Assessing Biblical Discernment of Women in a Virginia Church Setting:

An Action Research Project

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ABSTRACT

In one (1) page, explain and summarize the Social Action Research Project.

SECTION I

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

**Problem and Purpose Statements**

The problem is that despite biblical studies some of the women at a medium-sized church in Culpeper, Virginia are seeming to gravitate toward false teachers. The church leadership has publicly addressed by name some well-known leaders of unbiblical trending movements such as Word of Faith and the Prosperity Gospel. However some of the women are drawn to other popular teachers that have not been addressed. These teachers promote eisegesis over exegesis, extra-biblical revelation, and unbiblical approaches to prayer. Some also involve syncretism with other, unbiblical practices either not found in Scripture or even directly contradicting Scripture. The women may also be unaware that some of the popular teachers they do follow have partnered with and endorsed some of the more controversial, well-known un-biblical teachers.

The purpose of this action research project is to address the problem of gaps in biblical training and worldview discernment in the women at City Light Baptist Church. Addressing this issue involves consideration of several factors. It is unknown how long the women have been familiar with the Baptist tradition as stated and practiced at this congregation. It is also unknown what religious (or nonreligious) backgrounds the women have come from prior to City Light. Also important for consideration would be any formal or informal religious or worldview training any of them have had outside of a church context.

**Significance of the Problem**

The problem is significant because it not only affects women, but a larger part of the Christian population. Although the leadership at City Light carefully vets its music and teaching materials, calls out false teachers, and has active discipleship activities for every age group, some of the women are promoting false teachers. While these women exhibit awareness of some of the more obvious false teachers, the fact that they are still unaware of some presents an opportunity to beef up discipleship training and discipleship. Observations show that it is those women from other churches who have come to City Light who are promoting teachers and leaders they are not aware are unbiblical. The women who follow these teachings may be harmed but also pass those teachings on to family members, who may then continue to pass them on to others. False teachings are harmful in many ways.

The problem points toward a larger trend of false teachers supported in women's groups in mainstream Christianity. Using the statistically validated American Worldview Inventory, the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University has conducted some recent studies on worldview in the United States. In 2020, they released a study titled, *Perceptions of God* (AWVI 2020 Results – Release #3: Perceptions of God 2020). It found that the number of women holding an orthodox, biblical view of God went down 25 points from what it was in 1991 (AWVI 2020 Results – Release #3: Perceptions of God 2020).

Some of the false teachers that the church has spoken against are involved with the Word of Faith movement, while others that have come up in the women's group are also involved but not as directly. In a study conducted in 2022, scholar S.E. Zaluchu defined the Word of Faith movement as, “a pattern formulated by Kenneth Hagin to teach that believers must ‘claim their spiritual heritage’ as children of God. The trick is to use a carefully articulated prayer as a declaration of faith through positive words (Zaluchu, 2022).” Zaluchu noted that the movement interprets the Bible through eisegesis rather than exegesis (Zaluchu, 2022). Some of the ones supported by these women do not openly promote Word of Faith theology but support, affiliate with, or fail to rebuke those that do.

**Background and Literature review**

In this section, compose a robust review of the literature relevant to the problem based on your developmental readings.

Historically, heretical beliefs and false prophecies have persisted within Christianity, tracing their origins to biblical times. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus referred to those who espouse false teachings as "wolves in sheep's clothing" (Matthew 7:15) and differentiated between those who merely speak of Him and those who genuinely follow His divine will (Matthew 7:21). This literature review focuses on Modalism, Prosperity Theology, and Word of Faith, as well as movements involving a false prophecy, Extra-biblical Revelation, or a combination of these elements.

Modalism emerged in 180 A.D. (Bernard, 2020) and challenged trinitarianism. By rejecting the concept of three distinct persons within the Godhead, Modalism sought to maintain monotheism. However, this position was eventually condemned as heretical in the fourth century (Bernard, 2020). Dr. B. Conway, the host of the scholarly YouTube show "One Minute Apologist," defines Modalism as the belief in one God manifesting in three different modes instead of the coexistence of three distinct persons in the trinitarian view (Conway, 2013). He raises biblical concerns about Modalism, particularly concerning the Baptism of Jesus, wherein all three persons of the Godhead are present simultaneously (Conway, 2013).

In the contemporary era, Modalism continues to find adherents among prominent leaders within Mainstream Christianity, including the ministry of Tony Evans (Riley, 2022). Scholar and pastor T. Challies identifies T.D. Jakes's ministry is affiliated with Oneness Pentecostalism, which denies the trinity doctrine by positing that there is one God in three manifestations or modalities (Challies, 2014). Moreover, Pastor Steven Furtick of Elevation Church, a close associate of Jakes, has propagated modalist concepts in his sermons, distorting scriptural passages to support this unorthodox viewpoint (Dissenter, 2020). Furtick maintains a close alliance with Pastor Daniel Floyd of the Virginia-based mega-church LifePoint (Floyd & Furtick, 2019).

Christian communities have persistently grappled with challenges from heretical beliefs, false prophecies, and movements diverging from traditional biblical teachings, both historically and contemporarily. The early church faced Modalism, a heresy challenging the orthodox understanding of the Holy Trinity by proposing God existed in three modes, not distinct persons (Kelly, 2006). Recently, Prosperity Theology emerged, asserting that faith brings material wealth and physical well-being, a view many see as distorting the Gospel message (Jones, 2010). Another modern challenge is the Word of Faith movement, which postulates the spiritual power of words and the ability of positive confession to manifest prosperity and health, leading to critiques of minimized divine sovereignty and Christianized magical thinking (Hanegraaff, 2009). Further complexities arise from the spread of false prophecies and extra-biblical revelations, with claims of new revelations, visions, or translations potentially misguiding believers (Horton, 2008). These challenges underline the need for ongoing discernment, rigorous theological reflection, and adherence to scriptural teachings within Christian communities.

**Emerging Trends in Contemporary Christianity:A Study of New Movements**

The Word of Faith movement, a significant subject of scholarly research, is interpreted differently depending on the investigator's approach. For instance, Zuluchu perceives it as a detectable paradigm. On the other hand, Nel offers a comprehensive model in his 2023 publication, delineating it as a process constituted by four essential steps: verbalization, execution, acceptance, and declaration of personal aspirations. Meanwhile, Blazer's study(2022), contextualizes the Word of Faith or Prosperity Gospel movement within the historical trajectory of the "name it and claim it" doctrine. Blazer traces the roots of this movement back to the nineteenth-century New Thought movement and the Law of Attraction. According to Blazer, the fundamental proposition of this movement is that the believer's thoughts actively shape their reality. It contends that negative thinking can lead to adverse consequences, whereas optimism has the power to bring about favorable situations (Blazer, 2022).

**Critical Analysis of the Prosperity Gospel**

Nel (2023) critically evaluates the Prosperity Gospel, outlining several major concerns. First, Nel contends that the Prosperity Gospel presents a distorted view of God and Scripture. It erroneously exalts humans to a place of authority while simultaneously diminishing God's role to a mere force subject to manipulation by believers. Second, Nel notes the Prosperity Gospel's denial of core Christian tenets, including the deity and sinlessness of Christ. These critical elements of the Christian faith are overshadowed by a doctrine that prioritizes material wealth and well-being over spiritual virtues and the acknowledgment of Christ's unique divinity. Third, Nel asserts that the Prosperity Gospel's emphasis on human declarations and extra-biblical revelations equals these to the authority of established Scripture. This claim devalues the sanctity of the revealed scriptures. It detracts from the doctrine of Sola Scriptura, which recognizes Scripture as the ultimate and sufficient source of Christian faith and life. Fourth, Nel points out the Prosperity Gospel's inadequacy in acknowledging suffering among righteous believers. This movement seems to sidestep the observable fact that devout Christians can and do experience suffering, irrespective of their faith and righteousness.

In contrast, biblical accounts present a different picture of Christian living and suffering. Nel cites Daniel's steadfast loyalty to God despite facing threats of death (Daniel 3:17-18) and the Apostle Paul's acceptance of his "thorn in the flesh," viewing it as a reminder of his dependence on God's grace and power (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). These examples underscore the Christian commitment to trust and depend on God amid hardships rather than seeing prosperity as the primary sign of God's favor. Fee (1985) criticizes the Prosperity Gospel's overemphasis on wealth and health, pointing out the disparity between these teachings and the New Testament's emphasis on sacrificial love, service, and the willingness to endure suffering for the sake of Christ. This ongoing scholarly critique of the Prosperity Gospel affirms the necessity for continued theological discernment within Christian communities.

**Movements Involving Extra-biblical Revelation and False Prophecy**

The Bible strongly warns against modifying its content, reinforcing this directive with severe consequences for those who dare to add or subtract from its teachings. This warning is explicit in the Book of Revelation (22:18-19), where it is stated that anyone who adds to the words of the biblical prophecy will be afflicted with the plagues described within its pages. Anyone who takes away from its words will lose their part in the Tree of Life and the Holy City. In today's religious landscape, however, numerous movements engage in practices that could be perceived as contradicting this biblical admonition. They often involve elements of false prophecy or revelation outside the confines of biblical scripture. These extra-biblical revelations are frequently treated as supplementary scriptures, introducing new elements to the traditional biblical canon. Such movements typically propagate these additional revelations through mediums such as new "translations" of the Bible, mystical visions, or a blend of these methods. Consequently, this raises critical questions regarding the legitimacy of these movements concerning traditional Christian teachings and principles. It is essential to note that while these movements add new dimensions to religious interpretation and experience, they also spur intense debates among theologians and believers about the sanctity and inviolability of the original biblical text.

**Priscilla Shirer and the Issue of Extra-biblical Revelation**

Priscilla Shirer's teachings have been controversial among religious scholars, especially due to her insistence on the value of extra-biblical revelations. According to Rosebrough's (2020) analysis, Shirer promotes the idea that God's communication extends beyond the boundaries set by the canonical scripture. Such a stance provoked concerns among various Christian communities, primarily because it contradicts the Bible's explicit command not to augment or diminish God's word, as stated in Revelation 22:18-19. Rosebrough's critiques draw attention to the fact that Shirer perceives God's word as not solely contained within scripture, suggesting that divine communication continues in ways beyond it. This interpretation could potentially undermine the traditional Christian belief in the closed canon of the Bible, an understanding that sees the scripture as complete and self-sufficient, needing no additional revelation.

Furthermore, Shirer's depiction of the Bible as a "hand-me-down" revelation and her pursuit for further divine revelations has been met with responses from critics. They argue that her perspective undermines the doctrine of Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone), underscoring the Bible's sufficiency and superiority as the ultimate source of Christian faith and practice. This principle is affirmed in the Bible itself, particularly in passages such as 2 Timothy 3:16-17, which states that all scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. Adding to these criticisms is theologian R. Albert Mohler, Jr., who emphasizes the dangerous implications of extra-biblical revelations in his book "The Disappearance of God" (Mohler, 2009). Mohler argues that such practices can distort Christian doctrine and practice, leading believers away from the truth of the Gospel. He urges Christians to remain anchored in the scripture, asserting its completeness and sufficiency in guiding the life and faith of believers. Ultimately, the controversy surrounding Priscilla Shirer's teachings underscores the larger ongoing debates within Christian circles about the role and authority of the Bible, the nature of divine revelation, and the importance of adhering to traditional Christian doctrine.

The emergence of various novel movements has marked the evolving landscape of Christianity, each introducing distinct and often diverse theological viewpoints. Among these is the controversial Prosperity Gospel, a doctrine that promotes the belief that material wealth and physical well-being are the will of God for His faithful. This movement, which stands at the intersection of faith and material prosperity, has sparked intense debates regarding its alignment with traditional Christian teachings. Concurrently, there is a growing discourse around extra-biblical revelations, where teachings and visions outside the standard biblical canon are presented as supplemental religious knowledge. These revelations, often conveyed through new "translations" of the Bible, mystical visions, or a combination of both, challenge the foundational principle of scriptural inerrancy and the sanctity of the biblical text. Further complicating this landscape are the challenges brought forth by heretical beliefs that deviate from traditional Christian doctrine. These divergent views threaten the homogeneity of Christian theology, introducing alternative interpretations that often conflict with established teachings. Scholars and theologians are meticulously scrutinizing these developments, engaging in rigorous academic discourse to unravel the complexities these movements bring. Their objective extends beyond merely understanding these contemporary dynamics; it is an effort to assess their implications for the present and future of Christian theology and practice. These studies form a critical part of the ongoing conversation about the evolution of religious belief, the importance of scriptural integrity, and the diverse ways faith is understood and lived out in our contemporary world.

**Religion and Education in America**

Fraser's seminal work (2016) meticulously examines the complex relationships among religion, education, and law within the United States. His exploration traces various historical eras, offering valuable insights into significant shifts and transformations in these relationships. Fraser discussed the heavy influence of Protestant ideals in the early stages of public schooling and illustrates how early American schools integrated Protestant teachings into their curricula with various carefully selected examples and primary sources. This Protestant influence echoes Hunter’s (1991) discussion of how religious disagreements, primarily of a Protestant nature, influenced various social arenas, including education.

Fraser also delves into the subsequent struggles of religious minorities, such as Catholics and Jews, who aimed to preserve their distinct religious identities while navigating a Protestant-dominated education system. His discussions of the landmark court decisions that established a 'wall of separation' between church and state in public education provide a solid groundwork to understand the legal dynamics involved in these struggles. Addressing contemporary issues, Fraser scrutinizes the debates surrounding school prayer, the teaching of evolution, and the introduction of religious themes in textbooks. His analysis parallels Chancey's (2007) analysis of Bible courses in contemporary public schools and their inherent tensions.

Moreover, Fraser thoroughly examines the controversial issues of private religious schooling and homeschooling, focusing on the state's role in regulating religious education and the ensuing legal battles. This analysis offers invaluable insights into the ongoing discourse on the freedom of religious expression in education. Lastly, Fraser offers a progressive perspective by analyzing emerging trends and potential future challenges. He highlights the growing influence of non-Christian religions in the United States and anticipates how this may reshape the religious landscape of American education.

Fraser demonstrates how, despite the Constitution's prohibition of a state religion, the religious beliefs of the populace continued to exert significant influence on the education system. Founders such as Horace Mann, while advocating for examining sacred texts and traditions in the curriculum, emphasized the separation of indoctrination, leaving religious instruction to the churches attended by the students (Fraser, 2016). However, as the country progressed, the removal of mandated Bible reading and school-sponsored prayer in the 1960s signified a shift away from overt religious practices in public schools (Fraser, 2016).

Fraser's work, in conjunction with the works of Hunter and Chancey, contributes significantly to the understanding of religion and education in the United States. By exploring the intersection of these fields with the law, these scholars provide a multidimensional perspective that promotes a deeper comprehension of the complex dynamics at play.

**Religious Literacy**

In his work "Religious Literacy," Stephen Prothero (2008) addresses the concept of religious literacy and delves into its significance as a pressing societal concern. Prothero's definition of religious literacy encompasses many elements, including religious terms, symbols, beliefs, scriptures, and heroes used in American public life. The author emphasizes the need for religious literacy in the American context, especially when comparing it to compulsory religious education in European systems. He discussed how many American students lack a comprehensive understanding of their religious heritage, creating a disconnect between faith and comprehension.

**Structure and Content of Religious Literacy**

Prothero's (2008) work comprises three sections containing two chapters. The first section, "The Problem," explores the issue of religious illiteracy in American culture and presents a compelling case for its importance. The second section, "The Past," delves into the historical trajectory of religious education in the United States, culminating in its current state. The final section offers solutions and reflections on addressing religious illiteracy in various contexts. Additionally, the book includes a glossary of standard religious terms commonly misunderstood or misused due to a lack of formal education on the subject. An appendix features The Religious Literacy Quiz, an instrument used by Prothero to assess students' understanding of religion at the outset of his religion courses. Prothero acknowledges that religious literacy is crucial for understanding opposing worldviews and one's faith. This aspect is particularly significant for believers seeking to pass on their religious heritage to the next generation, whether as followers or future religious leaders.

The works of Fraser and Prothero provide valuable insights into the historical evolution of religion in American public schools and the importance of religious literacy in a multicultural society. Together, they contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between religion, education, and the law in the United States. They also offer potential solutions for addressing religious illiteracy in contemporary society.

**Cultural Trends**

Considering the limited resources and opportunities for the American public to gain a comprehensive understanding of Biblical Christianity, the responsibility of the church to prioritize robust worldview development becomes increasingly vital. However, recent studies based on the American Worldview Inventory (AWI) have revealed a disconcerting trend of declining adherence to foundational Christian beliefs within the American community.

**Findings from the American Worldview Inventory**

The AWI has been instrumental in assessing the state of American Christianity in recent years. The 2020 AWI report, "The Church and Worldview," presented alarming statistics regarding evangelicals. It indicated that more than half of evangelicals do not read the Bible daily, fully embrace absolute truth, or recognize the reality of human sin. Additionally, one-third and one-half of evangelicals hold beliefs that diverge from Biblical teachings. The study further revealed that only slightly over half of Pentecostals and Charismatics identified as "born-again," while the figure dropped just below half for mainline Protestants. In a subsequent AWI study conducted in 2021, researchers investigated the notion of being a Christian (Barna, 2021). The findings indicated that while many self-identified Christians held core biblical beliefs, they embraced several unbiblical tenets simultaneously. These included beliefs in the inherent goodness of people, karma, the notion that all religious beliefs are equally valid, the primacy of faith over the specific content of belief, and the possibility of earning salvation.

**Implications of Recent Studies**

The implications from these AWI studies suggest a troubling trend within American Christianity, characterized by an erosion of adherence to essential biblical teachings. This decline in biblical worldview development is particularly concerning given the limited opportunities for public education on Biblical Christianity. As such, it underscores the imperative for churches to address this issue and prioritize the cultivation of robust biblical worldviews among their congregations.

The AWI studies conducted in recent years reveal a disconcerting decline in biblical worldview development within American Christianity. The data highlights the need for the church to play a pivotal role in fostering a more profound understanding and adherence to foundational biblical beliefs among its members. To address this critical issue, concerted efforts are required to strengthen the theological education and spiritual formation of believers, helping them navigate the complexities of modern society while firmly anchored in the timeless truths of Biblical Christianity.

**Unveiling Unbiblical Practices**

Apologists C. Hinn and J. Peters engage in a candid conversation about their experiences with healing and the prosperity gospel movement in an episode of SO4J-TV (Peters & Hinn, 2018). Pastor J. Peters, who has dealt with cerebral palsy throughout his life, voices concerns about the inadequate considerations provided by many prosperity gospel leaders and churches for sincerely faithful Christians facing health issues (Peters & Hinn, 2018). He notes that individuals and their loved ones are often subjected to the distressing belief that their afflictions result from a lack of faith or insufficient giving (Peters & Hinn, 2018). In another episode, C. Hinn, who grew up in the prosperity gospel movement led by his uncle Benny Hinn, shares his journey of leaving this influential group (Peters & Hinn, 2018).

Former New Agers J. Peck and S. Bancarz recount their conversion to Christianity and identify the encroachment of new age practices within Christian churches (Bancarz & Peck, 2018). Drawing from their prior experiences in the new age movement, the authors highlight various examples of unbiblical concepts present or tolerated in modern Christian churches (Bancarz & Peck, 2018). These problematic practices include labyrinths, contemplative prayer, meditation, yoga, and near-death experiences that diverge from Gospel teachings (Bancarz & Peck, 2018). The revelations offered by C. Hinn and J. Peters in the context of the prosperity gospel movement shed light on the potential harm caused by distorted teachings within the Christian faith. The misguided notions of faith, healing, and prosperity can lead to the emotional and spiritual distress of believers grappling with health issues. Similarly, the insights shared by Peck and Bancarz call attention to the challenges posed by the infiltration of new age practices in Christian worship, raising concerns about fidelity to biblical teachings within contemporary Christianity. The testimonies of apologists C. Hinn and J. Peters and the revelations presented by Peck and Bancarz (2018) reflect critically on the prosperity gospel and the influence of new-age practices in modern Christianity. These discussions prompt a reevaluation of Christian teachings and practices, emphasizing the need for greater discernment and adherence to biblical principles within the church to preserve the authentic essence of the Christian faith.

**Prominent Voices**

During 2021, various distinguished Christian authors earned substantial recognition in commercial literature, as their publications pervaded the top 100 bestsellers list. Joel Osteen, renowned for his messages of encouragement and positivity, demonstrated his formidable reach and enduring influence in the Christian literary sphere by securing three spots on this coveted list with his works *Empty Out the Negative* (2020), *Peaceful on Purpose* (2021), and *You Are Stronger than You Think* (2021) (Christian Book Expo, 2023). Simultaneously, Priscilla Shirer, a highly respected author, and orator, experienced considerable acclaim. Two of her publications found their place within the top 100 list, with one earning the distinction of two awards (Christian Book Expo, 2023). This accomplishment further cements Shirer's status as a profound voice within Christian literature, deftly exploring themes of faith and spiritual evolution, as evidenced by the scholarly commentary by Mooney (2023).

In juxtaposition, despite an extensive array of contributions to Christian literature, Tony Evans was absent from this list (Christian Book Expo, 2023). However, his ministry's website affirms his authorship of over 150 publications throughout his ministerial career (Evans, 2023), underscoring his continuous dedication to disseminating Christian knowledge and literature. As Goodwin (2023) aptly noted, Evans' comprehensive body of work significantly influences Christian ideologies and discipleship, a notion not necessarily reflected in the commercial metrics of bestseller lists. Meanwhile, T.D. Jakes maintained a substantial presence on the list, as two of his works procured rankings of 34 and 42, respectively (Christian Book Expo, 2023). These ranks substantiate Jakes' lasting popularity and resonate with Bailey and Smith's (2023) comprehensive study on the reception and influence of Christian literature. Conversely, Steven Furtick, despite his multidimensional contributions to Christian culture and literature, did not feature on the Christian Book Expo's top 100 list for 2021 (Christian Book Expo, 2023). Nevertheless, Furtick's accomplishments are highlighted by his ministry's website, portraying him as a pastor, Grammy-award-winning songwriter & producer, and New York Times best-selling author (Steven Furtick Ministries, 2023). Peterson's (2023) critical analysis in the Religious Studies Review posits that Furtick's influence extends beyond mere book sales, illuminating his significant contributions to the broader Christian culture. These authors' collective literary endeavors and commercial success underscore their substantial influence within the contemporary Christian book market. By offering a reflection on the prevailing trends within Christian thought and providing valuable insights into contemporary believers' religious perceptions and concerns, they significantly contribute to the literary landscape of contemporary Christian writing.

**Research Question**

The research question for this action research project is as follows: How does a basic, biblical worldview training course at City Light Baptist Church affect the discernment of the women in recognizing false teachings/teachers?

Biblical Worldview training based on the belief statement found at the church website, would aim to familiarize the women with the core beliefs of the church so they would be able to identify even subtle unbiblical teachings. A solid, biblical understanding of the Christian faith would ground the women with a concrete foundation so they know what the correct one looks like. In addition, a firm grasp of fundamental theological terms could be combined with the course to strengthen spiritual growth and understanding.

**Professional Relevance**

This problem is relevant to my faith context because if affects brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as those outside the faith the Christians are called to share the Gospel with. Most specifically in this situation, it affects sisters in Christ. On a professional level it effects many of the students in the Virginia Community college system as well as people I work with in retail, both coworkers and and customers, because many of them attend churches led by these leaders and/or purchase their books.

The women at City Light Baptist Church will be assessed for Biblical worldview, and be instructed with a curriculum based on results of the assessment, then reassessed to see if the curriculum was affective.

Even though false teachings have been around as long as the church, they are still practiced today and still need to be addressed as soon as possible. The goal of the DSL project is to begin the research as soon as possible, once all the paperwork and forms are complete, and approvals have been obtained.

In a larger context, one of evangelical America’s largest congregations is Lakewood church in Houston, TX, led by Joel Osteen, who is one of the leading prosperity gospel teachers (Cochran, 2021). He has affiliated with Oprah Winfrey and Daniel Floyd (Winfrey, 2012; *Pastor Joel Osteen: Next Level Thinking (Q&A)* 2019). Oprah is a false teacher because she claims to be Christian but promotes many unbiblical teachings and teachers. Apologetics scholar P. Tunnicliffe notes that Oprah promotes the lie that humans can be like God (Tunnicliffe, 2009).

One of the largest Churches in Virginia is Lifepoint, led by Pastor Daniel Floyd and headquartered in Fredericksburg, Virginia (*Locations* 2023). Lifepoint consists of its main campus in Fredericksburg, in addition to Spotsylvania, Stafford, Richmond, and Culpeper, as well as an online campus (*Locations*, 2023). The Culpeper, VA campus is just minutes away from City Light Baptist Church.

The sisters in Christ are affected because not only could it lead them down the wrong path but they could pass it on to others, especially their children and grandchildren. In addition, they could mislead nonbelievers in a number of ways. Either the nonbeliever will stay that way because even they see problems with the false teachings which reinforce their disbelief, or they will desire to come to Christ only to accept a false gospel from a Christian who does not know any better, and will be led astray.

**Summary**

In light of recent studies, a research based intervention will target worldview in women at a medium sized church in Virginia. Relevant factors include cultural trends as well as various educational and religious backgrounds, and the American educational system. Also for consideration are the local and national church climate.

SECTION II

ACTION PLAN

**Introduction**

The action plan for this project invovlves a research based intervention to address biblical worldview discernment in women at a Virginia Church, as well as sociological and theological integration of the issue concerning symbolic interactionsim and the audience. The intervention consists of a pre-test, followed by a course and post-test analysis. Symbolic interactionism serves as a starting point to assess where the women are in their understanding of key biblical doctrines and concepts, which are adapted directly from the congregational belief statement.

**Research-based Intervention**

The research-based intervention utilized to address the problem in this action research project is a brief but intensive course based on the problem but adjusted if necessary to target any additional problems found in results from the first round of the questionnaire. The course will consist of lessons based on the items in the questionnaire, which are based on the belief statement of City Light Baptist Church. While some well-known authors may be used as examples, the lessons will focus more on the beliefs themselves. Based on some of the women’s reaction to questioning some of their favorite teachers, this seems more appropriate because it may be less likely to be perceived as an attack. After the intervention is complete, the participants will fill out the original questionnaire again as a post test.

This intervention is…(See Appendix C)

**Sociological and Theological Integration**

The sociological theory best suited to address this problem and the proposed intervention is Symbolic Interactionism because it can help to better interpret cultural settings that might otherwise not make sense to the observer (Heddendorf & Vos, 2010). Scholars Heddendorf and Vos define symbolic interactionism as “the kind of social reality found in the interaction of with the symbols they make and use (Heddendorf & Vos, 2010).” They also note the unlimited possibilities and changes in light of context and perspective (Heddendorf & Vos, 2010). Some situations, especially teachings or conflicts in the church might not make sense without the use of symbolic interactionism because context varies and changes. In this situation, symbolic interactionism can help too make sense of why people who supposedly follow the same God and use the same Bible would have very different understandings and beliefs. As for Christians who are receptive to false teaching, it is because different (in this case unbiblical) meanings have been assigned to key doctrines and presented to the masses. Therefore, the following concepts as symbols: the Bible, God, Man, Jesus, Atonement of sin, the resurrection, salvation, ordinances of the church, and eternity could all vary in meaning from one context to another. Also, an unbiblical change in one of these often changes its relationship to the other parts. The Bible describes itself as inerrant and complete (2 Timothy 3:16). Refusal to acknowledge this leads to other problems. The Bible will differ as a symbol from one individual to another depending on how the person views it. Be it inside or outside the church, an individual in question of the inerrancy of the Bible will disrespect it and teach others to do the same. Also, denying the sufficiency of the Bible invites the temptation to add or subtract from scripture, which could mean adding something unbiblical or depriving others of vital information. Without the Bible as a solid foundation, other concepts have room to be redefined and neglected.

Biblically, God is triune (Matt 3:13–17, Mk 1:9–11 and Lk 3:21–22, Jn1:29–34 ). Several movements inside and outside of Christianity that claim to believe in God may use the same word or symbol but the meanings differ. An unbiblical deviation from this model places all three members of the trinity in a different relationship with one another, contrary to scripture as in modalism where God is defined as one person in three different forms (Bernard, 2020). Other definitions of God even deny the divinity of any of its members, as in the prosperity gospel or word-faith movement, where it is taught that Jesus left his divinity in heaven to come to earth (Nel, 2023). Man, biblically, is a creation in God’s image; while being made in His image, man is still not God, or a god on any level (Genesis 1). The Word-of-Faith movement, however, teaches that God wants the health and wealth of His people and that they have the ability to demand them from Him (Blazer, 2023). Jesus Christ is biblically one person in the triune God; He is both completely God and completely human (John 1). He is also the only truly sinless person (1 Peter 2:22). In addition to leaving his deity to live as a man, prosperity theology teaches that Jesus was a substitute sinner rather than sinless (Nel, 2023). As for atonement of Sin, the Bible teaches that it is the sacrifice of Christ in place of sinners (). In contrast, the prosperity gospel, teaches that this was done not for salvation from sin but for sinners to gain the advantages of being divine and the worldly perks of material wealth and comfort (Nel, 2023). The only similarity of humans to God expected in the Bible is holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16). BIblically, Resurrection consists of Jesus’ death on the cross, burial, resurrection, and ascension (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Acts 1:9). The prosperity Gospel yet teaches that He went to Hell during the time period between His death and resurrection, an unbiblical concept justified by later “secret revelation (Nel, 2023).”

A biblical view of Salvation is that belief in Christ (Romans 10:9-11). Other movements including the prosperity Gospel teach that the purpose of salvation is not only for the believer to be spared of eternal condemnation but also worldy, fleshly problems regarding health and finances (Blazer, 2023). Ordinances of the Church include Baptism and Holy Communion ( Matthew 28:19-20, 1 Corinthians, 12:26). While Baptism and communion are signs of salvation, the acts themselves are not the cause of it (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Eternity, depending on the audience (even among professing Christians), will vary in meaning based on the audience. While the Bible teaches clearly on Heaven and Hell, other movements have different understandings of it. From the perspective of symbolic interactionism as defined in *Hidden threads*, the intervention will treat each of the above concepts from the church beliefs statement as a symbol. From this approach, the intervention will assess the participants’ understanding of these symbols, with the goal to correct any unbiblical understandings and replace them with a biblical foundation (Heddendorf & Vos, 2010).

From a Christian perspective, this problem is severe because if not addressed, false understanding of God and the Bible could creep into this church as they have others, which leads to devastating eternal consequences. False teachings could lead to further confusion, a faulty understanding or no understanding of God, Man, and salvation, as well as false conversions or no conversions.

In order to prevent this, the proposed intervention is a brief, intensive training course targeting Biblical information on the items in the church belief statements plus any related issues resulting from the first round of the questionnaire. The goal of the intervention is that worldview reinforcement will correct any errors and strengthen the participants’ growth in their learning about God. In addition to the concepts in statement of beliefs, key theological terms will also be assessed for in the questionnaire should they need to be addressed in the course. Also, due to theological and sociological reasons discussed above, the content of the training will aim to point out and defeat the false content of the teachers, rather than the teachers themselves. Due to (polite) push-back in earlier instances of pointing out false teachers and the ladies defending them, this is the best response so the training is not perceived as an attack on someone they admire. Also, the goal is not for a witch-hunt or that they will dislike these individuals but to recognize unbiblical teaching when they see it, regardless of how captivating the teacher is.

**Summary**

The intervention examinines worldview of the women at CityLight Baptist Church in light of scripture and the church doctrines. A basic, biblcal worldview course serves as the intervention. Symbolic interactionism functions to evaluate the theological and sociological implications of the womens beliefs and their understanding of scripture in relation to key Biblical concepts.

SECTION III

IMPLEMENTATION

(approx.. 2-3 pp)

**Site Permission and Protection of Participants**

Permission to conduct the action research intervention will be secured by…evidence of permission is in the form of a letter (see Appendix A).

Participants will be protected by agreeing to an Informed Consent Document (see Appendix B) prior to completing the data collection tool…

**Location and Duration**

The location of the intervention will be at City Light Baptist Church, 1121 Sperryville Pike, Culpeper, VA 22701. The duration of the intervention will be a total of six weeks meeting once weekly. The structure is based on the sessions as described in the teaching practicum offered at Omega Graduate School. It would be similar to adult or college level education, structured like an evening course or Bible study. This would give the women notice so they could plan for it ahead of time and reserve that day in their schedule for the next few weeks. The course would also be arranged into three units, each with 2 sessions. Each unit would consist of 2 lessons for the first meeting followed by a seconding meeting including a final lesson in that unit and concluding with a test case exercise. This structure would cover all nine areas from the belief statement page on the church website as well as provide room for active participation for learning.

**Data Collection Tools**

An open-ended questionnaire (see Appendix D) will be used to collect data from participants prior to and following the intervention. The data collection tool consists of a questionnaire with multiple choice questions relating to the items listed in the Belief Statement at City Light Baptist Church.

**Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

Data will be collected prior to, throughout the six week period of the study, as well as immediately after.

Approximately \_10+\_\_ participants are expected…

Results of the pre-intervention and post-intervention data will be evaluated for patterns and themes relating to the nine areas in the belief statement at City Light Baptist Church. Analysis of the data will also include observation of whether the intervention succeeded in meeting learning goals. Class sessions will be recorded for transcription and ant personally identifying information will be destroyed.

**Expected Outcomes**

If the problem is adequately addressed by the intervention, data should indicate a strengthened worldview of the participants. More specifically it should sharpen their discernment and provide a more biblical worldview of key concepts in the Bible framed by the beliefs statement on the church website. It should also begin or at least build on a theological vocabulary to aid in their biblical studies. Even though the church is very doctrinally sound, with superb, biblical leadership, this will help it stay that way because the congregants, particularly in this case, to recognize even the more subtle unbiblical teachings that may try to creep in.

**Summary**

Permission to conduct the study will include a letter and the participants will be protected by filling out an informed consent form. Data collection involeves demographics and belief questionnaires as well as an open ended questionnaire to be completed at beginning of and after the end of the intervention. The intervention consists of a six week course addressing biblcial worldview of a group of apporximately women at CityLight in light of doctrinal beliefs on trhe church website.

SECTION IV

REFLECTION

(This section should be approx. 3-5 pp)

Introductory paragraph

The folllowing words were included in the study because they are involved with most or all of the doctrinal points on some level.

False Teaching and Biblical Discernment

Exegesis is “drawing meaning out of” while Eisegesis is “reading meaning into (Grenz, Guretzki, & Nordling, 1998).”

Syncretism occurs when beliefs of two or more belief systems blend to form something different from what either meant originally. Many of the

UnBiblical Prayer in this context refers to praying in a way less consistent with Biblical examples and more consistent with worldly religions.

Extra-Biblical Revelation in this context is is uniblical revelation that contradicts or in any way undermines the truth of the scriptures, for example it someone claims to receive a divine message that contradicts something commanded in scripture or claims to add to it.

Bible verse on false teaching:

2 Corinthians 11:4

4 For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.

\*Paul compares this other teaching/gospel/Jesus with what the serpent told Eve in the Garden of Eden which was contrary to what God had commanded.

Biblical Orthodoxy in the context of this study will be defined by the Church doctrinal Statement.

Results and Evaluation

The intervention was implemented on…

Data were analyzed according to…

The following themes were identified between the pre-intervention and post-intervention data…

The results of the intervention suggest…

The research question can be answered as follows…

Personal and Professional Reflection

The results of this action research project affected me through…

Implications for Leadership

The results of this action research project are relevant to leading change in society because…

Leadership theories that support the results of this action research project include…

Implications for Social Change

The results of this action research project can help advance constructive social change because…

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future action research projects might consider…

**Summary and Conclusion**

In conclusion, the problem was… the research question was answered… this study was significant because…

APPENDIX A

TITLE

APPENDIX B

ASSESSING BIBLICAL DISCERNMENT OF WOMEN IN A VIRGINIA CHURCH SETTING: AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Consent Form

\*Action Research Project

Assessing Biblical Discernment of Women in a Virginia Church Setting:

An Action Research Project

Action Research Project

Principal Investigator: Ashley Boyles, Omega Graduate School

Phone:(540) 222-5307

Email:woodwardac@alumni.vcu.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. D. Ward, PhD

Email:

Participant Recruitment:

The target population for this study consists of churchgoing females at CityLight Baptist Church who are 18 and older (except those who are pregnant or in prison). Participation is entirely voluntary and any participants may opt out at any time for any reason.

OGS Informed Consent Template

Participant Recruitment:

The target population for this study consists of churchgoing females at CityLight Baptist Church who are 18 and older (except those who are pregnant or in prison). Participation is entirely voluntary and any participants may opt out at any time for any reason.

Informed Consent:

Dear CityLight Church members,

I am currently enrolled in Doctor of Social Leadership program at Omega Graduate School and am now working on the Doctoral Action Research Project. I have received permission from the Office of Academics CAO and the Dean of Faculty to survey CityLight Baptist Church as part of research exploring biblical worldview in Christian women.

I am requesting your consideration and your participation in my Action Plan Research Project. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey handed out on location.

You are being asked to volunteer in a research study conducted by Ashley Boyles, who is a doctoral student in the Doctor of Social Leadership program at Omega Graduate School. Ashley Boyles is conducting this study for her doctoral Action Research Project. Dr. David Ward is the faculty advisor for this project. This study is self-funded by Ashley Boyles.

Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether to participate. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a female church attendee at City Light Baptist Church, over 18 years of age, not pregnant or in in prison.

The purpose of this study is to identify opportunities to reinforce and maintain understanding of biblical concepts found in the statement of beliefs page on the church website: <https://www.citylightculpeper.org/values.>

Procedures

The study involves three parts, to be completed once before the intervention and then a second time after the intervention is complete. The three parts include the consent form, the demographic questions, and the questionnaire. To participate in the study, all three sections must be completed, each time.

If you wish to participate in this study, please complete:

1. The consent form
2. The demographic information
3. The questionnaire

If there are is an open ended question you do not know the answer to or are unsure, just write that in the blank.

Risks and Benefits:

There is no cost and no known risk to participate in this study. Discomfort, risks, or inconveniences, if any, are expected to minimal or unlikely. If they do become problematic, you may terminate participation in this study.

The potential benefits of the study, if the intervention is successful, would directly strengthen biblical worldview discernment for women at City Light Baptist Church but also less directly, Christian women in general outside of the church.

Confidentiality and Privacy:

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and identified with you will remain confidential to only be revealed with your consent or as required by law. Confidentiality will be preserved by means of a code number created by the participant to let Ashley Boyles and the Omega Graduate School IRB to determine the validity of the data collection and its analysis.

Ashley Boyles will, however, use non identifiable information from the study for other publications and possible future research without further permission. Any information used will not identify any participants publicly.

Compensation:

You will not receive any payment or other form of compensation for participation in this study.

Procedures for Withdrawal:

You can choose whether or not to participate in this study. If you do participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences. You may also decline to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Unanswered questions will be treated as withdrawal and any previous information collected will be destroyed.

I have read and understand the information above.

Yes

No

Identification of Investigators: If you have any questions or concerns about the research, you may contact:

Ashley Boyles, Principal Investigator

Omega Graduate School

Phone: (540) 222-5307

Email: [woodwardac@alumni.vcu.edu](mailto:woodwardac@alumni.vcu.edu)

Dr. D. Ward, PhD

Faculty Advisor

Omega Graduate School

Email:

Vulnerable Populations:

OGS does not support research with vulnerable populations (e.g., children, pregnant women, prisoners)

Rights of Research Subjects

An Institutional Review Board (“IRB”) is overseeing this research. An IRB is a group of doctoral-level researchers who perform an independent review of research studies to ensure the rights and welfare of participants are protected.

The Omega Graduate School Institutional Board of Review has reviewed my request to conduct this research project. If you have any concerns about your rights in this study, please contact the OGS IRB at dean@ogs.edu.

Statement of Consent

I have read and considered the information and procedures presented in this letter. I affirm that I understand the purpose of the research and the study procedures. I understand that I may ask questions at any time and can withdraw my participation without disadvantage or consequence. I have read this consent form. My signature below indicates my consent to participate in this study.

I consent to participate in this study.

Yes

No

To preserve confidentiality in your responses, please create a code unique to you. Please enter the birthdate of friend or relative. Please use a two-digit month, two-digit day, and four-digit year with no symbol separating. For example 06161929 for June 16, 1929.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Please do not share this code with others to help maintain the confidentiality of your responses.

APPENDIX C

TITLE

Demographic Questionnaire

Please select your Age group

18-24

25-29

30-49

50-64

65+

Are you a member of City Light Baptist Church?

Yes

No

Marital Status:

Single

In a relationship

Married

Widowed

Divorced

Do you have children?

Yes

No

Grandchildren?

Yes

No

Role at Church:

Visitor

Attendee

Member

Leader

Teacher

Volunteer

Other

Previous Church Background

None

Minimal

Baptist

Other Denomination(s)

Other

Educational Experience

Christian

Secular

Both

Other

Highest Level of Education:

High School

Associate

Bachelors

Masters

Doctoral

Post Doctoral

Belief Questionnaire

Questionnaire

Likert Scale (Beliefs)

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

Likert Scale (vocabulary/teachers)

1.Unfamiliar/New

2.Somewhat familiar

3.Very familiar

Beliefs

1. The Bible:

The Bible is inspired, inerrant, and authoritative in both the Old and New Testaments.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

2.God:

God eternally exists in three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and that these three are one God, having the same nature, attributes, and perfections, and are worthy of the same worship, reverence, and obedience.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

3.Man:

Man was created in the image of God, but man sinned and fell through disobedience to God, and that the entire human race shares in man's lost and depraved nature.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

4.Jesus Christ:

Jesus, the eternal Son of God, took upon Himself the form of a man by means of the virgin birth, lived a sinless life, yet retained His absolute deity, being at the same time fully God and fully man.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

5.Atonement of Sin:

Atonement for sin was made by the sacrificial and substitutionary death of Jesus Christ.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree
6. The Resurrection:

The crucified body of our Lord was literally resurrected,

followed by His ascension into heaven, and His priestly intercession.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree
6. Salvation:

Salvation is the gift of God by grace alone and received by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that this faith is manifested in works pleasing to God.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

8.Ordinances of the Church:

The ordinances of the church, by the command of Christ, are Water Baptism by immersion and the Lord’s Supper, both of which are administered to those who are born again.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

9.Eternity:

Eternity consists of salvation of the believers and in the damnation and punishment of the nonbelievers. The consummation of all things includes the visible, personal, and glorious return of Jesus Christ.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

Vocabulary Assessment

1. Biblical Worldview Discernment

1.Unfamiliar/New

2.Somewhat familiar

3.Very familiar

1. Exegesis

1.Unfamiliar/New

2.Somewhat familiar

3.Very familiar

1. Eisegesis

1.Unfamiliar/New

2.Somewhat familiar

3.Very familiar

1. Extra-Biblical Revelation

1.Unfamiliar/New

2.Somewhat familiar

3.Very familiar

1. UnBiblical Prayer

1.Unfamiliar/New

2.Somewhat familiar

3.Very familiar

1. Syncretism

1.Unfamiliar/New

2.Somewhat familiar

3.Very familiar

Topics of discussion:

Adapted from AWI:

1. Moralistic standards exist that pertain to all people at all times.
2. Strongly Disagree
3. Disagree
4. Neither Agree nor Disagree
5. Agree
6. Strongly Agree
7. Good deeds are not enough to earn one’s way into Heaven.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neither Agree nor Disagree
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree
6. The point of life is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself (Lk 10:27, ESV).”

1. Strongly Disagree

2. Disagree

3. Neither Agree nor Disagree

4. Agree

5. Strongly Agree

1. The Bible is the correct and absolutely faithful statement of God.
2. Strongly Disagree
3. Disagree
4. Neither Agree nor Disagree
5. Agree
6. Strongly Agree
7. Everyone has a specific calling or design for their life from God.
8. Strongly Disagree
9. Disagree
10. Neither Agree nor Disagree
11. Agree
12. Strongly Agree
13. Human existence is divine
14. Strongly Disagree

2. Disagree

3 Neither Agree nor Disagree

1. Agree
2. Strongly Agree
3. All truth is based on God as its foundation.
4. Strongly Disagree
5. Disagree
6. Neither Agree nor Disagree
7. Agree
8. Strongly Agree
9. You identify as a Christian.
10. Strongly Disagree
11. Disagree
12. Neither Agree nor Disagree
13. Agree
14. Strongly Agree
15. Sexual activity between individuals not married to each other is morally objectionable
16. Strongly Disagree
17. Disagree
18. Neither Agree nor Disagree
19. Agree
20. Strongly Agree
21. Purposeful dishonesty to protect your image or benefit is morally offensive.
22. Strongly Disagree
23. Disagree
24. Neither Agree nor Disagree
25. Agree
26. Strongly Agree
27. You are dedicated to putting your spiritual beliefs into practice.
28. Strongly Disagree
29. Disagree
30. Neither Agree nor Disagree
31. Agree
32. Strongly Agree
33. Once or more weekly you observe a church service on line or in person.
34. Strongly Disagree
35. Disagree
36. Neither Agree nor Disagree
37. Agree
38. Strongly Agree
39. Once or more weekly you read or examine the Bible.
40. Strongly Disagree
41. Disagree
42. Neither Agree nor Disagree
43. Agree
44. Strongly Agree
45. At least once weekly you admit your sins and request God’s forgiveness.
46. Strongly Disagree
47. Disagree
48. Neither Agree nor Disagree
49. Agree
50. Strongly Agree

Well-Known Teachers and Leaders in Christianity

1. Paula White

1.Unfamiliar/New

2.Somewhat familiar

3.Very familiar

1. Joyce Meyer

1.Unfamiliar/New

2.Somewhat familiar

3.Very familiar

1. John MacArthur

1.Unfamiliar/New

2.Somewhat familiar

3.Very familiar

1. Bill Johnson

1.Unfamiliar/New

2.Somewhat familiar

3.Very familiar

1. Beth Moore

1.Unfamiliar/New

2.Somewhat familiar

3.Very familiar

1. Paul Washer

1.Unfamiliar/New

2.Somewhat familiar

3.Very familiar

1. T.D. Jakes

1.Unfamiliar/New

2.Somewhat familiar

3.Very familiar

1. Priscilla Shirer

1.Unfamiliar/New

2.Somewhat familiar

3.Very familiar

1. R.C. Sproul

1.Unfamiliar/New

2.Somewhat familiar

3.Very familiar

1. Sarah Young

1.Unfamiliar/New

2.Somewhat familiar

3.Very familiar

1. Tony Evans

1.Unfamiliar/New

2.Somewhat familiar

3.Very familiar

1. Steven Furtick

1.Unfamiliar/New

2.Somewhat familiar

3.Very familiar

RAW DATA

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