation, I estimated it would take between five and ten interviews to reach the saturation point. When actually conducting the interviews, it took eight. At this point, I determined that I had collected enough information to proceed to the coding stage.

Coding

Coding is the process of labelling and organizing data into segments in order to produce themes and patterns.[82] More specifically, a code "is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data."[83] The need for coding exists because after collecting qualitative data, the researcher must then mine it for significance and meaning.[84] Coding is the first part of this process and involves dividing large amounts of data into manageable portions to analyze.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

There are different ways to code qualitative data, but I deemed reflexive thematic analysis the most beneficial.[85] Reflexive thematic analysis was popularized in 2006 by

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[80] Hennink et al., *Qualitative Research Methods*, 88.
[81] Hennink et al., *Qualitative Research Methods*, 89.
[82] Creswell, *Research Design*, 227.
[83] Saldaña, *Coding Manual*, 5.
[84] As will become apparent, I avoid the language of "emergence" when discussing themes. Themes do not emerge, they are conceptualized by the researcher.
[85] Other forms of coding include grounded theory, qualitative content analysis, interpretive phenomenological analysis, and discourse analysis (see Braun and Clarke, "Can I Use TA?" 38).

psychologists Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke. It involves identifying, organizing, and interpreting "patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set."[86] Reflexive thematic analysis is a subcategory of thematic analysis[87] that emphasizes the inductive process of conceptualizing themes from codes.[88] Coding inductively is significant because it is an unstructured, organic, and evolving process that captures "the researcher's deepening understanding of the data."[89] In a qualitative project like this, the codes I created provided a way to organize my research data into patterns of meaning that I could then analyze.[90] As demonstrated in Chapter 4, the codes I developed into themes exemplify how I consolidated the information from my research participants. This consolidated information then provided me with the content to analyze in Chapter 5.

Braun and Clarke outline six steps to reflexive thematic analysis. Step one is familiarizing oneself with the data.[91] This entails transcribing and reviewing the collected information and noting initial thoughts. Step two is generating initial codes.[92] This means identifying features within the data to organize and link into meaningful segments or groups. In doing so, "the main essence" of the participants' responses becomes clear.[93] Step three is generating initial themes from the codes.[94] This entails

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[86] Braun and Clarke, "Thematic Analysis," 57. This method was originally called "thematic analysis," but was changed as the concept developed.

[87] Braun and Clarke, "Can I Use TA?" 38. Thematic analysis is a broad term within coding and refers to the various ways that themes and patterns are created from a data set.

[88] The "reflexive" component of reflexive thematic analysis also recognizes the researcher as an active participant in the study and acknowledges the importance of their voice in the interpretive process (see Braun and Clarke, *Thematic Analysis*, 236).

[89] Braun and Clarke, "Can I Use TA?" 39.

[90] The number of codes varies for each research project. As Johnny Saldaña says, the numbers entirely depend on "the nature of your data, which particular coding method you select for analysis, and how detailed you want or need to be" (*Coding Manual*, 33).

[91] Braun and Clarke, *Thematic Analysis*, 42–59.

[92] Braun and Clarke, *Thematic Analysis*, 59–78.

[93] Aurini et al., *How To of Qualitative Research*, 192.

[94] Braun and Clarke, *Thematic Analysis*, 78–96.

combing through the organized data and attempting to see where it overlaps and intersects. Step four is reviewing the themes.[95] By re-examining the themes and wider body of data, the researcher often notices new patterns that they initially missed. After doing this, some themes become less relevant, some become more relevant, and some amalgamate with each other.[96] Step five is defining and naming the themes.[97] Here, the researcher begins to "define and refine" the themes that have been created from the codes.[98] Here is where the essence of each theme becomes apparent, and the researcher gains a deeper understanding of the patterns in the data. The final stage is reporting the findings.[99] This involves the researcher succinctly organizing the themes and writing about the discoveries.[100]

I used reflexive thematic analysis to code the survey and interview data because it provided an efficient way to explore the data and create patterns of meaning. Out of these patterns of meaning, I generated themes and proposed answers to my questions. The next chapter is the application of Braun and Clarke's method, but it is sufficient to mention here that through the six steps of reflexive thematic analysis, the information gathered allowed me to recommend practical solutions to YL about where changes regarding Bible teaching can be made.

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[95] Braun and Clarke, *Thematic Analysis*, 97–108.
[96] Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," 91.
[97] Braun and Clarke, *Thematic Analysis*, 108–118.
[98] Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," 92.
[99] Braun and Clarke, *Thematic Analysis*, 118–150.
[100] Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," 93. This stage appears in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 then uses the themes to answer the research questions.

Ethical Issues and Privacy

Before commencing this project, I received ethical clearance from the McMaster Research Ethics Board. The board reviewed my survey and interview questions, as well as the overall intent of the project. During this process, I outlined the risks participants might face and how to mitigate them. In this project, there were two potential categories of risks to consider: psychological and social. Psychological risks refer to any mental trauma or harm participants may undergo. Social risks denote the harm that might be created in the relational network in which participants live.

Psychologically, participants faced the potential of feeling embarrassed at the answers they provided, fearing they might reflect poorly on them. To mitigate this, before participating in the study, I versed participants in the objective of the project as well as their rights. Consent was given, and I stressed that they could end their involvement and or withdraw their answers before I completed the project.[101]

Socially, participants faced the possibility of their answers becoming known to others, thus breaking confidentiality. There was no guarantee that colleagues would not discuss what they said among themselves or that quotations or references would not give away one's identity. I advised participants that despite every intent to maintain anonymity, the stories one tells, the language they use, and the examples they provide may contain identifiable features. In reporting my findings, I avoided using content that I thought might be an identifiable feature. To maximize confidentiality, I shortened quotations and refrained from citing personal anecdotes. Furthermore, I stressed to participants that although I am their colleague, my task was not to evaluate them, but to

[101] No one did. Consent was verbal because the interviews were conducted over ZOOM. Before beginning, I read each interviewee their participant rights and asked for oral consent to proceed.

learn and grow from their knowledge. I also communicated that nothing they said would affect their role within YL.[102]

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a process of self-reflection, where the researcher looks inwardly at their own contributions to a research project.[103] Swinton and Mowat refer to it as "perhaps *the most* crucial dimension of the qualitative research process."[104] This is due to the necessity of understanding that the researcher cannot fully detach from their work. The researcher, their methodology, method, and data are not separate entities but are intimately intertwined.[105] There will perpetually be an element of autobiography in every project, and rather than deny this, it is preferable to outline and explain the context in which the researcher operates.

There are several reflexive elements to clarify before progressing in this study. First, as a YL insider, I approached this topic as someone invested in the outcome of the investigation. I regularly teach Campaigners, and I am acutely aware of the struggle that exists in biblical literacy. Second, from an academic standpoint, both my undergrad (BA [Hon.] in Religious Studies) and Master's (MTS in Biblical Studies) focused on the Bible, and the two theses I completed both dealt with various aspects of biblical studies (messianism within the Qumran community [undergrad], and historical Jesus studies pertaining to the empty tomb and resurrection debate [Master's]). Although the purpose

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[102] In my staff role, I oversee several full-time and part-time staff members. To protect against any conflict of interests, I did not interview anyone I supervise.

[103] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 59.

[104] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 59 (emphasis original).

[105] Mauthner and Doucet, "Reflexive Accounts," 415.

of this project was to learn from others, my academic and ministry experience gave me certain ideas about my research questions. Third, my evangelical background has shaped the view of Scripture that I hold. Young Life is a nondenominational ministry and has staff who differ on various aspects of exegesis, hermeneutics, and the role of the Bible. It must be noted that the biases and perceptions of Scripture that I have inevitably influenced my interpretation and analysis of what others around me said.

Delimitations and Limitations

Within qualitative research, there are both delimitations and limitations to consider. Delimitations refer to the boundaries and restrictions of the research.[106] For example, I did not conduct interviews at random. There were boundaries about who was an eligible participant. The most significant delimitation was my requirement that each participant be on YL staff and actively involved in teaching Scripture to Campaigners.[107] Although staff in other branches of the organization have ample expertise, I determined that for the consistency of the research, I needed to narrow the participant pool. Additionally, the scope of my project was to *only* focus on YL as an organization. A project such as this differs dramatically from ones like "The Bible in America," a multiyear study conducted by the Barna Group in which 14,000 teenagers were interviewed on their perspective of the Bible.[108] Although the knowledge obtained from my research has the potential to benefit churches and other youth associations, my objectives limited me to learning

[106] Wa-Mbaleka and Zubkov, "Research Planning," 69.

[107] In this context, I am referring to the specific branch of the organization that works with high school students (as opposed to WyldLife, Capernaum, and Skatelife). This also meant excluding volunteer leaders as potential participants.

[108] Barna Group, "Bible in America."

from practices within YL. In doing so, the value of this dissertation is on its *specific* focus and how it addresses pressing needs that are relevant to YL's operations.

Limitations refer to the predictable shortcomings of a project.[109] Many of these shortcomings and the solutions taken to prevent them have already been listed. It is helpful here, however, to catalogue two additional limitations. First, as a solo researcher, I was limited in the number of participants I could interview. Although I continued my study until reaching the saturation point, it is possible that I missed additional information due to the resources I had available. By using Alvesson's representativeness and quality principles, I mitigated this limitation by using a survey and being selective about my interviews. In doing so, I utilized my resources sensibly by only speaking with stakeholders who I thought had beneficial insight to offer. Second, staff might have felt uncomfortable being honest about their struggles, fearing they would sound incompetent in their teaching ability. If this were to happen, my data might not reflect the genuine experiences of my participants. My intention in using participatory action research was to minimize this concern. As discussed, participatory action research elevates participants to experts on a topic. Approaching my participants as specialists helped disarm some of their potential apprehensions. Furthermore, I sought to clarify that I was not testing their teaching skill and was only seeking to learn from their experience. Using a survey also allowed participants to answer anonymously without fear of reprisal.

[109] Wa-Mbaleka and Zubkov, "Research Planning," 69.

Timeline

I received ethical approval for this study in March 2021 and distributed the survey throughout April and May. I began interviews in May 2021, and completed three in short succession. Due to disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic, I paused the research until the spring of 2022. I completed the final interviews in August and then began delineating the findings. The final write-up of the data took until the spring of 2023, and the dissertation was finished in the summer of that year.

Chapter Conclusion

Theology and the Social Sciences

Practical theologians recognize that ministry is inescapably theological yet is also sociological. Ministry is about God but is filtered through the experiences of people. Dave Rahm explains this by writing, "If theology sets the direction for ministry—and it must—then sociological insights supply empirical data to accomplish the tasks to which God has called us."[110] Theology and the life of the Church are not mutually exclusive; rather, lived experience gives theology an avenue to make conversation about God practical. The phrase "mutual critical correlation" is used by scholars as a way of holding the tension between qualitative research and theology in balance. It seeks to understand how methods like participatory action research can still be used in theology.[111] As Osmer explains, correlational models "portray the dialogue between theology and other fields as one of *mutual influence.*"[112] This "mutual influence"

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[110] Rahm, "Reckoning with Adolescent Influence," 81.
[111] Pattison, "Some Straw for the Bricks," 2–9.
[112] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 164 (emphasis original).

denotes how methodologies and methods from different disciplines, especially those involving theology and sociology, can be used harmoniously.

Participatory action research is often used outside of ministry. In this project, what makes it theological is that I am using it to address a topic that revolves around a spiritual discipline. Bible teaching is a theological topic, but to explore it, I am using the social sciences. Doing this allows me to pursue new knowledge that has operational significance for a community in need. The social sciences can answer the first half of my primary research question: What pedagogical strategies would help better train Campaigners to read and engage with the Bible . . . ? But it cannot address the second half of the sentence . . . as they grow into resilient disciples. As useful as the social sciences are, inevitably, a shift is required from qualitative research to theological reflection. The former is only helpful within practical theology when the project's outcome is a more complete and holistic understanding of how the Church fits within God's redemptive narrative in Christ.

Summary

In this chapter, I have explained how I completed this project. I outlined how I conducted the research and described its challenges and limitations. Central to this project is the understanding that qualitative research is a helpful tool in answering practice-led questions. This understanding does not, however, replace the need for theological reflection. This project is theological but is also inescapably sociological. Improved pedagogical strategies are helpful, but only if they deepen the spiritual

formation of Campaigners who are wrestling with fundamental worldview questions relating to the person of Christ and their own experience of faith.

At practical theology's centre is the notion that God is relational and profoundly loves his creation. Practical theology does more than study faith; it studies faith *in action.* Examining practice is important because the actions of the Church matters. Practical theology uses the tools of the social sciences (i.e., its methodologies and methods) to discover truths about how Christians are meant to follow Christ, but the social sciences make theology practical.[113] Human experience does not dictate the study of God, but rather, influences it.[114]

[113] It is for this reason that "experience" is a component of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral and has been widely (though not exclusively) recognized by the historical Church as a viable source for theology.

[114] As Swinton and Mowat state, "theology does not acquire its ultimate significance from the data of qualitative research. It is an independent source of knowledge that draws on qualitative research for the purposes of clarification and complexification" (*Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 87).

CHAPTER 4: REPORTING THE DATA

Introduction

The previous chapter provided an overview of the methodology, method, and steps used to complete this practical theological research. The methodology ensures this research is centred around *practice* and the conviction that theology is meant to be lived. The method, however, provides an avenue to *capture and analyze* the data in a way that offers the most advantageous way to address the research questions.

The purpose of this chapter is to use reflexive thematic analysis to succinctly present the survey and interview findings as well as the codes and themes I created from the data. The reason for this is to develop a robust description of my participants' responses (the essence of biblical pedagogy within YL), which will be evaluated in Chapter 5. Doing so is a necessary step in formulating a theory about what changes can be made within YL as it seeks to grow in its ability to communicate the Bible well. Practical theology is a continually developing cycle that rotates between practice, theory, and renewed practice. At the heart of this cycle is *theological reflection*, the act of critically assessing an experience to develop meaningful change in the pursuit of deeper faithfulness to Christ (or, as an extension to this, resilient discipleship among Campaigners).

Presenting the Data

The reader will notice that the field research is presented and discussed over the following two chapters in different ways. In this current chapter, I present the data *systematically by subject*, based on the categories I divided the survey and interviews into. The next chapter is organized by *research questions* and restructures the data under the heading of each primary and secondary research question. The reason for these variations correlates with the respective goals of each chapter. Here, my focus is on *presentation and analysis*, whereas in Chapter 5, my emphasis is on *evaluation and question answering*. Presenting the data in different but complementary ways allows the reader to follow my process of thinking, discovery, analysis, and evaluation that occurred as this project took form.

A Review of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

As noted in Chapter 3, a beneficial way of presenting the codes and themes I generated from the data is through reflexive thematic analysis. Reflexive thematic analysis is a way of "developing, analyzing, and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves systematic processes of data coding to develop themes."[1] Using reflexive thematic analysis is helpful for making sense of research data because it highlights the importance of both codes and themes. Codes are the building blocks of themes and capture the essence of a statement, whereas themes are patterns that the researcher creates from codes and amalgamates them with a unified concept or thought.[2]

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[1] Braun and Clarke, *Thematic Analysis*, 4.
[2] See Braun and Clarke, *Thematic Analysis*, 284, 296; and Saldaña, *Coding Manual*, 4.

In the subsequent findings, not all codes fit within a theme. Some appear independently as important and noteworthy responses to questions that add depth to the research.[3] All themes are based on codes, however, and reflect the thoughts and ideas that reoccur around a particular concept. This chapter presents part six of Braun and Clarke's stages of reflexive thematic analysis (writing up and reporting the themes). I completed the first five stages in the data collection phase and in the preliminary work that occurred afterwards. These stages consisted of familiarizing myself with the data, making initial codes, generating themes, reviewing the themes, and defining them.

Findings

The following themes and codes are presented under four separate categories: Demographics and Biblical Literacy, Goals, Method, and Impact. These topics are a representation of how I categorized the survey and interviews. My intention in organizing the study this way was to gain insight and understanding from staff into various aspects of pedagogy that fit within these groupings. Under the four categories, I present the overarching themes related to each, along with the codes that led to their development. I also briefly analyze their implications and how they affect staff members' teaching. Within each topic, graphs, charts, excerpts from the survey, and quotations from the interviews are included to assist in visually displaying the content.

[3] Due to the quantity of data I collected, the codes in this chapter are kept intentionally broad. As previously noted, it is difficult to encapsulate the experience of *every* staff member, so participants were asked to generalize their responses. The resulting codes and themes are my attempt to encompass the wide variety of ideas and thoughts that emerged from a multitude of perspectives. The hope is not to identify every unique thought or statement but to summarize the findings and identity patterns of meaning (see Braun and Clarke, *Thematic Analysis*, 55).

Demographics and Biblical Literacy

I began the survey and interviews by asking participants generic questions. I asked how long staff have worked for YL, how big their Campaigner teams are, and whether students enjoy reading in general. The purpose of these questions was to acquire background context to assist in framing the remainder of the data. These questions also draw attention to the size and scope of YL's mission and the differences between each Campaigner team. Recognizing from the onset that staff differ in experience levels and are seeking to communicate Scripture amidst variances in group size, gender, grades, and spiritual maturity assists in better understanding the rest of the research.

After generic demographic questions, I asked participants about the biblical literacy of their Campaigners. I asked questions such as: How often do your Campaigners read the Bible?; What factors prevent them from reading the Bible?; and: How interested are Campaigners in reading the Bible? Asking these questions helped gain awareness into the overall landscape of scriptural engagement. The answers to these questions are naturally subjective. I asked participants to answer on behalf of their Campaigners to the best of their ability. As explained, I deemed it preferable to communicate with staff and not Campaigners. Each staff oversees a group of students and could provide a generalization resulting in a more complete picture of the landscape of YL.[4]

[4] In the future, an extension to this project might be to follow up with Campaigners and gather their feedback. This would further the participatory nature of the project as it enters its next stages and allow for more voices to be heard.

General Observations: New Staff, Small Campaigner Teams, and Non-Readers

The diversity of staff within YL implies that Campaigner meetings are run in different ways. Despite this, three general observations from the field research are immediately apparent. First, most staff who responded to the survey have been working for YL less than five years. Six respondents (27 percent) reported being in either their first or second year, nine (41 percent) said they are between years three and five, and the remaining seven (32 percent) have worked with YL for six or more years.[5]

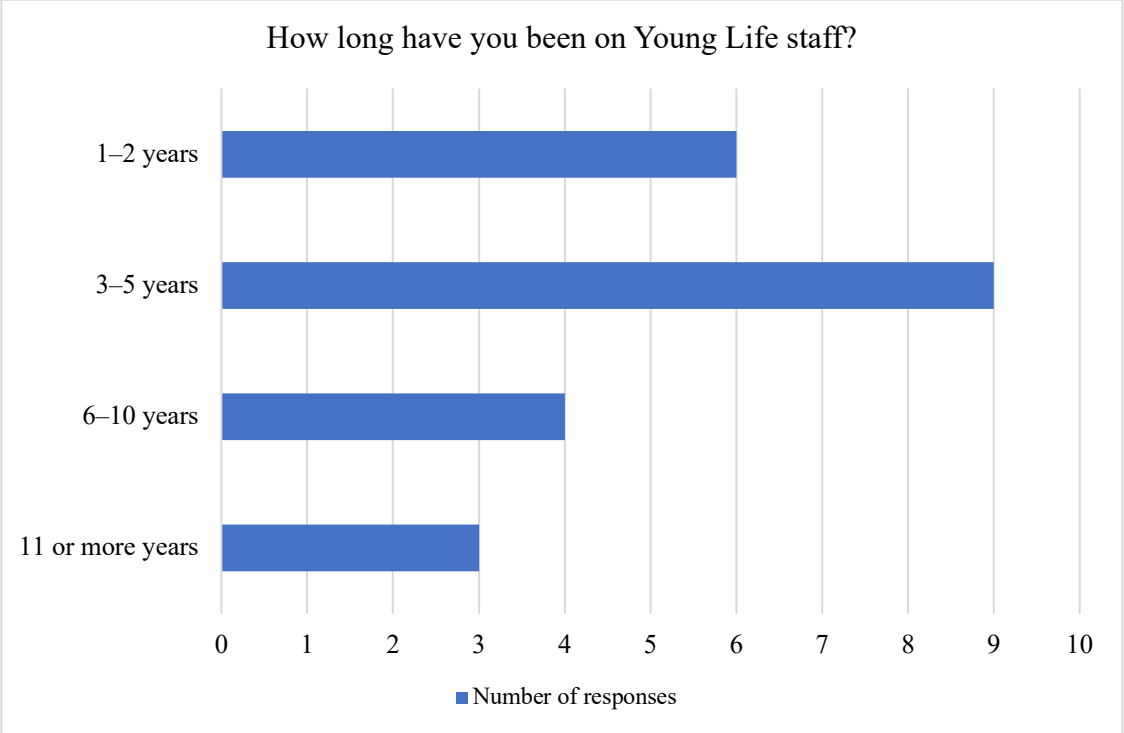


Figure 1: Time on YL Staff

[5] When conducting interviews, I ensured that a wide range of YL experience was represented. It is noteworthy, however, that when surveying the general population of YL staff, the average experience of those who responded is low.

Second, out of the twenty-two respondents, the majority (81 percent) said their Campaigner team is between one and five (36 percent) or six and ten (45 percent) students. Only one (5 percent) said their team has more than twenty-one students and the rest (14 percent) are between eleven and twenty.

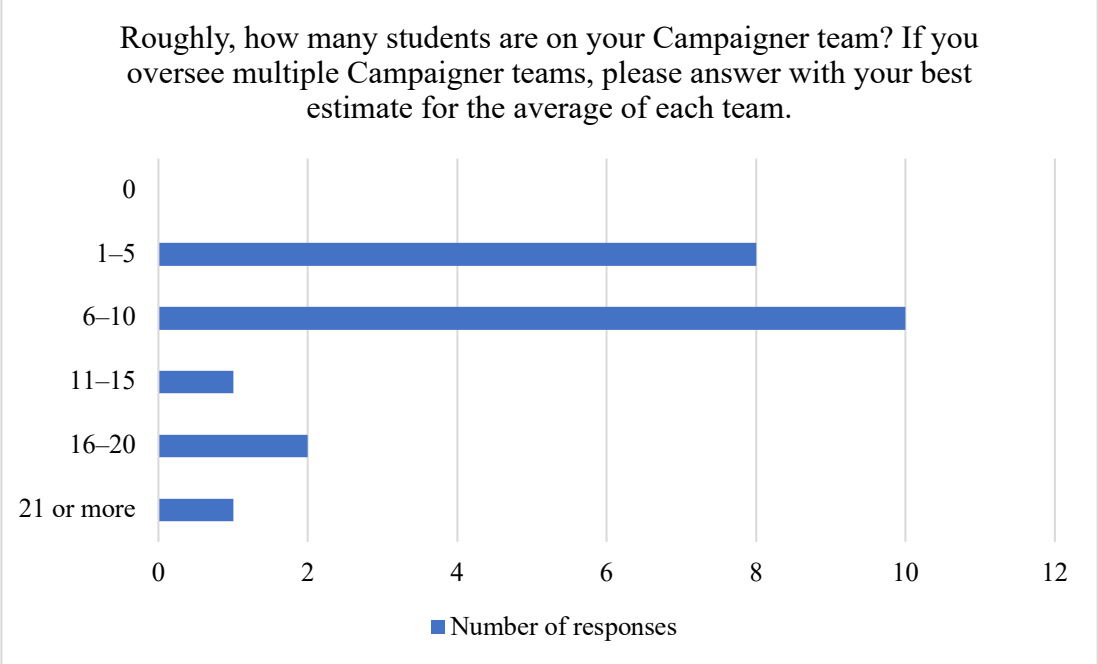


Figure 2: Size of Campaigner Teams

Third, staff estimate that teenagers are generally not avid readers and struggle with reading *any* book, not just Scripture. I asked survey participants: Apart from mandatory school reading, how frequently do students read books other than the Bible for their own enjoyment/edification? The results indicate that 95 percent of Campaigners read “not often” (45 percent) or “occasionally” (50 percent). Only one

participant said that their students read “often” (5 percent), and none selected “very often.”

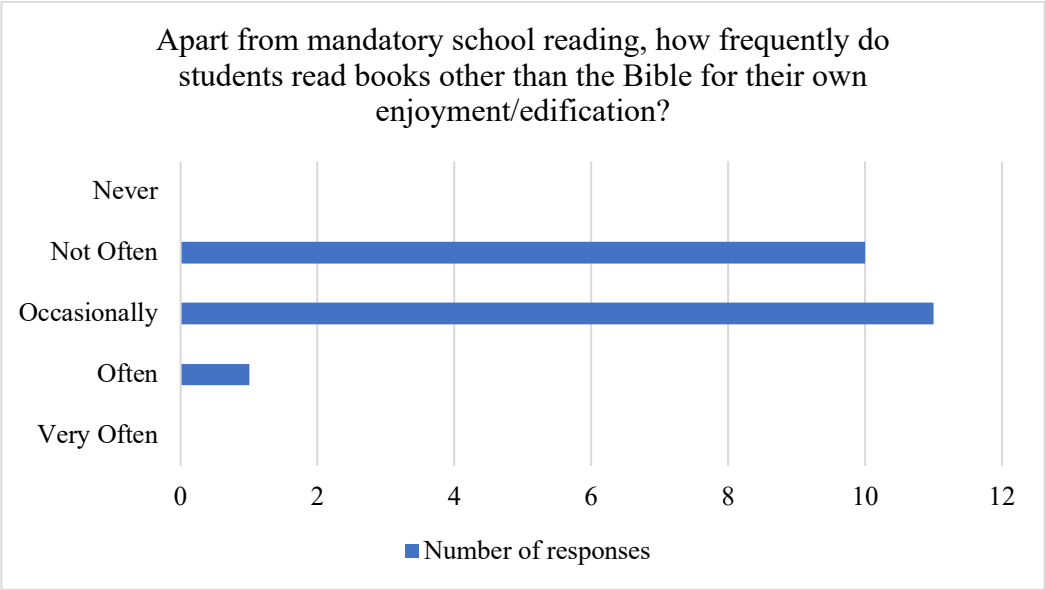


Figure 3: Reading Frequency

Three remarks stem from these initial observations. First, most sampled staff are new to YL and do not have substantial prior experience to reflect on as they teach students. Years of service is not a representation of Bible teaching skill and does not reflect a staff’s actual age or spiritual maturity; however, it is notable that on average, staff are relatively new to YL. The way that a fifteen-year youth ministry veteran teaches Scripture will naturally differ from how they taught in their first year, when they were in the early stages of learning how to connect and relate to teenagers. Second, it is significant that most Campaigner teams are reasonably small (under ten people). The way a teacher instructs an assembly of thirty is likely different from how they would teach a group of five. It is correct to assume that for most staff, as they prepare their lessons, they are instructing in a small group setting that is likely more open to

conversation and questions than a bigger group that might be more "lecture" based with less interaction. Third, there is a possibility that the issue at hand is not solely about Bible reading. According to the experiences of YL staff, students rarely read *anything*, not just the Bible. The conversation surrounding pedagogy and the Bible must be framed within the recognition that youth are struggling with literacy of all kinds and not just biblical.[6]

Theme One: Low Biblical Literacy

As explained in Chapter 2, a pervasive theme that underlies the entirety of the field research is that generally, Campaigners are struggling with biblical literacy. Being influenced by a worldview that often leads to Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, Campaigners have difficulty in seeing the necessity of the Bible in a relativistic culture where they are encouraged to "create their own truth."

This is an unfortunate and disappointing discovery but is unsurprising when reflected on in conjunction with the broader rates of Bible reading within church settings. It should be noted that *Christians*—adult and youth alike—and not just *Campaigners* are lacking in biblical literacy. As White bemoans, one of the defining features of Generation Z is "their spiritual illiteracy . . . They do not know what the Bible says. They do not know the basics of Christian belief or theology. They do not know what the cross is about. They do not know what it means to worship."[7] Although convicting, White's words align with my research discoveries. Building on Chapter 2,

[6] Sociological studies affirm this finding. See, for example, Twenge, *iGen*, 59–65.
[7] White, *Meet Generation Z*, 131.

what follows are several factors identified by my participants which lead to low biblical literacy among Campaigners.

Code 1a: Wrong Motivations

Description: First, most Campaigners only read the Bible because they think they should. Eleven of twenty-two survey respondents listed this as their primary answer to the question: What do you see being the primary motivation behind Campaigners reading the Bible on their own? When asked to elaborate on their response, one participant wrote, "My hope is to help them see that [Scripture] isn't an obligation . . . but I think that tends to be their reasoning." Another said, students only read "because they think they should, [but they] do not fully understand the importance of having a hunger for it." A third commented, "They have grown up with parents either expecting or telling them they should read their Bibles, but maybe lack some of the information surrounding why." Lastly, one insightful participant wrote:

> There seems to be a disconnect for them between the intellectual and emotional sides of their faith . . . Intellectually, they believe that reading Scripture is important and "the right thing to do" to experience and learn more about God, but most don't actually connect this way emotionally and despite wanting to experience more of God, they're really just reading out of some sort of obligatory desire.

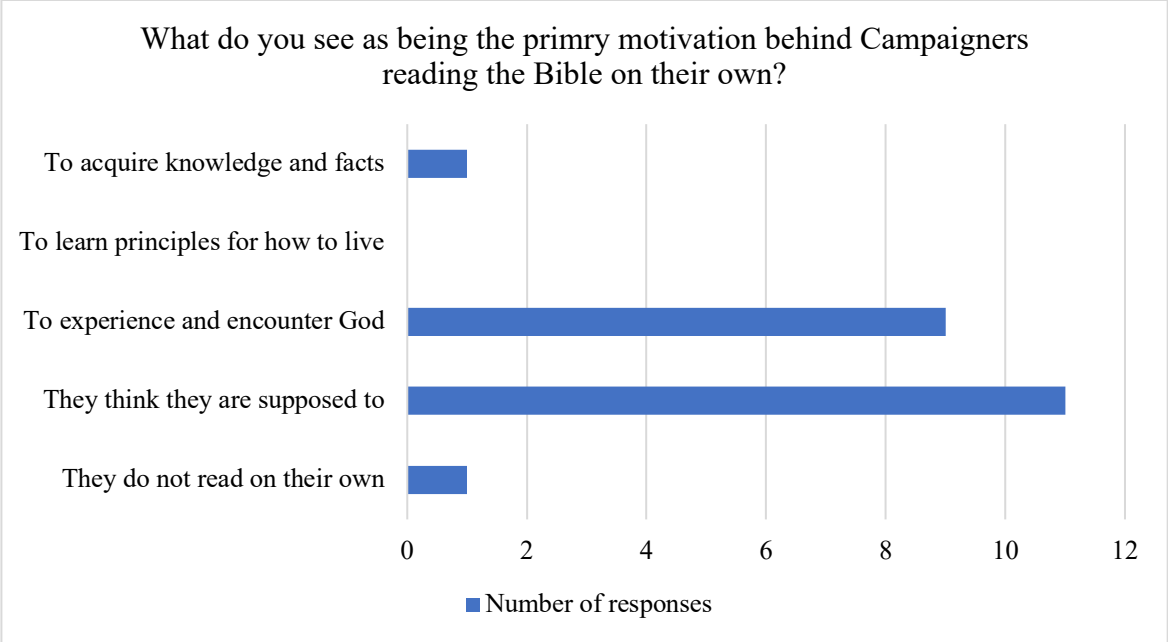


Figure 4: Bible Reading Motivation

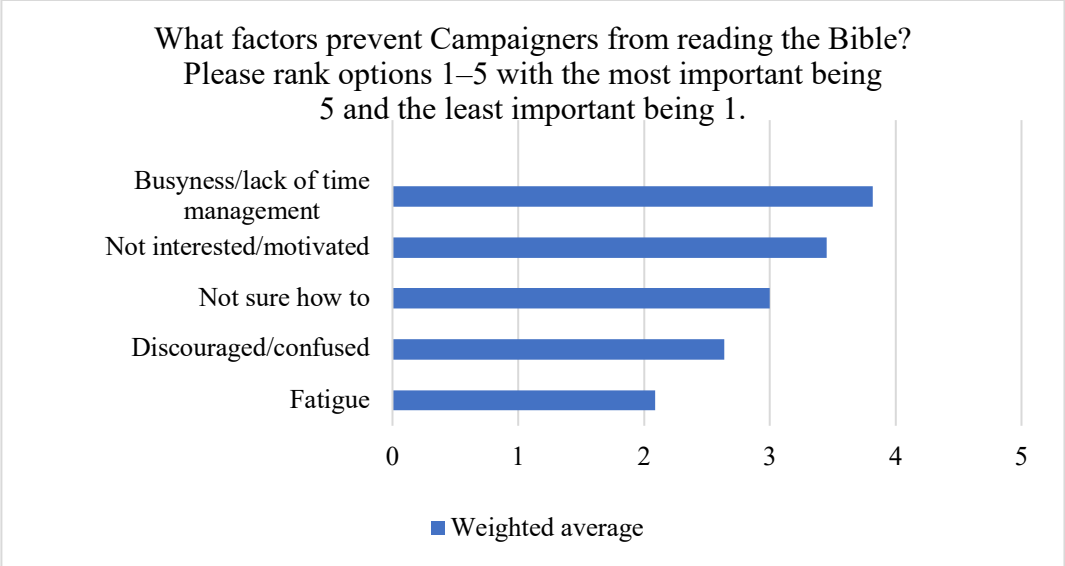
Analysis: Through teaching Scripture, YL desires for Campaigners to fall in love with Christ. This aspiration underscores how the Bible's centrality is about a person to follow (Jesus) and not the book itself. It is encouraging that the second highest survey response is the motivation to experience and encounter God (41 percent), but work remains to help students grasp that Scripture is a divine gift, aiding the reader in encountering Jesus. If students only read the Bible because they feel they should, it is being done grudgingly as a chore or as homework and not out of loving devotion or worship to God. As a result, students who only read reluctantly are less likely to develop a love for Jesus than those who see the Bible as a gift and opportunity to discover their God-given identity and encounter the One who created, redeemed, and is sanctifying them.

Code 1b: Obstacles

Description: The second primary reason why Campaigners struggle in reading the Bible is because of the obstacles that stand in the way of making Scripture a priority. If most students only read the Bible because they feel they should, then it reasonably follows that they will be quick to abandon it once challenges arise. To probe this hypothesis, I asked survey participants: What factors prevent Campaigners from reading the Bible? Responses indicate the three highest reasons are: busyness, lack of interest and motivation, and not knowing how to.[8]

[8] Note: on the following bar graph and subsequent ones like it, the scale on the X-axis refers to the weighted average. The higher the number, the more important the ranking. For example, the question asks participants to rank various factors that prevent Campaigners from reading the Bible from 1–5. In this context, a ranking of 5 (most important) amounts to a weighted average of 5.00, whereas a ranking of 1 (least important), amounts to a weighted average of 1.00. The resulting weighted average is calculated by multiplying each number of votes by its corresponding weighted average, summing up the total, and then dividing it by the total number of votes. This method of calculation is important for capturing the significance of each weighted average relative to the number of votes it received.

When reading the following table and subsequent ones like it, the percentages represent the number of participants who voted for that particular ranking. For example, 4.55 percent (1 out of 22) ranked "Fatigue" as the most important factor that prevents Campaigners from reading the Bible. Conversely, 45.45 percent (10 out of 22) ranked "Busyness/lack of time management" as the most important factor. These statistics were created by the survey analysis feature on www.SurveryMonkey.com and I have copied them into this report. The bolded number in each chart represents the highest weighted average for each question.



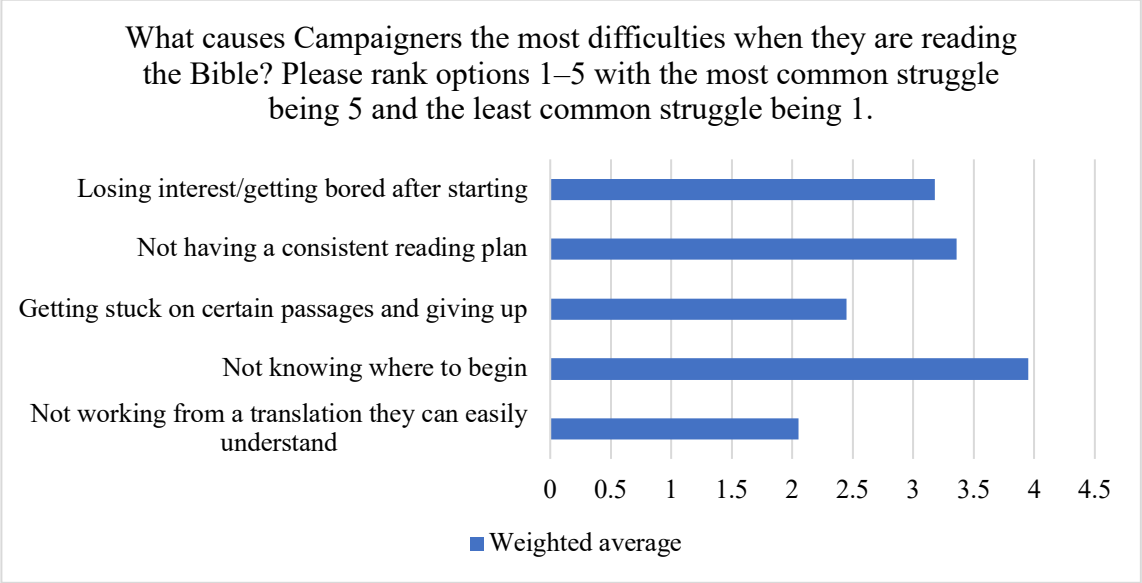
	1	2	3	4	5	Total Votes	Weighted Average
Busyness/lack of time management	4.55%	13.64%	22.73%	13.64%	45.45%	22	**3.82**
Not interested/ motivated	13.64%	4.55%	18.18%	50.00%	13.64%	22	3.45
Not sure how to	22.73%	18.18%	18.18%	18.18%	22.73%	22	3.00
Discouraged/confused	22.73%	31.82%	18.18%	13.64%	13.64%	22	2.64
Fatigue	36.36%	31.82%	22.73%	4.55%	4.55%	22	2.09

Figure 5: Factors that Prevent Bible Reading

When asked to discuss these obstacles, participants pinpointed their effect on steering youth away from the Bible. Observe the following responses in answer to the survey questions: What factors stop your students from reading and studying the Bible? And: Do your students want to read or study the Bible? Participants wrote: "they don't have time"; "they are running a mile-a-minute"; "they just don't care"; "they don't understand what they are looking at"; and, "I think they view Scripture like flossing. It's like 'I know I'm supposed to and I know it's good for me, so I'll do it sometimes.'"[9]

[9] It is noteworthy that the comparison between reading the Bible and flossing teeth was made by several participants throughout the survey and interviews.

In addition to these barriers, when students *are* reading Scripture, factors such as not knowing where to begin and not having a consistent reading plan present challenges that hinder Campaigners from staying engaged. As one interviewee said, "I have less and less confidence that the teenagers . . . have any inclination to read their Bible . . . any more than the verse of the day on the Bible app." In recalling a conversation she had with a student, another told me, "She was like, 'well, you could send me a quick Snapchat, like just a quick shot of a quote. Like I just want to get a quote of the day.'"



	1	2	3	4	5	Total Votes	Weighted Average
Losing interest/getting bored after starting	4.55%	18.18%	36.36%	36.36%	4.55%	22	3.18
Not having a consistent reading plan	27.27%	13.64%	0.00%	13.64%	45.45%	22	3.36
Getting stuck on certain passages and giving up	18.18%	40.91%	27.27%	4.55%	9.09%	22	2.45
Not knowing where to begin	4.55%	9.09%	13.64%	31.82%	40.91%	22	**3.95**
Not working from a translation they can easily understand	45.45%	18.18%	22.73%	13.64%	0.00%	22	2.05

Figure 6: Difficulties in Bible Reading

Analysis: Because of shorter attention spans, obstacles to biblical engagement seem to becoming more pronounced.[10] In a world of readily available technology where distractions abound, it is much easier for students to quickly scan a single verse on their phone and feel as though they have successfully "read their Bible," than it is to sit for any length of time and thoroughly process what they are reading.[11] Scripture is continually fighting for their attention against the pull of school, jobs, sports teams, extracurriculars, and friends. Additionally, the overwhelming influence of social media, gaming, streaming services, and technological outlets ensures that there are always alternative forms of entertainment to replace spending time with God. The Bible is a book that requires work and dedication to understand, and amidst a generation accustomed to the immediate gratifications of platforms like Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and TikTok, the desire to sit with Scripture and wrestle through challenging passages is lacking.

Code 1c: Hard to Understand in Modern Context

Description: A third reason why biblical literacy rates are low is because students have difficulty in drawing parallels between its original context and today. I asked survey participants: In one sentence, what causes Campaigners the most difficulty in understanding and implementing what they learn from studying the Bible? Failing to

[10] See Twenge, *iGen,* 49–91.

[11] The average teenager checks their phone more than eighty times a day, and youth spend more time communicating with people via screens than they do in person (see Twenge, *iGen*, 1–2). It has been said that the Millennial generation were digital pioneers, meaning they are primarily responsible for popularizing the widespread use of technology. Those in Generation Z, however, are digital natives, meaning they have no memory of a world not dominated by technology (see Parker and Igielnik, "On the Cusp of Adulthood").

comprehend how the Bible matters for their lives in the twenty-first century was the dominant response.

In answering this question, respondents wrote: "understanding old language and what it means in today's culture"; "connecting Scripture independently to their personal lived experiences . . . to support their understanding"; "barriers of understanding cultural differences between when the Bible was written and now, and how to apply teachings accordingly"; "not being able to wrap their heads around the fact that it is still relevant, and also the fear of how counter-cultural it is"; and, "connecting old culture to today's culture." When asked a comparable question during the interviews, responses were similar. One participant exclaimed, "when they read it, they feel like it's irrelevant . . . like what they're reading from . . . doesn't fit or work in our culture or in their personal lives." Another said, "I once heard somebody tell me, 'reading the Bible is like talking to a 2000 year old Jewish man . . . what are your chances of understanding what he's gonna say?'"

Analysis: There seems to be a dichotomy between how YL views the Bible and how Campaigners do. Philosopher Simone Weil is often credited with the saying, "to always be relevant, you must speak eternal things."[12] The Bible is relevant because it speaks eternal truths about the characteristics and nature of Christ, as well as humanity.[13] If Jesus truly is "the same yesterday and today and forever," then he is no less relevant to Generation Z than Millennials, or any other generation (Heb 13:8). The

[12] The authenticity of this statement is in doubt, but see Weil, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil*, 444, for a comparable quote.

[13] There are a large number of verses that speak of God's eternal nature, but as a sampling, see the following passages in the Psalms: 9:7; 16:11; 45:6; 48:14; 66:7; 90:2, 4; 102:12, 26–27; 100:5, 103:17; 105:10; 106:1; 111:3; 112:3; 117:2; 119:142; 145:13; 146:6.

onus is not on Christ, and by extension Scripture, to become *more relevant*; instead, the responsibility is on teachers of Scripture to assist their audience in seeing that he is eternally significant, even amidst the relativism of a postmodern world.[14] It is then the work of the Holy Spirit to illuminate that truth and guide the readers in it (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). As Kinnaman notes:

> The next generation's disconnection stems ultimately from the failure of the church to impart Christianity as a comprehensive way of understanding reality and living fully in today's culture. For too many young people who grew up in Christian churches, Christianity seems boring, irrelevant, and sidelined from the real issues people face. It seems *shallow.*[15]

Campaigners, just like the non-Christian friends they bring to Club, need to comprehend that Christ is with them in their high school challenges, relationship break-ups, parents' divorces, mental health struggles, etc., and that the Bible invites them into union with God who meets their deepest desires and needs through faith (Matt 6:8, 33; 2 Cor 9:8; Eph 1:3; Phil 4:19; Rom 8:32). The evidence suggests, however, that many youth struggle to understand this.

Code 1d: A Glimmer of Hope

Description: Despite the grim indications of the state of biblical literacy, there are reasons for optimism. Staff repeatedly mentioned that despite their students struggling with Scripture, there remains a desire to commune with God. This desire is not always actualized, and as noted above, there is a sizable gap to close on the path toward resilient discipleship. Still, staff were adamant that the landscape of where Campaigners *are* does

[14] The onus is also on the students to accept this teaching.
[15] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 114 (emphasis original).

not necessarily reflect where they *hope to be* or *will be* by the time they graduate from high school.

During the interviews, the same participants cited above who were lamenting the difficulties and challenges students face also spoke about their students' inherent longing to understand the Bible, even amidst the difficulties and obstacles. One participant mentioned how adolescents often lack strong role models who exemplify a commitment to Scripture and, as a result, are not seeing the practical fruit that comes from communion with God. Another told me, "I think that as kids understand more of what they're dealing with in Scripture, you can see that desire grow a bit." A third mentioned that just by showing up each week, Campaigners must "have a desire to be there and to learn more." Lastly, another said:

> The desire is there for every kid, every human, but sometimes it's untapped . . . I truly believe deep down that every kid has a desire to understand where they come from. And I think that the Bible . . . and the Jesus story is paramount to that. I've seen kids who said, "This is b******t. I don't want to do it." But when they start seeing it, they are like "Whoa, this is actually interesting."

The key word that repeatedly appears in these quotations is "desire." Staff were steadfast that a desire to know the Bible and have it become central to their faith exists in youth, even if it is a small seed often overcome by a plethora of obstacles.

There is also evidence to suggest that a student's biblical literacy increases as they mature. I asked survey participants: In your view, how interested are Campaigners in studying the Bible? The results indicate a divide between males and females, but also between juniors (grades 9–10) and seniors (grades 11–12). The two student groupings who have the highest desire to study the Bible are first, senior girls, and second, senior boys. Junior girls have the third highest desire, and junior boys the lowest.

One hundred percent of survey respondents answered that senior girls fall within the range of being "somewhat interested" (9 percent), "interested" (55 percent), or "very interested" (36 percent) in studying Scripture. Eighty six percent said the same about senior boys (29 percent are "somewhat interested," 38 percent are "interested," and 19 percent are "very interested"). In contrast, however, 100 percent of respondents placed junior boys within the categories of "very uninterested" (5 percent), "uninterested" (38 percent), and "somewhat interested" (57 percent). Junior girls were ranked substantially higher than junior boys but fell short of matching senior boys (5 percent are "very uninterested," 9 percent are "uninterested," 23 percent are "somewhat interested," and the remaining 64 percent are "interested").

In your view, how interested are Campaigners in studying the Bible?

	1 (Very uninterested)	2 (Uninterested)	3 (Somewhat interested)	4 (Interested)	5 (Very interested)	Total Votes	Weighted Average
Junior girls (grades 9–10)	4.55%	9.09%	22.73%	63.64%	0.00%	22	3.45
Junior boys (grades 9–10)	4.76%	38.10%	57.14%	0.00%	0.00%	21	2.52
Senior girls (grades 11–12)	0.00%	0.00%	9.09%	54.55%	36.36%	22	**4.27**
Senior boys (grades 11–12)	0.00%	14.29%	28.57%	38.10%	19.05%	21	3.62

Figure 7: Interest in Studying Scripture

A similar trend is evident when I asked participants to gauge how well Campaigners understand the Bible and apply it, and how frequently they read it. First, I

asked survey participants: In your view, how well do Campaigners understand the Bible and apply it to their lives? The corresponding data indicates that senior girls are most likely to understand and apply it, with 95 percent being placed within the categories of "fairly well" (36 percent), "well" (45 percent), and "very well" (14 percent). Participants ranked senior boys second, junior girls third, and junior boys fourth. It is noteworthy that 0 percent of participants ranked junior boys within the top two categories of "very well" and "well"; instead, they were placed entirely in the categories of "very poorly" (10 percent), "poorly" (52 percent), and "fairly well" (38 percent).

In your view, how well do Campaigners understand the Bible and apply it to their lives?

	1 (Very poorly)	2 (Poorly)	3 (Fairly well)	4 (Well)	5 (Very Well)	Total Votes	Weighted Average
Junior girls (grades 9–10)	0.00%	36.36%	45.45%	13.64%	4.55%	22	2.86
Junior boys (grades 9–10)	9.52%	52.38%	38.10%	0.00%	0.00%	21	2.29
Senior girls (grades 11–12)	0.00%	4.55%	36.36%	45.45%	13.64%	22	**3.68**
Senior boys (grades 11–12)	0.00%	9.52%	66.67%	23.81%	0.00%	21	3.14

Figure 8: Biblical Understanding and Application

Second, in relation to Bible reading habits, I asked: Please indicate how frequently, on average, Campaigners read their Bibles: 1=rarely (around once a month); 2=sometimes (around once a week); 3=somewhat frequently (2–4 times a week); 4=frequently (5–6 times a week); 5=very frequently (7 or more times a week). Once more, senior girls are ranked the highest, followed by senior boys, junior girls, and junior boys. Senior girls are the only category to receive a percentage of "very frequently" (5 percent), whereas, in contrast, 90 percent of junior boys were placed within "rarely" (45 percent) and "sometimes" (45 percent).

Please indicate how frequently, on average, do Campaigners read their Bibles?

	1 (Rarely)	2 (Sometimes)	3 (Somewhat frequently)	4 (Frequently)	5 (Very frequently)	Total Votes	Weighted Average
Junior girls (grades 9–10)	0.00%	57.14%	33.33%	9.52%	0.00%	21	2.52
Junior boys (grades 9–10)	45.00%	45.00%	10.00%	0.00%	0.00%	20	1.65
Senior girls (grades 11–12)	0.00%	18.18%	50.00%	27.27%	4.55%	22	**3.18**
Senior boys (grades 11–12)	0.00%	47.62%	38.10%	14.29%	0.00%	21	2.67

Figure 9: Bible Reading Frequency

Analysis: The breakdown between genders and grades reveals several insightful patterns that provide a glimmer of hope to discouraged staff. The data strongly indicates that *age matters* and that biblical literacy grows as students mature. When a Campaigner begins high school, their faith is not the same as when they finish. Adolescence is a period of substantial growth and maturity, and it follows that an eighteen-year-old senior will be in a different place of faith from when they entered high school at fourteen. By the time a Campaigner becomes a senior, 90 percent of boys and 95 percent of girls understand and apply the Bible either "fairly well," "well," or "very well," and 82 percent of senior girls and 52 percent of senior boys read the Bible two or more times a week. This indicates that *maturity* and not just *pedagogy* is a core component of growing in one's engagement with Scripture.

Meaningful insight is also evident in the gender differences between males and females. It is unsurprising that staff routinely ranked female students ahead of males in terms of biblical literacy. Neuroscientists and developmental psychologists have long pointed to the slower rates of maturity in males when compared to females. During the teenage years, the former are approximately two years behind the latter in terms of

maturity development.[16] Rather than being surprised by this, staff should *expect* that junior males will rarely be in the same place of faith as their female counterparts.[17] Patience, rather than frustration, is needed as young men learn what the Bible is, why it matters, and how it is instrumental in their walk with God. Hope should be found in the notion that students do mature, but it does takes time and patience.[18]

Summary of Demographics and Biblical Literacy

The purpose of this section of the field research was to better understand the demographics and biblical literacy of Campaigners. As discussed, there are a plethora of reasons why rates of biblical literacy among Campaigners are low. The primary codes are listed above, but more reasons, such as discouragement, fatigue, getting stuck, using complex translations, not having strong role models, etc., also influence how Campaigners engage with Scripture.

The most surprising discovery is the optimism on the part of staff regarding students' desire to grow in biblical engagement. This was an unanticipated discovery but aligns well with the data indicating how biblical literacy often grows in conjunction with maturity. This finding does not detract from the importance of pedagogy, but it does draw attention to how in qualitative research, field data is multifaceted and intricate.

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[16] See Jensen, *Teenage Brain*, 226–37.

[17] There are, of course, exceptions. This is a generalization rather than a guarantee.

[18] What is outside the scope of this dissertation but important nonetheless, are the statistics that mention how young adults are struggling in faith as well. On average, 59 percent of young adults with a Christian background have at some point stopped attending church regularly. Additionally, 57 percent report being less spiritual than when they were fifteen, and 32 percent indicate they are in a period of rejecting their parents' faith (see Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 23). This shows that despite there being a gradual increase in students' faith throughout high school, it can also be quickly lost once they graduate.

Goals

The next discovery stage consisted of learning about the goals staff and students have as they teach and are being taught the Bible.[19] I discovered that most YL staff set goals for what they hope their students will learn, both in individual lessons, and over the school year. I asked survey participants: When preparing for a Bible study, do you establish learning objectives for what you intend your students to learn? The results indicate that 23 percent "always" do, 23 percent "almost always" do, 36 percent "often" do, 14 percent "sometimes" do, and only 5 percent "rarely" do. No respondent said that they "never" set goals.

I then asked staff to explain their primary goals in teaching Scripture and how these compare to the students they teach. I asked questions such as: What is your primary goal in teaching the Bible to Campaigners and why is it important to you?; and: What is your students' primary goal in reading/studying the Bible and why is it important to them? Later sections focused on *practice*, but my purpose here was to learn how teachers *think* about the Bible and what they hope their students will learn from engaging in it. To explore this topic, I intentionally asked questions from the standpoint of both staff and students. I did this to compare the goals that the former have while teaching, with the ones the latter have while being taught. I asked these questions because I was curious whether a disconnect exists between the two, which I thought might offer further explanation into potential barriers that prevent resilient discipleship.

[19] Lorin Anderson et al., provide a helpful way of conceptualizing goals. They write, "when we teach, we want our students to learn. What we want them to learn as a result of our teaching are our objectives" (*Taxonomy for Learning*, 3). In terms of biblical pedagogy, the question becomes: Through teaching, what do YL staff hope Campaigners will learn?

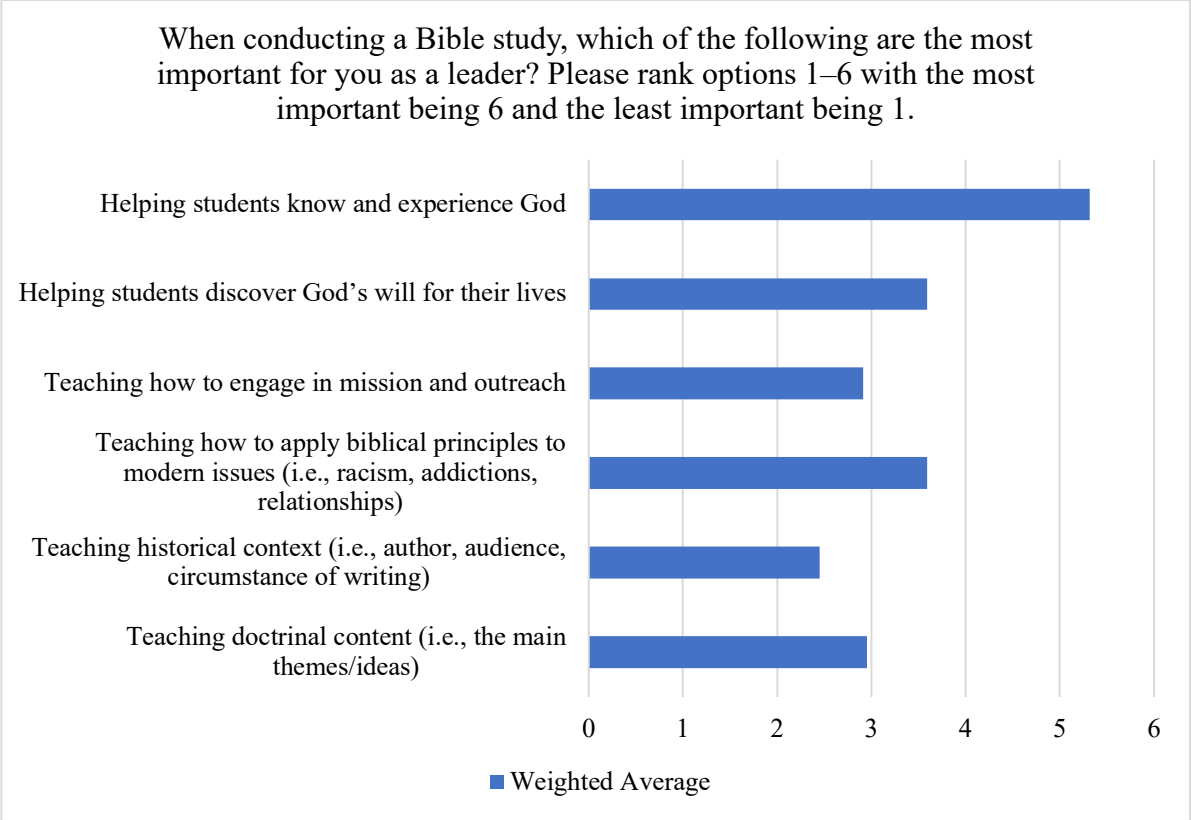
Theme One: Staff Hope that Scripture will Be Central to Campaigners' Spiritual Formation

A strongly upheld goal is teachers' prevailing desire for students to be spiritually shaped and formed by God through the pages of Scripture. In an increasingly secular culture, one where "the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence," a strong desire exists for students to be firmly rooted and confident in their relationship with Christ.[20] What follows are several factors which exemplify the goal of seeing Campaigners grow in spiritual formation through the Bible.

Code 1a: Know and Experience God

Description: First, staff were quick to affirm their desire that Campaigners will grow to know and experience God in their personal lives. When asked what their most important goal in teaching the Bible is, 68 percent of survey respondents listed: "Helping students know and experience God" as their top priority. I then asked a follow-up question: In one sentence, what is your primary goal in teaching the Bible to Campaigners and why is it important to you? Observe the following answers: "To know and experience Christ and to put their faith into action"; "To have them deeply root themselves in God's Word so they would truly fall more in love with him, knowing and trusting he will guide their lives"; "To teach them to know God and fall in love with him"; and, "[To show them] how they can know God through who Jesus was."

[20] Murray, *Post-Christendom*, 6.



	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total Votes	Weighted Average
Helping students know and experience God	0.00%	4.55%	9.09%	4.55%	13.64%	68.18%	22	**5.32**
Helping students discover God's will for their lives	13.64%	18.18%	13.64%	9.09%	40.91%	4.55%	22	3.59
Teaching how to engage in mission and outreach	19.05%	14.29%	28.57%	23.81%	9.52%	4.76%	21	2.91
Teaching how to apply principles to modern issues (i.e., racism or addictions)	9.09%	9.09%	31.82%	22.73%	18.18%	9.09%	22	3.59
Teaching historical context (i.e., author, audience, circumstance of writing)	31.82%	36.36%	4.55%	13.64%	9.09%	4.55%	22	2.45
Teaching doctrinal content (i.e., the main themes/ideas)	27.27%	18.18%	13.64%	22.73%	9.09%	9.09%	22	2.95

Figure 10: Teacher Objectives

Analysis: Young Life does not have a written statement on what it means to "know and experience God," but I suggest that in this context, knowing God means that Campaigners better grasp his characteristics and nature, appreciate his mystery, absorb his truth, and learn how to actively partner with Christ as he redeems, reconciles, and sanctifies the Church (Phil 3:10; 2 Cor 5:11–21). It also means that Campaigners better understand how Christ is vigorously working in their lives, being present through the Spirit as they navigate the complexities of being a teenager in a secular world. As Scot McKnight says, "what we are looking for in reading the Bible is the ability to turn the two-dimensional words on paper into a three-dimensional encounter with God, so that the text takes on life and meaning and depth and perspective and gives us direction for what to do today."[21] Knowing and experiencing God is rooted in a theology of spiritual formation and who staff hope Campaigners will *become.* Such a goal points beyond what they hope Campaigners will *do* (e.g., remember biblical dates, places, and names) and instead, towards who Christ is forming and shaping them *to be.* As McKnight summarizes, "God gave the Bible not so we can know *it* but so we can know and love God through *it.*"[22] Planning lessons with this in mind allows Bible teachers to think and prepare in a way that conveys this truth accordingly.

Code 1b: Reading the Bible through a Christocentric Perspective

Description: Alongside Campaigners growing in their experience of and encounter with God, staff also hope that through teaching, students will gain a Christocentric perspective and see Jesus at the heart of the biblical narrative. Concerning this,

[21] McKnight, *Blue Parakeet*, 41.
[22] McKnight, *Blue Parakeet*, 101 (emphasis original).

participants communicated their goal for students to see Christ at the centre of Scripture, and as a result, grow in faith and develop into lifelong disciples. The hope is for them to see Jesus as someone worth giving up everything to follow, not only in high school, but throughout their life.

To convey this, one survey participant wrote, “I want teens to know and experience Jesus through the entire Bible from start to finish.” Another said their goal is for students to “have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and to show them how to grow in their identity in Christ.” A third said that they hope their students will “move closer to Jesus” as they learn to engage with Scripture.

When I asked interviewees to provide more details about their goals, one participant spoke about communicating “the Jesus thread” throughout the entirety of the Bible. Another talked about the splendour of Christ she hopes will be apparent: “I don’t just want to give people information and expect them to act on it. I want to lift up the beauty of who Jesus is and say to students, ‘I just want you to see this. I just want to lift this up.’” This same participant later said, “You could do a great job in a Campaigner lesson with information . . . about fixing motorcycles, but that’s not really a Campaigner lesson . . . all Scripture points to Jesus.”

Analysis: Throughout the field research, staff never used the word “Christocentric,” but in speaking about Jesus being at the heart of the Bible, this is the essence of their statements. Most participants recognized that the importance of Scripture is less about the book itself and more about the One it bears witness to. Even without using precise theological terms, staff explained that the best teaching goals

begin with Christ as the hermeneutical key.[23] Staff frequently mentioned that lifelong faith (i.e., resilient discipleship) stems from a sincerely rooted relationship with Christ and that Scripture is paramount to its development and growth (Col 2:6–7). For spiritual growth to occur, Campaigners must learn to read and study the Bible in light of the new covenant inaugurated by Jesus through the cross and resurrection (Matt 26:26–9; Mark 14:22–5; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:23–6).

Theme Two: Staff Hope that Campaigners will Develop the Necessary Tools Needed to Utilize the Bible in their Discipleship Journey

In addition to spiritual formation, it was frequently mentioned that Campaigners must understand the Bible as central to how they live in a post-Christendom culture that is becoming increasingly antagonistic towards Christianity. The implication of this is that strong pedagogy leads to students applying what they have learned after they finish their involvement in YL. In preparing to teach, staff often think of how to assist youth in reading the Bible for themselves, and not solely relying on someone to read for them. What follows are two of the codes that lead to the development of this second theme.

Code 2a: The Bible Is Culturally Relevant

Description: As outlined above, one of the primary reasons for low biblical literacy is Campaigners' prevailing assumption that the Bible is irrelevant in a postmodern, post-Christendom culture. Students routinely question how an ancient book can impact their twenty-first century lives. Considering this, it is thought-provoking that a prominent goal is staff's aspiration for Campaigners to grasp how culturally relevant and

[23] See Brauch, *Abusing Scripture*, 256.

significant the Bible is and how the biblical truth about Christ transcends time, language, and culture.

To communicate this, one survey respondent wrote, Scripture "absolutely is still relevant and not outdated . . . it impacts all areas of our lives." Another said they hope to show their students "The redemptive work [that] God has worked and continues to work" in the world; and a third wrote, "I want them to see that what the Bible says about who God is, and how He wants us to live matters to us today."

In further discussing the cultural relevance of the Bible, an interview participant told me, "Every time we read, there are things in there that impact us right now. Like, I say to my students 'This impacts me right now. And there's things that impact you guys right now. It tells us about us, and it tells us about God, and even learning new things about who God is . . . that *actually changes our lives right now.*'"[24]

Analysis: In saying that Scripture matters for the here and now, participants told me that the Bible has not (and will not) lose its cultural relevance. In addition to teaching students the content of a passage, it is also paramount to explain the enduring applicability of Scripture. Despite being removed from its original context, the Bible retains its relevance because it speaks to the heart of the human condition and addresses the fundamental worldview questions that every teenager is either implicitly or explicitly asking. This is not to deny that culturally specific instructions and mandates do exist in the Bible. The overarching narrative, however, of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration is timeless.

[24] Emphasis added.

Code 2b: The Bible Is Approachable

Description: Besides being culturally relevant, another goal is for Campaigners to understand the Bible as something they can approach by themselves. Such an aspiration speaks to a long-term discipleship plan for students and the acknowledgment that the time a Campaigner spends in YL is short. The Bible often has a stigma among teenagers as being intimidating, scary, and beyond their capability to grasp. To make resilient disciples, however, staff are adamant that teenagers must view the Bible as navigational (i.e., something they can approach and read by themselves in a way that draws them towards Christ).

To emphasize this, observe the following quotes staff wrote in the survey: “The Bible is exciting and life-changing”; “I would like our Campaigners to experience the wonder of who God is, develop a relationship with him, and understand why the Bible is key to their growth as a Christian”; “If you give the Bible a chance, it will come alive to you . . . Scripture is alive”; “My goal always is to be teaching the Bible and helping them learn and grow in what it would look like for them to be pursuing a relationship with God and reading the Bible on their own”; and, “The Bible is accessible to everyone.”

Several participants further explained this notion during the interviews. One participant told me: “The Bible is approachable and actually fun to read . . . if a kid’s not entertained or wowed to some degree, the Bible is like a bunch of dead pages with words on it.” Another said, “I want them to understand that it’s not homework.” Lastly, another stressed how his teaching gears entirely towards presenting Scripture:

> In an approachable manner . . . Most kids have the perception of it being a dusty old book of rules. “Like It’s going to tell me all the things I’ve done wrong and is

> a checklist for living a moral life." . . . That's kind of assuming that that's what's in there . . . I'm much more invested in seeing a kid in ten years [after they are done high school] thriving in their faith. I'm much more invested in that than like a kid bringing all their friends to Club and three years later running into some tough questions and abandoning their faith because we didn't help them build a foundation or challenge them to ask tough questions . . . I think my biggest overarching goal is for people to be set up, to read and understand and engage with Scripture independently.

Analysis: In discussing the approachability of Scripture with participants, it became evident that students must see the Bible as being accessible and something that *they themselves* can navigate. A lasting faith in Christ will not result from reading Scripture as a duty or chore. Effective teaching seems to equip Campaigners to read apart from reliance on a teacher. This does not remove the necessity of the Church or following Christ in a community. Instead, it is the recognition that resilient discipleship stems from believers taking advantage of Scripture being readily available and learning basic hermeneutical principles to read and interpret it competently.

General Observation: A Disconnect Between Teachers and Students

When discussing pedagogical goals with my participants, a pattern developed: teaching should not just focus on biblical content. Instead, it must be rooted in the spiritual formation of the pupil and the long-term hope of resilient discipleship that extends beyond YL. A question that arises from this, however, is: If these goals reflect the heart of YL staff, why does a disconnect exist between the hope leaders have for their students and the fact that deep struggles regarding biblical literacy exist?

A possible answer is found in *students' goals* when being taught in contrast to the *YL staff* teaching them. As part of the survey, I asked: In one sentence, what is your students' primary goal in reading/studying the Bible, and why is it important to them?

Participants gave an extensive range of answers, but a discernible pattern is students' fixation on *short-term, action-oriented* goals. Some of the answers given were: "To learn how to be a 'good Christian'"; "To learn more about God and how to live as Christians"; "To find out what they are supposed to do with their lives"; and, "To learn what their purpose on earth is."

Interview answers were more elaborative. In response to the same question, a participant said, "They want to know how to navigate relationships and . . . how to navigate family . . . and how to navigate the questions of like: 'Who am I? What am I? What's my purpose and direction with life?'" Another said his students' goals are, "Give me that go-home thing that I can do tomorrow but don't drown it out . . . I need to fit the Bible into my instant gratification understanding of culture." A third said, "They are like: 'If God can't be meaningfully involved in the minutiae of my teenage life, like what's the point?'" A fourth lamented, "Their goal is survival." A fifth stated, "There's always the sense of: 'What do I do with my life and how are things going to go? . . . How do I be a good person?'" And lastly, someone said, "I think to be honest, some of my kids' goals are just to eat whatever food I bring for them. I think for others, their goal is just to get through their Campaigner lesson."

In comparing staff and students' goals, a contrast emerges: staff seem to care more about the long-term spiritual development of a teenager's faith, whereas students are primarily fixated on what momentary gain they can attain from the Bible. In essence, students are asking: *What can the Bible do for me right now?* Meanwhile, staff who have carefully considered their goals are often asking: *As we read the Bible, who is Christ shaping you to become through the power of the Spirit?* The Bible can and does

give insight into how to live, but it is fundamentally not the "magic formula" that students appear to view it, where it provides a direct answer into every minute decision. Furthermore, a proper reading of Scripture does not provide the freedom for Moralistic Therapeutic Deism and the liberty to create God in the image of the reader.

An insightful comment quoted above is when one interview participant said, "I think their goals are, "Give me that go-home thing that I can do tomorrow but don't drown it out . . . I need to fit the Bible into my instant gratification understanding of culture." As previously mentioned, youth today are part of an instant gratification seeking culture, whereby teenagers are accustomed to getting what they want in the timeframe they want it. If this characterizes their worldview, then it reasonably follows that their scriptural goals will align accordingly. When the Bible fails to fit within this worldview, it is discarded and rejected as being "outdated," "irrelevant," "bland," "boring," and "useless." This contrast is a juxtaposition that will require attention and addressing by YL. The solution does not appear to be the altering of goals on the part of staff, but rather, aiding Campaigners in expanding their horizons to focus first on formation *and then* the practical side of how Scripture helps believers walk faithfully in their relationship with Christ.[25]

Summary of Goals

The purpose of this section of the field research was to gain a deeper understanding into the pedagogical goals that staff set as they prepare to teach the Bible. As a generalization, staff commonly aspire not only to instruct on a particular passage but to

[25] This will be discussed in Chapter 5.

"go deeper" and emphasize the Spirit's transformation in the life of a believer who seeks Christ with their entire being (Jer 29:13; Jas 4:8). It is through Scripture that staff hope Campaigners are shaped and formed spiritually, as they meet and encounter God, and experience Jesus at the heart of the biblical story. Staff also aim to show their students that the Bible is a culturally relevant and appropriate book that Campaigners can develop the proper skills to engage with.

In summarizing the various themes and codes that encapsulate the topic of goals, the strongest pedagogical aspirations seem less focused on specific elements of content (i.e., biblical dates, places, and names) and more on what the content *leads to.* The field research suggests that the Bible is perhaps best viewed as an invitation into a story: an invitation to process and explore, not *only* the specific details of the text, but the God who inspired it as revealed in Christ and illuminated by the Spirit. Through this deeper level of conceptualization, students can explore the fundamental worldview questions that inherently shape and form their identity, where they learn to better engage the world with their faith.

As indicated, the goals of teenagers are highly *behaviour focused*. In being centred on what the Bible can do *for them*, they easily miss the transformation of what God is doing *in them.* They are, in a sense, utilitarian and are putting the "cart ahead of the horse," making short-term gain the focus of Bible reading and not long-term formation. In actuality, it should be reversed. A life shaped by Christ leads to the development and growth of the wisdom and discernment needed to navigate life. The often-quoted Proverb remains true: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your

paths straight" (3:5–6). Wisdom gleaned from the research participants explains that information alone cannot save Campaigners. A higher *telos* in goal setting that focuses on how Scripture points Campaigners towards the truth of Christ and allows the Spirit to illuminate that truth is needed.

Method

Whereas the previous section focused on the conceptualization of biblical pedagogy and how staff members *think and plan* for their lessons through setting goals, attention now turns to the methods with which they *actually teach*. The purpose of this part of the field research was to better understand what happens in a typical Campaigner Bible study and to learn about the teaching methods that staff have found helpful in their time with YL. If the primary goals of teaching the Bible are to help students know and experience God, read the Bible Christologically, understand it as culturally relevant, and develop the tools required to approach it, the next step is comprehending how these goals are accomplished. To learn from participants how they prepare for lessons and instruct Campaigners, I asked questions such as: How do you break down and teach a passage of Scripture?; Do you use any teaching aids (i.e., commentaries, devotionals, study Bible notes)?; and: How do you typically organize your Bible studies?

Theme One: Discussion-Based Conversations where Campaigners Discover Jesus within Community

The most common method for running Bible studies, as explained by my research participants, is when the leader acts more as a guide and facilitator than an instructor. This means that Campaigners learn best when *they* discover the biblical text for

themselves, and the teacher helps draw out the necessary implications and ensure they remain theologically orthodox. Rather than lecturing from a podium or giving a sermon on a topic, pedagogy seems more successful when it occurs in a discussion-based conversation format. The following codes provide evidence that led to the development of this theme.

Code 1a: Questions and Discussion

Description: When I asked staff how they teach their students, the dominant response was that well thought through questions that provoke discussion is the most common method. Participants were adamant that to engage their audience, questions are the driving force that produces involvement and the discovery of God that is paramount to the growth of resilient disciples.

I asked survey participants: How is the biblical content in your meetings normally presented? The majority stated that their focus is on drawing insight from students through question-based discussions. The results indicate that 96 percent of participants “always” (23 percent) or “often” (73 percent) teach using this format, as opposed to them being the one to deliver most of the content, or dividing Campaigners into small groups to work together. One participant explained, “If I’m talking for 20 minutes, it’s easy for them to tune me out. If their peers are pulling things out, I think it’s great for them to hear from a different voice.”

How is the biblical content in your meetings normally presented?

	1 (Never)	2 (Rarely)	3 (Sometimes)	4 (Often)	5 (Always)	Total Votes	Weighted Average
Through teaching (i.e., you doing most of the speaking)	0.00%	0.00%	68.18%	22.73%	9.09%	22	3.41
Through discussion (i.e., you predominantly raising questions and/or getting insight from your students)	0.00%	0.00%	4.55%	72.73%	22.73%	22	**4.18**
Through small group work (i.e., dividing students into clusters and assigning them a passage to work through)	18.14%	22.73%	18.18%	31.82%	9.09%	22	2.91

Figure 11: Teaching Methods

I also asked: How do you typically explore a passage of Scripture with Campaigners? Seventy three percent of respondents said they either “always” (5 percent) or “often” (68 percent) teach in a way where they guide their students in interpreting the text (i.e., by pointing Campaigners in a certain direction by asking specific questions). This method of instructing is opposed to teachers directly telling their Campaigners what the text means (9 percent said “always,” and 14 percent said “often”), allowing them to interpret it by themselves (5 percent said “always,” and “23 percent said “often”), or following the content of outside resources (0 percent said “always,” and 36 percent said “often”).

How do you typically explore a passage of Scripture with Campaigners?

	1 (Never)	2 (Rarely)	3 (Sometimes)	4 (Often)	5 (Always)	Total Votes	Weighted Average
Tell your students what the text says/means	0.00%	13.64%	63.64%	13.64%	9.09%	22	3.18
Guide your students in making an interpretation of the text	0.00%	4.55%	22.73%	68.18%	4.55%	22	**3.73**
Allow your students to interpret the text by themselves	4.55%	9.09%	59.09%	22.73%	4.55%	22	3.14
Follow the content of a study guide/other resource	4.55%	22.73%	36.36%	36.36%	0.00%	22	3.05

Figure 12: Teaching Styles

To further explore this during the interviews, I asked each participant: How do you break down and teach a passage of Scripture? Through this dialogue, a more substantiated explanation of the value of questions and discussion became evident. One participant explained that her teaching is "all questions." She clarified that she attempts a mixture of content and application-based inquiries to encourage students to engage in the text. In studying a gospel story, for example, "the questions really drive the conversation." She would ask questions such as: "What do we notice about how Jesus talks? What would it look like if you were to do that now? . . . What stops us from doing that? What does this mean for us?" In her teaching, students pull most of the content from the Bible, and she is "piggyback[ing]" on their responses. She also mentioned how the questions she asks are either opinion-based (e.g., "Why do you think Jesus said this?"), text-based (e.g., "Look again at Mark 5:34, what was it that Jesus said healed the bleeding woman?"), or application based (e.g., "In this story the bleeding woman came to Jesus for help; can you think of an area in your life where you need Jesus' help? What

stands in the way of you asking Jesus for help?"). Asking questions that fit one of these three categories ensures that anyone can answer them. Instead of needing prior biblical knowledge, Campaigners can either share their own thoughts or discover the answer from within the text.

Another interviewee said his lessons are "essentially all questions." A third explained that his emphasis is not just on asking questions in general, but rather, "open-ended" ones that will lead to conversation and participation. A fourth emphatically said that his lessons are not "giving a sermon" but that his questions are focused on processing the depth of a passage. This participant also spoke to the importance of the teacher answering the questions, so Campaigners get "feedback" and a "response" on what the instructor has learned through their preparation. Another said, "We want our kids to be the ones discovering Jesus, and I think questions are just so good for that."

Lastly, one twenty-five year veteran of YL spoke at length about how he has developed a teaching method he calls "peppering" the text. The purpose of this method is not to ask questions to students but to have them be the ones who make the inquiries. Having learned from a seminary professor who taught him to read a passage and write down as many questions about it as possible, this participant leads Bible studies by telling his students, "We're gonna pepper the text. We're gonna throw questions at it until we're out of questions. The rule is: anytime a question comes to your mind, you have to let it out." He emphasized that these questions can be detailed and complex, or as simple and abstract as: "What colour were the sandals on Jesus's feet? What time of day was it? Was Jesus hungry?" This participant explained how his method "lowers the bar" for students and teaches them that anyone can ask questions and participate. After

peppering the text, this participant said that outside of one or two questions that he will intentionally focus on, he discourages Campaigners from trying to answer every question. He says to his students, “I actually want you to leave here agitated that you asked a question that you didn’t get an answer to, because that means you might go home and look it up for yourself. And you might walk away with less smugness about what the Bible does or doesn’t mean.”

Analysis: The significance in asking questions appears related to what the questions *lead to*. Questions spark discussion where students are more prone to wrestle with the Bible, participate in conversation, and discover for themselves the beauty of Christ. By facilitating discussion, teachers can tailor the conversation to the needs of their students, offer examples to explain the text, but most importantly, create an avenue to help students unpack the Bible where they are the ones drawing out information and thinking critically about how it relates to their life. By encouraging students to ask questions but not always giving them answers, the hope is to inspire curiosity to pursue their own research while also embracing the mystery of Jesus and the adventure of faith that Christ leads his followers on.

It is also important for staff to have researched and answered their own questions in the preparation stage to provide parameters and “guardrails” to avoid an open interpretation of Scripture, where any answer goes. As one survey participant wrote, “I always ask them what it [the text] means and I fill in the gaps.” This might entail gracefully correcting a student who answers wrongly, circling back to what the teacher hopes will be shared, or teaching it explicitly if needed. There is a balance between

having students do most of the speaking but also teaching and coming prepared with a plan in mind about where the teacher hopes the discussion will go.

There also appears to be value in having students ask questions. When the instructor asks the questions, they can guide their pupils along the path they have pre-planned and ensure the conversation remains focused on their goals for the lesson. When students have the freedom to ask questions, however, they become active participants in the lesson and have more ownership over the conversation. The discussion may become broader and more sporadic, but the value of *active inclusion* seems to have strong potential in helping students learn. Both methods assist in achieving the teacher's goals but are accomplished in two different yet complementary ways.

Code 1b: Balance between Context and Application

Description: In discussing the content of their lesson, participants spoke about the necessity of balancing historical context with modern application. As previously noted, most Campaigners are primarily concerned about the contemporary cultural applicability of the Bible. Reflecting on their experiences, however, staff noted the importance of also providing background information to contextualize the content in its appropriate setting before moving to application.

During the survey, I asked: How confident are you in teaching the historical context of a biblical passage, versus the contemporary relevance/application of a passage? The results signify a comparatively even split between the two, but with slightly more respondents being confident in teaching a passage's contemporary relevance and application.

How confident are you in teaching the historical context of a biblical passage versus the contemporary relevance/application of a passage?

	1 (Not confident)	2 (Not very confident)	3 (Somewhat confident)	4 (Confident)	5 (Very confident)	Total Votes	Weighted Average
Historical context	0.00%	5.26%	31.58%	57.89%	5.26%	19	3.63
Contemporary relevance/application	0.00%	0.00%	27.27%	50.00%	22.73%	22	**3.95**

Figure 13: Historical Context and Contemporary Meaning

Only 5 percent of survey respondents said they are "very confident" in teaching the historical context of a passage, but an additional 90 percent are "confident" (58 percent) and "somewhat confident" (32 percent). Only 5 percent labelled themselves as "not very confident," and none said they are "not confident." In contrast, 23 percent said they are "very confident" in teaching the contemporary relevance/application of a passage, 50 percent said they are "confident," 27 percent said "somewhat confident," and none are "not very confident," or "not confident." In the additional comments section, several participants wrote how, although they lack formal theological training, they are striving to improve their capability to confidently teach the historical context of a passage (i.e., who wrote it, who are they writing to, or the environment the passage appears within).

Regarding their preparation process, I also asked survey participants whether they use outside resources. The results signify that a high proportion of staff frequently use written and digital study resources to help them better learn the text before they teach it. According to survey participants, 86 percent either "always" (27 percent), "often" (41 percent), or "sometimes" (18 percent) use commentaries; 64 percent "always" (5 percent), "often" (32 percent), or "sometimes" (27 percent) use devotionals;

90 percent “always” (27 percent), “often” (45 percent), or “sometimes” (18 percent) use study Bible notes; 59 percent “always” (9 percent), “often” (14 percent), or “sometimes” (36 percent) use sermons; and 82 percent “always” (23 percent), “often” (45 percent), or “sometimes” (14 percent) make use of video resources like the BibleProject.

When preparing to teach the Bible, which of the following do you use?

	1 (Never)	2 (Rarely)	3 (Sometimes)	4 (Often)	5 (Always)	Total Votes	Weighted Average
Commentaries	0.00%	13.64%	18.18%	40.91%	27.27%	22	3.82
Devotionals	13.64%	22.73%	27.27%	31.82%	4.55%	22	2.91
Study Bible notes	0.00%	9.09%	18.18%	45.45%	27.27%	22	**3.91**
Sermons	4.55%	36.36%	36.36%	13.64%	9.09%	22	2.86
Videos (e.g., BibleProject)	0.00%	18.18%	13.64%	45.45%	22.73%	22	3.73

Figure 14: Teaching Preparation Tools

I did not seek to uncover how many staff have a theological education, but it is reasonable to suggest that few do. In explaining why they gravitate towards these resources, participants spoke about the clarity they bring to a text, the level of understanding they provide for the teacher, and the new questions and insight they raise. One interviewee said, “Commentaries and study Bible notes are my go-to . . . A lot of the time, they bring up things that I hadn’t even thought of.” A second said that study resources help him “dig into the text a little bit more”; and in speaking about the BibleProject and Right Now Media, a third said, “They will unpack things in a new way, and they will broaden your horizons a little bit.”

The data reveals that although there is a temptation to quickly jump into modern relevance, wise teachers begin with placing the Bible in its original setting and then

move to its current application. One interviewee said he "Starts with the context stuff," but then moves to "how that would impact" his Campaigners. Another talked about moving from the "Big picture to the small picture . . . and then back to the big picture again," where he emphasizes context, but then "injects a little bit of: 'Where do we go from here?'" A third participant said he begins a lesson by asking general observation questions like, "What did you notice that is significant to you?" But then he shifts to giving "them more of the context." A fourth said she first asks her students about the context of a passage and afterwards pivots to modern relevance. She does this because Bible studies tend to "Tip pretty quickly towards application."

Out of curiosity, I asked an interviewee to explain more about the balance between context and applicability. His answer illuminated how both are essential in teaching students. This participant said he begins by asking context-based questions such as "Who is writing? Who are they writing to? Why are they writing? What is our understanding of the cultural context of the people they are writing to?" He does this to help Campaigners learn "that all of those things are different from us" and that the Bible was not originally written to them: "This is not like one of your friends writing something to you today. This is across the world thousands of years ago in a different time, in a different culture, in a different environment." He then shifts to communicating how, even though Campaigners are removed from the original setting of Scripture, "The truth of the Bible isn't that it happened, but that it's still happening . . . Whether it's in a middle Eastern agrarian society, or in a modern North American technological society, there are still truths here." As an example of what he might say to his students, he said:

> Take [the book of] James. James is talking about how the tongue sets the world on fire, and it's like a rudder that steers a massive ship. And it's like, well, none

> of you [Campaigners] are steering ships or burning forests or anything like all this stuff, but you can relate to sending a text message that you didn't think through very well, and all of a sudden, your whole friend group is in chaos over like a poorly worded text [with the implications being], the things you say matter because they ripple out into the lives of people in the world around you.

Analysis: In discussing the necessity of conveying both context and applicability, staff are wrestling with the hermeneutical question of *meaning* within a text. As W. Randolph Tate explains, biblical hermeneutics "studies the locus of meaning and principles of biblical interpretation," combining both "exegesis and interpretation."[26] In exploring the Bible, scholars commonly face the question: Who is responsible for the meaning of a passage? Three options present themselves; meaning is either derived from the author, the text, or the reader.[27] An approach to pedagogy that only emphasizes the author or text will predominantly focus on the historical element of a passage. In contrast, a reader-centred approach will predominantly focus on contemporary relevance. By discerning the required degree of each, participants often spoke of an integrated approach that weds the author's and text's world together with the readers'.[28] In speaking of this integrated approach, Robert Stein writes, "if we understand how the author's intended audience would have understood the text . . . we, as readers today, can also understand the meaning of the same text."[29]

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[26] Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 1.

[27] See Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 1–7.

[28] Tate concurs, saying, "What I propose . . . is that meaning results from a conversation between the world of the text and the world of the reader, a conversation informed by the world of the author" (*Biblical Interpretation*, 5).

[29] Stein, *Basic Guide*, 24. Although Stein's statement draws helpful attention to the hermeneutical task of understanding the Bible in its context, the second half of his statement is perhaps better worded as "we, as readers today, can also [*better*] understand the meaning of the same text." Understanding the context of a passage does not guarantee an accurate interpretation of it. Such an understanding *helps*, but does not dictate anything further.

Despite the survey indicating staff's comfort in discussing application over context, it was difficult to ascertain *how much* emphasis should be placed on either. Both are evidently important and might vary between lessons. It is suggested, however, that students must see the value of trying to understand the author's intent for a passage before exploring its modern implications.[30]

Code 1c: Small Sections of Text

Description: Thus far, effective pedagogy, as stated by the research participants, includes placing an emphasis on question-asking and navigating between historical context and modern application. Staff also revealed the benefits of dividing their lessons into small, manageable sections of the Bible (i.e., verse-by-verse or section-by-section), and not trying to present too much at once.

In a typical Campaigner lesson, more teachers prefer to work through books of the Bible than they do themes and topics. The survey results signify that 62 percent of staff typically work through biblical books, whereas 38 percent predominantly study themes and topics (i.e., love, forgiveness, grace, mission, etc.). Regardless, only going through small sections of the Bible is said to work best. Teenagers' short attention spans were commonly mentioned as a reason why, and upon reflection, teachers would rather cover less text but do so more thoroughly, than quickly breeze through large chapters

[30] Stein, *Basic Guide*, 34. A caveat deserves mentioning here. Discerning the meaning of a passage is a highly nuanced subject and great debates exists among scholars as they seek to uncover what the original intent of a biblical author was and how the original audience would have perceived it. To suggest that YL teachers with little formal biblical education can do this perfectly is naïve and inaccurate. In acknowledging this, the claim here is that it is important for teachers to have a basic understanding of the context of a text. There might be elements to it that are beyond their ability to properly understand or delineate, but to the best of their ability, and with the help of outside resources, participants are saying that they must strive to place the text within its proper context.

without providing students with the opportunity to absorb the text and work through its implications. One interview participant said, “The pattern we do . . . is to break [the Bible] down verse-by-verse” to assist Campaigners in seeing the importance of taking Scripture slow and sitting with difficult passages instead of brushing past them. He also said, “the most we [cover] is ten verses.” This enables him to thoroughly break down the text, which he does by repeating it several times in different translations. Another interviewee said that when first starting with YL, he would attempt to teach a whole chapter in each lesson but found it ineffective. Now, his focus is finding “a way to break it down enough that it is digestible, but still consistently inserted into the full story” of the biblical narrative. To do this, he and his students “read one or two verses, I ask the questions I want to ask, read one or two verses, ask the questions I want to ask, etc.”

Analysis: This method of reading several verses, pausing to comment, and then proceeding with a few more was the dominant explanation of how the Bible is taught. Experience has taught staff that trying to accomplish too much in a lesson will leave students feeling exhausted and overwhelmed. There is still the recognition, however, that the Bible contains various genres that deserve to be read differently. Exegeting Paul’s letter to the Romans, for example, differs from the patriarchal narratives in Genesis. The former might be done best in small segments, while the latter might be better read in a more flowing narration.

One participant mentioned the “full story” of the Bible and explained his insistence on working each passage into the broader story arc of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration found throughout the Bible. This focuses not solely on how long or short the passage is, but on how it fits within the story of the Bible. Although

reading small sections may help a teenager's attention span, there also appears to be wisdom in studying a passage within its context and ensuring the story's wider framework is not lost due to brevity. What appears to be a more important question than: "How many verses?" is: "To convey the wider context of this passage, what needs to be communicated, and how can it be communicated in a reasonable timeline?"[31]

Code 1d: Easy to Understand Bible Translations

Description: The last code in this theme relates to the Bible translations that staff use while teaching. I discovered that the NIV is the most commonly used translation, followed by the NLT, ESV, and Message. Outside of 45 percent of respondents indicating that they use the NIV, the results did not show a strong sway towards any particular translation.[32] Several participants also indicate that they regularly switch Bible versions or read the same passage in several different translations to present it from various perspectives.

[31] No participant mentioned how long their Bible studies take, but a typical rule of thumb within YL is not more than thirty minutes.

[32] It is also noteworthy that 91 percent of staff reported predominantly using a physical Bible as opposed to 9 percent who use an electronic one. For more information about the rise of Scripture's digitization, see Hutchings, "Now the Bible Is an App," 143–61.

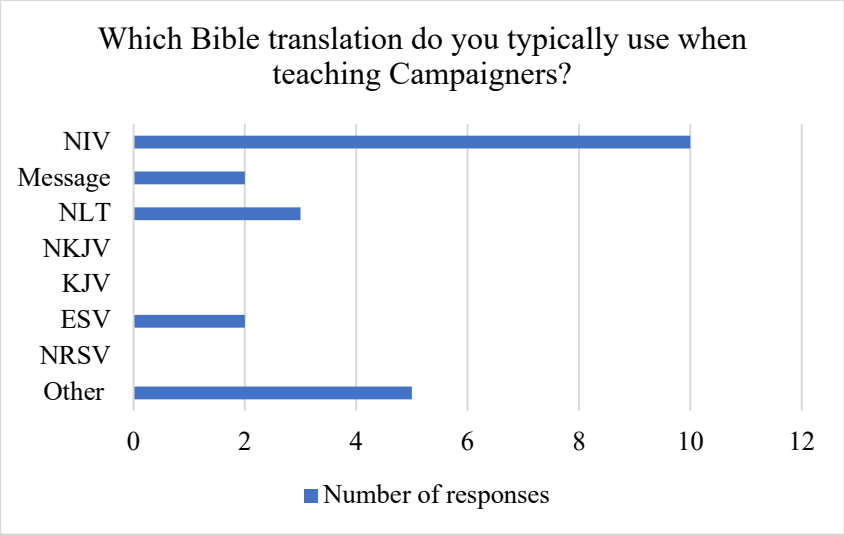

Figure 15: Bible Translations

When I asked why they use these translations, a contrast emerged between some staff who had carefully thought through their translation usage and others who simply had one they felt comfortable with. For those that had a reason for using a translation, they frequently use a functional/dynamic or natural language version of the Bible, where the translation editors alter the grammatical structure of the original language to emphasize the meaning of the text and prioritize ease of understanding.[33] One participant spoke of his preference for the NIV because it is like "the Times New Romans of Bibles." Another said, "I primarily use the NIV. I find this just simple and easy language." A third said he uses the NLT because it "removes some of the complexity of a translation" that might be a barrier to students engaging with a passage.

[33] This is in contrast to Bible translations that are more "formal equivalent," where the objective is to remain as authentic as possible to the wording of the original text. It is noteworthy that Bible translations rarely fit perfectly into one particular approach. Instead, translations are better viewed as being situated along a continuum, where significant overlap can exist between them (see Mounce, *Why I Trust the Bible*, 193–226).

And a fourth stated, “Sometimes I’ll use The Message cuz I feel like The Message is written in a really understandable way.”

For those who do not have a reason for using a certain translation, the common feature was their comfort level in using the Bible they are most accustomed to. One said he uses the NLT “because that’s what mine is and it’s just my favourite,” while another said, “I use the ESV . . . I’ve spent my adult life working in the ESV and I don’t really ever think about one being better than the other.” Even for those who use a more formal equivalent translation like the ESV, staff noted the priority in still helping Campaigners understand the meaning of a text. Some spoke about reading in their ESV translation, then re-reading it in colloquial wording, and summarizing it in their own words. One respondent also mentioned she occasionally uses a children’s Bible to supplement the passage with a new perspective.

Analysis: Regardless of translation usage, a common feature among staff is their desire to find a way to ensure that *every* student can hear the Word of God in a way they can understand, relate to, and respond to. Regardless of faith background and experience, the best teaching seems to occur in an environment where the text makes sense to its listeners, who can process it in community with their peers and leader. As William Mounce says, all major translations will “lead you to the cross.”[34] There does not appear to be any “perfect” translation, provided readers can comprehend the heart of a passage.[35]

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[34] Mounce, *Why I Trust the Bible*, 196.

[35] Bible translations can be a contested topic among biblical scholars, with some having a preferred translation over others. The argument here is that, in their experience, research participants have not found one translation to be significantly more valuable than others in helping their students become more competent readers of Scripture. For more information on the strengths and weaknesses of different translations, see Fee and Strauss, *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth.*

Summary of Method

The purpose of this section of the field research was to gain a deeper understanding into the various methods in which staff teach the Bible. Explained another way, I sought to better understand what pedagogy "looks like" in action. Several key elements became apparent; however, they revolve around the core conviction that the Bible is best taught to Campaigners through discussion-based conversations done in community with their peers. I learned that questions (both asked by the teacher and by students) are an important driving force behind a lesson, and that teachers must strike a balance between historical context and modern application. Furthermore, I discovered that exploring the text in small segments and ensuring that students are using a translation they can understand is a helpful approach in getting them to engage.

Effective pedagogy does not seem to come from preaching to teenagers or overwhelming them with knowledge. Instead, it appears to come from a relational and communal standpoint, where staff and students explore the Bible together. Through this, God can speak inductively through the pages of his Word, and the Spirit can elucidate the beauty of Christ. Teachers must prepare for their lessons having carefully thought through questions, researched their answers, and prepared appropriate background contextualization. The real work during a lesson, however, is completed by the students, who, through the answering and asking of questions, become immersed in the text to discover the wonder of Jesus. Teaching previously-prepared content is then a way to supplement questions to fill students in on information they may not be able to answer through the teacher's questions.

Impact

My final area of inquiry was to better understand the impact that various teaching methods have on Campaigners. I have already noted that biblical literacy is generally low and that students are struggling with faith. I have also noted, however, that certain forms of teaching appear to connect better with students than others. This final section of data more thoroughly explores the impact of pedagogical methods as *used by* staff and as *received by* students to help better understand this phenomenon.

While interacting with participants, I intentionally chose the language of "impact" over comparable terminology such as "results." This conscious decision was to reiterate to staff that their skill as a Bible teacher was not being challenged. Instead, as the researcher, I am the learner, collector, and disseminator of their expertise.

To measure impact, I asked questions such as: In general, are you confident that your students have a firm grasp on the biblical content that you teach?; In one sentence, what causes Campaigners the most difficulty in understanding or implementing what they learn from studying the Bible?; and: Do you think students understand the authority and significance of the Bible and why it is important? I posed these questions to uncover an additional layer of depth regarding the topic at hand. For example, in the method section I asked participants: How do you break down and teach a passage of Scripture? In the impact section, however, I asked: What method of teaching works best for you? At the outset, the second question seems redundant. Presumably, it would be ironic for someone to have a method that works "best," yet not regularly use it. I asked these questions in different places, however, to probe whether any new information would surface. What emerged in this section ended up providing a more "bird's-eye view" of

pedagogy, where, rather than repeat the same details from earlier, staff spoke more about their overarching theory of teaching and pointed to additional reasons as to why their students struggle with the Bible.

Theme One: General Understanding of Content but a Lack of Heart Transformation

When asked to reflect on the takeaways that Campaigners frequently have from Bible studies, staff were honest in admitting that teenagers seem to have a relatively firm grasp on basic content, but a barrier appears to exist in this content translating into transformation. I asked survey participants to measure their confidence level regarding how well Campaigners grasp the content they are taught. Fifty percent of respondents stated they are "confident," and the other 50 percent selected "somewhat confident." None said they were "very confident," "not very confident," or "not confident."

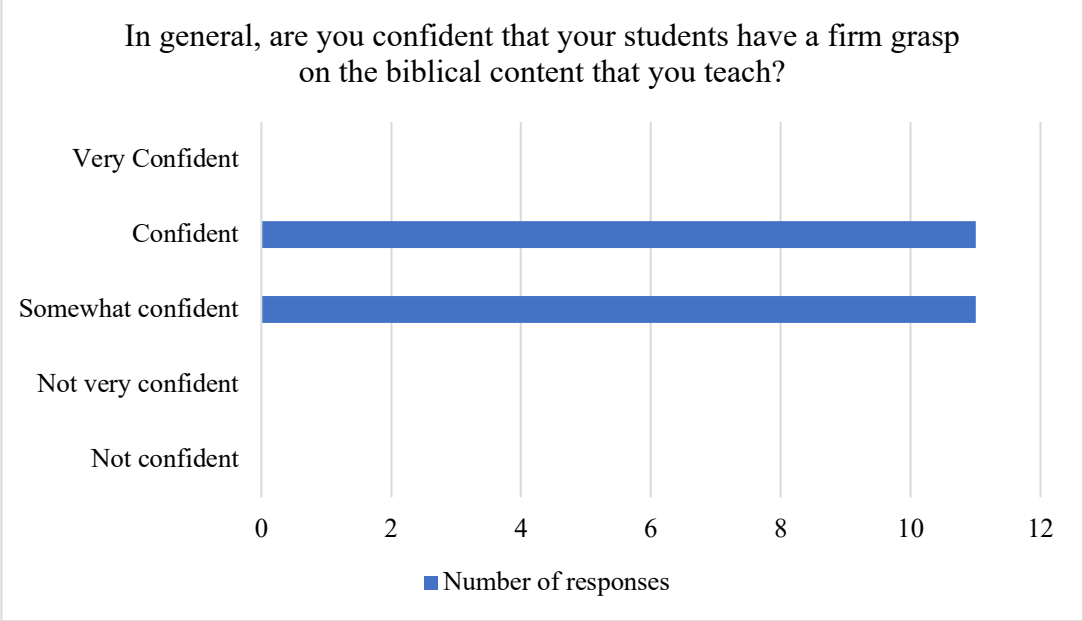

Figure 16: Student Comprehension

These results indicate that staff are *reasonably* confident that their students understand what they teach. As two respondents wrote in the notes section, however, "It's sort of hit or miss. Sometimes it seems like they really grasp it and find it impactful. other times it's just so-so"; and, "I feel like they understand it . . . but most do not retain it and wouldn't be able to recap much of what we talked about 6 hours later."

Earlier, I postulated that the primary goal Bible teachers have is for Campaigners to know and experience Christ. This goal is rooted in spiritual formation and who staff hope their students will become. A fuller picture of a life shaped and formed by Christ became clear when I asked survey participants: What evidence/fruit would demonstrate that Campaigners are living out what they learn from the Bible? Participants wrote: "An attitude of selflessness and eyes confidently set on Jesus"; "Their attitude towards things in their lives and how they treat other people"; "Love"; "Seeing Campaigners excited to introduce their friends to Jesus"; "Outreach to their friends, personal breakthroughs, healthier mental state"; "You would see fruit in how they treat those around them"; "Lives that are stable and balanced as they interact with the world around them"; "Freedom from guilt and shame about what they've done and what negative things they have begun to believe about themselves"; "Loving other students at their schools, especially those who are very different than them"; "Lov[ing] others in a tangible way"; "changing their habits"; "Lov[ing] their neighbour"; "A change in how they treat people"; "Their interactions with the outcasts of today, their thirst for justice, and above all, the unconditional love shown to all people because they understand that Christ first loved them"; and, "They are more in tune with the Spirit's leading and direction in their lives, and they are filled with boldness with their love for God and others."

These answers reveal a significant premise: as the Spirit illuminates the beauty of Christ and draws Christians into a deeper relationship with him, Campaigners are meant to be changed. By encountering Jesus, minds are renewed, hearts are transformed, and believers are compelled to live differently. The unfortunate truth, however, is that something often stands in the way of this transformation occurring. The question I attempted to answer in this section of the field research was: Why is this the case?[36]

Code 1a: Wrong Takeaways

Description: First, research participants suggested that even though Campaigners seem to grasp the content taught in lessons, they leave with an inadequate understanding of how the Bible impacts their faith. One interview participant mentioned his students' struggle in going beyond a "surface level" understanding of what he teaches and how they often approach the Bible as another "checklist" item on their agenda. Another said youth are frequently missing the "well-rounded and fuller picture" of who Jesus truly is and wrongly assume him to be an "esoteric dude who floats around sharing good vibes" rather than the Lord of creation who "came and died for [them]." Lastly, a third said how, despite her best efforts, "they struggle with: 'How does this impact my life?'"

Before the field research for this project commenced, I too hypothesized that Campaigners are frequently stuck in a surface-level reading of Scripture and are missing depth in their comprehension of the Bible. To further examine this, I presented survey

[36] Note the similarities and differences in this section versus earlier when discussing reasons for low biblical literacy. Earlier, the focus was on the barriers and obstacles that lead to low rates of literacy. Here, the focus is on reasons that stop Campaigners from being spiritually transformed through biblical engagement.

participants a diagram of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy[37] and asked them to label it based on where they feel their Campaigners best fit regarding their "grasp of the Bible."[38]

The results indicate that many Campaigners reside in the bottom three pyramid levels. Staff suggested that 19 percent of Campaigners have not progressed beyond "remembering," 32 percent have not progressed beyond "understanding," and 22 percent have not progressed beyond "applying." Only 14 percent were placed in "analyzing," 11 percent in "evaluating," and 9 percent in "creating."

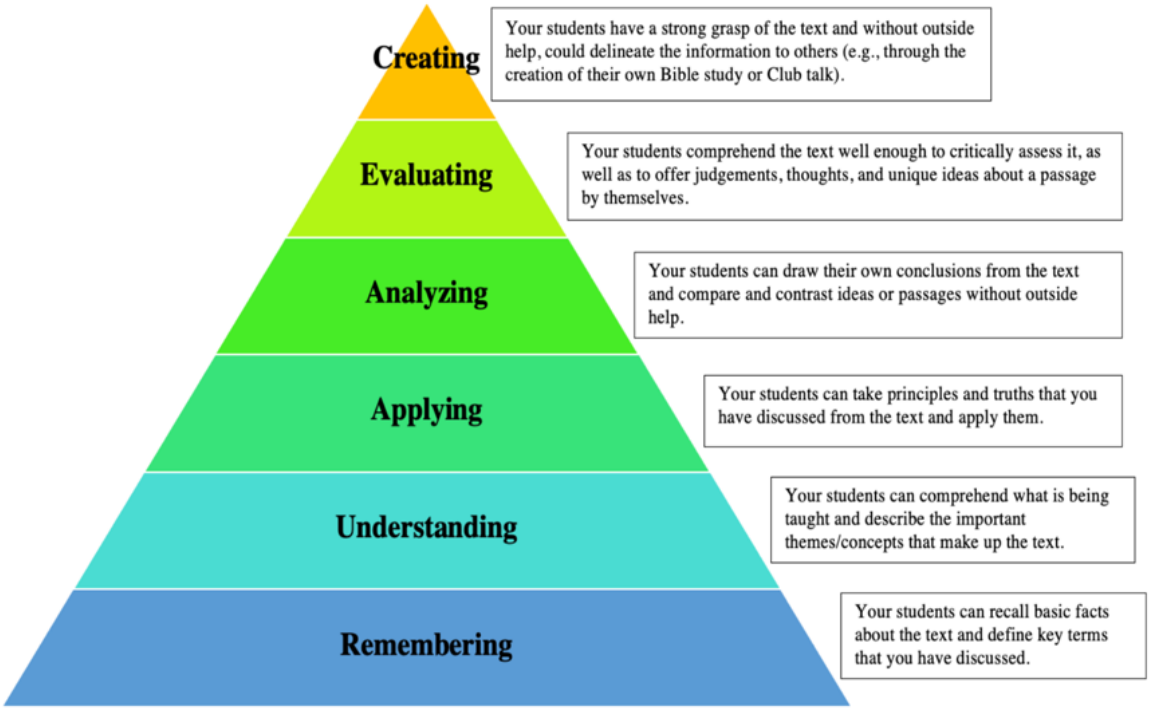

Figure 17: Bloom's Revised Taxonomy

[37] The picture of the Taxonomy included below was adapted from Armstrong, "Bloom's Taxonomy."

[38] Chapter 5 provides a more thorough explanation of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, but it is sufficient to mention here that it is a hierarchy to explain various levels of learning. The Taxonomy has the appearance of a pyramid, where each succeeding level represents the next stage of the learning process. The levels of the hierarchy are: Remembering (beginner stage), Understanding, Applying, Analyzing, Evaluating, and Creating (advanced stage). For example, understanding is a more advanced stage of the learning process than remembering. Each progressive step leads a student towards mastering a subject (see Anderson and Krathwohl, eds., *Taxonomy for Learning,* 5).

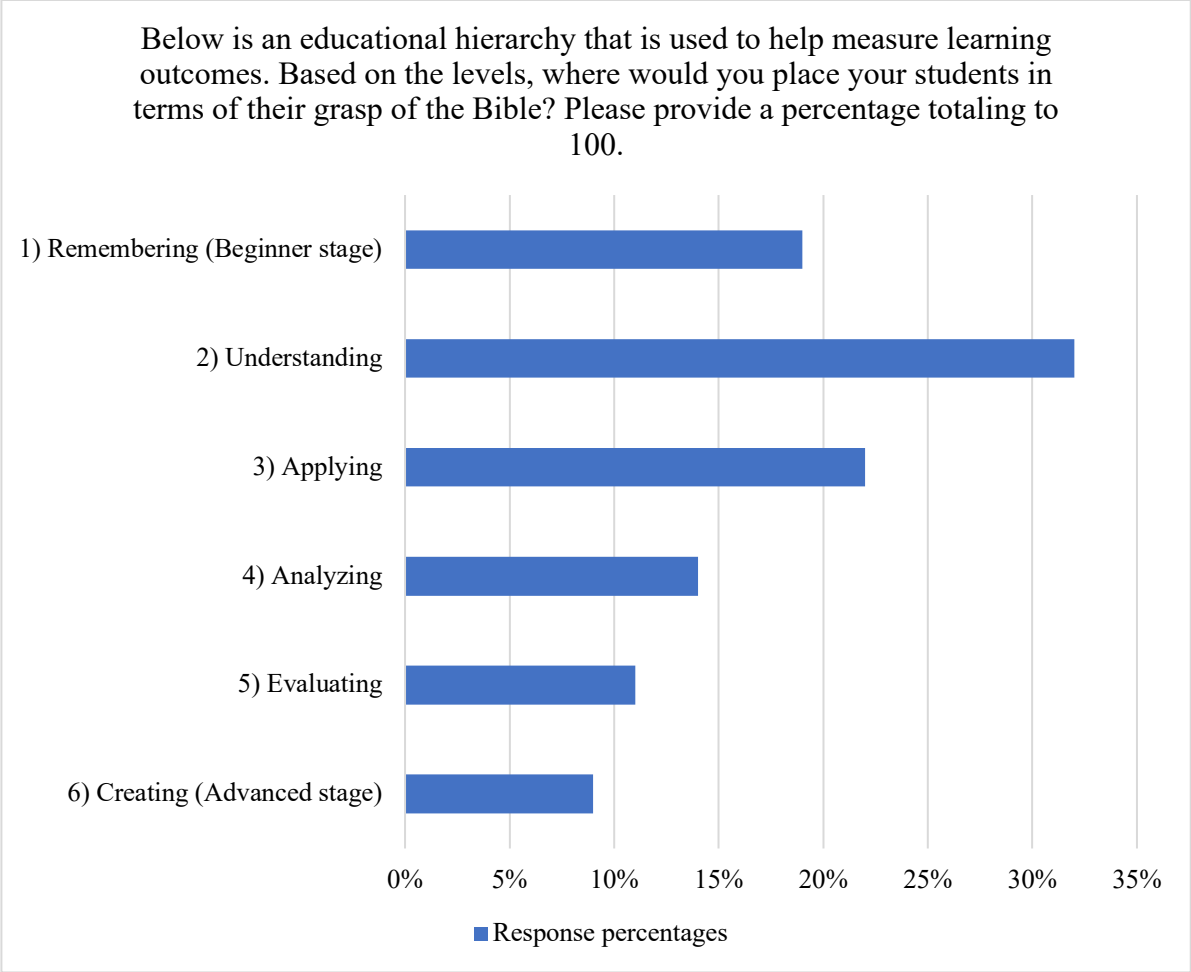

Figure 18: Campaigner Placement on Taxonomy

Analysis: The data outlined by staff regarding the Taxonomy compares well with the notion that Campaigners are often stuck in a surface-level reading of Scripture. The findings reveal that 51 percent of students have not progressed beyond the lower two levels of the hierarchy. Out of this 51 percent, 19 percent can only remember basic facets of information about the text, and a further 32 percent can only remember and understand the main themes and ideas from a passage. When compared to the previously indicated statistics suggesting that 100 percent of staff are either “confident” (50 percent) or “somewhat confident” (50 percent) that their Campaigners have a firm grasp

on the biblical content they teach, further analysis suggests this comprehension is primarily related to the basic levels of learning and is not elevating students to a place where they can critically assess (evaluating) and disseminate unique thoughts (creating) by themselves.[39]

Code 1b: Scripture Is Important but Not Authoritative

Description: A second reason why Campaigners may understand basic biblical content but miss a deeper level of transformation stems from their view that the Bible is important, but not necessarily authoritative.[40] When youth approach Scripture, they often regard it as having some element of value and importance, but not in a way where it speaks life-altering truth that compels them to live differently. As Wright says, "It is enormously important that we see the role of Scripture not simply as being to provide *true information about*, or even an accurate running commentary upon, the work of God in salvation and new creation, but as taking an active part *within* that ongoing purpose."[41] Wright then helpfully explains that in speaking about the Bible's authority, "We need to set Scripture within the larger context which the biblical writers themselves insist upon: that of the authority of God himself."[42] The Bible is not authoritative in the biblicism sense of "Scripture says it, I believe it, that settles it." Instead, it is authoritative in that it inspires its reader to obey the will of God, and to love and follow

[39] As explained in the next chapter, the pinnacle of the Taxonomy is not the end goal of Bible studies; instead, deeper intimacy with Christ is. The Taxonomy is still useful, however, in evaluating the state of learning among Campaigners.

[40] See Olshine, *Youth Ministry*, 123.

[41] Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 24 (emphasis original).

[42] Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 26.

Jesus, who is the ultimate authority over creation (Matt 28:18; John 17:2; 1 Cor 15:24; Phil 2:10; Col 1:15–18, 2:10; 1 Pet 3:22).[43]

When discussing this notion with interviewees, the dominant consensus is that Campaigners have little trouble in believing that the Bible is important. The disconnect lies in their lack of belief that it should impact how they live. I asked participants: Do you think students understand the authority and significance of the Bible and why it is important? No interviewee answered in the affirmative, and every response was a combination of "yes, Campaigners know that the Bible is important; however, no, they do not typically view it as being authoritative." As one participant said, "I think [Campaigners] understand the significance of the Bible more than the authority of the Bible." He elaborated by saying, "If you were to ask them . . . they would kind of be able to give their answer of 'yeah, it's a great book. It gives us lots of teaching and shows us Jesus and all those kind of things.'" Another said, "Generally, they believe it's significant and important. Authority is the hard part for a lot of them, I think." A third answered, "No. No I don't . . . I just see in our culture like a pushback to authority. 'So you say the Bible is authoritative' it's like well, 'I don't want to act [like it is].'" A fourth elaborated by saying, "Probably not . . . I think the significance piece is probably well established . . . It's funny, because part of what it means to be a teenager is to reject and challenge authority . . . I think authority is a tough thing with teenagers, because they naturally reject authority." Lastly, one participant made an astute connection between biblical authority and worldview. He spoke about the plethora of voices Campaigners often have in their ear, whether it be parents, mentors, or youth leaders

[43] See Smith, *Bible Made Impossible*, 173–78.

constantly telling them the Bible matters, so they tend to think to themselves, "Oh, so this should be important, but I'm not sure why it's important. So I'll pretend to believe it's important until I figure it out." He continued by saying:

> Across the board, I don't think this is just a Bible problem. I think this is like a history problem . . . Worldview highly impacts authority and importance. And I think they just want to say that it's important. I think the authority piece is so mystical to them that it just doesn't make sense. But I feel like the importance piece is a bit more concrete, and they want to believe it, but they don't understand why it's important . . . I think for them to fully understand . . . they need to realize the worldview they currently have. And we as Bible teachers have to bring them back into the worldview [that the Bible teaches].[44]

This insightful participant finished his statement by explaining, "A kid is going, 'why should [the Bible] have authority over my life? I'll just believe it. I don't actually need to let it have authority because *to let it have authority means I need to change my behaviour*.'"[45]

Analysis: Earlier, I cited a lengthy series of quotations in response to the question: What evidence/fruit would demonstrate that Campaigners are living out what they learn from the Bible? This evidence/fruit can only emerge when a student truly desires to faithfully follow Jesus and let the Spirit transform their hearts. When Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me," he was calling his followers (then and now) to a lifetime of surrender, where God becomes their ultimate authority (Luke 9:32). Campaigners' claim that the Bible is important is insignificant when such a claim is void of context. For example, someone might claim that the works of Shakespeare or C. S. Lewis are important. Something being important, however, does not mean that people will live

[44] This statement and the topic of worldview is a significant finding and is analyzed more in Chapter 5.

[45] Emphasis added.

differently because of it, or surrender their lives to it. With Campaigners, biblical importance does not appear problematic, but biblical authority does. Students seem to have the same view of Scripture as they do Shakespeare or Lewis, where the words of the text have some element of historical importance, but not to an extent where they will surrender themselves to the author who inspired or wrote them. Several participants noted that teenagers innately reject and rebel against authority, which raises the question: How do YL staff teach students about the authority of Scripture in a way that promotes deeper union with God and not rebellion against him?[46]

Theme Two: Effective Pedagogy Happens through Relationships

The final theme I developed from the field research is that pedagogy appears most effective when a relationship exists between the Campaigner and their teacher. I have already discussed how relationships are an integral component of YL's ministry, but this notion was also heavily emphasized by my participants. Young Life has a common saying about "earning the right to be heard" and how, to share the gospel with non-Christian teenagers, YL leaders must first earn their respect and trust. After respect has been garnered, walls are broken, and a teenager is more receptive to hear about Jesus and honestly process their thoughts and emotions. While staff often apply this philosophy to their work with non-Christian students, the field research reveals that the same concept is needed with Campaigners.

[46] I discuss this question in Chapter 5 as I theologically reflect on the data.

Code 2a: Creativity and Adaptation

Description: Each teenager is unique, and each Campaigner team has students in varying places of spiritual growth. Staff noticed that effective Bible teachers willingly adapt and change their plans or put aside their own aspirations to meet their students wherever they are at in their faith. In reflecting on a decade's worth of experience, one participant spoke about the need to continually ask the question: "What works best?" By this, he meant being willing to change and alter his teaching style if it meant better engagement from his group. Another spoke about one of his students having dyslexia and how he must adapt to meet the needs of someone for whom reading is a tremendous challenge. He mentioned that the "medium" of *always* reading lengthy Bible passages must be confronted and that teachers must be creative in how they communicate Scripture.[47] Similarly, another said that in response to adults saying, "Go read your Bibles," there are students who are thinking, "I would love to, but I can't sit down and read . . . it takes me thirty minutes to read four verses because the letters are getting mixed up in my brain." Lastly, another spoke of an example of a Bible study series he ran that he thought was excellent but later heard that it did not connect with his students. In reflection, he said, "I think it was a really great series, but it didn't serve the Campaigner team with where they were at."

Analysis: Being willing to creatively adapt can only be done when teachers know the greatest needs of their students. As already noted, most Campaigner teams are under ten people. Over time, staff should become aware of the individual needs that make up their group, giving them insight into how to best serve them. In the case of a

[47] Note the earlier observation that indicates that most Campaigners struggle with reading any book and not just the Bible.

more mature team, this might mean intently exploring a passage and providing a comprehensive examination of the text. In others, where students are younger in faith, it might entail moving slower to ensure they grasp the content. Either way, this information is only gleaned through relationships. It might also mean coming up with creative and unique ways to present the Bible (i.e., through videos, games, or skits) to help students for whom the act of reading is a barrier to the gospel.

Code 2b: Strive for Depth

Description: Lastly, staff stated that pedagogy has a significant impact when students are encouraged to pursue depth and to wrestle honestly with how the Bible speaks into their lives. This is not surprising considering Bloom's Revised Taxonomy cited above. Still, it was fascinating to hear interviewees (whom I did not ask about the Taxonomy) explain the necessity of depth and going beyond the simplicity of remembering, understanding, and applying information.

One nine-year veteran of YL said about teaching Campaigners, "Don't tell them everything . . . Follow up the conversations." By this, she highlighted the importance of teenagers embracing the mystery of Christ and how a Bible study does not end when Campaigners leave the room. Instead, it continues throughout the week in relationship between the leader and student. Another spoke about the danger of "pushing kids too quickly," yet was also quick to accentuate the risk of "being too hesitant to engage kids . . . They don't want surface level skin deep answers that don't really go anywhere. They want [to hear us say], 'Hey, that's a hard question that people have been wrestling with for thousands of years, you're not alone . . . let's really dig into this topic.'" This

participant later spoke about the intelligence of youth and how they are "Not interested in flimsy, half-baked one sentence answers." A third said, "I see . . . how much changes when you go deeper," referring to the longing she sometimes witnesses in her students to explore Scripture, even if they struggle in knowing how to.

Analysis: Teenagers are looking for worldview answers to comprehend the world around them and must learn that as they traverse the unknowns of high school, Jesus meets them in the complexity of their life. As they do this, there appears to be wisdom in teachers striking a balance between giving adolescents too much and not presenting enough of the depth of Scripture. As Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean note, "Young people are not bored by theology. They are bored by theology that doesn't matter."[48] The field data shows that Campaigners often lack depth in their faith. In coming alongside their students, so as not to overwhelm them, staff must show them the value of wrestling with the biblical text to learn how it relates to their modern context. As previously noted, encouraging students to ask questions is helpful here; not necessarily to arrive at a "perfect" answer, but to theologically reflect on the presence of Jesus. Such teaching can only be done in relationships where teachers have "earned the right" to do this with their students.

Summary of Impact

The purpose of this section of the field research was to gain a deeper understanding into the impact that various pedagogical methods have on Campaigners and to discover what Campaigners are leaving Bible studies having *actually learned.* My findings indicate

[48] Root and Dean, *Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, 22.

that students are generally open and receptive to receiving information, but it is not necessarily taking root in a way that leads towards transformation. In reference to Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, students are commonly stuck in the lower end of the learning spectrum and struggle to advance higher. Campaigners seem to have few objections to viewing the Bible as important, however, this rarely translates into it having authority in their lives. This dichotomy arises when Scripture contradicts a student's way of life, and they recognize that following Jesus means surrendering a part of themselves they are not prepared to give up.

Staff reported with conviction that the Bible is taught best in relationships and that pedagogy connects well with students when the teacher has "earned the right to be heard." Knowing one's audience allows the teacher to be creative and adapt based on their students' individual needs. Teaching relationally also enables the instructor to encourage depth among their students and lead them beyond a surface-level understanding of Scripture.[49] Furthermore, relationships prevent the teacher from being a "cold outsider" who speaks *at* students and instead turns them into a guiding shepherd who communicates *with* them, lovingly guiding youth through the content they are discussing. This denotes much more of a partnership between student and teacher than it does a one-sided disseminator of information. When the Bible is presented by someone teenagers love, trust, and respect, they are more inclined to engage.

[49] See Sadowski, "Growing up in the Shadows," who reports on the essential need for youth to have a caring and trusting adult in their life (92).

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided a detailed description of the data I uncovered during my field research. Organized around the four primary discovery topics, my goal was to accurately convey the information presented by the survey and interview participants, and to summarize the data around codes and themes. These themes did not simply emerge from the data; instead, I created them to unify and connect the various codes that synopsize the core of what the research participants said.

The key word that encapsulates this chapter is *essence.* My role as a participatory action researcher was to learn from my participants, who are the "experts" in biblical pedagogy, and to organize, summarize, and disseminate the essence of their expertise. Stated another way, my primary role was to describe the experiences of YL staff from across Canada and pool their knowledge to better understand how they teach the Bible to Campaigners.

Under the first topic of Demographics and Biblical Literacy, I discovered that most staff who participated in the research are relatively new to YL and are working with small groups of teenagers who struggle with both biblical and generic literacy. Some reasons for their lack of biblical literacy are their wrong motivations in approaching the Bible, the plethora of obstacles that prevent Scripture from being a priority, and the fact that they struggle in seeing how it impacts their lives in the twenty-first century. Despite these struggles, reasons for optimism also exist. As Campaigners age, their biblical literacy generally grows, and graduating students are usually in a more mature place of faith than when they started high school.

Under the topic of Goals, I created two primary themes from the data. First, staff hope that Scripture will be central in Campaigners' spiritual formation. This goal is based on a long-term hope of who staff aspire their students to become. The primary goal staff have is for students to view the Bible as a revelation from God through which they can know and experience him. There is also the hope that they will read the Bible through a Christocentric perspective and see Jesus at the centre of the biblical narrative. Second, staff hope that Campaigners will develop the necessary tools to utilize the Bible in their discipleship journey. Again, this goal is long-term and stems from the recognition that students are only in high school for four years. To become resilient disciples, staff hope that through their teaching, students will see the Bible as culturally relevant and approachable.

Under the topic of Method, I discovered that the most effective way to instruct the Bible appears to be through conversational teaching (rather than lecturing), where Campaigners discover Jesus within a community of their peers. By asking open-ended questions that create discussion, balancing the amount of historical context and contemporary application, only studying manageable portions of a passage, and prioritizing translations that assist students in understanding, Campaigners can better grasp the biblical text and more effectively wrestle with how it matters for their life and faith.

Under the topic of Impact, I created two primary themes. First, Campaigners often have a general understanding of content but seem to be lacking the transformation that comes alongside an active and growing relationship with Christ. By leaving lessons with the wrong takeaways and viewing Scripture as important but not authoritative,

students often remain at a surface level reading of the Bible and are not deepening their faith in a way that leads to resilient discipleship. Second, I discovered that although hindrances to pedagogy exist, staff see the best engagement when they creatively adapt their teaching to the needs of their Campaigners and strive for a depth of content that is only possible because of the relationship they have with their youth.

Participatory action research is by nature interpretative and provides a way to report data *and* gauge its significance. This chapter has inaugurated that process by completing part six of Braun and Clarke's steps for reflexive thematic analysis (writing up and reporting themes) and by offering a brief analysis of the significance of the findings. Through this process, a detailed description of the phenomenon of biblical pedagogy, as evidenced by the data, is apparent. The next step is to evaluate the data alongside the research questions that instigated this project. The following chapter applies the data findings to the research questions, highlights the most important discoveries, and theologically reflects on their significance.

CHAPTER 5: ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the field research and sought to provide a detailed description of how YL staff approach teaching the Bible to Campaigners. Using Braun and Clark's six steps of reflexive thematic analysis, I disseminated the survey and interview findings along with a brief analysis of their implications. To present the data, I organized the results into four categories (Demographics and Biblical Literacy, Goals, Method, and Impact), alongside various themes, codes, and general observations. My intention in doing so was twofold. First, it was to invite the reader to follow my journey of discovery as I conducted the research. Second, it was to delineate the essence of my findings as explained by the research participants who joined me in the project.

This fifth chapter aims to answer the research questions proposed in Chapter 1 and to theologically reflect on their significance. In Chapter 4, I sought to "hold up a mirror" to understand *what YL staff do*. Now, I strive to reflect on *why YL staff do what they do.* This distinction is noteworthy. Previously, the emphasis was on *presentation and analysis*. Here, it is on *evaluation and question answering*. As such, this chapter's structure deviates from Chapter 4's categories and is centred instead around the research questions that initially sparked this project.

Project Background

Answering the research questions is the final step in tying together the various sociological elements at work in this dissertation. By moving beyond the "what"

questions of biblical pedagogy to answer the "whys," this chapter is vital for "interpreting the phenomenon or lived experiences that are presented in the data."[1] In doing this, I am seeking to provide an additional layer of depth to the conversation at hand and to integrate the voices of the research participants with my own.[2] As Lucretia Yaghjian writes, theological reflection helps "those who engage in it 'to make sense of their world' through the disciplined and creative exercise of the theological imagination." This is done by "thinking, questioning, constructing, critiquing, speaking, and writing in the conceptual language of theology—in dialogue with our individual and communal experience."[3] Yaghjian effectively summarizes my goal in this chapter as well as practical theology's overarching objective. The "world" I am seeking to make sense of is Bible teaching within YL, and I do this by "thinking, questioning, constructing, critiquing, speaking, and writing" about what I have learned through researching and reflecting on the topic.

Summary of the Research

Before progressing to the research questions, it is worth summarizing the previous chapters. Each chapter has a different purpose and reflects a distinct yet essential component of my question-answering process. Although unique from one another, they play an integrated role in exploring the essence of biblical pedagogy and in answering the research questions.

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[1] Miles and Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 193.

[2] To aid in reflection, an internal question I asked was: "If the data could 'speak' what would it say?" In asking this, my goal was to interpret the large amount of information I collected from the field research.

[3] Yaghjian, "Teaching Theological Reflection Well," 83.

In Chapter 1, I introduced my ministry practice and explained how, through my experience of teaching Campaigners, I noticed a troubling theme: youth frequently lack a comprehensive understanding of Scripture and, by-and-large, struggle to see the Bible as being central and relevant to their faith.[4] In short, they lack biblical literacy. Considering the fundamental role that Scripture plays in the faith of a Christian and the Bible's high value in YL, this disturbed me. To better understand this lack of literacy, I started asking questions about the role of biblical pedagogy in the spiritual vitality of Campaigners and began this practice-led research project to gain insight from my colleagues about how to better instruct Scripture. In commencing this project, I asked one primary question and three secondary questions that I thought would assist me in developing a pedagogical hypothesis. The primary question is: What pedagogical strategies would help better train Campaigners to read and engage with the Bible as they grow into resilient disciples? To address this primary research question, the three secondary questions are: (1) What current methods of teaching the Bible do YL staff use?; (2) Which of these methods are effective or ineffective and why?; and (3) What are effective pedagogical techniques to assist adolescents in learning?

In preparing to commence this dissertation, I adopted a concept called "resilient discipleship" from Kinnaman and Matlock as a way to provide a target for what a vibrant life of discipleship entails. In their book *Faith for Exiles*, the authors develop the phrase "resilient discipleship" to define "*Jesus followers who are resiliently faithful in the face of cultural coercion and who live a vibrant life in the Spirit*."[5] This definition

[4] As John Patton explains, there needs to be a "recovery of and respect for our experiences" (*From Ministry to Theology*, 12). A benefit of practical theology is that it emerges from real ministry experience and addresses problems with tangible solutions.

[5] Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 30 (emphasis original).

fits well with YL's hope for Campaigners and the concept of "resilient discipleship" has been commonplace throughout the organization.

Using resilient discipleship as a goal, I started this dissertation to examine the role of biblical pedagogy in the faith formation of Campaigners. I did not seek to quantitatively track how many Campaigners qualify as resilient disciples. Instead, I asked qualitative questions about Bible teaching in hopes of developing a theory of pedagogy that can be used to train staff in better communicating Scripture (from which resilient discipleship is the optimistic result). I have humble and modest goals for this dissertation. Rather than transform the fields of pedagogy, hermeneutics, or educational theory, in this practice-led research study, my goal is to learn from the experience of YL staff about how to approach teaching the Bible to Campaigners. I hypothesized that by pooling the knowledge of my colleagues, I could amalgamate the findings and present them in an organized and readable way.

In Chapter 2, I explored the integration of practice, theory, and theology within practical theology and discussed why the problem of low biblical literacy exists among Campaigners. After surveying empirical data regarding Canada's religious landscape, it is evident that the Western Church is living in a post-Christendom society where faith by-and-large lacks importance. Campaigners are a part of a postmodern, Generation Z culture that has rarely been exposed to religious matters, and often fail to see faith as having substantial value for ethical and moral living. Using the concept of worldview as a diagnostic tool, I proposed that Campaigners often have a relativistic view of the world and, as a result, struggle to see the Bible as essential in their faith journey. If there is no objectivity and truth, then it is difficult to see Jesus as the *only* way to salvation.

The resulting view of God that many teenagers have is Smith's Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. In this view, Campaigners regularly exhibit freedom (even if it is implicit) to use the Bible to construct God in their image rather than recognize that they are made in his. Campaigners fail to engage in Scripture when their worldview misrepresents their understanding of it. Rather than the Bible shaping their worldview, my observations suggest their relativistic worldview shapes the Bible.

In Chapter 3, I explained my research design and discussed how I address and answer the research questions. In collecting data, I deemed participatory action research to best suit my methodological purposes. Participatory action research emphasizes the role of "stakeholders" in a study and categorizes them as the experts the researcher learns from. Instead of being "research subjects," they became "participants" who worked alongside me. I attained the data needed to answer the research questions by using a survey and interviewing YL staff. In hearing from a variety of voices, I sought to better understand the essence of Bible teaching and learn from my colleagues about their experience in instructing Campaigners.

In Chapter 4, I presented the findings from the field research. In collecting the field data, my role as the researcher was to be a *listener.* First, I needed to listen to my research participants to hear their expertise and wisdom. Second, I needed to "listen" to the data to make sense of it. I did this through reflexive thematic analysis. This form of data analysis allowed me to consolidate the data and present it succinctly. In doing so, the information I collected from dozens of research participants could be displayed in a systematic and organized way.

Secondary Research Questions

In turning to address the research questions, my goal is to integrate and merge the theory and theology discussed throughout this project with the practice of Bible teaching in order to offer meaningful suggestions to YL.[6] Producing knowledge that leads to active change is an essential aspect of practical theology and is what separates it from other academic disciplines that are primarily theoretical.[7] This active knowledge is meant to directly impact YL and is an example of practice-led research within practical theology; it is a sociological exploration into a theological problem with the goal being to develop practical solutions to grow the discipleship of the Church.[8]

In terms of the secondary research questions, my objective in asking them was to gather data that I could apply towards answering my primary research question. By themselves, these secondary questions provide insight and depth into the topic I am addressing in this project, but their primary value is in building a foundation of participant-validated content to work from in approaching the main question that initially sparked this research. Taken together, the secondary questions provide an overview of the experiences of my co-workers and are a concise presentation of what I learned in listening to their expertise.

Central to this discussion is the integration of the five "voices" listed in Chapter 1. As a reminder, these voices are: (1) YL staff; (2) Campaigners (represented through staff); (3) myself as the researcher; (4) the Holy Spirit speaking through Scripture; and (5) academic literature. To succinctly incorporate these voices, the following sections

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[6] See Sullivan, "Making Space," 48.

[7] Miller-McLemore, "Practical Theology and Pedagogy," 178.

[8] Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology*, 25. To reiterate, the practical implementations of my suggestions are meant to occur in part two of this project.

are laid out purposely to prioritize readability and organization. I address the three secondary questions first using the answers provided by my participants. As such, the voices at play are predominantly limited to staff (number one) and Campaigners (number two). An exception to this is the third secondary question, which is a combination of voices from staff (voice one), students (voice two), and academic literature (voice five). After addressing the secondary questions, I turn attention to the primary research question, which is my theological reflection on the data in conjunction with how it relates to Scripture and other theological treatises (voices one through five).[9]

Secondary Question 1: What Current Methods of Teaching the Bible Do Young Life Staff Use?

Description

Before answering the first secondary question, two observations from the field research deserve mentioning. First, I learned that my co-workers frequently share my sentiment that Campaigners struggle with biblical literacy and often forfeit depth in their relationship with Christ as a result. As previously discussed, there are three primary contributing factors to low biblical literacy rates: (1) the wrong motivations that Campaigners have in approaching the Bible; (2) the plethora of obstacles that stand in the way of them doing so; and (3) the difficulties they have in relating Scripture to their modern context. Second, how staff teach is often contextualized by the goals they have. Two central goals seem paramount in framing this discussion on method. The first is that staff hope Scripture will be central to Campaigners' spiritual formation. This goal is

[9] Some of the data in the following section is unavoidably repeated from Chapter 4 but is done so in a different context with a particular focus being on how to make the information practical.

actualized in two ways: (1) staff seek to teach their students that Scripture is the primary way to know and experience God; and (2) staff seek to teach their students that Christ is central to the biblical narrative.[10] The second goal is for students to develop the necessary tools needed to utilize the Bible in their discipleship journey. This is also actualized in two ways: (1) staff seek to teach that Scripture is culturally relevant; and (2) staff seek to teach that the Bible is approachable and understandable for youth to read by themselves. Most Bible lessons seem to be framed and contextualized around these goals, where one's teaching methods assist in achieving their desired outcomes. What staff do, how they do it, and why they do it, tend to revolve around these two goals.

My purpose in asking this secondary research question was to learn how the Bible is taught throughout YL. My motivation was to better understand what happens in Campaigner meetings across the organization and to address the "how" component of teaching (i.e., how is the Bible taught?). As a ministry practitioner, I regularly instruct my own group of students, but I began this project with a desire to also understand what others do. Young Life is a large organization, and I assumed that each individual staff would have a unique method of instructing. To an extent, this assumption proved true. Each YL area *is* different, and each staff member *does* use different Bible teaching methods. In reflecting on the data, however, what surprised me is that strong commonalities emerged.

[10] This does not mean reading the Bible in a way where every passage is an allegory about Jesus. Instead, it is to say that the Bible *bears witness* to Jesus, even if not every passage is a *direct reference* to him.

The most common way of teaching Scripture that I discovered is by running Bible studies where the teacher acts as a guide and facilitator more than as a lecturer. Variations of this exist, but staff consistently explained that their primary form of teaching is through discussion-based conversations where Campaigners discover Jesus within a community of their peers. This is frequently done in a way where the instructor guides students in interpreting the text rather than telling them outright what it means (at least initially), or trusting them to interpret it by themselves. This facilitating emphasis does not mean forsaking the role and value of the teacher presenting content, but it does mean helping students become competent readers of Scripture by challenging them to think critically about the text in relation to their own lives and to process this via discussions. Rather than using wording like, "This is what it means," I found it more common for staff to ask discussion-provoking questions to help students process the material (e.g., "What do you see happening here?"; "What do you think this means?"; "Have you considered that it might mean this. . . ? What do you think about that?"; "That's an excellent thought, but what about. . . ?").

In further exploring this phenomenon, I discovered four methodological components that strongly influence how the Bible is taught. These components are the codes in Chapter 4 that comprise the theme: "Discussion-Based Conversation where Campaigners Discover Jesus within Community," under the section entitled, "Method."

My first methodological discovery is that questions which create dialogue are the most common element of a Bible study. This is keenly important, and my research showed that 96 percent of staff "always" (23 percent) or "often" (73 percent) teach in a way that prioritizes discussions that occur around questions. Two strands of questions

distinguished themselves. First, there are ones that the teacher asks their students. These questions help draw youth back to the text to examine what is written in a passage (e.g., "Take another look at John 1:1, what does it say was 'in the beginning?'"). They also enable Campaigners to consider how a passage causes them to reflect on their own life and faith (e.g., "In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul talks about the importance of love. When are there times in your life where you find it hard to love other people?"; "What are your thoughts on love being an action and not just a feeling?"). Second, there are questions that a teacher encourages their students to ask about the text. The scope of these questions vary anywhere from content they do not understand (e.g., "What does this word mean?"; "What is Jesus talking about when he said . . . ?"; "Where else in the Bible does it talk about . . . ?"), to more theological or abstract questions (e.g., "If Jesus healed the blind man, why did he not heal my grandmother?"; "How does knowing this story impact my faith"?; "What kind of clothes did people wear back then?"). As noted by the research participants, the primary value of these questions is found in the discussions they lead to. By centring a Bible study lesson around these types of conversations, staff encourage Campaigners to immerse themselves in the text and wrestle alongside their peers with not only what the text *meant*, but also what it *means.*

My second methodological discovery is that staff often instruct in a way that balances historical context with contemporary application. I determined that although more staff feel comfortable discussing application, the results represent a comparative split between the two. Ninety-five percent of participants said they are either "very confident" (5 percent), "confident" (58 percent), or "somewhat confident" (32 percent) in teaching historical context, whereas 100 percent said they are either "very confident"

(23 percent), "confident" (50 percent), or "somewhat confident" (27 percent) in teaching application. In further discussing this topic, most staff recognize the need to have both and to emphasize exegesis (reading out of a text) over eisegesis (reading into a text).[11] Participants explained that Campaigners cannot understand what a passage means in a contemporary setting if it has not first been situated in its proper context. As one interviewee said, he "Starts with the context stuff" before moving to application. Doing this teaches Campaigners that although the Bible was not originally written *to them*, it is written *for them* and still holds tremendous meaning and value for discipleship growth.

My third methodological discovery is that most teachers only work through small sections of the text and prefer to study it in small segments (i.e., verse-by-verse or section-by-section).[12] Rather than trying to accomplish too much, I learned that most teachers favour moving slowly to dissect a passage, which avoids overwhelming their students.[13] It is commonly attested that teenagers have short attention spans and can only stay focused for a limited amount of time. By working through small passages, teachers recognize the value of trying not to give their student more than they can receive. A balance is required, however, between not teaching too much, but also ensuring that each passage fits within its broader context (i.e., that of the biblical book it is in, but also the wider story arc of Scripture). It takes wisdom and discernment on the part of the teacher to stretch and grow their students while also taking active steps to avoid burdening them with too much information. By working through small sections of

[11] Although these terms rarely appeared in my transcript notes, they reflect the essence of what was said.

[12] It is also noteworthy that staff more frequently go through books of the Bible as opposed to themes within the Bible.

[13] A caveat to this depends on the type of text being studied. For example, narratives are easier to work through in large sections than Paul's letters.

Scripture and breaking it down into small clusters, the teacher narrows the scope of their lesson to ensure they communicate the main idea of a passage. They also have the freedom to pause and adapt their lesson depending on the conversation to highlight the needs of their students.

My fourth methodological discovery is that most teachers prioritize students' understanding of the text, and this is frequently evident in the Bible translations they use to teach from. Many staff use translations that are more functional/dynamic (e.g., NIV, NLT) than formal equivalent (e.g., NKJV, ESV). Using a translation that forgoes some of Scripture's literal wording for the sake of clarity helps elucidate the key thoughts of a passage and, as one participant said, "removes some of the complexity of a translation." For those who do use a formal equivalent Bible like the ESV, often, they have not given substantial thought to which translation they employ and simply use whatever Bible they read in their own devotions. When careful thought *has* been given to a translation and a formal equivalent has been selected, it is often supplemented with additional translations or descriptive summaries. Participants repeatedly stressed the value of ensuring that God's Word is accessible to every student, regardless of their faith level and intellectual ability. Furthermore, teachers seem more willing to compromise on the exact wording of a passage (the goal of formal equivalent translations) if the main idea can still be communicated in colloquial language (the goal of functional/dynamic translations). Much like how the New Testament was written in the common vernacular of the first-century Greco-Roman world (*Koine* Greek), so too is there value in ensuring that Scripture is accessible in the language that adolescents use and understand today.[14]

[14] See Ward, *Authorized*, 61–86.

Summary

These methodological discoveries comprise the primary elements that form the main theme under "Method" in Chapter 4. By examining these elements, a more complete picture emerges in understanding *what YL staff do.* To amalgamate participants' answers to succinctly address the first secondary question, Bible teaching often looks something like the following: an individual or several volunteers read a short passage out loud for the group. The teacher then summarizes the passage and gives an appropriate amount of background context. The teacher provides examples to explain the passage and asks several well-prepared questions that are a combination of text-based (answers that students can find by looking in the Bible), opinion-based (answers that reflect the views of the students), or application based (answers that students can provide by reflecting on their experiences). The teacher then asks Campaigners to think of any questions they might have before transitioning to the next passage. Questions at the end of a study are also helpful to summarize the discussion, provide takeaways, and help students comprehend how the passage informs them about themselves and God.

Secondary Question 2: Which of these Methods are Effective or Ineffective and Why?

Description

My purpose in asking this question was to gain insight into the usefulness of certain methods of pedagogy over others. I asked participants to reflect on their experiences and communicate what they have found to be effective ways of teaching the Bible and what they have found to be ineffective. As explained in Chapter 1, measuring effectiveness is a challenging task. In asking these questions, I was prompting staff to reflect on their

experience and communicate what they have found works well in helping their students engage with the Bible. In exploring this, I placed a particularly high value on the collaborative component of this dissertation and the benefits of pooling information from YL practitioners across Canada. Amalgamating the voices of experts is the principal value of participatory action research and is an example of where the benefits of learning from others is particularly relevant.

My initial expectation was to evaluate various methods and allocate them into two categories: ones that effectively point students toward resilient discipleship and ones that do not. In conducting the research, however, I discovered that the data did not fit as smoothly into these categories as anticipated. I noticed that my conversations surrounding effectiveness frequently became an elaboration of the first secondary question. By this, I mean participants frequently repeated themselves and discussed why they think the above methods work. Furthermore, when discussing ineffective methods, I noticed that participants often used the vocabulary of "hindrances" to effective pedagogy rather than explain to me entire methods that are ineffective.

Upon reflection, this distinction is logical. Staff operate in a particular way because, to some degree, *their methods seem to be effective*. Similarly, there is little to say about blatantly ineffective methods precisely because *they seem to be ineffective*, and staff do not use them. To reflect this finding, my answers to this secondary research question are slightly different than predicted. To convey the data more accurately, I have organized this question into two sections. First, I outline hindrances that prevent

effective pedagogy. Second, I outline why discussion-based conversations (and its various components) seem to be effective.[15]

Ineffective Pedagogies

As honest as participants were in sharing what has worked well for them, they were equally forthright in sharing hard-learned lessons about what has not. As mentioned, the terminology of "hindrances," rather than "ineffectiveness," is a more accurate representation of the data. Participants often spoke about what "hinders/stops/prevents/impedes" their teaching more than concrete methods they have abandoned as unhelpful. I discovered nine hindrances that prevent the Bible from being taught effectively. Although distinct, each hindrance seems to have the same overall effect: they lead Campaigners farther away from biblical literacy and act as a barrier to resilient discipleship.

The first hindrance to effective pedagogy is a lack of preparation. Teachers must be well prepared and let the truth of God's Word penetrate their own hearts and minds before communicating it to others. One participant advised taking "Twice as long preparing as your lesson is going to be." Without first sitting with the text and grappling with it, teachers will lack the depth needed to break below a surface-level presentation. Much learning goes on in the preparation process, and by not spending time with the text before a lesson, teachers are forgoing the opportunity of being personally impacted by the Spirit and therefore, cannot expect their students to be either. When this happens, the resulting content is shallow and does not lead to depth or quality in a Bible study.

[15] At least relatively. Below, I explain how method is not all that is at stake in pedagogy.

The second hindrance is teaching to *inform* rather than *transform*. As one participant said, “Everybody thinks that information alone is gonna save them,” implying that it cannot. Teaching information, but in a way that misses the Bible’s Christological focus, will prevent Campaigners from experiencing transformation. When information is the focus of a study, the teacher becomes a lecturer and students lose the ownership they need to become invested in the study. Furthermore, the opportunity for youth to wrestle deeply with their heart-felt questions is removed because content has become the *telos*.

Similarly, the third hindrance is trying to accomplish too much in a lesson and not having the patience to trust the journey of discipleship that God is leading youth on. Going too deep into content is just as much a hindrance as staying at the surface level. Having students gain knowledge, but in a way that misses lasting faith, is the antithesis of a successful Bible study. Having the patience to move slowly and trust the process of long-term discipleship is more beneficial than forcing large amounts of information on teens who are not ready to receive it. In exploring this topic, a participant told me of a time when his students “learned a lot, but I don’t think [the Bible study] necessarily helped them in their personal faith.” This was because he failed to properly diagnose the needs of his students and did not help them see the relevance of what was studied. The Campaigners learned information, but they missed out on a deepening of their faith.

The fourth hindrance is not asking well thought through questions. Questions themselves are not transformational, but they lead students below the surface of a text to ask how the Spirit might be speaking to them in their cultural context. As one staff explained, “I think putting as much time and effort into your questions as your Bible

study portion is incredibly important." Questions help students think critically about the text and go beyond asking them to remember biblical dates, times, and places. Well-prepared questions allow teachers to cater toward the needs of their students and help spark conversation to remove the boredom that otherwise occurs when Campaigners are only passive recipients of information and not active learners.[16]

The fifth hindrance is not teaching out of an earned relationship. Teenagers are most open to learning within an environment of trust, where their instructor has earned the right to speak truth into their lives. As one participant said, for Campaigners to listen, they must know it stems from the "personal experience" of someone who lives out what they teach. Another said, "In the ministry of Young Life, 90 percent of discipleship happens in a relational space . . . Most of it is sharing our lives together." A third said, "Partnership is key in discipleship." Pedagogy suffers when the teacher has not taken the time to relationally invest in their students. Like Jesus mentoring his disciples, Campaigners are more prone to learn if they have a relationship with the one teaching them. Equipping students in discipleship is to say as Paul did, "follow my example as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1).

The sixth hindrance is overutilizing study materials to the point where they detract from the teacher's own insight. Teachers know their students best and are acutely aware of their struggles and needs. Relying entirely on outside material might produce an exegetically accurate Bible study but miss the depth of what students *need* to hear. One participant mentioned how spending too much time with commentaries or other resources can detract from a teacher's conscious effort to filter the material and ask what

[16] Perry, *Heart Cries of Every Teen*, 49–65.

would best connect with their students. To teach the Bible well, instructors must contextualize Scripture to the needs of their Campaigners. This does not mean forgoing the use of study tools, but it means recognizing the importance for teachers to "create [their] own material" in conjunction with other resources.

The seventh hindrance is teaching in a way that fails to equip students with the tools needed to read Scripture for themselves. If a primary goal of teaching the Bible is to train students for their own discipleship journey outside of YL, then it follows that a major methodological emphasis needs to be preparing students to read the Bible without relying on someone to do the work for them. Teaching "what is in the Bible" seems different than "teaching the Bible," where the fullness of the Christian narrative and new life in Christ is communicated and where students are shepherded to grow in their love for Jesus.

The eighth hindrance is not teaching in a way that prioritizes students' need to encounter Jesus. When this Christological focus is missed, the Bible becomes no more authoritative than Shakespeare, Lewis, or any other old but important writings. Effective Bible studies are ones that lead students *toward* Christ. As one participant explained, their hope is that Campaigners would "deeply root themselves in God's Word so they would truly fall more in love with him, knowing and trusting he will guide their lives." If a teacher fails to recognize this, the study has lost its entire purpose.

Most importantly, the ninth hindrance is not trusting the Spirit to work in Campaigners' lives. Teaching the Bible is a spiritual practice and is an act of worship and devotion to God. It introduces students to the grace and love of the God who justified, is sanctifying, and who will one day glorify them. Every step of the Bible

study process, from the planning and goal setting to the meeting itself, must be done with worship and the movement of the Spirit in mind. As one participant said, "prayer, prayer, prayer" is needed most. Another said that "preparation, prayer, and faith that the Holy Spirit is present" are the most needed elements of a Bible study. Teaching Scripture is a theological task and must be treated as such. The Bible's words are not in and of themselves divine, but through them, the Spirit bears witness to the One who is.

Effective Pedagogies: Why Do Young Life Staff Use these Methods?

In asking staff what pedagogies are most effective, I found there to be substantial overlap with the first secondary question. Staff use the methods they do *because* they have found them to be effective (at least to some degree). If teaching in a discussion-based format where students encounter Jesus in a community with their peers is effective, a more important question is: *Why do staff think so*?

There appears to be a relatively simple answer to this question: *Scripture is best discovered rather than taught.* Reflecting on experience, participants explained that Campaigners learn best when *they* unpack the Bible. In such a scenario, the one leading the study is a guide and facilitator to ensure that all essential content is discussed and that the group remains theologically orthodox. Questions and a conversational approach help students take ownership and become active participants in the learning process instead of being passive recipients. By approaching their teaching this way, staff believe that Campaigners have a better chance of engaging in the discovery process, retaining the material, and being impacted by it because the students are invested and involved in the process. A survey participant emphasized this when answering the question: Do you

have a “secret ingredient” in effectively teaching students the Bible? If so, what is it? They wrote, “I don’t know if it is a secret ingredient, but I always try to allow discussion and honest thoughts to occur and then steer the conversation from there. It’s always helpful to hear where students are at first, rather than blindly teaching what I think is helpful.” By encouraging conversation, teachers hear the needs of their students and can adjust accordingly to ensure that these needs are discussed. Such adaptation is impossible unless the teacher is prepared to dialogue *with their Campaigners* and not lecture *to them.*

It was particularly noteworthy that most teachers instruct by prioritizing questions. Nearly all participants explained how questions are the driving force behind their lessons. For example, the participant from Chapter 4 who spoke about “peppering the text” provided vital insight into why questions are so essential in the methodological process. By valuing questions, this participant explained the importance of providing space for youth to wrestle with what is on their hearts and minds. He often tells his Campaigners:

> I actually want you to leave here agitated that you asked a question that you didn’t get an answer to, because that means you might go home and look it up for yourself. And you might walk away with less smugness about what the Bible does or doesn’t mean.

By using this approach, Campaigners are forced to struggle with the text and explore it deeply, rather than rely on someone to provide answers for them.

It appears as if the importance of asking questions is twofold. On the one hand, questions create ownership. They cause youth to become actively involved in discovering the text for themselves. Another factor appears to be at work as well, however: asking questions and encouraging teenagers to do the same helps them

embrace the mystery and adventure of faith, while cultivating within them a spirit of humility.

In a world where technology is routinely available to answer questions, there are few spaces in life where students are encouraged to sit in ambiguity and confusion. There appears to be much wisdom, however, in letting them ask hard questions about God, faith, and life. This encourages them to honestly grapple with what is weighing on their heart and forces them to look to Christ for answers that Wikipedia, Siri, or ChatGPT cannot provide. As Gary Newton explains, "While truth never changes, in order to learn it at a heart-deep level, we must experience it personally in as many dimensions of our being as possible through studying, interacting, wrestling, questioning, comparing, critiquing, and practicing."[17] Reading the Bible and asking hard questions allows the Spirit to lead students on an adventure of discovery. They may never arrive at a "perfect" answer, but by journeying through meaningful inquiries, they will discover more of Christ along the way (John 16:13–15). This leads to a spirit of humility, where the pride of routinely being able to find answers to questions is replaced with the necessity of trusting in Christ for answers they may not discover this side of new creation.

Secondary Question 3: What are Effective Pedagogical Techniques to Assist Adolescents in Learning?

Description

My purpose in asking this question was to gain insight into how teenagers learn best and to explore ways of teaching in a way that maximizes the chance of helping them learn.

[17] Newton, *Heart-Deep Teaching*, 60.

The answer to this question differs slightly from the previous two in that addressing it solely based on the responses of the participants is difficult. I am not an educational theorist, nor are my colleagues. From the beginning of this research, I hypothesized that participants might struggle to answer this question with the depth I hoped for. Furthermore, I realized it would be unfair to put my participants in a position where they were not equipped to answer my questions.

In conducting the field research, I *did* gather insight into how adolescents learn; however, this insight was not substantially unique from the previous questions already addressed. In drawing on the previously explained data, the answer to this third question is simple: adolescents learn best when taught through discussion-based conversations where they are encouraged to discover Jesus in a community of their peers. This is done through questions, balancing context and application, working through small sections of text, and prioritizing understanding. Staff use these methods *because* they have discovered them to be relatively helpful ways of helping Campaigners learn.

To uncover more depth, instead of asking participants a question outside of their expertise, I provided them with an educational growth model (Bloom's Revised Taxonomy), and asked questions regarding where Campaigners fall within it. In doing this, my goal was to learn where Campaigners fit on the hierarchy and better understand how to move them towards greater scriptural engagement. In effect, rather than asking: What are effective pedagogical techniques to assist adolescents in learning?, a more adept question became: In light of certain pedagogical techniques that assist adolescents in learning, where are Campaigners currently at, and what strategies would assist them in growing?

Bloom's Taxonomy Explained

In 1881, Oscar Browning published *An Introduction to the History of Educational Theories*, in which he traced various approaches to education throughout history. Browning concluded that educational theories vary and continually evolve to better reflect the needs of a continually changing world.[18] In 1956, Benjamin Bloom developed a helpful framework to discuss learning theories, commonly called "Bloom's Taxonomy." Bloom's Taxonomy is a set of hierarchical models that reflect learning objectives in the domains of knowledge (cognition), emotion (affection), and action (psychomotor).[19] These models have since been widely used within education to help conceptualize how students learn, gain knowledge, and master a subject as they move from lower-order thinking to higher-order.[20]

Beginning from the bottom of the cognitive hierarchy and moving upwards, Bloom hypothesized that learning commences with basic knowledge, then progresses to comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and lastly, evaluation.[21] Explained another way, the first stage of mastery over a subject is to remember basic facts about the topic, and the final stage of mastery is to critically evaluate and make judgments about it. To move up the hierarchy, students must first master the lower-order stages. For

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[18] This is reflected in the frequent updating of educational theory textbooks. See, for example, Olson and Ramirez's *Introduction to Theories of Learning*, which was first published in 1976 and is already in its tenth edition.

[19] See Bloom, ed., *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives.*

[20] The hierarchy began by solely focusing on cognition, but additional models were created to include other components of the learning process (affective and psychomotor). When speaking of "Bloom's Taxonomy," typically, cognition remains the primary focus. The initial element of my discussion remains centred on cognition, but it will be explained below how in teaching Scripture, cognition alone is not enough. For insight into how the Bible impacts multiple learning domains, see Newton, *Heart-Deep Teaching.*

[21] Krathwohl, "Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy," 213.

example, analysis cannot occur before application, and evaluation cannot happen without synthesis.[22]

In 2001, Bloom's Taxonomy was revised by Lorin Anderson and David Krathwohl, two of Bloom's former students. Anderson and Krathwohl amended the Taxonomy to better reflect society's ongoing generational changes and to incorporate more current research into how students learn.[23] Anderson and Krathwohl kept Bloom's hierarchy largely intact but re-phrased the labels to be action-focused (i.e., verb centred) rather than static (i.e., noun centred).[24] From lower level learning to higher level, the cognition hierarchy is now listed as: (1) remember; (2) understand; (3) apply; (4) analyze; (5) evaluate; and (6) create.[25]

I have found Bloom's Revised Taxonomy particularly helpful in conceptualizing the process of learning. When conducting the survey, I included a copy of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy and asked staff to place where their Campaigners best fit regarding their comprehension of Scripture. The results indicate that most staff place their students in the bottom half of the hierarchy. When studying the Bible, staff estimate that 19 percent of Campaigners can only remember basic facets of what they are taught, 32 percent can remember and understand the information, and 22 percent can remember, understand, and apply it. What this means, however, is that only 34 percent fall within the upper half of the hierarchy, where they meet the requirements of the lower levels, but can also analyze (14 percent), evaluate (11 percent), and create new material (9

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[22] See Bloom, ed., *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, 201–7.

[23] Anderson and Krathwohl, eds., *Taxonomy for Learning,* xxi–xxii.

[24] Anderson and Krathwohl also changed the synthesis level to "create" and moved it to the top of the hierarchy.

[25] Anderson and Krathwohl, eds., *Taxonomy for Learning,* 28.

percent). This shows that most Campaigners have a reasonably strong handle on the elementary components of learning but struggle to move beyond it.

Campaigners' struggles are explicit throughout the research data, even without appealing to the hierarchy. I began this dissertation having witnessed that biblical literacy is low, and my research from outside YL (Chapter 2) and within it (Chapter 4) affirm these observations. An emerging question, however, is: How does knowing where Campaigners fall equip staff to propel them forward?

Bloom's Revised Taxonomy Made Practical

By using Bloom's Revised Taxonomy as a framework and by incorporating staff's suggestions as to where Campaigners fit within it, I can now provide a more complete answer to the third secondary question. Effective strategies to assist adolescents in learning will prioritize the higher levels of the hierarchy without forsaking the bottom levels. In particular, this means actively seeking to move students beyond the levels of remembering, understanding, and applying and focusing more heavily on teaching them how to analyze, evaluate, and create new material.[26]

Below is an example of what navigating through the levels of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy might entail, using a Bible study series on 1 Corinthians 13 as an example. First, remembering information means recalling fundamental aspects of a topic from one's long-term memory bank or recalling what was recently discussed from one's

[26] As I explain below, for staff to teach their Campaigners this way, they themselves will need to be taught too. Upon completing this project, I anticipate that one of my future roles in YL will be to delineate my findings to our staff team and discuss how to implement my proposed suggestions.

short-term memory.[27] A Campaigner who has mastered the first level of learning may be encouraged to recall several of Paul's verb descriptors of love (e.g., love is patient, love is kind) after a lesson. Second, understanding information entails constructing meaning and drawing connections between data points.[28] A Campaigner may be able to quote parts of Paul's definition of love (level one learning), but this does not mean they comprehend what it *means* (level two). To understand 1 Cor 13 might mean for a Campaigner to put the text into their own words and summarize its essential elements. Third, to apply information means to carry out and use a procedure in a particular situation.[29] This might include a Campaigner taking the principles taught in a lesson about love and consciously displaying these attributes at school. It might also mean comparing and contrasting a different passage of Scripture (e.g., John 13:34–35) in light of Paul's explanation of love. Fourth, analyzing information means dividing data into its constituent segments and grasping how the individual parts relate to one another.[30] This might entail a Campaigner breaking down Paul's definition of love and differentiating between what love is (e.g., patient, kind, etc.), with what it is not (e.g., envious, boastful, etc.), and being consciously aware of these differences as they seek to live them out. At this level of the Taxonomy, Campaigners may also develop the skills to judge how the biblical definition of love challenges the societal norms they are surrounded by (e.g., that love is lustful and solely sex-related). Fifth, evaluating data refers to a student's

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[27] Other action words associated with remembering include "recognizing" and "recalling" (Anderson and Krathwohl, eds., *Taxonomy for Learning,* 66–70).

[28] Other action words associated with understanding include "interpreting," "exemplifying," "classifying," "summarizing," "inferring," "comparing," and "explaining" (Anderson and Krathwohl, eds., *Taxonomy for Learning,* 70–76).

[29] Other action words associated with applying include "executing" and "implementing" (Anderson and Krathwohl, eds., *Taxonomy for Learning,* 77–79).

[30] Other action words associated with analyzing include "differentiating," "organizing," and "attributing" (Anderson and Krathwohl, eds., *Taxonomy for Learning,* 79–83).

ability to make judgments about a topic based on certain criteria and standards.[31] This might entail a Campaigner listening to a sermon on 1 Cor 13 and judging for themselves whether the speaker is accurately communicating Paul's message. It might also include the student thinking critically about the sermon and identifying areas of agreement and disagreement with what was said. Sixth, creating new information is the final stage of learning mastery. Creating means that a student can successfully reorganize data into a new pattern or structure they were previously unaware of.[32] This final stage of the hierarchy might include a Campaigner putting together their own Bible study, sermonette, or Club talk about 1 Cor 13. It would also involve them applying the previous five stages to reach the learning hierarchy's pinnacle. When all six levels are evident, high-level learning has occurred, and it is possible to say that a student has successfully engaged with the material.[33]

Transitioning to the Main Research Question

In light of these three secondary questions, I now turn my attention to address the primary research question.[34] As Elizabeth Conde-Frazier writes, "Practical theology requires that we read the context of our daily living" in order to theologically reflect on how to revise practices towards greater faithfulness to Christ.[35] The information I have presented is my attempt to "read the context of the daily" lives of YL staff who are

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[31] Other action words associated with evaluating include "checking" and "critiquing" (Anderson and Krathwohl, eds., *Taxonomy for Learning,* 83–84).

[32] Other action words for creating include "generating," "planning," and "producing" (Anderson and Krathwohl, eds., *Taxonomy for Learning,* 84–88).

[33] At least from a methodological perspective. See below for a more nuanced discussion on how other elements of pedagogy in addition to method are also needed.

[34] Safary Wa-Mbaleka et al., "Presenting Findings in Qualitative Research," 244.

[35] Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research," 234.

regularly engaged in the discipleship of teenagers. Learning from them has been fruitful in hearing the voices of experts in youth ministry and pooling their resources. The fact that the topic at hand is rooted in spiritual formation is what makes this an exercise in practical theology as well as sociology.[36] As Root notes, "Youth ministry is theological because its very purpose is to participate in the action of God."[37]

My theological reflection below is presented as the answer to the primary research question. My goal in answering this question is twofold. First, it is to cultivate the new knowledge that arose from this study. Second, it is to provide academic yet practical solutions to Campaigners' low biblical literacy in a post-Christendom world. In doing this, I am developing a theory to present to YL about biblical engagement that I hope will lead to staff becoming more competent teachers of Scripture.

Primary Research Question

What Pedagogical Strategies Would Help Better Train Campaigners to Read and Engage with the Bible as They Grow into Resilient Disciples?

A Unique Discovery

The data presented above is a useful way to conceptualize YL's Bible teaching using the voices of my research participants. By themselves, however, these responses do not represent the totality of my findings, and, as I discovered, the answer to the primary question is not as simple as pulling together the above-mentioned data and summarizing its conclusions. In contemplating my findings, I discovered a deeper essence that was

[36] See Whyte et al., "Participatory Action Research," 20.
[37] Root, *Taking Theology to Youth Ministry*, 55.

not readily apparent when I commenced this project. This additional layer of discovery was unexpected yet proved foundationally insightful.

In beginning to explore the practice of Bible teaching, I wrongly assumed that the issue was predominantly methodological and that I would find the root of the problem in what YL staff *do.* If this assumption proved true, then I hypothesized the solution would also be methodological and would consist of what staff can *do better*. As explained above, I discovered useful method-based information that has substantial implications for how to improve teaching. The answers to the secondary questions are all excellent operational outcomes from the data, yet a problem continues to exist, and *something still appears to be missing.* Method seems to be part of the solution to better teaching strategies but not its entirety. In my research, I uncovered perceptive wisdom that experienced staff had to offer, but the same fact remains: *Despite some strategies of Bible teaching seemingly having better effect than others, Campaigners still struggle to read Scripture and know why it matters for their life and faith.*[38]

Epistemology Informing Method

If improving method is not enough to create strong biblical engagement by itself, then something else is needed to accompany it. Method accounts for the "visible and practical" elements of a Bible study, but it does not account for the deeper essence of *what* is being convey and *why* this is the case. After reflecting on the data and more heavily examining the responses of my participants, I hypothesize that for biblical

[38] This is particularly evidenced by the Impact section of Chapter 4.

pedagogy to be effective, *the focus cannot be entirely methodological, it must also be epistemological.*

Epistemology is the study of knowledge. Michael Proudfoot and A. R. Lacey define it as an "inquiry into the nature and grounds of knowledge," concerned with addressing questions surrounding "What can we know, and how do we know it?"[39] Employing a method and measuring its effectiveness can tell YL staff that something works (i.e., that one way of teaching the Bible is better than another), but it cannot prove *why* this is the case. This is the role of epistemology.

In Chapter 2, I explained that practical theologians within youth ministry must be trilingual. By this, I mean they must be competent in combining practice with theory and theology. Practice (method) is the most visible component of the three, however, it is derived from a foundation built on theory and theology (epistemology). As Root explains, "Practical theology's heart is *not* theology, but ministry. *But ministry (as opposed to practice alone) needs the discourse of the theological to attend to the fullness of its subject*."[40] A metaphor of an iceberg is helpful to explain the merging of method and epistemology. Method is the visible component of the iceberg above the water. Here, this refers to the specific strategies and techniques staff use to teach the Bible. Method is informed (either implicitly or explicitly), however, by epistemological (theoretical and theological) considerations that compose the iceberg under the water,

[39] Proudfoot and Lacey, "Epistemology," 118–22.

[40] Root, *Christopraxis*, 190 (emphasis original). Here, Root equates theology with theory, but the point remains: practice is only as "good" as the theory and theology informing it. Root continues by mentioning, "Theological discourse gives us the best epistemological tools to express and reflect on the reality of God's act in our concrete lives" (190). At the centre of practical theology is ministry, and the space that ministry provides for reflection on how divine action and human experience merge together.

even though it is hidden from sight. One is not significantly more important than the other, but they work in tandem and complement one another.

Epistemology gives substance and depth to what is communicated through method and provides more nuance into *why* certain elements of teaching work better than others and *what* causes them to be successful.[41] My suggestion for how YL should understand this nuance is to return to the conversation of worldview. In Chapter 2, I used worldview to diagnose why problems leading to low rates of biblical literacy exist among Campaigners. Here, I explain how worldview is also part of the solution regarding how YL should conceptualize Bible studies as the organization seeks to point adolescents towards resilient discipleship.

A Return to Worldview

In reflecting on the field research, a question arose: What is the epistemological distinction that complements method in terms of importance? To answer this, I wrote down the various headings of Chapter 4 and filled them in with the previously explained themes. Then, I asked myself: "If I turned these themes into codes, what would be the 'master theme' to summarize their totality?" The answer I postulated was *worldview*.[42]

As suggested by my participants, teenagers have a certain way of viewing faith that is informed by their worldview. In approaching Scripture, I have observed that

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[41] In the second secondary question, I began addressing this "why" component, however, the discussion was still focused on method and came from the perspective of staff. Here, I am using my own voice to further this "why" conversation and add an additional layer of depth to what question two started.

[42] As a reminder, these themes are: Demographics and Biblical Literacy: (1) Low Biblical Literacy. Goals: (2) Staff Hope that Scripture will Be Central to Campaigners' Spiritual Formation; (3) Staff Hope that Campaigners will Develop the Necessary Tools Needed to Utilize the Bible in their Discipleship Journey. Method: (4) Discussion-Based Conversations where Campaigners Discover Jesus within Community. Impact: (5) General Understanding of Content, but a Lack of Heart Transformation; and (6) Effective Pedagogy Happens through Relationships.

Campaigners frequently ask action-oriented questions like: *What can the Bible do for me right now?*, instead of asking ontological questions like: *Through the Bible, who is the Spirit shaping me to become?* A contrast emerges between what students expect from the Bible and what the Bible actually is. This dichotomy is centred around the deeper epistemological element of worldview and reflects a juxtaposition between traditional Christian theism on the one hand, and culture's relativistic secularism and the impact this has on Christian teenagers on the other.[43]

Scripture teaches that Christians have received a new identity in Christ, where they have been redeemed through the cross. They now possess a vocation as redeemed image bearers of God to reflect him to the world as he reconciles it to himself. In the culture in which teenagers live, however, there is a notion of them creating their own truth, being who they want to be, and living in pursuit of pleasure. The guiding framework that shapes these beliefs is Crain's slogan of "feelings are the ultimate guide, happiness is the ultimate goal, judging is the ultimate sin, and God is the ultimate guess."[44] These two worldviews are at odds with one another, and Campaigners find themselves caught in the middle. They have a rudimentary understanding of faith and Christian theism, yet feel the pull of a relativistic society to deviate from their beliefs (if not reject them) and create their own truth instead.

It appears as if Campaigners are looking for something to ground their worldview in and will cling to whatever they think will help traverse the challenges of twenty-first century high school. Their interpretation of the Bible frequently appears as though they are searching for a "Jesus Genie" who will grant them wishes and do so in

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[43] See Bird, *Religious Freedom in a Secular Age*, 11.
[44] Crain, *Faithfully Different*, 52.

their timeframe. In actuality, however, this "search" appears to be rooted in a worldview-centred cry of their heart that is calling out: *What does the Bible mean for me as I struggle to be a teenager in a world diametrically opposed to the faith I profess?* Campaigners struggle with engaging in Scripture when they have practical needs they think or feel that God is not meeting. When this occurs, their faith begins to suffer, and pedagogy loses its desired effect. Moreover, the resulting view of God becomes Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, where God is created and morphed into the image of his creation (Campaigners), instead of his creation understanding and living out their vocation as ones made in his.[45] Furthermore, if God's benevolence or omnipotence (i.e., his goodness and power) are called into question, then the resulting temptation is for Campaigners to try and solve their own problems instead of having faith to trust him throughout their struggles. The long-term consequence of this is a shaky faith built on a skewed perception of God and not the resilient life of discipleship that leads to intimacy with Christ. In such an occurrence, excellent teaching methods lose their significance if a Campaigner's view of the Bible and God is already askew.

Biblical Importance and Authority

As frequently explained throughout the field research, staff regularly observe the challenges teenagers face in grasping how the Bible relates to their life and faith. A divide seems to exist between students seeing the Bible as important versus it having authority. As one participant noted, his students think, "why should [the Bible] have authority over my life? I'll just believe it. I don't actually need to let it have authority

[45] As Smith explains, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism has become the newest "religious faith for our culturally post-Christian, individualistic, mass-consumer capitalist society" (*Soul Searching*, 262).

because to let it have authority means I need to change my behaviour." This response accurately summarizes the problem: because of students' worldviews, the Bible does not *appear* to relate to their lives in a practical way. At best, they cognitively view it as a book on ethics and history, and at worst, it is outdated, boring, and expendable (especially with the prevalence of technology and distractions that are so readily available). Scripture may be important as a historical document or something youth understand "should" matter for their professed faith, but if that is all it becomes, they will fail to live any differently because of it. More importantly, they will fail to meet and encounter Jesus who is at the heart of the biblical narrative. Essentially, the Bible is perceived as important because it taught people long ago about God and teaches Christians today what they should and should not do, but it is not authoritative because it fails to breathe God-inspired culturally relevant truth in the same way it once did.

As Root explains, "Our goal is not necessarily to turn adolescents into interpreters of the Bible, but rather, to help them use the Bible to interpret the action of God in their lives and in the world. There is no salvation in the Bible; there is salvation only in encountering the living God."[46] If this "goal" is not actualized, Campaigners may openly view the Bible as important, but little else.[47] If the Bible is "living and active" and if it truly is inspired by God for the benefit and growth of the Church, then the problem at hand is not Scripture itself, nor is it entirely methodological. The issue is *worldview* and the fact that struggling adolescents often have an inaccurate

[46] Root, *Unpacking Scripture in Youth Ministry*, 40.

[47] Especially among a generation who, as one participant explained, are "hardwired to rebel against authority."

interpretation of what the Bible is (even if they do not realize it) and therefore have an off-centred perception of how God is transforming their lives.

Teaching in Light of Worldview

After examining the field research, my working theory is that *for YL staff to effectively instruct Campaigners in the Bible, they must be aware of the worldview that Campaigners have and teach in a way that addresses the longings and needs of Generation Z living in a postmodern world*.[48] This does not mean catering to a Moralistic Therapeutic Deistic perception of God and changing the gospel so it "feels good." Instead, it means contextualizing the biblical narrative in a way that does not compromise its orthodoxy.

In Chapter 2, I presented Sire's definition of worldview, but it is worth repeating. Worldview is:

> A commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) that we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.[49]

Sire's definition illuminates the dichotomy pulling Campaigners away from the Bible. Although they have made a "*commitment*" to Christ, this has not always translated into a "*fundamental orientation of the heart*." In a postmodern society that rejects metanarratives, it is a foreign concept to understand Christianity as an objective

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[48]As noted in Chapter 2, postmodernism does not always equate to atheism. Furthermore, it is best described as a worldview within a worldview. My argument here is that postmodernism has certain assumptions and predispositions (particularly relativism) that are at odds with the biblical narrative (as does any other worldview outside of Christian theism).

[49] Sire, *Universe Next Door*, 6.

"*story*." Instead, teenagers frequently have a relativistic view of Christianity, where it is seen as one of many options for moral living, however, one that is dominated by rules and regulations (i.e., wrongly held "*presuppositions . . . about the basic constitution of reality*"), that fails to provide a sustainable and life-giving "*foundation on which we live and move and have our being.*"

In a postmodern society where any notion of a story that binds culture together has been erased, my research suggests that teenagers must see the Bible as a "culturally conditioned revelation of God's Word that needs to be worked out in a modern context."[50] By living within a cultural milieu that rejects metanarratives, adolescents (often inadvertently) are forced into creating their own rule of life regarding what constitutes "good living," yet they have no absolutes or forms of objectivity on which to base these decisions.[51] Young Life staff then face the resulting implications, which include a disengagement from Scripture, a failure to understand why the Bible matters, an unsubstantiated view of God, and ineffective pedagogy. What they teach (i.e., their content) might be theologically sound, and their methods might be strong, but it will be incomplete if they fail to consider how their pupils understand themselves, God, Scripture, and culture.[52] If what YL *does* is not *framed within* the theory and theology of how teenagers interpret reality, beneficial teaching methods will fall on deaf ears. This is because staff will inevitably speak *past* Campaigners and not *with and to* them, preaching a doctrinal gospel that might be theologically orthodox, but that fails to invite

[50] McKnight, *Blue Parakeet*, 201.
[51] Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 63.
[52] It is noteworthy that in considering the worldview of teenagers, one's theology still needs to be sound and their methods strong. Teachers accounting for the worldview of their students does not override the need for a robust and holistic approach to instructing but simply makes pedagogy more complete.

teenagers into the story of Christ to personally encounter his love within the society in which they live.[53]

If worldview is an important epistemological "link" that accompanies method within pedagogy, the resulting question is: How does it fit within Bible teaching? As stated, what I am suggesting is more of a theory that contextualizes teaching than it is direct content or a method to use. Where and how, then, does it fit? After reflecting on my research, I have adapted a phrase called "worldview apologetics," that I suggest is a way of applying this epistemological consideration.[54]

Worldview Apologetics: The Christian Narrative Tells a More Complete Story

Scholars have postulated various terminologies to articulate a reasonably similar concept to worldview apologetics. Christopher Watkin, for example, uses "biblical critical theory,"[55] Chatraw, "inside out apologetics,"[56] and McGrath, "narrative apologetics."[57] From a YL perspective, I define "worldview apologetics" as being *a framework through which staff must work together with Campaigners to help them see how the biblical narrative offers a more complete and compelling story than the rest of society about the meaning and purpose of life and faith.*

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[53] This does not mean that YL staff always have a biblically accurate worldview either. Staff live in the same culture as their students and face the same struggles and challenges. The contrast is less between "staff versus students," and more between "Christian theism and anything that opposes it." My goal in this study was not to critique my participants' worldview and so the following discussion centres primarily on students'. This caveat is an important reminder though.

[54] I have not borrowed the phrase "worldview apologetics" from other sources and applied it to my research. I use the terminology "adapted" rather than "coined," however, because after conducting an online search, it is evident that others have used it as well (see, for example, https://ephesiology.com, where an online Christian course called "Worldview Apologetics" is offered). Below is my definition of how I employ the phrase.

[55] See Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory.*

[56] See Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story.*

[57] See McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*.

My research data has led me to hypothesize that a fundamental component of teaching the Bible must be helping Campaigners see that Scripture offers comprehensive worldview answers to foundational questions regarding what it means to be human. Generation Z is an experiential generation wrestling with questions like: Who am I? (identity); Do I matter? (value); Why am I here? (purpose); and Can I make a difference? (agency/vocation).[58] Teenagers do not necessarily give their allegiance to what is factually and objectively true. Instead, they give their allegiance to what makes the most sense of their experiences as they live within a culture that has largely rejected objectivity and God.[59]

To help understand these implications, Lesslie Newbigin's distinction between facts and values is helpful. Newbigin argues that a difference exists between objective facts (e.g., gravity) and subjective values (e.g., religious beliefs). Although distinct from one another, the two are interrelated in that facts provide a framework for understanding reality, and values provide the means through which to interpret and give meaning to facts.[60] From Campaigners' perspective, as they approach faith, they appear less worried that Christianity be an objective fact and are more concerned with understanding how to interpret faith within the cultural values they hold. A Christian theistic worldview contends that the biblical narrative *is* factually true and would not be worth following if

[58] Baumeister, *Meanings of Life*, 29–57. These questions are also contained within Sire's eight worldview questions listed in Chapter 2.

[59] Experience and truth are not identical, and the lack of experience does not equate to a lack of truth. Truth is objective, whereas experience is subjective. The point here is that teenagers learn well through experience, and as they approach Scripture, the questions they ask are typically experiential (see Newton, *Heart-Deep Teaching*, 11–12).

[60] See, for example, Newbigin, *Gospel in a Pluralist Society.*

not.[61] What seems to be an important accompaniment to this, however, is that the biblical narrative is also *complete*. Because Christianity is true, it offers fuller answers to the central worldview questions that teenagers are implicitly or explicitly asking. As a result, it presents the best story for youth to centre their lives around. This "completeness" appears to be the missing value-centred link that Campaigners are struggling with as they approach the Bible. They are confused as to how Scripture helps them interpret the world and fail to see it as being a necessary tool in the hermeneutical process of understanding society as well as the complexity of their own lives.

Vincent Donovan, a missionary in Africa, wrote in his journal that "Christianity must come to . . . people in their way, not ours."[62] Donovan was referring to spreading the gospel to remote tribes, but the concept applies equally well to the current discipleship of Campaigners in Canada. For example, trying to doctrinally argue teenagers into submission to Christ will not produce resilient disciples. Instead, based on the postmodern world in which they live, a more prudent way seems to be guiding them into seeing how Jesus makes sense of their lives, as evidenced through the Bible.[63] In my experience, Campaigners care less about questions regarding: Is it true?, and are more concerned with: Does it work?[64] Campaigners rarely need an apologist to scare them away from hell, argue them into the kingdom, or intellectually convince them of God's existence.[65] Instead, they need an introduction to the Good Doctor who does soul

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[61] See 1 Cor 15:14, for example, where Paul writes, "if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith" (cf., v. 17). Traditional apologetics does not erase the need for faith but attempts to show the plausibility of it.

[62] Bowen, ed., *Missionary Letters of Vincent Donovan*, 114.

[63] See Shelley *Helping Those Who Don't Want Help*, 59.

[64] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 17.

[65] See the discussion throughout McDowell, ed., *New Kind of Apologist*.

surgery on the deepest corners of their hearts as they seek to find their identity and purpose (Ezek 36:26; Matt 9:9–13; Mark 2:13–17; Luke 5:27–32).

My theory is that for the methodological component of biblical pedagogy (as outlined in Chapter 4 and evaluated in the first half of Chapter 5) to be effective, staff must frame their teaching in a way that helps Campaigners understand the gospel to be: (1) a philosophical worldview that makes sense of society and culture; and (2) something that is truly good news and desirable for their lives.[66] This is not a way of teaching (method), or even specific content to teach, but instead, is a framework of teaching that underlines the biblical content being discussed.

In a society that rejects metanarratives, Campaigners are searching for a way to make sense of their lives and the culture around them. As Chatraw explains, people tend to have certain "ideals and beliefs, but . . . these assumptions don't always make much sense within their current script." The solution is, "They need a *better* story."[67] This story is the Christian narrative, which gives a more complete picture of reality and truer insight into the character and nature of God. For YL's purposes, it is a narrative through which staff can help Campaigners see the movement of God in their lives, as well as his invitation for them to be a player within his story.[68]

My proposal of having worldview apologetics frame YL's teaching is meant to accomplish two tasks, both explained by Watkin. First, it is meant to "expose the main flaws in the dominant culture's narratives, showing how they fit neither human nature

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[66] Frame, *Apologetics*, 31–32.

[67] Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story*, 17 (emphasis original).

[68] There is controversy surrounding whether to classify Christianity as a "metanarrative." I purposefully avoid that debate here and use the language of a "bigger" and "better" story instead (see Vanhoozer, "Disputing about Words," 192).

nor our most profound intuitions about life." Second, it is meant to "point to the beauty and truth of the gospel as the source of numerous fulfilling counternarratives."[69] The challenging role that Bible teachers face as they disciple youth is to show them that the biblical narrative is a story "within which all other stories find their place."[70] Stated another way, through studying the Bible, my hope is for Campaigners to see how Scripture makes more sense of their lives and culture than anything else around them. Not only does the Bible introduce them to the characteristics and nature of God, but it also points them towards what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls a "better worldliness," as they navigate the eschatological contrast of the "already but not yet" of the kingdom.[71] Improved ethics that result from a renewed heart do not come from Campaigners trying to follow the rules of the Bible but from letting the Spirit do its transformative work in changing them. Only when this happens can Christ-followers properly set an example for those around them about what it means to be fully human (i.e., created in the *imago Dei*). When this framework underscores pedagogy, my research suggests that students have a better chance of understanding that society's cultural narratives are not complete and fulfilling (task one), whereas the biblical narrative is (task two).

Inviting Campaigners into God's Story: A Return to Narrative Theology

In explaining worldview apologetics as a teaching framework, I am advocating for YL staff to better understand the role of narrative theology in their teaching. In Chapter 1, I presented an overview of YL's view of Scripture and provided a brief outline of the

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[69] Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, xvi.

[70] Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 21. As Watkin explains, it is not about "being the most gripping or necessarily satisfying; it is about telling the *bigger* story" (21) (emphasis original).

[71] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 60.

ecclesiastical and theological positions that the organization holds. As explained, my best estimation is that YL's theological positioning is a rough combination of scholastic and narrative theology. Scholastic theology and its emphasis on doctrine is important for formulating beliefs in accordance with traditional orthodoxy. Narrative theology, however, is an important accompaniment to this in that it assists an experiential generation in participating in God's story.[72]

Young Life's view of Scripture fits within narrative theology through its use of storytelling and metaphors to communicate the gospel to students at Club and Camp. In reflecting on my research findings, however, I propose that narrative theology should also be instrumental in the discipleship of Campaigners. The reason for this is that narrative theology speaks to the *experiential cry* of Campaigners' hearts that stems from their worldview. My participants communicated to me that whether youth can articulate it or not, what they desire is an encounter with Jesus where their faith is made practical and tangible (i.e., experiential). In essence, they are longing for the experience of faith that comes from Christ (through the Spirit) meeting them amidst the confusion of their lives and telling a complete and encompassing narrative about their identity, value, purpose, and agency.

In the Impact section of Chapter 4, I explained how it was commonly reported that students have a general understanding of biblical content but lack heart-level transformation. For this transformation to occur, the data suggests that students must see Scripture as being both important and authoritative. Pedagogy that is only doctrinal will

[72] As noted, when applied correctly, narrative theology does not negate doctrine or systematic theology. Instead, they work symbiotically to provide depth to the biblical story. Doctrine and systematic theology provide parameters and guardrails to narrative theology and add to it significance and depth, but do not contradict or negate the enduring story element of Scripture.

emphasize the importance of Scripture but will fail to make it authoritative. For the Bible to be authoritative, students must see it as an invitation into the story of God through which the power of the Spirit works to shape and mould their hearts and minds (Rom 12:2; Eph 4:23).[73] This is, in essence, a key part of narrative theology. Scripture is authoritative *because* it is anchored in the truth of Christ, not because its totality is doctrine to learn, commandments to obey, and history to memorize. All of these elements are fundamental components of the Bible, but if Campaigners *only* see doctrine, ethics, or history, they will miss encountering Jesus and the life to the fullest that a relationship with him offers (John 10:10b). Returning to Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, engaging with Scripture cannot only be cognitive, it must also be emotion (affect) and action (psychomotor) centred. If pedagogy is only doctrinal (i.e., what to believe), it will only affect the cognitive domain of Campaigners and will not penetrate to their heart (emotions), or impact how they live (actions).[74]

In McGrath's *Narrative Apologetics*, he outlines how stories are a crucial element in approaching, affirming, defending, and explaining the Christian faith.[75] To be human, McGrath asserts, is to ask worldview questions related to who we are, why we exist, and why life matters. To answer these questions, humans tell stories (both individually and collectively) that address core components of our humanity.[76] In doing this (and without replacing the need for doctrine), narrative theology helps Campaigners

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[73] Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God*, 24–25.

[74] McMaster Divinity College's paradigm of "knowing, being, and doing" is a helpful accompaniment to what I am explaining here. In the life of a disciple, all three elements are needed and are incomplete without each other. Here, I am drawing attention to the "being" component of the paradigm (ontology) and how formation is a central component of discipleship. Information (knowing) is important, as is action (doing), but they must be rooted in the new identity that followers of Christ have received.

[75] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 7.

[76] McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 9–10.

discover, understand, and unpack the biblical story in a way that invites them to enter God's grand narrative. Scripture is not simply telling hundreds of various stories collected into sixty-six books and two testaments; instead, as Rowan Williams explains, from Genesis to Revelation the Bible is telling "one focal interpretative story of Jesus."[77] Although the Bible is complex and demands the use of various hermeneutical and exegetical methods to study it, the reader of Scripture must never lose sight of "God at work in his creation and among his people."[78] As John Westerhoff firmly proclaims, "At the heart of our Christian faith is story. And at the heart of Christian education must be this same story . . . Unless the story is known, understood, owned, and lived, we and our children will not have Christian faith."[79]

My purpose here is not to describe exactly how the Christian narrative tells a better story; others do this in extensive detail elsewhere.[80] My intention, rather, is to explain my hypothesis about how effective pedagogy stems from a deeper epistemological understanding of adolescents' worldviews and how "story" plays a role in it. To instruct the Bible well, teachers need to first know how their students see Scripture and the world around them and then, with grace and truth, show them how God meets all their needs in Christ. Youth are storytelling beings trying to answer worldview questions about the meaning of life. In accordance with this, worldview apologetics is primarily concerned with showing youth how Christianity works for their lives amidst a confusing and convoluted world.[81] Youth might struggle with

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[77] Williams, *Resurrection*, 68.

[78] Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 79.

[79] Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*, 32.

[80] See, for example, Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*; Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*; Wright, *Simply Christian*; and Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story.*

[81] Downey, "Perspective on Narrative Theology," 291–92. This does not negate the need for truth and objectivity amidst a relativistic world, however. Christianity "works" because it is true.

understanding *doctrine*, but they do understand *narrative*. As the Spirit illuminates the story of the Bible, the reader discovers that in approaching Scripture, they discover it to be a *better narrative* than anything else about what it means to be human and made in the image of God. The Bible's narrative does not erase the need for other forms of theology, nor does it make experience and a reader's interpretation of the text the only hermeneutical tool at play. Instead, focusing on the story arc of Scripture is a *worldview-centred contextualization of the gospel that shares the truth about Jesus in a way that makes sense to a generation struggling to understand how their faith impacts their daily lives.*

Worldview Apologetics and the *Missio Dei*

A central reason for studying the Bible in YL is for Campaigners to learn the importance and value of working with Christ in the *missio Dei*.[82] Christopher Wright states that "*our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation.*"[83] A helpful way to think about the *missio Dei* is not simply as the "mission of God," but also as the "story of God." This story is the overarching arc of the Bible: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. It is a story of a loving God on mission to redeem a broken creation that has turned away

[82] As a reminder, YL is a missionary organization dedicated to helping Campaigners become missional in their faith. The *missio Dei* is a recognition that God is a missionary God: the Father sent the Son. The Father and the Son sent the Spirit. Now, the Father, Son, and Spirit are sending the Church into the world to announce the kingdom and reign of God (see Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390).

[83] Wright, *Mission of God*, 22–23 (emphasis original).

from him in sin.[84] The mission is God's, but followers of Christ share in that mission and work alongside him as "co-workers in God's service" (1 Cor 3:9).

Based on my research, I suggest that when Campaigners better understand the biblical story and their place within it, the Bible is more likely to become living and active in a way that encourages the reader to participate in a drama that revolves around the incarnation, death, resurrection, and mission of Jesus. This framework helps youth see that the Bible tells a better story than that of society, with Jesus as the hero, and invites them to respond. No longer is the Bible solely an antiquated book centred around rules; instead, it is a grand narrative about God's redemptive plan through Christ.

Teenagers are practical and concrete thinkers who struggle with abstract concepts. To grow in biblical literacy, they must tangibly understand and experience the narrative that Jesus offers them. This begins with accepting Scripture's invitation to become a player in God's story and to live out the current act of God's drama in which Christians are characters.[85] This drama commenced with the Bible's first words: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). It carries on through its last: "He who testifies to these things says, 'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen" (Rev 22:20–21). And it extends to the present day. Helping teenagers understand and experience this story is the purpose of worldview apologetics.

Ultimately, what I hope will develop in Campaigners is a deeper and richer love for Jesus. In conducting the field research, I had frequent conversations with colleagues,

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[84] See McKnight, *Community Called Atonement*, for helpful language about humans being cracked image bearers (*eikons*) as a way to describe humanity's condition before God (15–24).

[85] Bartholomew and Goheen, *Drama of Scripture*, 15. See also Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding*; and *Drama of Doctrine*.

where together we asked: Why do Campaigners not love the Bible? In hindsight, perhaps a more fundamental question is: Do they love Christ? As staff help Campaigners see the better story that Scripture tells, the ultimate *telos* is a stronger love for Christ, from which a more profound desire to read and study the Bible follows. If Campaigners do not love Jesus, they will not (and cannot) love Scripture. Additionally, for the above reasons, I do not fathom how pedagogy can be effective. When, however, students respond in faith to the Bible's invitation to encounter Christ, I suggest that transformation through the Spirit is more likely to occur.

Section Conclusion

My purpose thus far has been to theologically reflect on my findings in this dissertation and explain why method is not the *only* consideration within pedagogy. Method is important, but it does not seem to be entirely indicative of a successful Bible study. When method and orthodoxy are sound, yet struggles in biblical literacy exist, something else must be contributing to it. I conclude that these struggles often result from a relativistic worldview where Generation Z frequently fails to see why Scripture is authoritative for their lives. When this occurs, a lack of love for the Bible is not surprising, it is expected. By identifying the influence that worldview has, however, I propose that steps can be taken to rectify the problem. When one's teaching focus shifts from "method alone" to "method built on epistemology," then even as generations change and new demographics of students arrive, the theory and theology underlining method will hopefully remain timeless, despite certain teaching practices becoming obsolete.

To provide a succinct answer to the main research question: in teaching the Bible to Campaigners, YL staff must have a more holistic view of pedagogy beyond just method and take seriously the epistemological (theoretical and theological) considerations that ultimately provide the foundation for what is conveyed through method. Neither is complete without the other, and pedagogy cannot be effective when the former does not include the latter. Method is still important and can take a "good" Bible study and make it "better," but by itself, it cannot point students toward resilient discipleship. A broader view of teaching that takes into consideration the worldview of students is also needed.

As Lewis famously stated, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen—not only because I see it, but because by it, I see everything else."[86] Lewis's argument is that the Christian worldview provides a more encompassing way to think about life than all other secular philosophies. Similarly, I propose that for pedagogy to be effective, worldview must be central in a teacher's mind, and its implications be evident to students who are learning how to follow Jesus. By using worldview apologetics as an epistemological framework, my suggestion to YL is that Bible teachers must plan their lessons around how youth see the world and seek to show their students how the scriptural narrative offers a more complete story for them to anchor their lives in. This narrative focus does not replace doctrine but instead accompanies it and helps an experiential generation better understand how the gospel is practical and relevant to their lives. Furthermore, this focus communicates how the centre of the Bible is not rules to follow but a person (Christ) to love, who is worth giving up everything to serve.

[86] Lewis, *Weight of Glory*, 140.

Practically, taking worldview into consideration will mean shaping and altering the questions asked in a Bible study, facilitating conversation to relate the Bible to Campaigners' experiences, and showing them how God meets all their needs in Christ (Phil 4:19).[87]

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has been an evaluation of the field research I completed in pursuit of a deeper understanding of biblical pedagogy within YL. The components within it were threefold. First, I reviewed the previous chapters and explained how they form a necessary part of the research process where I articulated the problem (Chapter 1), the problem's origin (Chapter 2), how the problem is addressed (Chapter 3), what data exists regarding the problem (Chapter 4), and now, a solution to the problem (Chapter 5). Second, I addressed the three secondary questions using the data collected from the field research. Third, I addressed the primary research question and explained how my findings provide a more complete picture of the research topic.

I started this dissertation wrongly assuming that YL's problem with biblical literacy is methodological and that the solution would be found in refining techniques. Although I discovered helpful techniques for improving method, these findings were not "revolutionary," nor did they summarize the totality of the data I collected. Upon reflecting on my findings, I concluded that epistemology is a needed accompaniment to method and helps address fundamental questions about why certain elements of teaching work and others do not. In discussing this, worldview once again became central to the

[87] See Chapter 6 for an overview of a practical example where I have applied this theory in a Bible study.

conversation. I used worldview earlier to identify why teenagers struggle with Scripture, but it also appears significant in explaining how to teach them more effectively.

Ultimately, staff might keep doing much of what they are doing in terms of their teaching method. Outside of the methodological suggestions listed above, there does not appear to be a "magic formula" to teach Scripture. What is an important supplement to method, however, is framing biblical conversations within a larger context of worldview and introducing Campaigners to the better and more encompassing story that Jesus tells, which penetrates their every nuance (including their emotions and actions). When a particular teaching method leads to excellent engagement among students, it is most likely because, in some way, the content addresses their worldview.

The Bible contains doctrine, but that is not its entirety. The Bible is better conceived of as an *invitation*, an invitation to experience the presence of God as he renews the hearts of his children, redeeming them through the cross, and turning them into new creations. As Newbigin notes, "The Bible tells a story that is *the story,* the story of which our human life is a part. It is not that stories are part of human life, but that human life is part of a story."[88] In other words, there is no part of a teenager's life in which Jesus is not saying, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me" (Rev 3:20).

Studying the Bible is more than a cognitive exercise, which explains why progressing through Bloom's Revised Taxonomy is not the end goal of a lesson. Every Campaigner within YL could hypothetically move to the top of the hierarchy, yet still

[88] Newbigin, *Open Secret*, 82 (emphasis original).

miss the depth of Scripture. This is because, in this context, the top of the hierarchy is not "creating," it is *love for Christ*. As explained above, the Taxonomy has many uses and provides an excellent "measuring stick" for gauging Campaigners' biblical comprehension. By itself, however, the Taxonomy is incomplete because method *alone* cannot lead students to intimacy with Christ. What seems to be more holistic is using the Taxonomy to help communicate the deeper essence of biblical engagement that is needed in helping youth experience the gospel. Method can get a student "part way," but the building blocks for effective teaching seem to begin with helping Campaigners realize that studying the Bible is not about creating their own truth but about recognizing God's. As Chatraw states, "We can't expect unbelievers to build along with us as we leverage ideas grounded in a preconceived rational framework they don't necessarily share."[89] The same applies to Campaigners. If their worldview is not recognized and accounted for, then they will continually fail to engage with Scripture and understand why it is authoritative for their lives.

Despite excellent teaching, it must be noted that resilient discipleship is never a guarantee. As philosophers such as Gilbert Ryle explain, teachers can only provide students with the "wherewithal" (i.e., the tools needed) to approach a particular subject. It is then the students' responsibility to apply them.[90] As teachers of Scripture, however, my colleagues and I must work hard to provide this "wherewithal," and it is our responsibility to consider the needs of our Campaigners and contextualize the gospel message without compromising its integrity.

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[89] Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story*, 63.
[90] Ryle, "Teaching and Training," 465.

I discovered that staff often have excellent goals and methods in teaching the Bible. The problem is that both teachers and students tend to view the Bible cognitively, when their hearts long for *experience*. Because of this, not only does their view of the authority of Scripture diminish, but so does their love for God. When doctrine-centred biblical authority feels forced, teenagers are hardwired to rebel. But, when the focus turns to instilling in them a love for Christ and an understanding of how faith is made practical, a love for Scripture is more likely to follow.

Former YL staff member Drew Hill argues, "If kids can just get a glimpse of who Jesus Christ truly is, they can't help but fall in love with him."[91] Hill's argument is overly optimistic, however, the concept is noteworthy. Throughout Jesus's ministry, his numerous adversaries saw far more than a glimpse of his nature yet continued to reject him. The sad reality is that a proportion of teenagers will too. Perhaps, Hill's statement should be re-written as, "*unless* kids get a glimpse of who Jesus Christ truly is, they *cannot possibly* fall in love with him" (cf. Matt 7:14). Through my involvement in YL, experience has suggested that few Christian teenagers have an adequate understanding of who Jesus is, or how deeply loved and valued they are by God. It logically follows that a misunderstanding of his nature will negatively influence them amidst false expectations regarding how they think and feel God should act in their lives.

In considering youth ministry, Root and Dean ask, "Does the God presented by . . . churches pacify adolescents with pizza and youth groups, or does God satisfy their deepest longings and deliver them from their most profound dreads?"[92] Through Campaigner Bible lessons, my hope is that teenagers will understand that Jesus meets

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[91] Hill, *Alongside*, 48.
[92] Root and Dean, *Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, 65.

their deepest needs (Phil 4:19), that they are friends of God (John 15:15), who are adopted into his family (Rom 8:15), and who have a purpose and vocation (Matt 28:16–20; Matt 22:36–40; Mark 12:28–34; Luke 10:25–28). By speaking to the cultural relevance of Scripture, my hope is also that staff will communicate the new identity students have received from becoming children of God (Gal 3:26). As Paul writes to the Corinthians, "if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Cor 5:17). As believers in Christ, Campaigners have been reconciled with God (Rom 5:10), they are God's workmanship (Eph 2:10), and have peace with him (Rom 5:1). This way of being human outlined in Scripture is eternally relevant, and without students understanding this, the Bible cannot be central to their faith amidst the relativistic world in which they live. When it is understood, however, this new identity allows youth to live a holy, gospel-saturated, question-provoking life to those around them (1 Pet 3:15–16).

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Introduction

In this practical theological project, I have sought to articulate my chain of logic as I thought through, researched, and addressed questions that directly affect the work of YL staff as they disciple Campaigners. The stakes are high when the questions one addresses arise from real ministry experience. As a result, throughout this practice-led research dissertation, my intention has not been to simply propose new ideas but to suggest actual solutions to real problems.

My interest in practical theology stems from my conviction that Christian ministry (i.e., practice) is a viable "text" for theological analysis. Doing practical theology means navigating through a paradigm of practice, theological reflection, and renewed and improved practice. This circular paradigm reflects the importance of critically assessing what Christians *do* to develop new practices that lead to greater faithfulness to Christ. My work in this dissertation has initiated this paradigm and I have engaged in critical theological reflection on an important practice within YL. The next step is to implement my proposed suggestions and gauge their effectiveness. Doing so does not guarantee resilient discipleship, but it is a step forward in the first of what is expected to be other cycles of reflection by YL.

Recap of Goals and Findings

As Swinton and Mowat state, "in order to understand what is *actually* going on within [a] situation it is necessary to understand the *meaning* of the actions."[1] In exploring the complex topic of low biblical literacy among Campaigners, I have sought to better understand one related element: the role of Bible teaching. To undertake this initiative, my goal in this project has been to address one primary question and three secondary questions that arose from my ministry, to refine how staff teach Scripture to Campaigners.

In exploring the role of method within pedagogy, this research took an unexpected turn that revealed a deeper insight than what I initially anticipated. Although I discovered valuable methodological insight, I also found that method is not the *only* element behind effective Bible lessons. Method is undoubtedly important, but by itself, is not enough to be transformational. From my research, I suggest that a more robust epistemological combination of theory and theology (centred around worldview) is needed to make what is presented via method more engaging and applicable to students. By utilizing a framework that I call "worldview apologetics," I argue that Bible teaching is more likely to be effective when staff combine methodological considerations with an acute awareness of how Generation Z sees and interprets the world, especially regarding their perceptions of God, Scripture, and culture.

Worldview apologetics is more of a framework to teach from than it is specific content. It is a way to contextualize Bible lessons to help show Campaigners that Jesus tells a better story about their lives than the relativistic world in which they live. When

[1] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 38 (emphasis original).

one's method is strong, but Campaigners are not engaged, it is likely because their worldview has failed to be addressed in a relevant and meaningful way. The resulting implications are that Scripture seems boring, outdated, and irrelevant.

A prevalent issue among today's youth is the question of identity. From sexual orientation to the overwhelming number of choices about who to "be" in high school, an identity crisis is plaguing adolescents. Just because Scripture does not mention vaping, social media, bullying, or online gaming, does not mean it is void of relevance or truth that instills in youth their identity as children of God. In searching for identity, teenagers often turn to stimulants such as drugs, alcohol, sex, social media, and pornography. When this happens, one's identity becomes formed around a secular worldview that lacks fulfillment, as well as an objective anchor in which to ground it.

My findings affirm that Campaigners will only fall in love with Scripture if they first fall in love with Christ. As Smith argues, "Evangelicals need to realize that the Bible is not a 'how to' book. It is a 'HERE IS WHO!' book. First and foremost it tells everyone: *Here is who Jesus Christ is and therefore here is who you are and need to become in relation to him.*"[2] The same is especially true for teenagers living in a relativistic culture that is increasingly hostile to their religious beliefs.[3] Creating truth and working hard to "become someone" will not lead Campaigners to peace, fulfilment, or intimacy with Christ. As youth seek to "find themselves" in a postmodern world, they must realize that their identity is less of something to "create" and more of something to "accept." It is only by turning to Scripture as an invitation to encounter Christ, who transforms his followers into new creations through the empowerment of the Spirit, that

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[2] Smith, *Bible Made Impossible*, 175 (emphasis original).
[3] Michael Bird refers to this as "militant secularism" (*Religious Freedom in a Secular Age*, 37).

youth will become passionate followers of Jesus and recognize their identity as children of God.

Contributions, Implications, and Personal Impact of Research

Contributions

My contribution to practical theology has been threefold. First, from a theoretical perspective, I have sought to provide an in-depth analysis of the underpinnings that contextualize Bible teaching (using YL as a case study). In my assessment, such an analysis is a missing gap in the youth spirituality literature. Rather than rely on quantitative statistics to learn how frequently adolescents read Scripture, I have assessed the role of teachers from a qualitative position, uncovering answers to questions that statistics alone cannot provide. Furthermore, by going "beneath the surface of the iceberg," I have sought to provide extensive theoretical depth to the conversation surrounding pedagogy in a way that offers a more complete picture of the topic.

Second, from a theological perspective, I have sought to provide insight into the role of Bible teaching in the spiritual formation of youth. If Campaigners are to assume the responsibility of being leaders within the Church, I contend that how they are discipled in the *present* is critically important for how they will lead and serve in the *future*. In the twenty-first century, the Bible has never been more accessible, yet youth struggle to read it. By drawing attention to the spiritual discipline of Bible teaching, my goal is to help YL staff become more competent communicators of Scripture. As a result, I hope Campaigners will benefit from this improved teaching.

Third, from a practical perspective, I have sought to provide tangible suggestions to YL about how to improve Bible teaching. Such insight aims to better equip staff with the tools needed to teach a generation of Campaigners who often approach Scripture with a misconception of what it is and why it is relevant. Although my primary goal in this present work is to develop a theory, this theory is ultimately meant to lead towards actual changes in how YL staff teach. Without part-two of this project, my findings would remain in the realm of hypotheticals. Instead, this *practice*-led research is meant to contribute *practical* suggestions to YL that have a real and tangible impact on the spiritual formation of Campaigners.[4]

Implications

In Chapter 1, I explained how my goal in this project was to not only understand the "how" of Bible teaching, but also the "why." Although multifaceted and unexpected, I welcome the depth behind my discoveries into why some Bible studies seem to be more effective than others. The answer is not solely because the method was excellent, but because it speaks to students' worldview in a way that causes them to critically reflect on how the Christian narrative makes sense of their lives and the world in which they live. My findings point to the complexity behind Bible teaching and reveal the value of theologically reflecting on practice in order to better understand it. Knowing *why* something works is essential for developing a theory of teaching that will last, even as new generations of students come and go.

[4] Miller-McLemore, "Contributions of Practical Theology," 14.

After reflecting on the data, I am pleased to share my discoveries with YL. My concern, however, is that, like my initial assumption that biblical engagement would improve as long as method did, this is also the organization's consensus. There is value to method, but by itself it cannot create lead to biblical engagement. This is because method alone cannot account for Scripture's holistic nature that impacts the totality of a person. The Bible is not meant to be taught through a purely doctrinal and cognitive lens, and when it is, Campaigners will miss the formational aspect of who the Spirit is shaping them to become. As Wright says, "the Bible isn't there simply to be an accurate reference point for people who want to look things up and be sure they've got them right. It is there to equip God's people to carry forward his purposes of new covenant and new creation."[5] Generation Z longs for *experience*, and without understanding the Christ-centred hermeneutical lens through which to contextualize the action of God in the world, Campaigners will miss the value of Scripture and the Christ-centred worldview that derives from it. Most importantly, teenagers will miss encountering Jesus and the vibrant life to the fullest that a relationship with him brings.

Young Life's Bible teaching must take Generation Z's relativism and Moralistic Therapeutic Deistic perception of God (i.e., their worldview) seriously. If this consideration is not given primacy, the content taught will only proceed to fuel the faulty image of God that many teenagers already have. As YL staff teach, they must see their Bible studies through the worldview lens of their students, not to cater to an inaccurate perception of God, but to lovingly frame and contextualize their lessons around how Campaigners see and interpret reality. In this way, they can better introduce

[5] Wright, *Simply Christian*, 182.

Christ in a way that makes sense of students' experiences amidst their challenging high school environment.

My research suggests that YL staff are acutely aware of the need for application in their Bible studies. I submit, however, that they might be unaware of *the right kind* of application that will lead Campaigners toward biblical engagement. Furthermore, when staff find that they *have* led a successful Bible study, I am unsure if they realize *why* this is the case. Through my research, I have sought to articulate what is not readily apparent. In arriving at my conclusion, I let the research data inductively drive the analysis. That said, the data only got me "part of the way there." It was by theologically reflecting on why, despite excellent method low biblical literacy still exists, that filled in the missing links. Method remains important and is not to be pitted against epistemology; instead, the two are meant to work in conjunction, where epistemology gives depth to what is communicated through method. This then leads to ontology and the formational component of who the Spirit is shaping students to become.[6]

My research is not meant to negatively critique YL; instead, it is intended to encourage the organization towards deeper theological thinking. As previously mentioned, this dissertation is only part one of what I conceptualize to be a three-part research project. In this work, I have consolidated, organized, and presented what YL staff communicated to me (part one). This dissertation is built on *their* input and *my* reflection on it. Through my reflection, I have produced a hypothesis about what I

[6] My findings in this dissertation learn heavily towards epistemology and I have not thoroughly discussed the role of ontology. In the following stages of this project, however, ontology seems to be the next area of inquiry where YL can more directly focus on questions like: As Campaigners engage with the Bible, who are they becoming? And: What is the relationship between spiritual formation and biblical engagement?

suggest will lead Campaigners towards better biblical engagement. In doing this, I have sought to provide a theory that YL can use to empower its staff to think critically about what it means to instruct the Bible within their particular contexts. The next step (part two) is to implement my suggestions and gauge their impact. In a sense, the new research question will become: Are my findings actually effective? The third part will be to continue the cycle of reflection and provide further refinement and development based on how the suggestions are working.

Personal Impact

In discussing the implications of this research, I find it judicious to circle back to how this project began from the observations and questions that emerged from my own practice. In conducting this project, I wore (and continue to wear) multiple "hats" as both a researcher and ministry practitioner. I am not a neutral observer in this research; instead, I am heavily invested and interested in the findings.

In participatory action research, the goal is to understand a problem and also learn strategies for solving it. Because this research is not yet at a stage where I can gauge the effectiveness of my findings, the forthcoming parts of this project are an essential next step. The "participatory action" component of this work did not end after I collected the field research, nor does it end after this dissertation is finished. The collaboration needs to continue as my colleagues and I apply my findings and reflect on their usefulness in conjunction with one another. In doing so, the long-term goal is *empowerment* to become more proficient communicators of Scripture.

Despite being in the early stages of this project, the data I collected has already significantly impacted me and caused me to adapt my teaching style. My findings have challenged me to seriously consider my students' worldview (a foreign concept to me prior to this dissertation) and, more specifically, to teach in a way where I identify their disposition towards relativity and their need for experience. This recognition has become an underlying assumption within my pedagogy and has helped me frame and contextualize my teaching around how my Campaigners see the world. Practically, I have begun using Sire's eight worldview-defining questions in my preparation process and look for opportunities in my lessons to discuss them with my students as we navigate a biblical text. In doing so, these questions have helped guide my Campaigners in considering how Jesus makes sense of both the world and their lives. Pairing this epistemological framework with Bloom's Revised Taxonomy and the other methodological considerations discussed above has helped me guide my students toward a deeper level of learning without losing sight of the ultimate *telos* in studying Scripture: a deeper love for Christ.

As an example of this, during a Bible study series on the Gospel of John, my Campaigners and I spent a lesson discussing the implications of Jesus's words in 10:10, where he said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." After discussing the background context of the passage, the bulk of our conversation centred around what "life to the fullest" means. In leading this conversation, I intentionally considered Sire's eighth worldview question: What personal life-orienting core commitments are consistent with [students'] worldview? First, I asked my Campaigners to define how their friends at school would

describe life to the fullest and how this compares to their own definition. The answers were not substantially different and largely revolved around the notion of being "happy" and a "good person." Then, we asked ChatGPT to define life to the fullest in relation to John 10:10 and spent time analyzing and evaluating its definition (levels four and five of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy). In doing this, we realized that the AI's definition focused primarily on how life to the fullest comes from following the teachings of Jesus and being moral. By asking several leading questions, I attempted to help my students see the problems with this definition. ChatGPT's answer was based on an "outside—in" rather than an "inside—out" paradigm where it assumed culture's postmodern philosophy that teaches how fulfillment comes from striving to be happy and doing "good things." The biblical narrative, however, indicates that being happy is not the end goal of life, but instead, holiness is (Lev 21:8; Ex 19:6; 1 Pet 1:16). We discussed how life to the fullest does not come from "trying harder to be good" but from surrendering our lives to the lordship of Christ (Matt 6:33; 16:24; Luke 9:23; 14:33; Rom 12:2; Jas 4:7). In doing this, the Spirit renews our hearts and leads us in sanctification (Rom 8:6). The resulting conversation with my Campaigners was fruitful and engaging as we unpacked the implications of this discussion and wrestling together with what life to the fullest means in a high school context. I ended the Bible study by having them make a new definition of life to the fullest (level six of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy), and we deliberated on how this concept relates to their identity as followers of Jesus.

Applicability and Future Research

By nature, practice-led research is context specific. As Smith and Dean explain, practice-led research leads to "specialized research insights which can then be generalized and written up as research."[7] The key word here is "specialized," which is both a limitation and a strength of practice-led research.[8] My primary focus in this project has been the ministry of YL in Canada, and I have not attempted to explain the implications of my data for those outside the organization. Moreover, within YL, I concentrated my scope on the work done by staff and not volunteer leaders. I also did not attempt to integrate the data with YL's other branches of ministry (e.g., WyldLife, Capernaum, or Skatelife).[9] Now that I have presented my findings, I invite others to reflect on how they might be similar or different in their own context. I suspect that even outside of YL, much of this data will prove relevant. From a youth ministry perspective, Campaigners are no different than other Generation Z high school students. Whether an adolescent belongs to YL, Youth for Christ, or a local youth group, teenagers across North America face similar challenges in living out their faith in a post-Christendom world. Furthermore, for those who do not belong to Generation Z, the same need exists to understand worldview and to contextualize the gospel without compromising its integrity. How this is done (the method) might differ, but the same principles still apply.

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[7] Smith and Dean, "Introduction," 5.
[8] See Cahalan and Nieman, "Mapping," 80.
[9] See Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 41–50.

Future Research within Young Life

My intention has not been to finish the conversation about biblical pedagogy within YL but instead, to start one. In addition to the next stages of this project that I have already proposed, what follows are several ideas about how YL might wish to further the research I have commenced. First, it may be worth quantitatively knowing how many Campaigners fit Kinnaman and Matlock's definition of resilient discipleship. As noted in Chapter 1, YL previously conducted a study with a subset of former Campaigners to learn this, but widening the research to include current Campaigners might help provide more depth into the spiritual demographics of the organization's youth. Second, interviewing Campaigners and hearing their voices may provide an additional layer of insight that I could not give. I intentionally chose staff as my participants because my research focus was on how *they* teach. Surveying and interviewing Campaigners, however, would allow the voices of those directly impacted by staff's Bible teaching to share their thoughts about how they learn and engage best. This would add additional depth to the project's participatory action nature and allow a wider range of voices to be heard. Third, conducting the same research among other branches of the organization would provide awareness into how different demographics of youth (i.e., junior high students or those with special needs) are taught Scripture, and what it means to consider their worldview when instructing. Fourth, in this project I was concerned with *how* and *why* YL staff teach but did not thoroughly address *what* they teach. With this being a practical theology project, I contributed my own theological reflection to the data at hand to develop a theory, but it was outside of the scope of my research to critique the theology and teaching content of my co-workers. While there is value in providing

theoretical insight into the conceptualization and framing of Bible studies, it is also important to provide theological training for staff to lead them toward greater exegetical and theological competency. This is a future area of focus that I recommend YL emphasize. If one's teaching method is strong and rooted in an epistemological understanding of what best connects with teenagers, but the ultimate theology that is communicated is poor, this will contradict the positives and ultimately weaken and hinder the faith of Campaigners.

Conclusion

Young Life staff are only one voice in the spiritual journey of a Campaigner, but they have the potential to be an influential one. Throughout this dissertation, I have mentioned how healthy relationships underlie YL's pedagogy as well as its overarching approach to ministry. Strategies for teaching can be improved, research questions can be answered, but Bible teaching in YL must continue to be framed within the mentoring relationship between teacher and student. In doing this, youth are not only hearing "about" the Bible but are living life in proximity to a mentor they trust, whose life has been fundamentally changed by the Spirit. The bond between Campaigners and staff often leads to lifelong friendships, and this is both a responsibility and joy that must be held in balance. It is a responsibility in that youth are young, impressionable, and inclined to believe the teaching of those they trust. Staff must acknowledge their role in faithfully communicating Scripture and strive to grow in their ability to instruct well (Jas 3:1). It is a joy in that staff have the pleasure of walking alongside teenagers as they grow into men and women of God who are blossoming into adult followers of Jesus.

There is also great joy in recognizing that only the Spirit changes hearts and that staff are nothing more than fellow pilgrims along for the journey, sojourning alongside teenagers as they explore questions about life and faith.

As noted in Chapter 1, my hope for this research goes beyond improving teaching methods. It is meant, instead, to lead those impacted by it towards faithfulness and worship to Christ. As John Piper explains, "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't."[10] The purpose of teaching the Bible is not only to communicate cognitive knowledge but to shepherd others in their worship and love for Jesus. As McKnight says, "God designs all biblical study to be a 'useful' process that leads us to the *Bible in such a way that it creates a person who loves God and loves others.*"[11] Everything that I have said in this dissertation is meant to be contextualized within a deep love for youth and a desire for them to grow into resilient followers of Jesus.

It is no secret that adolescents in the Western Church are struggling with biblical literacy and are leaving organized religion at an alarming rate. As Reggie McNeal declares, "The further down you go in the generational food chain, the lower the percentage each succeeding generation reports going to church."[12] Reimer and Wilkinson furthermore add, "in short, the future of institutional religiosity of Canadian youth looks grim."[13] There is truth to both these statements and there is a shared responsibility inside the home (the responsibility of parents), and outside it (the

[10] Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 15.
[11] McKnight, *Blue Parakeet*, 121 (emphasis original).
[12] McNeal, *Present Future*, 3.
[13] Reimer and Wilkinson, *Culture of Faith*, 160.

responsibility of the Church), to raise children in "the way they should go," so that "even when they are old they will not turn from it" (Prov 22:6).[14]

Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to show that in teaching the Bible, YL staff must combine robust method with epistemological considerations that takes seriously the worldview of students. In essence, staff's *method* of teaching is best contextualized within a *framework* of teaching that gives one's *content* the best chance of connecting with students. Data from both within and outside the organization is clear: teenagers are struggling with biblical literacy. Based on my research, I contend that a significant reason for this struggle is a worldview that promotes relativism and a Moralistic Therapeutic Deistic version of God. Young Life teachers must graciously challenge this worldview and show Campaigners that biblical theism offers a more complete story regarding what it means to be human. Of course, even if my suggestions are noted and applied, it is still the responsibility of each student to open themselves up to discipleship and the transformation of the Spirit. In approaching the Bible, they must learn to cultivate the attitude of Martin Luther, who said, "the Holy Scriptures require a humble reader who shows fear and reverence toward the Word of God, and constantly says, 'Teach me, teach me, teach me.'"[15] It is through this humility that a biblical worldview can be constructed, and resilient discipleship can follow.

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[14] Parental influence is widely considered to be the biggest contributing factor to youth religiosity (see Smith, *Soul Searching*, 261). Many students come to a faith different from their parents, however, and must learn how to cultivate and grow it without parental modeling, and in many cases, despite parental criticism. Being a missionary organization, this is a common occurrence within YL.

[15] Cited in Sproul, *Knowing Scripture*, 112.

Hope for Campaigners

Despite the difficulties in discipling youth, there is also an abundance of *hope*. This hope is found in the cross and resurrection of Jesus and the love that the eschatological groom has for his bride. Because of Jesus, there is hope for Campaigners, the Church, and the world. Christ has not forsaken his creation and will continue to work in and through believers from every "nation, tribe, people, and language" to advance the kingdom (Rev 7:9). Campaigners may be young, but they are future leaders in the Church, and have an opportunity to set an example for others "in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Tim 4:12). Because of this, the discipleship and mentoring of teenagers must not stop.

Given all that I have said regarding the role of the teacher in a Bible lesson, the ultimate teacher is the Spirit, who leads Campaigners forward in faith. My research alone will not directly cause resilient discipleship, but through training staff, I hope to eliminate as many barriers as possible for Campaigners to understand and respond to the gospel. Scripture has many purposes, but at its centre is a redemptive story about Jesus and his invitation for people to surrender their lives to him. I pray that Campaigners of the present and future will hear that invitation and respond to it in faith, and in doing so, encounter God who "in his great mercy has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3).

APPENDIX 1

Letter of Information
McMaster Divinity College
Young Life Campaigners, the Bible, and Pedagogy

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Purpose of the Study:
The purpose of this study is to learn about how you teach the Bible to Campaigners. Specifically, I would like to learn from your experience in discipling Campaigners and hear from you about what you have found works well in teaching them the Bible. In beginning this research, I am operating under the assumption that how we teach Scripture dramatically influences how Campaigners read it. With the information learned through this research, I will suggest pedagogical strategies to Young Life regarding how to best instruct Campaigners in order to assist them in becoming more competent readers of the Bible.

I am doing this project as part of a doctoral dissertation at McMaster Divinity College. This dissertation is under the supervision of Dr. Michael Knowles (knowlesm@mcmaster.ca) and has been approved by Young Life Regional Director, Brent Klinck (bklinck@younglife.ca) and Vice President of Human Resources, Amanda McLean (amclean@younglife.ca). The information learned throughout this project will not only assist me in completing this degree but will also lead to improved practices within Young Life as we seek to walk alongside Campaigners and help them grow in faith.

Procedures Involved in the Research:
During this project, as research participants, you will be asked to complete a 40-question survey and potentially participate in a one-on-one interview. The survey will be administered online through SurveyMonkey and all interviews will take place online through ZOOM, or over the phone. This project is not designed to critique you as a teacher, but to learn from your experience about how to better teach the Bible. Questions I may ask include: What is the most important goal for you when you are teaching the Bible?; How do you break-down a passage of Scripture with your Campaigners?; and: How can Young Life better equip you in teaching the Bible?

Potential Risks:
The risks involved in this project are minimal. It is unlikely that there is any harm or discomfort associated with anything asked in either the survey or interviews, however, you may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. To minimize this risk, you do not need to answer questions that you do not want to. You may also choose to stop participating at any moment without question. If you are in the survey, you may simply exit the link, and if you are in an interview, you may ask to end prematurely. Please note that no repercussions will stem from the answers that you give or if you wish to opt-out as a participant.

If you are interviewed, and if anything you say is cited, a pseudonym will be used. Despite efforts to protect anonymity, however, there is the slight risk that your answers may act as an identifiable feature. To mitigate this risk, I will not publish any information that carries the risk of distinguishing your identity. Please be mindful in your responses that the language you use and the stories you tell can act as an identifiable feature. To protect your confidentiality, I also ask that you refrain from discussing your responses with co-workers.

Potential Benefits:
The purpose of this study is to benefit Young Life staff. The data collected will be used to help refine Bible teaching methods, which will help Campaigners understand Scripture more as they grow and mature in faith. This research will also provide important advancement to the field of practical theology and will address a pressing issue related to youth spirituality that has implications beyond Young Life.

Confidentiality:
All information collected in this study is confidential and will not affect your status within Young Life. The survey is anonymous, and no personal information is collected. If you are interviewed, nothing you say will be tied to your identity.

With your permission, I would like to record audio from the interviews to help me as I sort through the data, however, if you do not consent to this, it will not be used. In recording your answers, you will be assigned a random numerical ID in place of your actual name, and audio files will be safely stored on a password protected hard-drive and not anywhere online. To protect participants from unwanted ZOOM infiltrators, protocols will consist of using a password-protected account, and entry into the call will be given through the waiting room feature.

Please note that ZOOM is an externally hosted cloud-based service. While this service is approved for collecting data in this study by the McMaster Research Ethics Board, there is a small risk with any platform of information falling outside the control of the researcher. If you are concerned about this, I would be happy to make alternative arrangements for you to participate over the phone, or on ZOOM, but without video. If you are interested in reading further about ZOOM's privacy protocols and what steps are available to ensuring confidentiality, please see: https://zoom.us/docs/en-us/privacy-andsecurity.html.

Participation and Withdrawal:
Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw for any reason. Once you submit your survey responses, your answers will be put into a database and will not be identifiable. This means that your responses cannot be withdrawn from the study because I will not be able to identify which are yours. If you exit from the link prematurely before submitting, nothing will be sent. It is also possible to complete the survey but skip over certain questions.

If you are interviewed, you may withdraw at any point. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be erased unless you indicate that it is permissible to keep. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but can still participate. After the interview, if you change your mind about having your information used, you may contact me to withdraw your data. The estimated deadline to withdraw information is November 30th, 2022, by which time the analysis and coding part of the project will be completed. Direct quotes, however, may be removed up until May 31st, 2023, when I expect to submit my dissertation for review.

Information about the Study Results:
I expect to have the final project completed by the summer of 2023. If you would like a copy of the results, please let me know how you would like it sent to you. Based on where I am in the dissertation, I would be happy to share my findings.

Questions about the Study:
If you have questions or need more information about the study, please contact me at: (289) 259-6447 or nberesh@younglife.ca

This study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 x23142
c/o Research Office for Administration, Development & Support
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

APPENDIX 2

Interview Questions
McMaster Divinity College
Young Life Campaigners, the Bible, and Pedagogy

Information about the Interview: This document gives you an idea about what I would like to discuss during this interview. Interviews will be conducted one-to-one and will be open-ended (not just "yes" or "no" answers). Because of this, the exact questions might change slightly. Sometimes, I will also use questions to make sure I understand what you said. I may use statements such as: "So you are saying that…?" At any time during the interview, please feel free to ask for clarification or offer any additional information that you think is relevant.

Demographics and Biblical Literacy:

1. Do your students want to read or study the Bible? Why or why not?
2. What factors stop students from reading or studying the Bible?

Goals:

3. What is the most important goal for you when teaching the Bible? (i.e., what do you most clearly want to communicate?)
4. What are your students' most important goals in learning the Bible? How do you think your goals differ from theirs?
5. What do you think qualifies as "good" Bible teaching?
6. How would you explain what the Bible is and why it is important?

Method:

7. How do you break down and teach a passage of Scripture with Campaigners?
8. Do you use any teaching aids (i.e., commentaries, devotionals, study Bible notes)? If so, which ones?
9. What Bible translation do you use to teach from? What translations do you see your students using?
10. Does YL's emphasis on being "missional" impact how you teach Scripture to Campaigners? If so, how?

Impact/Conclusion:

11. What methods of teaching works best for you? Why do you think they are effective?
12. Are there any methods that you have found do not work very well?
13. What is the most common "takeaway" that Campaigners have after a Bible lesson?
14. Do you think students understand the authority and significance of the Bible and why it is important?
15. How can Young Life better equip you in teaching the Bible?
16. Is there anything else you would like to add or suggest about this topic?

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