

Gardner-Webb University

Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University

Doctor of Ministry Projects

School of Divinity

Spring 2023

Developing A Shared Ecclesial Identity Utilizing Story-Based Elements With First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Georgia

Jeremy T. Shoulta

Gardner-Webb University, jeremysoulta@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/divinity_etd



Part of the [Organizational Communication Commons](#), [Organization Development Commons](#), [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#), and the [Sociology of Religion Commons](#)

Citation Information

Shoulta, Jeremy T., "Developing A Shared Ecclesial Identity Utilizing Story-Based Elements With First Baptist Church, Gainesville, Georgia" (2023). *Doctor of Ministry Projects*. 62.

https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/divinity_etd/62

This Project is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Divinity at Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Ministry Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. For more information, please see [Copyright and Publishing Info](#).

DEVELOPING A SHARED ECCLESIAL IDENTITY
UTILIZING STORY-BASED ELEMENTS WITH
FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, GAINESVILLE, GEORGIA

A PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY
OF THE M. CHRISTOPHER WHITE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY
BOILING SPRINGS, NORTH CAROLINA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
JEREMY T. SHOULTA
NOVEMBER 28, 2022

APPROVAL FORM

DEVELOPING A SHARED ECCLESIAL IDENTITY
UTILIZING STORY BASED ELEMENTS
WITH FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH GAINESVILLE, GEORGIA

JEREMY T. SHOULTA

APPROVED BY:

_____(Faculty Advisor)

_____(Field Supervisor)

_____(D.Min. Director)

Date: _____

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work surrounding this Doctor of Ministry project was supported by countless individuals who wished me joy and success throughout this endeavor. I am grateful to have been at the receiving end of so much support and prayer through the duration of this project.

To the Gardner-Webb University community: I am overjoyed to have met so many new acquaintances while working through this program. Our conversations about faith and life while eating at the Snack Shack or exploring the Holy Land were just as valuable as our classroom discussions. Thank you for your friendship, especially during seasons of remote gatherings.

To the School of Divinity faculty and staff: From the moment I first sought information about this program, you have gone out of your way to support my educational and vocational pursuits. You have gifted me such wisdom and insight for the journey of ministry, and I will never take your investment in my life for granted. For this project, I am especially grateful for direct support from Drs. Robert Canoy, Ben Leslie, Jim McConnell, Herbert Palomino and Danny West. I'd also like to extend a special thanks to my field supervisor, Dr. Scott Hagaman.

To the faith communities who directly and indirectly invested in my doctoral work, namely First Baptist Church Black Mountain and First Baptist Church Gainesville: I was immensely blessed by your grace throughout the course of this program, especially during those weeks which required me to focus heavily on this project. I pray that my continuing education has played some role in your ongoing Kingdom work.

To Valarie, Maggie and Macy: To say that I could not have accomplished my personal goals without your patience, understanding and love would be a massive understatement. I could never adequately express my appreciation for your relentless encouragement these past few years. You have been, and will always be, the most important "characters" in my story.

ABSTRACT

The Body of Christ is challenged to, “be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind” (Philippians 2:2). How then could a congregation, comprised of individuals harboring diverse cultural worldviews, discover and live into this reality? Through various individual and group exercises, participants sought to determine whether story elements have the power to serve as a true sense-making device within an ecclesial setting. The results indicate that that a majority of participants found the story-based framework beneficial in regards to their personal understanding of the work of First Baptist Church.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vi
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	ix
Chapter One	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Project Setting	2
Statement of Problem	5
Project Goal	6
Resource Review	6
Chapter Two	
2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION.....	9
Detailed Project Description	9
Project Calendar	14
Means of Evaluation	15
Chapter Three	
3. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE.....	17
Introduction	17
The Story of the Testing of Abraham	19
The Story of David and Goliath	21
The Stories of Finding Lost Things	24
The Story of the Warrior Christ	29
The Meta-Narrative of Scripture	31

Intertextual Examples of Self-Identification In God’s Story	33
Chapter Four	
4. CRITICAL EVALUATION.....	38
Participant Demographics	38
Pre-project Data Analysis	40
Data Analysis: Character and Setting	46
Data Analysis: Conflict	49
Data Analysis: Plot	53
Data Analysis: Theme	55
Post-project Data Analysis	57
Methodological Critiques	64
Chapter Five	
5. CONCLUSION.....	68
Appendix	72
A. INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE.....	72
B. PROJECT CONSENT FORM.....	73
C. SUMMARY OF WEEKLY INTERACTIVE CONTENT.....	76
D. DATA FROM COLLABORATIVE EXERCISE.....	82
E. PRE-PROJECT & POST-PROJECT SURVEYS.....	86
F. WEEKLY PRE-SESSION & POST-SESSION SURVEYS.....	94
G. FACILITATOR EVALUATION.....	106
SOURCES CONSULTED.....	108

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURE 1	Participant Demographics: Age Range.....	39
FIGURE 2	Pre-project Data Analysis: Gender.....	40
FIGURE 3	Pre-project Data Analysis: Personal Presence & Involvement.....	43
FIGURE 4	Pre-project Data Analysis: Frame of Reference (Personal).....	43
FIGURE 5	Pre-project Data Analysis: Frame of Reference (Congregation)...	44
FIGURE 6	Pre-project Data Analysis: Frame of Reference (FBC).....	44
FIGURE 7	Pre-project Data Analysis: Utilizing Story For FBC Identity.....	45
FIGURE 8	Pre-project Data Analysis: Participant Utilization of Story.....	46
FIGURE 9	Data Analysis: Helpfulness of Character and Setting.....	47
FIGURE 10	Data Analysis: Importance of Understanding Conflict.....	50
FIGURE 11	Data Analysis: Utilizing Conflict (Congregation)	51
FIGURE 12	Data Analysis: Utilizing Conflict (Personal).....	52
FIGURE 13	Data Analysis: Utilizing Plot (Personal)	54
FIGURE 14	Post-project Data Analysis: Frame of Reference (Congregation).....	59
FIGURE 15	Post-project Data Analysis: Frame of Reference (FBC)	60
FIGURE 16	Post-project Data Analysis: Personal Presence & Involvement....	61
FIGURE 17	Post-project Data Analysis: Participant Utilization of Story.....	63
FIGURE 18	Methodological Critique: Participant Age Range (Survey 4A).....	65
FIGURE 19	Methodological Critique: Participant Age Range (Survey 4B).....	65
FIGURE 20	Post-project Data Analysis: Utilizing Story For FBC Identity.....	69

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In his groundbreaking book, *Building a Storybrand*, Donald Miller writes,

“The most powerful tool we can use to organize information so people don’t have to burn very many calories is story. Story is a sense-making device. It identifies a necessary ambition, defines challenges that are battling to keep us from achieving that ambition, and provides a plan to help us conquer those challenges.”¹

Miller’s appreciation for story is not unique, but the embrace of story as an organizational framework remains elusive for many institutions, not least of which includes the local church. Week by week, churchgoers hear the stories² (or story) of scripture in order to strengthen their personal theological, ethical and moral foundation, but most congregations do not view their own collective identity in terms of story. With an abundance of rich storytelling in the biblical narrative, would it not be beneficial for faith communities to speak of and live into a story-based framework as they seek to discover meaning in their respective contexts?

Given the significant cultural shifts over the past few decades and the seismic impact of COVID-19, First Baptist Church Gainesville faces significant questions about its future and how it might utilize fresh expressions of being the church. Rather than holding onto the outdated notion that church involvement is a “given” for individuals and families in the community, First Baptist Church Gainesville must discover a “sense-

¹ Donald Miller, *Building a Storybrand* (Nashville: Harper Collins, 2017), 8.

² Utilizing terms such as “story,” “tale” and “character” does not necessitate literal or non-literal manners of interpretation. For instance, referring to Jesus as a “character” does not imply a fictional, non-historical existence. This general use of story-based terms will remain true throughout the duration of this project unless indicated otherwise.

making device” for strengthening congregational identity and purpose. It is my belief that the church would do well to consider the timeless but powerful story-based framework for pursuing ecclesial identity and purpose.

In order to explore the usefulness and impact of this framework, I invited twenty leaders from First Baptist Church to develop a collective identity utilizing story-based elements. This project challenged the subjects to think in broad, visionary ways but carried no official authority in regards to First Baptist Church business. Rather, the project encouraged diverse individuals within the congregation to consider their personal stories as part of a larger narrative within the local church. Upon the commencement of this project, it was my hope that participants would discover an exciting and collaborative way to understand the story of First Baptist Church alongside the biblical witness, potentially leading to a more widespread initiative.

Project Setting

First Baptist Church is a nearly 200 year-old congregation located in the Green Street Historical District of Gainesville, Georgia. Gainesville is the seat of Hall County, which is home to more than 200,000 individuals. Affectionately known as “The Poultry Capital of the World,” Gainesville is a thriving city in the vibrant region of Northeast Georgia. It is experiencing rapid growth due to the expansion of the Atlanta metropolitan area combined with the appeal of establishing roots in a medium-sized residential area. Other significant demographics include:

- Racial Composition: 74.83% White, 15.47% African American, 4.2% Other
- Median Age: 31.5 years

- Language: 59.13% English-only, 37.8 Spanish
- Education Attained: 75% High School Degree, 26.97% Bachelors Degree or Higher
- Median Household Income: \$51,520
- Overall Poverty Rate: 20.97%³

First Baptist Church is a large congregation with over 3,000 members and approximately 800 active members. While there is noticeable diversity amongst various generations at First Baptist Church, a majority of members are comprised of the 50+ age demographic. A majority of members are counted among the white, middle-to-upper class demographic. This is considerably less diverse than the general population of Hall County.⁴

Like most “big steeple” churches in North America, First Baptist Church is grounded in traditional ministry models not limited to worship approach, Sunday school classes and small groups, discipling and mission programs, volunteer opportunities, and facilities utilization. As of October 2022, ten full and part time clergy and numerous operations staff lead and facilitate major areas of ministry and mission. The church has made a concerted effort over the years to periodically revitalize and renew these models without any significant “deconstruction.” Indeed, the traditional aspects of the

³ “Atlanta--Athens-Clarke County--Sandy Springs, GA-AL CSA,” Census Reporter, November 2, 2021, <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/33000US122-atlanta-athens-clarke-county-sandy-springs-ga-al-csa/>; “Gainesville, Georgia Population 2021,” World Population Review, November 2, 2021, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/gainesville-ga-population>.

⁴ “QuickFacts: Gainesville city, Georgia; Hall County, Georgia,” United States Census Bureau, November 2, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/gainesvillecitygeorgia,hallcountygeorgia/PST045219>.

congregation will likely remain a central tenet of First Baptist Church's identity for the long haul.

The church associates with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship as its primary denominational partner, though other major partners in ministry and mission include the Southern Baptist Convention and Baptist World Alliance. The congregation serves alongside other churches in the Gainesville area and takes part in ecumenical initiatives such as Lenten worship and service-oriented projects. First Baptist Church partners with dozens of regional, national and global mission organizations and involves a significant percentage of the membership in this work.

While it has become increasingly difficult to categorize the theological identity of most any congregation, it would be more than fair to designate First Baptist Church as a moderate Baptist church relative to other protestant churches in the region. Because of its steadfast commitment to ordaining women as ministers and deacons, maintaining ecumenical partnerships and welcoming diverse theological viewpoints among its members, the church is sometimes regarded as a "progressive" community amongst Gainesville residents. On the contrary, the congregation maintains an adherence to the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message, a rather moderate-conservative compilation of Southern Baptist beliefs.⁵ First Baptist Church has utilized curriculum from publishers such as Lifeway Christian Resources, Smyth and Helwys, Nurturing Faith, NextSunday Resources and Baptistway Press.

⁵ "Comparison Chart," The Baptist Faith and Message, Southern Baptist Convention, November 2, 2021, <https://bfm.sbc.net/comparison-chart/>.

Statement of Problem

Traditional Baptist teaching and practice has led to an overly individualistic understanding of ecclesial identity and participation. The very notion of the Christian experience is framed almost exclusively in terms of one's eternal destination and the personal adherence to a "correct" set of beliefs and moral standards. This narrow approach to the Christian faith diminishes the expansive nature of the Christian journey and the importance of serving alongside a diverse body of Christ while instilling kingdom values in the community.

The common structural makeup of established congregations only exacerbates the individualistic approach to church understanding and engagement. The formation of insulated "ministry silos" requires clergy, staff and lay people to commit to specialized areas of ministry and mission with limited collaboration. This structure has come under increased scrutiny in recent years due to its adverse effects on church dynamics, resources and cooperation. It is not uncommon for participants of every stripe to engage in "turf wars" for finances, volunteers, calendar space, and promotional priorities. Inevitably, any sense of shared purpose is compromised on account of a structure which encourages a "stay in your lane" mentality and flow. Even as members seek to support the church at-large, there is a tendency to neglect the overarching mission of the organization and focus exclusively on that which is solely within one's purview. This reality is rather common in established, longstanding congregations, First Baptist Church notwithstanding.

Because a complete dismantling of existing structures is virtually impossible in most settings, including First Baptist Church, we must discover a more effective way to

emphasize our shared purpose and collaborative efforts as a church body. With this in mind, could there exist a non-traditional ecclesial framework which has the power to help the Body of Christ adhere to a common purpose and pursue more collaborative efforts in being the hands and feet of Jesus?

Project Goal

The ultimate goal of this project was to determine whether or not a focus on story creates a greater sense of collective purpose, or “meta-narrative,” amongst a sampling of lay leaders at First Baptist Church. A secondary goal was to see if focusing on such a framework might move individuals or the entire sampling to express a desire to pursue more meaningful involvement through the work of First Baptist Church. Though somewhat subjective in nature, my greatest hope was to see the power of story generate unity, connection and the desire for increased engagement with other individuals at First Baptist Church.

Resource Review

For this ministry project, I utilized numerous and diverse groups of resources, not least of which included scholarly publications, previous academic and ministerial works, internet software, items provided by First Baptist Church Gainesville and human resources (for assistance and participation).

Scholarly works from the library of Gardner-Webb University were the primary support for my biblical rationale. These resources included acclaimed commentaries such as the *Anchor Bible Commentary Series*, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary For*

Teaching and Preaching, *The New Interpreters Bible Commentary*, the *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary* and several other mainstream works.

Former coursework materials and textbooks from my time at Baptist Seminary of Kentucky and Gardner-Webb University were consulted throughout the research phase of the project. Daniel Migliore's *Faith Seeking Understanding* was the central textbook for my Master of Divinity theology course, and I elected to utilize this resource again for the project. Additionally, my Masters level Hermeneutics course provided a solid foundation for the continued exploration of Narrative Criticism and Salvation-History, both of which remained in the foreground of my research and writing. The Ministry of Biblical Interpretation at Gardner-Webb built upon and expanded my interest in and knowledge of this realm of study. My final assignment for that course entitled, *An Exposition of Revelation's Letter to the Church at Philadelphia* provided support for the biblical rationale within this project, particularly in regards to the nature of apocalyptic literature.

Devotional books from my personal library were also utilized to further my research as well. A couple of these works include *Simply Christian* by N.T. Wright and *The Story of God* by Michael Lodahl.

First Baptist Church Gainesville provided numerous resources for the execution of this project. Specifically, the church provided tools and space for the presentation of this project material. Video recording, producing, editing and internet uploading was made possible through First Baptist Church technology and infrastructure. Additionally, First Baptist Church provided classroom space and a dry erase board and markers for the in-person collaborative exercise.

The specific manner in which I presented this project to test subjects was made possible by free resources from Google, LLC.⁶ I was able to utilize YouTube, Google's free online video sharing and media platform, to upload and host the weekly interactive sessions. Additionally, I utilized Google Forms for the creation and implementation of participant surveys. This technology allowed for participants to complete the surveys on their own devices. Because the participant surveys were completed and stored on Google's server, I was able to access, study and transfer project data in an efficient manner.

The most important resource in this project involved the participation of approximately 20 individuals from within the First Baptist Church community. Their willingness to provide such time, intelligence, energy and personal feedback ensured the success of the project on a research level. The abundance of qualitative feedback they supplied provided the greatest evidence for the importance of this project both academically and ministerially.

⁶ The utilization of Google, LLC does not serve as an endorsement of the company or any of its products.

CHAPTER TWO

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Detailed Project Description

This ministry project challenged a group of First Baptist Church members to participate in a multi-week, interactive process with the intent of developing a shared ecclesial identity utilizing story-based elements. In my attempt to create an accurate representation of First Baptist Church membership, I invited an equal number of male and female participants from each adult generation, all of whom were listed as “active participants” on First Baptist Church Sunday School rosters.⁷ This approach, assuming full participation, would ensure a broad sampling of at least minimally-involved First Baptist Church members contributing to the data collection.

Over the course of several weeks, test subjects experienced a series of short videos containing teachings, guided reflections and writing challenges centered around the power and effect of story, the impact and importance of storytelling in the scriptures, the inherent presence of narrative elements in certain biblical stories and the potential or perceived presence of story-based elements within our own congregational life. The final week of the project consisted of an in-person collaborative exercise which sought to bring everyone’s reflections together in hopes of discovering a shared ecclesial identity utilizing story-based elements.

The first five sessions (Weeks 1-5) were made available for participants to conduct on their own schedule within a designated week. The videos contained

⁷ “Builder,” “Boomer,” “Generation X,” and “Millennial.”

educational lessons based on a particular story-based element, self-guided journaling instructions and a link to the week's project survey(s).⁸ The video lessons and journaling instructions were entirely written and composed by the project facilitator and did not utilize mass-produced curriculum or resources. All biblical references, quotations and visual media were given proper credit during the presentation.⁹ Though project surveys and facilitator evaluations would remain confidential, I invited participants to preserve their journaling exercises for the sake of sharing some or all of their reflections during the Week 6 collaborative session. I encouraged participants to make all, or at least a portion of, the journaling exercises suitable for public dialog and collaboration. I clarified that no one would be forced or compelled to share during the collaborative exercise nor would anyone be held in a low regard should they choose not to share or participate.

Week 1 of the ministry project invited participants to reflect on the power of story in a general, biblical and ecclesial sense. Upon viewing the Week 1 video session, participants were asked to complete a written reflection on a biblical story of their choosing by describing its impact on their personal faith journey. The participants were encouraged to keep this biblical story "on hand" throughout the course of the project as they would reflect on it each week. Additionally, participants were challenged to read and reflect on the Book of Jonah as a common point of study for the duration of the project. Finally, participants were prompted to reflect on "the story" of their involvement at First Baptist Church. Participants were asked to complete a pre-project survey prior to this Week 1 video session but were not given a posttest following the session.

⁸ A summary of video content can be found in Appendix C.

⁹ E.g. biblical references, quotations, etc.

The Week 2 video session introduced two story elements: character and setting. Participants were first asked to identify and write about the character(s) and setting(s) present within the biblical story they chose during Week 1. Upon the completion of this exercise, participants experienced a short teaching and reflection on the story of David & Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. This teaching focused on the story's characters and setting(s) as critical to the understanding and interpretation of the biblical text. Following this teaching, participants were challenged to reflect on and journal about the setting(s) and characters present within the Book of Jonah. Finally, participants were asked to write about the "characters" and "settings" present in their personal stories at First Baptist Church. In order to evaluate the impact of Week 2's material, I asked participants to complete an identical pre-session and post-session survey in hopes that they had garnered an increased understanding and appreciation for the story elements within the biblical text and within their own "stories" at First Baptist Church.

Week 3 challenged participants to reflect on the "conflict" element of story. Participants were first asked to identify and write about the conflict(s) present within the biblical story they chose during the Week 1 exercise. Upon the completion of this exercise, participants proceeded to experience a short teaching on the conflict present within the story of the Warrior Christ in Revelation 19. Following this teaching, participants were prompted to reflect on and journal about the conflict (or conflicts) present within the Book of Jonah. Finally, participants were asked to write about the "conflicts" they had experienced during their journey at First Baptist Church. As in Week 2, participants were asked to complete an identical survey prior to and after this video session.

Week 4 invited participants to focus on the element of “plot” as necessary to understanding and appreciating a story. As in previous weeks, participants were first asked to reflect on their chosen biblical story from Week 1 and to write about the plot (or plots) present within that story. After this exercise was completed, participants experienced a short teaching on Genesis 22, commonly referred to as “The Testing of Abraham,” and were invited to reflect on the plot of this narrative. Following this focused teaching, participants were challenged to identify and journal about the plot(s) of the Book of Jonah. They were then asked to reflect on the “plot” of their time at First Baptist Church. With this particular story element, participants were also encouraged to imagine a storyline which extends into the future, inviting them to explore their “future story” at First Baptist Church. Participants were asked to complete an identical survey prior to and after this session.

Week 5 challenged participants to consider the final story-based element of “theme.” After journaling about the theme(s) present within the biblical story they chose during Week 1, participants experienced a brief teaching on the theme(s) present within the Parables of Luke 15. Participants were then invited to reflect on and journal about the theme (or themes) within the Book of Jonah. Finally, participants were given the opportunity to journal about the “themes” present within their stories of involvement and participation at First Baptist Church. Participants were asked to complete identical surveys prior to and after this session.

Week 6 marked the final week of the project and invited participants into a common space at First Baptist Church to consider the implications of focusing on story-based elements. While the previous sessions were conducted through virtual, self-guided

exercises, the sixth week encouraged extensive group reflection and dialog. Ideally, this collaborative exercise (and corresponding evaluation) would help us determine whether or not a story-based framework, in the most general sense, could serve as a means of understanding congregational identity and purpose.

During the first portion of the Week 6 session, participants were asked to name the biblical stories they had chosen during the first week of the project. The primary purpose of this activity was to “break the ice” and create a space of comfortable sharing and intent listening. After this time of sharing, participants were asked to share their reflections (or a portion of their reflections) from the previous weeks’ Jonah exercises. All participants readily engaged in a lengthy and healthy time of dialog regarding the story-based elements within the Book of Jonah. The variety of reflections were numerous and insightful. I compiled the participant feedback on a white board in order to illustrate the diversity of thought within this relatively small focus group.¹⁰

I went on to ask participants if a biblical meta-narrative is even possible due to the numerous stories (and their respective elements) throughout the 66 books of our Canon. This consideration admittedly served as a “leading question” as most churchgoers regard the Bible - to some degree - as a collection of interrelated documents with Christ as the central “lens” through which all stories are interpreted and understood. However, this “reverse approach” to understanding the scriptures as a meta-narrative brought the crux of this project to the forefront of our conversation. I will expound on the effectiveness of this material in Chapters 4 and 5.

¹⁰ See Appendix D.

After the Bible-focused exercise was completed, participants were asked to consider their personal First Baptist Church stories, including character, setting, conflict, plot and theme. Participants once again shared their reflections from the previous weeks' self-guided reflections. This portion of the session appeared to generate some combination of deep reflection, bewilderment and – potentially – confusion. I will expound upon this observation in Chapters 4 and 5.

In closing, I asked participants if it would be possible for us to articulate a common narrative based on the diverse set of story elements we observe in the faith community. Additionally, I prompted participants to consider whether or not this story-based approach changed their personal understanding of membership and participation at First Baptist Church. The final survey would help me to determine whether or not this approach provided a compelling & helpful ecclesial framework for the participants. After the completion of this session, I invited each participant to complete the final project survey and facilitator evaluation.

Project Calendar

May 2022

- Project approved by Dr. Danny West, Executive Director of the Doctor of Ministry program.

June 2022

- Began seeking approval to commence project from the Institutional Review Board
- Issued informal invitations to 20 First Baptist Church members to participate in ministry project. Secured 2-3 alternates in the event that participants could not fulfill obligations at time of project.
- Prepared evaluative materials (10 surveys and 1 facilitator evaluation on Google Forms) for use with test subjects

August 2022

- Received approval to commence project from Institutional Review Board
- Distributed & received completed Informed Consent from participants
- Deployed project on YouTube
- Initiated project by inviting participants to experience video session(s) and to complete corresponding surveys
- Scheduled Week 6 collaborative exercise for September 26

September 2022

- Held Week 6 group exercise at First Baptist Church & deployed final survey and facilitator evaluation

November 2022

- Evaluated data and drew conclusions from participant surveys
- Completed project and submitted to D.Min. faculty
- Participated in oral defense with D.Min. faculty

Means of Evaluation

In order to evaluate this project, I gathered qualitative and quantitative data throughout the entire course of the project. The quantitative portion of the evaluations utilized a 10-point Likert scale to provide the most precise data. A sizable number of questions were asked prior to and after each weekly session to track the participants' changing sentiments, if any such changes existed. Though there were fewer qualitative questions throughout the surveys and tests, they allowed for deeper, more extensive reflections on the project material. After the weekly sessions and surveys were completed, I examined the responses and looked for significant data points that would help me determine whether or not the utilization of story-based elements made an impact on individuals and/or the entire group of participants.

I had originally planned to examine multiple demographics when determining the success or failure of adopting a story-based framework. These demographics included generational representation, gender representation and representation based on frequency of attendance at core church functions. Upon the commencement of and throughout the duration of this project, I came to realize that attempting to analyze demographics might be excessive and unnecessary due to the desire for the project to transcend demographics, theology, politics, etc. As specific gender and generational differences were not in and of themselves central to the success of this project, I decided to only reference these demographics upon significant data shifts and/or as a result of specific qualitative feedback.

It should be noted that I elected not to utilize a control group for this project. I chose to forego this research practice due to the prevalence of data collection throughout the course of the project. Because the goal of the project was to evaluate the effectiveness of a particular program, a singular group of participants offered feedback to identical surveys prior to and after engaging the subject matter. Due to this approach, I concluded that a control group was unnecessary for evaluating the effectiveness of the project.

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

Introduction

In its statement of faith, First Baptist Church regards the Christian Scriptures as “...the inspired revelation of God's will and way, made full and complete in the life and teachings of Christ, [as] the authoritative rule of faith and practice.”¹¹ The contents of the Scriptures are expansive and diverse, which instill both wonder and bewilderment for those who seek truth within its pages. One of the greatest challenges to interpreting the Bible as a whole arises from the presence of multiple literary genres among the 66 books of Christian Scripture. These genres include, but are not limited to law, history, psalm, proverb, gospel, epistle and apocalypse, each of which include multiple “sub-classifications.”¹² With each of these types of literature comes various means of interpretation, teaching and application - a reality which has inevitably led to intense theological disagreement and division.

Despite the presence of such tension, Christians have sought to discover a faithful biblical interpretation which pursues a broader narrative throughout the entire collection of scripture. According to Alister E. McGrath, “the Bible tells stories about God, just as much as it makes doctrinal theological statements.”¹³ Biblical scholar and theologian

¹¹ “About Our Church,” First Baptist Church Gainesville, November 2021, <https://www.fbcgainesville.org/about>.

¹² For example, the Psalms contains multiple classifications including Praise, Lament, Wisdom, Thanksgiving and Enthronement.

¹³ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 167.

N.T. Wright asserts that the Bible is a narrative journey of God's redeeming work in the world, finding its ultimate meaning in the life, death and resurrection of Christ.¹⁴ Wright claims that Christians must "[live] in the world of the story which scripture tells...soaking ourselves in that story, as a community and as individuals."¹⁵ In his primer on narrative theology, Michael Lodahl writes,

"In a sense, then, the entire Bible is a...theological narrative, with countless little stories within that great narrative, countless characters, numerous twists and turns, but one basic plot: that the God of Israel, who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has labored in creation to reach and redeem all peoples, and indeed all of creation."¹⁶

The frequent use of story throughout the Scriptures indicates that God's people recognized their very existence as a living, breathing witness of God's work in the world. The written record of their faith stories - whether they are intended to be interpreted literally, allegorically or morally - would serve as the primary means of passing the truths of the faith on to future generations of new believers. The intriguing plots, colorful settings & characters, meaningful themes and ardent conflicts possess the unique power to convey the dynamic, timeless truths of the One God and His desires for the redemption and reconciliation of creation.

This biblical and theological rationale will examine four distinct stories from scripture, each containing quintessential story-based elements including (1) Plot, (2)

¹⁴ N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 185.

¹⁵ Wright, 187.

¹⁶ Michael Lodahl, *The Story of God* (Kansas City: Beacon Press, 2008), 20.

Character & Setting, (3) Theme and (4) Conflict.¹⁷ Each of the four stories will invite a greater focus on these particular elements and their respective impact on the reader. Next, we will explore the concept of a Christian meta narrative. This chapter will conclude with intertextual examples of self-identification within God's story.

The Story of the Testing of Abraham (Genesis 22:1-19)

An intriguing plot is critical to the impact and effect of storytelling. Compelling characters and settings, heightened conflicts and provocative themes mean nothing amidst a less-than-compelling plot line. The tale of the testing of Abraham does not contain a complex or confusing plot, but the stakes for the characters and the underlying theological themes are of great importance to the reader. Gordon Wenham claims that “No other story in Genesis, indeed in the whole OT, can match the sacrifice of Isaac for its haunting beauty or its theological depth.”¹⁸

The commencement of Genesis 22 draws the reader into an intriguing, if not disturbing plot line: Abraham is commanded by God to take his only son, Isaac, to the land of Moriah with the intent of offering him as a sacrifice. (Gen. 22:1-2). The story progresses in a gut-wrenching manner: the father and son leave on their journey, gather supplies along the way (Gen. 22:3-6) and move towards a tragic event of which Isaac is apparently unaware (Gen. 22:8). The plot continues to move towards the climax at an alarmingly sluggish pace, building tension and asking whether Abraham, and ultimately

¹⁷ I elected to combine “character” and “setting” in one section due to their often-overlapping characteristics; The progression of these story-based elements coincides with canonical order.

¹⁸ Gordon J Wenham, “Genesis 16-50,” in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 2, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 112.

God Himself, would see this human sacrifice through to the end. The climax of the story arrives in verse 11, when the angel of the Lord calls to Abraham and commands him to cease his actions: “for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me” (Gen. 22:12). The resolution of the story's conflict appears to be twofold: the sparing of Isaac and God’s blessing, “to...make [Abraham's] offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore” on account of Abraham’s obedience. (Gen. 22: 17-18).

The intense plot of the testing of Abraham, along with its grave conflict and hopeful resolution, gives way to themes of faithfulness, sacrifice and deliverance. E.A. Spiser writes,

“Each successive moment in that seemingly interminable interval of time is charged with drama that is all the more intense for not being spelled out: the saddling of the pack animal; the unarticulated orders to the servants; the splitting of the wood for the sacrificial fire; the long, wordless trip to the spot from which the chosen site can first be seen; the forced matter-of-factness of Abraham’s parting instruction to the attendants.”¹⁹

The theological and ethical implications of God’s original summons and Abraham’s willingness to take part in child sacrifice deserve extended reflection, but the author seems to direct the reader’s focus towards the redemptive qualities of the story, which would not be possible without a salvific resolution. Kathleen M. O’Connor writes, “I group [this story] with other disaster stories in the book...all of these present a narrative that heads in the direction of the traumatic end of life, but the major characters survive.”²⁰

¹⁹ E.A. Spiser, “Genesis,” in *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 1, (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 164.

²⁰ Kathleen M. O’Connor, “Genesis 1-25a,” in *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary*, vol. 1A, (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2008), 309.

Spiser notes that, “the object of the ordeal, then, was to discover how firm was the patriarch’s faith in the ultimate divine purpose. It was one thing to start out resolutely for the Promised Land, but it was a very different thing to maintain confidence in the promise when all appeared lost.²¹” The very nature of the plot, then, invites readers to trust God’s guidance when things seem most dire.

The Story of David & Goliath **1 Samuel 17**

The story of David and Goliath is one of the first biblical narratives a child learns within the context of a local faith community. The monumental face-off between the young shepherd boy and the gigantic, boastful enemy soldier signifies a grand conflict between the tiny nation of Israel and the colossal, intimidating Philistines. The story finds its climactic moment when David hurls a stone towards the Philistine, knocking him unconscious, granting David the opportunity to slay him with a sword (1 Sam. 17:49-51). The account of this battle is more than a mention of Old Testament events. According to Bruce Birch, “This story...embodies the hopes of all persons when they are faced with overwhelming and evil power that there is a way to overcome the power and win the future.²²” The inspiring theme at the heart of the story of David and Goliath is as palpable as any story in the Old Testament. Such a theme could not arise, however, without the author’s inclusion of the physical setting and rich characterization present within the story.

²¹ Spiser, 166.

²² Bruce E. Birch, “The First and Second Books of Samuel,” in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 2, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 2: 1114.

The story fleshes out a vivid setting alongside character introductions, successfully connecting the protagonist and antagonist with the Israelites and Philistines, respectively. The Philistines and their notable champion, Goliath, are introduced to convey the intimidating - and ultimately evil - nature of the enemy. Goliath was painted as the heavy favorite with significant advantages for waging battle, including height (1 Sam. 17:4), heavy armor (1 Sam. 17:5-6), destructive weaponry (1 Sam. 17:7) and a healthy dose of arrogance (1 Sam. 17:8-10). P. Kyle McCarter observes, “The Philistine is perfectly terrifying in his sheer, malevolent power and perfectly hateful in his bold defiance of Israel.”²³

David, on the other hand, represents the polar opposite of the story’s antagonist, not just in stature, but in humility and resolve. David is not introduced to the reader until the Israel/Philistine conflict is set; the text implies that his presence *should* be inconsequential in the grand scheme of events. After all, David is the youngest son of Saul whose sole purpose (in this narrative) was to tend to his father’s sheep (1 Sam. 17:15). What significant role could this character possibly have in such a grand story?

While the confrontation between David and Goliath serves as the climactic moment of the story’s plot, the character development continues to progress on both fronts. The Philistine, as he approaches David on the battlefield, solidifies his place as one of the premiere “villains” of the story, if not all of scripture. Brueggemann notes that “The Philistine is insulted by such a weak opponent, or pretends to be insulted (v. 43)...Thus, the Philistine taunts the way a bully taunts, half inviting, half intimidating,

²³ P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., “1 Samuel,” in *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 8, (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 295.

conducting his own brand of psychological warfare.”²⁴ Goliath is not a mere opponent who happens to be on the “wrong side” of God’s story; he personifies the oppressive, violent characteristics of those who stand against God’s people and their call to further God’s mission in the world.

The character of David embodies hopeful possibilities within the story of God’s people. David, like Israel, appears overmatched and assuredly doomed when facing the powerful, well-armed Goliath.²⁵ Unlike the Philistine, however, the shepherd boy does not depend on his own strength, gaudy armor or excessive confidence as he marches to victory. Instead, “David...carries his armor on the inside. He is steeled within by faith in God, emboldened and empowered by a force that is greater than himself.”²⁶

Brueggemann writes, “David refused to be like...the nations, or like the Philistine (v. 39b)...David’s confidence is in the ‘living God,’ who has delivered and who will deliver. Such faith is David’s alternative to conventional modes of self-defense.”²⁷

The setting and characters in this story are critical to understanding and interpreting the scriptures. Birch writes, “[This] story has been told and retold especially by the weak, the oppressed, the marginal, and the powerless – those who do not simply hope for a David but see themselves as David, faced with the giants of oppression, and who know that their only hope lies with the living God.”²⁸ Likewise, McCarter, Jr. says

²⁴ Walter Brueggemann, “First and Second Samuel,” in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 131.

²⁵ McCarter, Jr., 297.

²⁶ Tony Cartledge, “1 & 2 Samuel,” in *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2001), 219.

²⁷ Brueggemann, 131.

²⁸ Birch, 1114.

that “The story is set as a paradigm of bold faith in an arena of fear, threat, and defiance.”²⁹

The Stories of Finding Lost Things Luke 15

According to Merriam-Webster, theme is a “subject or topic of discourse” or “a specific and distinctive quality, characteristic, or concern.”³⁰ It is in the nature of scripture itself to invite the reader to discover transcendent themes of faith, and perhaps there are no greater stories in which to explore the concept of “theme” than the Parables of Jesus.

Luke 15 contains three of Scripture’s most memorable parables, each with a common overarching theme. The Parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin & Lost Son involve simple settings, characters, plots and conflicts but “are so distinctive of the Lucan portrait of Jesus that this part of his account has been called “the heart of the Third Gospel” (L. Ramaroson, “Le coeur”).”³¹ The strong thematic elements of each distinct narrative demonstrate the power of storytelling as a most valuable tool in Christian formation and practice.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep is a simple story inviting us to experience the joy of rescue and salvation. Jesus challenges the listeners to consider the joy of a shepherd

²⁹ McCarter, Jr., 134.

³⁰ “Theme,” Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, September 10, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theme>.

³¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Gospel According To Luke X-XXIV,” in *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 28A, (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 1071.

who finds a single lost sheep that had been separated from the entire herd (Luke 15:3-6). He goes on to bridge the gap between the simple story and pronounced theme, saying, “I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Luke 15:7). Richard Vinson notes, “The whole scenario...describes the nature of God, who acts much differently than any of us. If God rejoices, then God seeks the lost.”³² John Nolland writes, “The emphasis on shared joy...seems to be designed primarily to encourage in the church an outward-looking concern for the winning of sinners, and participation in the joy of those who are successfully involved in such outreach.”³³ The theme of lost things being found, which continues throughout the entirety of Luke 15, challenges the reader to respond in two distinct manners: (1) to acknowledge God’s desire to rescue *all* people and (2) to celebrate this reality despite our tendency to ignore or despise cultural “outsiders.” As is the case with Jesus’ parables, this theme transcends even the simplest biblical stories.

By telling the Parable of the Lost Coin, Jesus continues utilizing the power of story to convey deeper truths about the nature of God’s Kingdom. The story, once again, is simple: a woman loses a coin and “drops everything” to search for this one missing item of value. When she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her (Luke 15:8-9). Jesus explains the theme of the parable by claiming, “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Luke 15:10). Nolland writes, “As was the man with his sheep, so is the woman with her silver coin: again the

³² Richard B. Vinson, “Luke,” in *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary*, vol. 21, (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2008), 505.

³³ John Nolland, “Luke 9:21-18:34,” in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 35B, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 772.

point is that God takes special delight in the restoration of the sinner who has been lost from His people.”³⁴

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is a “biblical masterpiece” in its ability to convey the heart of the Christian narrative. Vinson says, “The characters are well developed and fluid, the narrator’s diction is both clear and highly nuanced, and the plot provides tensions resolved and unresolved - the best of circumstances for interpreters, because there is plenty here to think about.”³⁵ The story of Prodigal Son utilizes all story-based elements to illuminate the “great theme” of Christianity: “By grace, you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

The parable begins by establishing a simple setting with few characters: a man with two sons. The younger son asks the father for his inheritance (Luke 15:11-12), a rather insulting request as this inheritance would not normally be collected until the father’s death. The son receives his father’s inheritance (Luke 15:13), squanders it (Luke 15:14), and in an act of desperation, finds work in the pig fields (Luke 15:15-16), unquestionably hitting “rock bottom” personally, culturally and religiously. Without question, themes of disrespect, rebellion, separation and sinfulness come to the forefront as the reader observes the downward spiral of the youngest son.

The aforementioned themes, while worthy of continued dialog, are not intended to become the central focus of the story. On the contrary, the fall of the youngest son sets the stage for the great theme of redemption and forgiveness. As the younger son returns

³⁴ Nolland, 775.

³⁵ Vinson, 507.

home, the father “runs out and puts his arms around [the son] and kisses him” (Luke 15:20), signifying a radical and surprising act of forgiveness and grace in the face of damnable offenses. The father does not merely forgive the son but celebrates his return by clothing him in royal attire and calling on the entire household to prepare a great feast in his honor (Luke 15:22-24). Jesus accentuates theme of this parables with the father’s proclamation, “This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” (Luke 15:24).

It may be tempting for the reader to assume that the parable, up to this point, is solely intended for those who we refer to as “the other,” but Fred Craddock cautions us against such an interpretation: “Perhaps the most fitting location for us, then, is not with Jesus or with the Pharisees but among tax collectors and sinners, who find ourselves welcomed and forgiven in his presence.”³⁶

The story does not end with the heartwarming interaction between the father and younger son, however, as half of the parable expounds upon the tension between the father and eldest son, who becomes enraged at the father’s forgiveness and generosity towards the younger son in light of his rebellion and sinful lifestyle (Luke 15:28-30). The story concludes with the father’s affirmation of the elder son and reiteration of the cause for celebration: “This brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found” (Luke 15:31). The shift from “this son of mine” to “this brother of yours” is an invitation to the reader, and perhaps most pointedly, to the Pharisees and scribes, to

³⁶ Fred B. Craddock, “Luke,” in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary*, vol. 29, (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 185

celebrate where the father celebrates and to regard all of God's children as "brothers and sisters." Vinson writes,

"Maybe Jesus' listeners, knowing the biblical tradition of the favorite younger/youngest son, could have expected a 'God loved Jacob, but hated Esau' ending. Maybe Luke's readers, members of the Gentile church, hoped that the elder brother, surrogate for the Pharisees, would be tossed out of the house for his unforgiving legalism. But this father rejects no one...So even when the elder son does the wrong thing, the privilege of being a son is not withdrawn."³⁷

Indeed, there is no places for jealousy or self-righteousness or "othering" in the Kingdom; God welcomes all those who are lost into His loving arms, and in that steadfast embrace, we can be assured of His everlasting love and care.

The Parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin and Prodigal Son utilize simple and clear stories to convey the transcendent themes of the Gospel. Of these parables, Vinson sees a common narrative: "We lose our way, and God brings us back, often through the loving ministries of others; these others who minister to us find in turn that God is finding them in the act of ministry."³⁸ While these stories carry great meaning for the individual reader, the opportunity for the Body of Christ to respond and live into the theme of Luke 15 is striking. Arlund J. Hultgren writes,

"The congregation at worship is the place for celebrating the homecoming each week of the prodigals, including all of us, and driving away all thoughts of righteous resentments about who all is coming to dinner. Resentment leads to alienation, going off into a far country of our own making. As the father welcomed the son, so God in Christ welcomes us."³⁹

³⁷ Vinson, 516.

³⁸ Ibid., 517.

³⁹ Arlund J. Hultgren, "Commentary on Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32" Working Preacher, Luther Seminary, March 10, 2013, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-in-lent-3/commentary-on-luke-151-3-11b-32-3>.

The Story of the Warrior Christ Revelation 19:11-21

In a past Doctor of Ministry assignment at Gardner-Webb University, I wrote that “Revelation is arguably the most fascinating and potentially confusing book in the entire Christian canon, and the inability to recognize and understand its unique genre (or genres) has led to pervasive misunderstandings about its content and purpose.”⁴⁰ It is unfortunate that some of the most influential methods of interpreting Revelation, mostly popularized in the United States, have hindered our ability to make sense of this book, effectively stopping us from garnering a much needed message of hope in the midst of trial and tribulation. Nevertheless, placing a greater emphases on the story-based elements of Revelation helps the reader to recapture the original intent of the book: despite the pain and suffering of the present life, Christ, along with His faithful followers, will overcome the principalities and powers of the world.

The story of the victorious Christ as presented in Revelation 19 offers vivid characterization, including the rider on the white horse, who is described as “Faithful and True, and in righteousness...judges and makes war” (Rev. 19:11). Additional attributes include eyes like a fiery flame (Rev. 19:12), many crowns (Rev. 19:12), a robe dipped in blood (Rev. 19:13), a sharp sword which protrudes from the rider’s mouth (Rev. 19:15), and the inscription, “King of kinds and Lord of lords” upon his thigh (Rev. 19:16). This rider, who is the Christ, stands against the great and evil powers of the world, including “the beast,” “the kings of the earth” and “their armies” (Rev. 19:19). Additionally, there is a reference to the “false prophet who had performed in its presence the signs by which

⁴⁰ Jeremy Shoulta, *An Exposition of Revelation’s Letter to the Church at Philadelphia* (essay, Gardner-Webb University, 2019), 11.

he denied those who had received the mark of the beast” (Rev. 19:20). The dramatic and sometimes grotesque features of Revelation’s central characters conjure strong emotional reactions and emphasize the gravity of the circumstances surrounding the conflict between good and evil. Within the confines of this passage, the plot is relatively concise: the rider on the white horse enters a world prepared for war and bloodshed, only to take matters into His own hands. “The battle is apparently over before it gets started. The beast and the false prophet...are captured and thrown alive into the lake of fire.”⁴¹ Does Christ’s swift victory eliminate any notion of serious conflict in the story or in the lives of those who heard John’s apocalypse?

According to Mitchell Reddish, “The struggle between God and evil is at the heart of the Apocalypse. The final defeat of evil is the goal toward which the entire work has been moving.”⁴² It is tempting to believe that Christ’s assured victory over the opponent somehow lessens the stakes or minimizes the current conflict between good and evil. On the contrary, the real-world circumstances which lead to such apocalyptic events only underscore the gravity of faithful Christian living and the need to persevere in light of such trial and tribulation. Those who originally received John’s letter were under constant pressure to conform or submit to emperor worship, cultic practice, creeping heresy, religious hostility, or some combination thereof.⁴³ How impactful must it have been to learn that such conflicts are a part of a grand narrative in which Christ is invested? Even

⁴¹ Mitchell Reddish, “Revelation,” in *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary*, vol. 30, (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2001), 370.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 365.

⁴³ Shoulta, 9-10.

more, how inspiring might it be to learn that faithfulness in the midst of such tribulation is part of Christ's "victory plan" for His followers? Indeed,

"The weapons of Babylon seem terrible, but they cannot ultimately withstand the power of the Word of God. The faithful suffering in Asia Minor, who feared more persecution might come, are encouraged to stand fast with the word of God and not to fear the weapons that Rome can use against them."⁴⁴

The Meta-Narrative of Scripture

Though these biblical narratives provide rich story-based elements for the reader to feast upon, it is rather challenging to find a "thread" which unites these, and hundreds of other biblical narratives into a unifying story. The effort to discover a grand narrative becomes more difficult given the abundance of authors, community origins, historical contexts and literary genres. People of the Christian faith, however, understand Christ to be the interpretative lens through which all scripture is interpreted and applied, echoing the words of Paul in Colossians 1: "By him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him" (Col. 1:16). Daniel Migliore writes,

"The central actor in the biblical drama is God. Scripture witnesses to the reality of God, to the purposes of God, to the kingdom of God. The content of the biblical story is God's faithfulness in acts of judgment and mercy in the covenant with the people of Israel and in the history of Jesus. The biblical narrative has many aspects, but the central theme is the work of the faithful God..."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Catherine Gunsalus Gonzalez and Justo L. Gonzalez, "Revelation," in *Westminster Bible Companion*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 128.

⁴⁵ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2004), 56.

Indeed, the Christian meta-narrative must necessarily be read and understood within God's redemptive work in the world.⁴⁶

The individual stories of scripture, such as those we have explored in this project, could be interpreted in a multitude of ways (e.g. literally, historically, allegorically, morally, etc.), but in embracing a story-based framework, we must acknowledge a central character, setting, plot, conflict and theme through which all biblical stories can be understood. McGrath affirms the strength of a narrative framework in understanding, interpreting, and enacting the Christian faith. He writes, "Narrative theology enables us to recover the central insight that God became involved in our history. God's story intersects with our story. We can understand our story by relating it to the story of God, as we read it in Scripture."⁴⁷

The agonizing but ultimately resolute plot of the testing of Abraham teaches us to trust that the Lord wishes to save the most vulnerable individuals among us. The intriguing characters and setting of the story of David & Goliath have the power to inspire strength, confidence and faith in the "bullied" peoples of the world. The Parables of Lost Things challenge us to find joy in our own salvation and the salvation of others. And the stakes of the dramatic battle between good and evil in the Book of Revelation invite us to work towards the defeat of oppression and marginalization in our own lives and communities. These narratives summon us to reflect upon our lives and discern where God is moving even as our own stories are being written.

⁴⁶ Theological concepts such as revelation, authority, and biblical hermeneutics are critical to understanding God's work in the world but fall outside the scope of this project.

⁴⁷ McGrath, 169.

Intertextual Examples of Self-Identification In God's Story

There exists numerous references throughout the biblical canon which indicate a knowledge of the interconnectedness of God's Story. It is necessary, however, that we explore circumstances where the biblical authors (and communities which they represent) understand their identity in light of the stories of scripture.

Psalm 106

The Book of Psalms contains no shortage of references which call on the hearer to remember the works of God in a previous era. Psalm 106 makes numerous, explicit references to the story of the Exodus from Egypt, recalling such moments as the crossing of the Red Sea (Ps. 106:9), the drowning of Pharaoh's army (Ps. 106:10-11), the giving of Manna in the desert (Ps. 106:15), the crafting of the golden calf (Ps. 106:19-20) and a host of other circumstances referencing the sins of the covenant community and corresponding acts of judgment and compassion of Yahweh. The recounting of such events is more than an exercise in recitation of Old Testament events. According to Karl Jacobson, "Moments from Israel's history are recalled to iterate and reiterate the steadfast love of the Lord for the people."⁴⁸ Jacobson adds,

"The historical memory in Psalm 106 functions in two ways: (a) drawing the individual reader/hearer directly into Israel's story - the individual Israelite and Israel are one and the same in this psalm; and (b) encouraging the present-day "people of Israel" to recognize their own standing before the Lord - they, too, forget as their ancestors did."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Karl Jacobson, "Psalm 106," in *Psalms For Preaching and Worship: A Lectionary Commentary*, ed. Roger E. Van Harn and Brent A. Strawn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 276.

⁴⁹ Jacobson, 280.

The author's references to Israel's past setting, key characters, significant conflicts and themes of sin and redemption show the power of story as Israel further solidifies its identity.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Acts 8:26-40

Another instance of story informing the peoples' identity can be found in the "Suffering Servant" passage of Isaiah 52 & 53 as understood by Philip and the Eunuch in Acts 8. There is a great deal of scholarly debate as to the contextual identity of the servant figure, and we will not attempt to navigate that conversation in this project.⁵⁰ There is enough substance in the passage, however, for God's people to learn of their standing in God's Story - namely, that "God intervenes to end the exile and to usher in his eschatological reign."⁵¹ The story, even with its mysterious "main character," invites Israel into the plot of God's redemptive narrative. Childs writes,

"The point of the Isaianic text is that God himself took the initiative in accepting the servant's life as the means of Israel's forgiveness... Israel not only recognized the freedom that the servant had won for it, but in the experience of encountering the hidden plan of God was itself transformed into the new Israel, which shared in the coming redemptive age."⁵²

The story of the Suffering Servant finds additional application and meaning as God's Story continues to unfold, even into the New Testament era. "Quotations from the

⁵⁰ "It is hardly necessary to remind the reader that this passage is probably the most contested chapter in the Old Testament." Brevard Childs, "Isaiah," in *The Old Testament Library*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 410.

⁵¹ Childs, 410.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 418.

chapter are found in all four Gospels and in Acts, Romans, Philippians, Hebrews and 1 Peter. The wide use of the passage by these New Testament writers shows that they considered it to be vital to the understanding of the gospel.”⁵³ Among the most notable and convicting cross-references utilizing the Isaiah passage involves Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. When the eunuch expresses confusion about the meaning of this particular text, Philip draws a connection between the Suffering Servant of Isaiah and Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 8:30-35), which ultimately leads to the baptism of the eunuch (Acts 8:38) and full acceptance into the community of Christ. As Brevard Childs notes, “The suffering servant retains its theological significance within the Christian canon because it is inextricably linked in substance with the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is and always has been the ground of God’s salvation of Israel and the world.”⁵⁴ Though we are not privileged to know the extent of Philip’s conversation with the Eunuch, we can confidently conclude that he harnessed the power of story in witnessing to the saving grace of Christ.

Hebrews 6:13-20

The Book of Hebrews is unique amongst its New Testament counterparts. Luke Timothy Johnson writes, “Hebrews...challenges every reader with a vision of reality, an understanding of Jesus Christ, and a sense of Christian identity that are distinctive within the New Testament and that are difficult for present-day readers either to comprehend or

⁵³ Page H. Kelley, “Isaiah,” in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971), 341.

⁵⁴ Childs, 423.

to accept.”⁵⁵ Indeed, while the interpretation of this book remains challenging for scholars and lay Christians, the author invites the reader to consider Christ as the “central character” in one’s personal faith identity and in the identity of the universal Body of Christ.

One such passage where the reader is invited into the historic, broad Story of God is Hebrews 6:13-20. Within this brief section, the author references God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 22 (Heb. 6:13-15) and the role of the Old Testament High Priest, Melchizedek (Heb. 6:20). Johnson writes, “The mention of those who inherit the promise reminds hearers of the author’s early declaration that God ‘takes hold of the descendants of Abraham’ (2:16), and leads directly to this clarification concerning the promise and the oath sworn by God.”⁵⁶ With this theological pronouncement of Jesus becoming the new “high priest” of God, the reader is assured that, “Nothing can divest him [Jesus] of his priesthood and nothing can change the promise of God in which our hope is finally vested.”⁵⁷ This assures followers of “The Way” that the promise God gives to Abraham is eternal and unbreakable and that the work of the great intercessor and high priest, Jesus Christ, expands and perfects this covenant. The “plot” which began unfolding in the beginning pages of Scripture continues to moves towards its climax as Christ intercedes for the sins of humanity. The Good News for the readers is clear in this select passage:

⁵⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, “Hebrews: A Commentary,” in *The New Testament Library*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 1-2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁵⁷ Charles A. Trentham, “Hebrews,” in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972), 341.

we can self-identify as characters in God's Story as we receive the full blessings of God in Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 4

CRITICAL EVALUATION

The project provided sufficient quantitative and qualitative data to make certain determinations about the effectiveness of utilizing story-based elements in congregational settings. In order to evaluate project data in the most organized fashion, I will first offer brief insights into participant demographics. I will then proceed to evaluate data based on the timeline of the project itself, beginning with the pre-project survey (Survey 1). I will then move to analyze survey results from each individual story element as presented in Week 2 through Week 5. After considering the impact of each story element, I will examine the generalized, high-level impact of the story-based framework by focusing on the data collected from the post-project survey (Survey 6). Finally, I will offer personal critiques of the methodology and offer suggestions as to how the data might be more effectively collected in future endeavors. It should be noted that only the most impactful data points will be utilized in this analysis.

Participant Demographics

A total of 18 participants consented to take part in this ministry project, which is consistent with the highest number of surveys completed during any particular distribution. Each week saw between 14 and 18 participants complete project surveys, suggesting that at minimum, 78% of project participants were fully engaged week-to-week. This level of participation confirms that while the relatively meager sample size could not possibly reflect the sentiments of the entire congregation of First Baptist

Church, it was large enough to reveal patterns and consistencies amongst participants, should they exist.

I recruited project participants across the four adult generational demographics in order to garner perspectives from various ages, cultural influences, life experiences and other attributes.⁵⁸ Additionally, I worked to secure an equal number of male and female participants. These demographic aspirations, if met, would provide a broad perspective representative of the larger faith community. Unfortunately, while I was not able to obtain a precisely equal distribution on either front, the breadth of generational and gender representation provided a solid range of perspectives for this project. A general example of the demographic distribution can be seen in Figures 1 and 2.

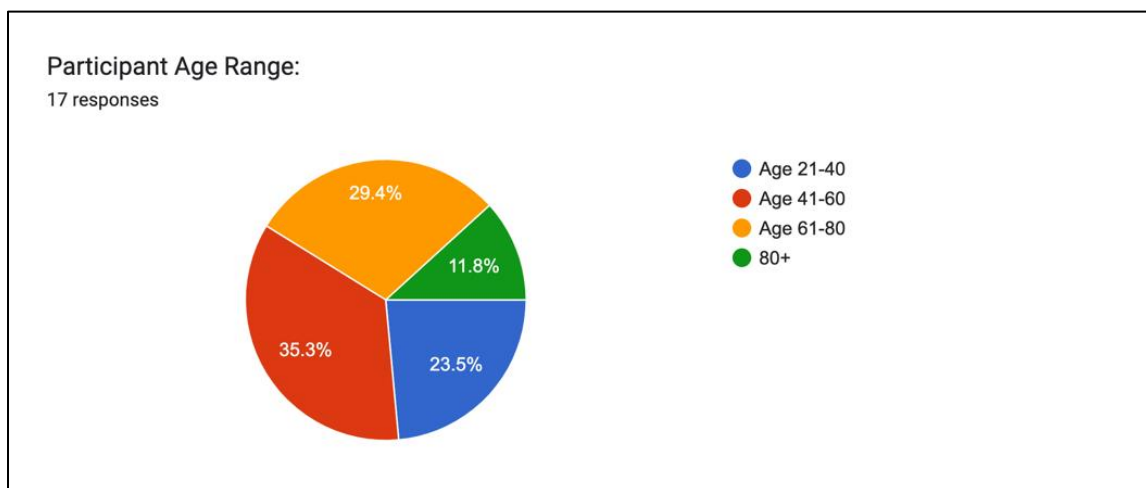


Figure 1 – Participant Demographics: Age Range (Survey 1)

⁵⁸ Builder (Born 1928-1945), Boomer (Born 1946-1964), Generation X (Born 1965-1980), Millennial (Born 1981-1996).

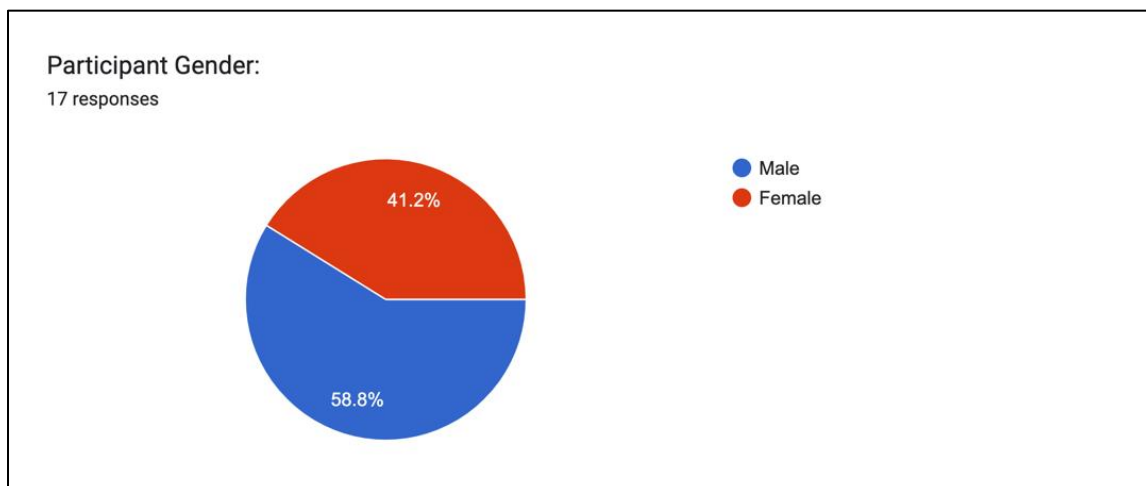


Figure 2 – Participant Demographics: Participant Gender (Survey 1)

The nature of discovering an ecclesial, story-based identity is intended to transcend demographics and boundaries, so the data analysis will necessarily focus on the collective feedback of group participants. Though all project surveys provided the option to identify additional demographic details, such data points will not be pursued unless the qualitative data invites further reflection. I provide additional thoughts on my desire to forego the analysis of demographic subsets in the “Methodology Critiques” section of this chapter.

Pre-project Data Analysis

Participants were asked to complete a pre-project survey (Survey 1) prior to experiencing the weekly video sessions. This survey was intended to invite the participants into story-based thinking and to establish a starting point for data analysis as the project commenced. In this particular survey and throughout most of the project, participants were regularly asked to consider a story-based framework from three perspectives: (1) the general perspective of the local church, (2) the perspective of First Baptist Church in Gainesville and Hall County and (3) the participant’s own theological

perspective. This layered approach was intended to help me determine whether the story-based framework would benefit individuals, the collective Body of Christ, or both.

Before deploying story-based questions and reflections, I believed it necessary to gather the participants' perspectives on the nature of church life from a personal, communal and theological standpoint. For questions pertaining to the generalized work of the local church, several consistencies were noted. These consistencies included responses such as, "To provide care and leadership for the Lord in their community," "the church should actively serve the needs of the community," "a place [for] us to organize our activities that further God's will in the greater community and world" and "The church is also a source of aid for the community and its members for the relief of social needs, and a point of moral standards for the community to look to." Other frequent responses touched on worship, service and frequent mention of God/Christ/Jesus as essential to the work of the church.

When asked to describe the work of First Baptist Church in Gainesville and Hall County, similar sentiments were expressed, but with greater specificity. One participant wrote, "The work of FBC Gainesville is to minister to the local community by way of service, demonstrating the love of Jesus in and through the actions of the church." Another participant wrote, "FBC Gainesville works to distribute Christ's love to our community in practical ways , including involvement in local non profits, in house programs, and through the lives of individual church members. FBC Gainesville provides a safe and thoughtful place for non believers to congregate and learn about Christ." One participant pointedly said, "In my opinion, FBC is a place that strikes a good balance between evangelical and social justice. Most SBC churches are all about evangelism and

the heck with social justice. Other churches are all about social justice and hardly hear Christ mentioned. I feel like we do a good job at both.” Many of the responses listed specific ministries and local mission organizations/partnerships as central to the work of First Baptist Church. There were also numerous references to campus-based ministries such as worship, Sunday School, music ministry and others.

When prompted to reflect on their personal participation at First Baptist Church, answers noticeably shifted from more outward-focused initiatives to church-centric roles, responsibilities and events. Participation in Sunday School was among the most frequent responses followed by participation in various ministry areas including music ministry and youth ministry. Additionally, leadership positions such as deacon and committee member were noted in several responses. There were significantly fewer mentions pertaining to the outward-focused ministries or the greater Gainesville/Hall County community, though a few mission groups or projects were mentioned. A potentially related piece of data involved a quantitative inquiry regarding the individual participants’ view of their own importance to the work of First Baptist Church. Figure 3 shows a scattering of responses with nearly half of participants rating themselves below 8 (Total average: 7.4). This data point concerned me as a pastor; I was especially curious to see if this project could “move the needle” in regards to this sentiment, which participants would answer again in the post-project survey.

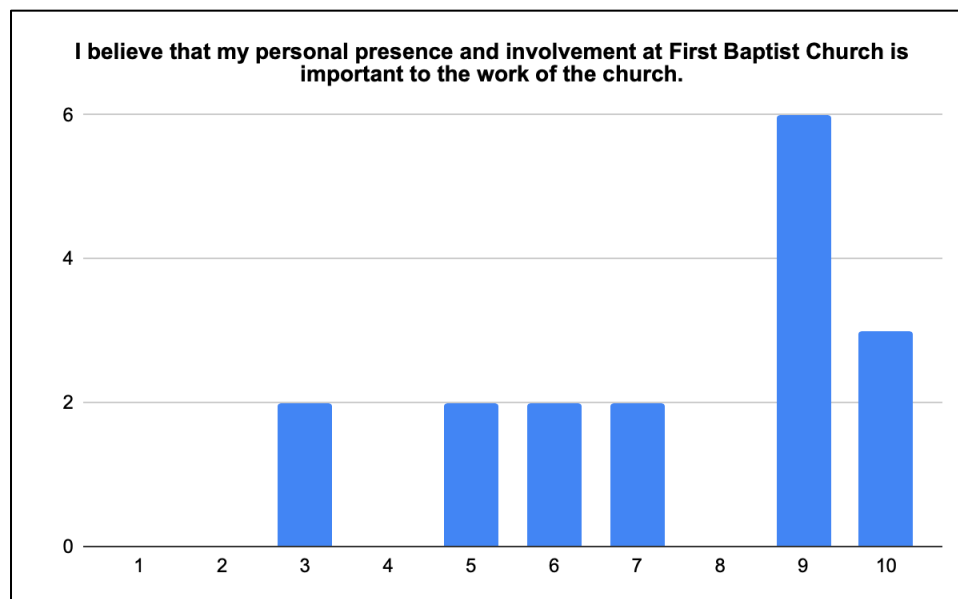


Figure 3 – Personal Presence & Involvement (Survey 1)

When asked if individuals and congregations, including First Baptist Church, could benefit from a better frame of reference for understanding the work of the church, participants responded with answers landing mostly between “neutral/no opinion” and “completely” (see Figures 4-6).

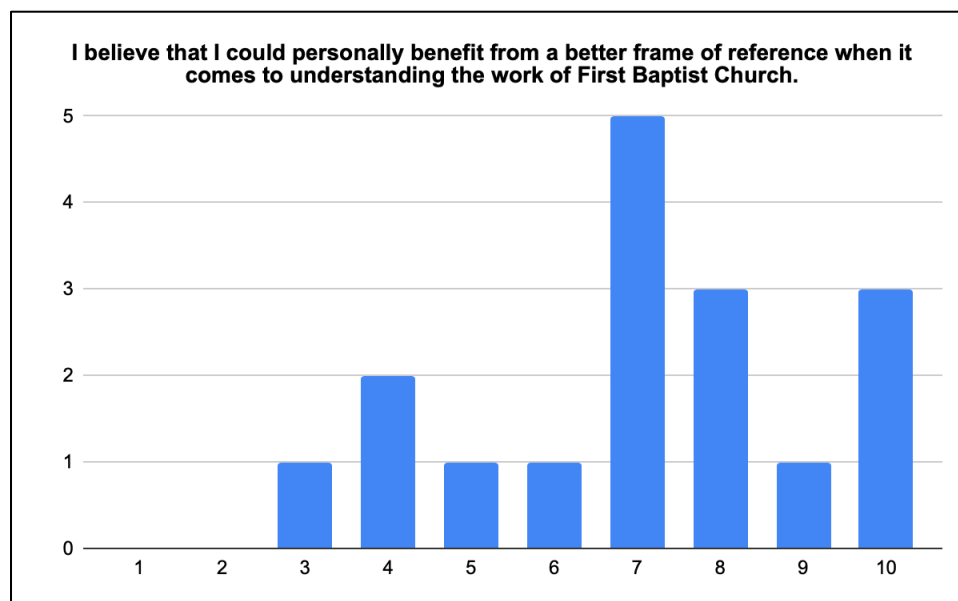


Figure 4 –Frame of Reference (Personal) (Survey 1)

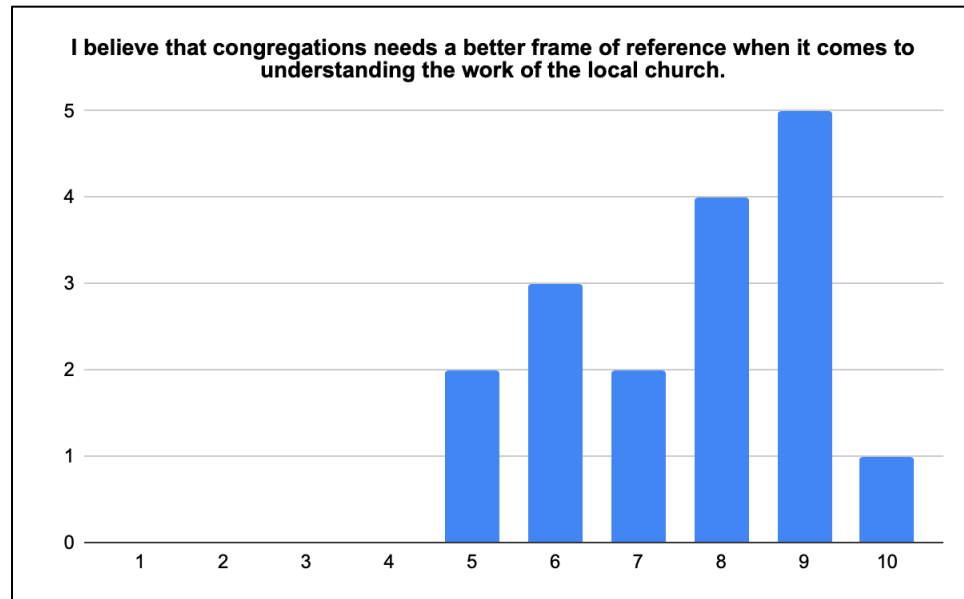


Figure 5 –Frame of Reference (Congregation) (Survey 1)

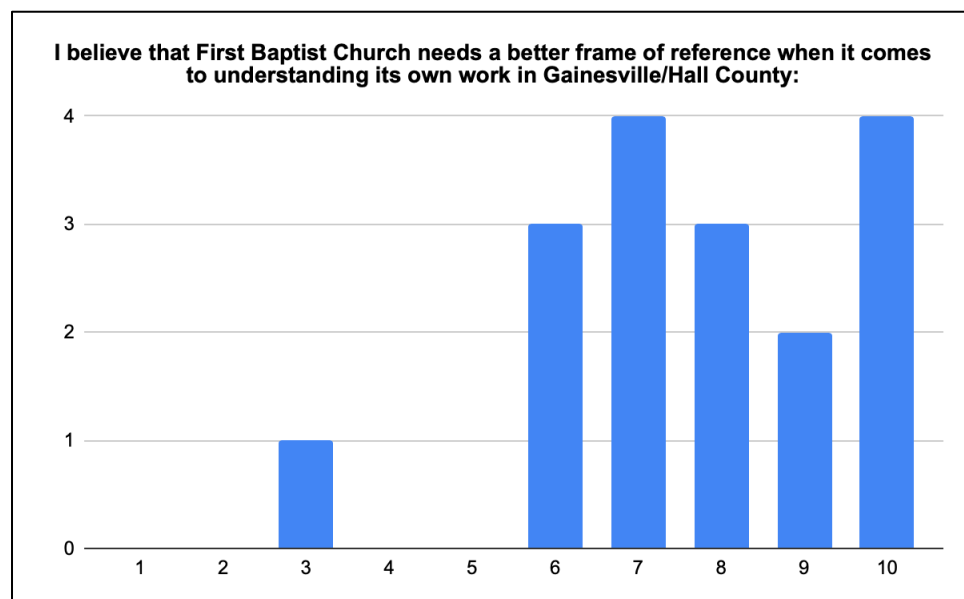


Figure 6 –Frame of Reference (FBC) (Survey 1)

This data created an ideal starting point for the project as it showed a degree of uncertainty about the need to discover a better way of understanding and participating in the work of the church.

In order to gauge participants' initial regard for a narrative framework, I asked if participants think in terms of "story" when considering the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church. Once again, I received excellent starting data, as revealed in Figure 7.

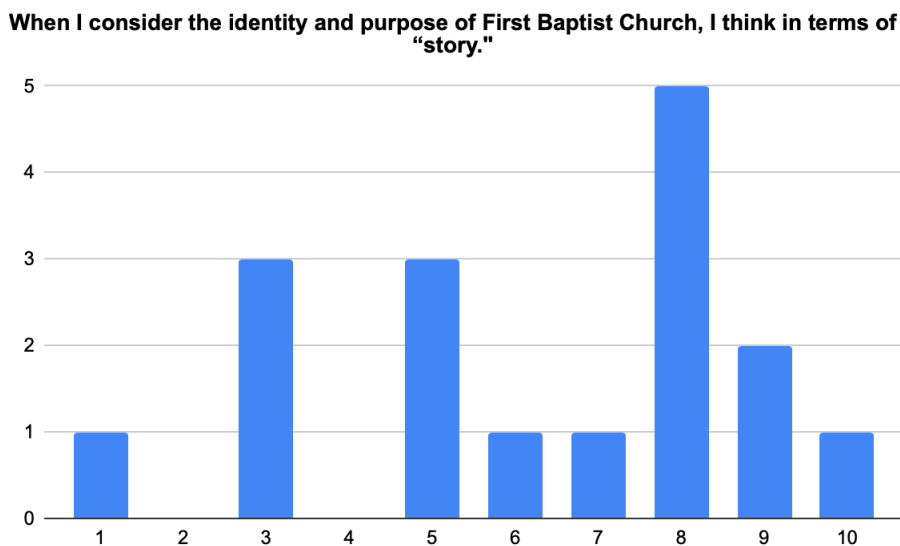


Figure 7 – Utilizing Story For FBC Identity (Survey 1)

The scattering of responses to this introductory question averaged 6.2, which showed a relatively low to moderate utilization of story-based thinking at the start of the project. Any movement on this data point would assist me in arriving at conclusions about the effectiveness of the project.

To conclude the pre-project survey, I prompted participants to evaluate their use of story elements when considering First Baptist Church's identity and purpose. The average response for each question, utilizing the same Likert scale, resulted in the data points as shown in Figure 8.

Likert-scale Prompt	Average Response
When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of specific individuals and personalities which affect the work of this congregation:	Average Score: 8.1
When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of the structural/contextual/cultural setting(s) within the church and the greater Gainesville/Hall County Community:	Average Score: 7.5
When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of the past history, present circumstances & future direction of this congregation:	Average Score: 8.2
When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of those forces (individual, societal, cultural, etc.) which prevent us from fulfilling the God's call for our church:	Average Score: 7.3
When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of a deeper & more transcendent reality which must be continually acknowledged and celebrated:	Average Score: 7.0

Figure 8 – Participant Utilization of Story (Survey 1)

These data points were important to tracking any changing sentiments throughout the course of the project in regards to specific story-based elements.

Data Analysis: Character and Setting

The overall data surrounding the story-based elements of “character” and “setting” showed increased understanding and appreciation of the subject matter as

indicated in the Week 2 post-session survey (Survey 2B). The average for all Likert scale questions showed movement within only 1 point, though the movement was universally positive. This relatively low shift could have resulted due to an already-heightened affection for character and setting as indicated in the pre-session quantitative responses.

One particular prompt saw a significant shift between the pre-session and post-session survey results. The Likert-scale prompt, “I believe that a thorough understanding of the ‘characters’ and ‘settings’ within a ministry context can help a church understand and pursue its calling” received a total of 12 “Completely [Agree]” responses in this post-session survey, as shown in Figure 9.

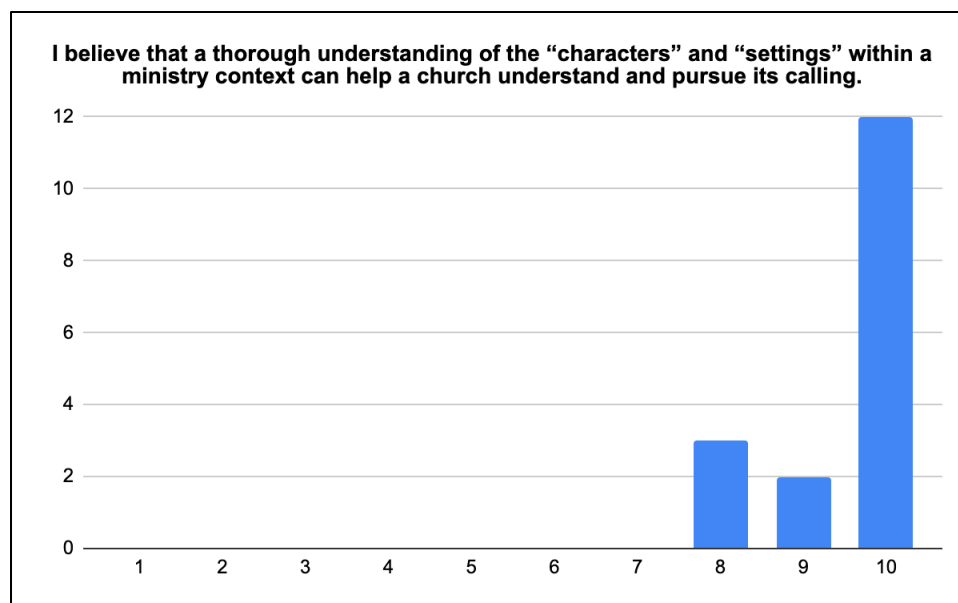


Figure 9 – Helpfulness of Character and Setting (Survey 2B)

This data point represents one of the most top-heavy pieces of data from the ministry project. After completing the Week 2 video session, participants appeared to hold a strong belief that the church’s ability to pursue its calling could benefit from a thorough focus on the “characters” and “settings” within a given ministry context.

Qualitative responses revealed a few shifting sentiments in regards to this particular story-based elements. In the pre-session survey (Survey 2A), several participants indicated they were uncertain about the benefit of thinking in terms of “character” and “setting” for their personal work in the church. One participant stated, “To be honest, I don't think I've ever judged the work of any church based on a focus on characters or settings.” Another stated, “It does affect my personal regard, but it is not the bottom line.” One participant was hopeful by expressing, “I am hopeful this type of focus can give me and others insight into the mindset and historical dynamics of our congregation and hopefully a better understanding of how to work toward unity in purpose, mission, and service as we go forward.” Several responses suggested that participants believed a focus on character and setting have the potential to impact the church as whole, if not their individual theology and worldview.

Several responses from Survey 2B gave the impression that an increased utilization of character and setting could benefit the work of the church. When asked about the potential impact of such a framework, one participant stated, “The individual members of a congregation can benefit from understanding their own characteristics and how that meshes with other members of their congregation. This will direct their behavior in the areas listed above.” Another claimed, “It is important for us to focus on specific characters and settings to tell our story so that we can create a common narrative with specific connection/anchor points that allow each person to identify with and contextualize our story with their own.” One individual noted, “This makes me think of job descriptions and being specific in identifying what someone’s role is in a church. What exactly is the person supposed to do and where should this work take place?” Such

introspection shows that at least one participant drew a connection between conceptual terms (i.e., “character” and “setting”) and the necessary work that every member of the Body of Christ is called to engage in.

While quantitative and qualitative responses expressed overwhelming reception and appreciate of this week’s content, one participant commented, “Tactics (utilization of biblical stories and their constituent elements) do not in and of themselves enhance my regard for the local church. My regard for the local church is enhanced through its clear representation/interpretation/clarification of implementation of the Christian mission of the church.” Another stated, “I don’t think that I consider the setting of a church in regard for the work of the church.” With these in mind, it would not be accurate to claim that this particular story-based element is universally appreciated.

Data Analysis: Conflict

The element of “conflict,” like “character” and “setting,” appeared to produce an increased understanding of the subject matter upon experiencing the Week 2 video session. Two quantitative prompts saw a significant increase of 1-point-or-more in their respective averages for the post-session survey (Survey 3B). Additionally, one quantitative prompt saw a slight decrease in the average response between the pre-session survey (Survey 3A) and Survey 3B. Overall, this element harbored the most trepidation and resistance, especially where qualitative data was concerned. Before proceeding, it should be noted that of the 17 participants who completed Survey 3A, one did not go on to complete survey 3B. Furthermore, one additional participant elected not to complete the qualitative responses in survey 3B.

The first indication that “conflict” might generate some unique feedback can be seen in the first question’s data, which prompted participants to reflect on the statement, “I believe that a thorough understanding of conflict is critical to gaining a deep appreciation of any story.” Though the question received relatively high marks across Surveys 3A and 3B, the average dropped by .1 points, the only instance where the project saw negative quantitative movement (see Figure 10).

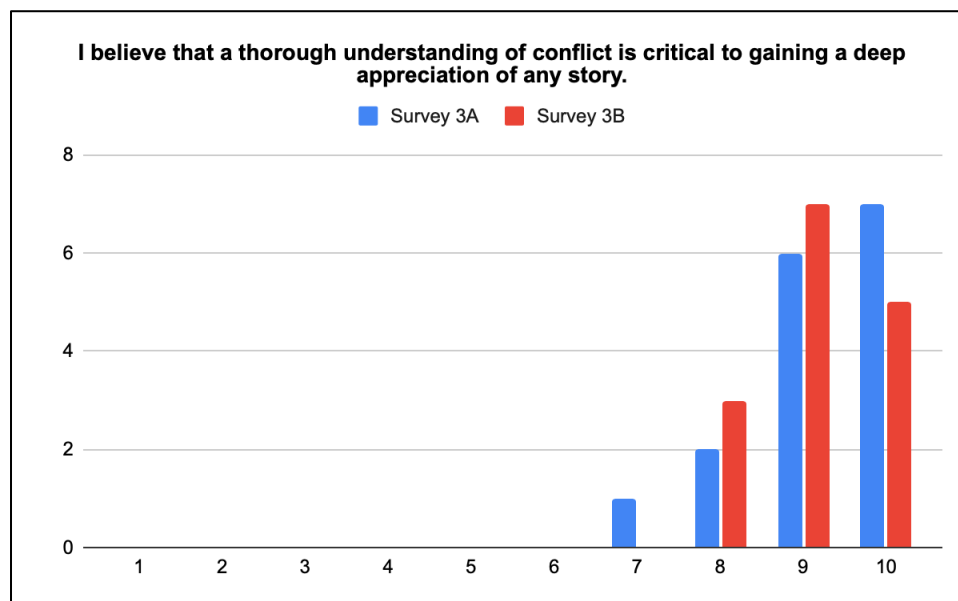


Figure 10 – Importance of Understanding Conflict (Surveys 3A and 3B)

It is possible that the participant who chose not to complete Survey 3B ultimately skewed this data point, but the graph indicates that at least 1 other participant lowered their response in Survey 3B. At the very least, we observe that a majority of participants did not modify their original rating after experiencing the Week 2 session.

Despite the previous data point, two prompts saw a 1-point-or-more increase in regards to conflict. When prompted with the statement, “I believe that a church should explicitly utilize conflict when attempting to articulate its identity and purpose,”

participants showed significantly differing sentiments between Survey 3A and Survey 3B, as seen in Figure 11.

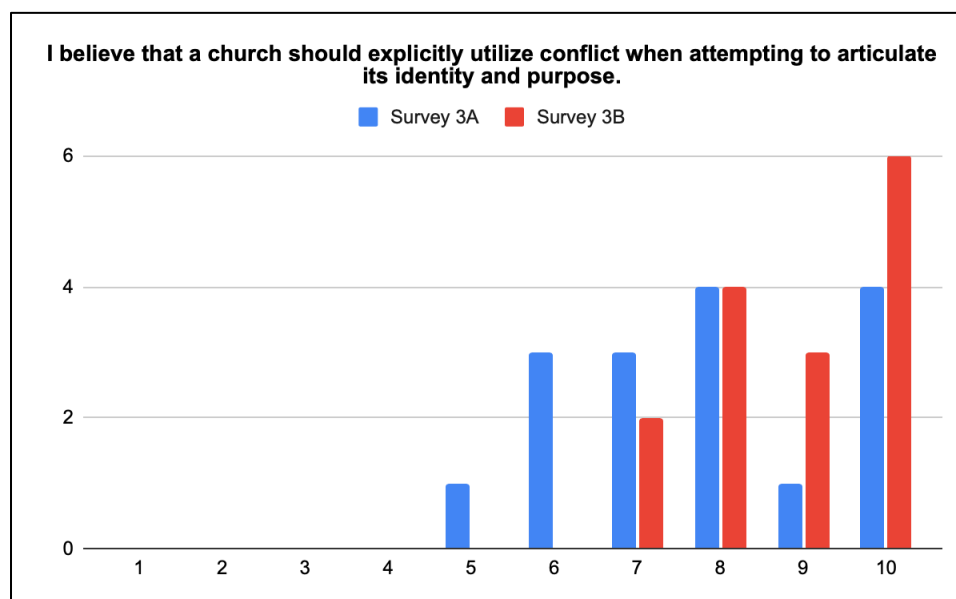


Figure 11 –Utilizing Conflict (Congregation) (Surveys 3A and 3B)

Another prompt showed similar increases. When asked to rate the statement, “When I personally reflect upon the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of the conflicts which affect the work of this congregation,” the average response increased by 1.7 points over the course of the Week 3 session, as indicated in Figure 12.

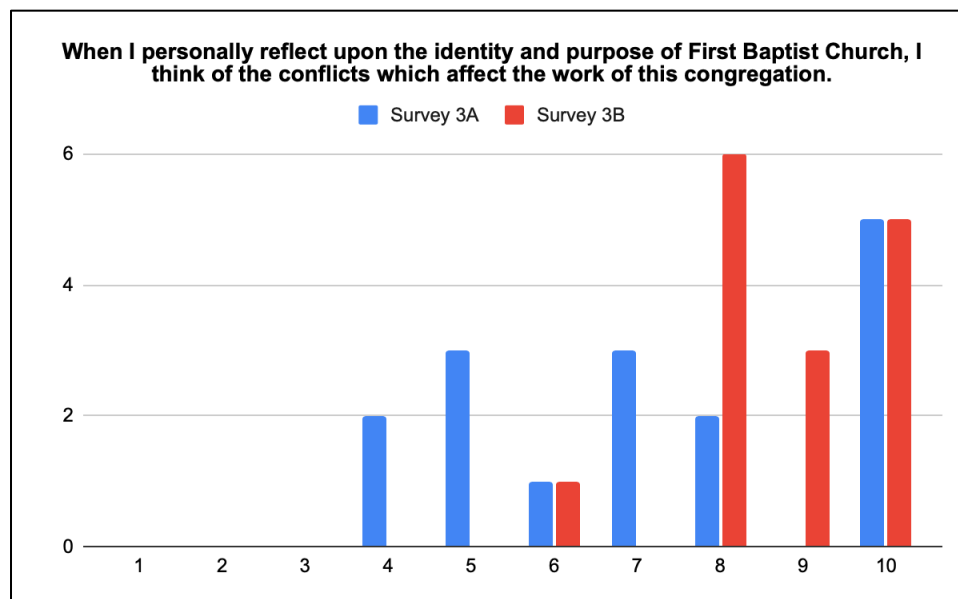


Figure 12 – Utilizing Conflict (Personal) (Surveys 3A and 3B)

The quantitative increase arising from these two prompts showed a great sense of movement towards the belief that a utilization of “conflict” in a church setting, particularly at First Baptist Church Gainesville, would be of great benefit to understanding our own identity and purpose.

The qualitative data received from Session 3A did not display universal acclamation for conflict. This story-based element was initially regarded in a reserved and somewhat negative manner. Early responses included, “The term focus on conflict bothers me a little--indicates negative thought” and “A focus on conflict, even in a ‘biblical narrative,’ I believe should be carefully crafted so as not to inadvertently create or reinforce a [pseudo]-conflict of us versus them.” When asked whether or not a focus on conflict affected the participant’s regard for the work of the church, two participants responded with, “I don’t think it affects my personal regard” and “I tend to avoid conflict so it isn't necessarily a topic that I feel is needed.” These responses were indicative of a

cultural concern about the nature of conflict itself and echoed the common sentiment that conflict is inherently dangerous and should be avoided, or at the very least, “handled with care.”

Survey 3B qualitative responses did show the willingness to engage conflict as a necessary component of the church’s identity and purpose. When commenting on the relationship between biblical conflict and the church’s conflict, one participant said, “Telling these biblical stories helps to contextualize our beliefs and commitments as a community of faith, and helps us navigate the conflicts and relationships in our own lives.” In response to a question about one’s acknowledgement of conflict and the church, a participant wrote, “Understanding the conflicts we each face in our own lives makes us better equipped to be the hands and feet of Jesus to others.” Finally, it’s clear that the test subjects were engaged in serious self-reflection after one participant wrote, “The work of the church should be somewhat controversial if its parishioners are doing what Jesus taught. That is uncomfortable for people comfortable with the status quo (self included in this statement).”

Data Analysis: Plot

As in previous weeks’ sessions, data revealed an increase in the participants’ understanding and appreciation of “plot” upon experiencing the interactive video session. While one quantitative prompt saw a significant increase in its respective average for the post-session survey (Survey 4B), the qualitative data revealed greater insights about the importance and impact of plot in the life of the church. It should be noted that Week 4 encompassed the largest number of active participants in the pre-session survey (Survey

4A) with 18 total responders. However, the total number of responders who completed Survey 4B dropped to 16 total individuals who completed the quantitative data section and even fewer who completed the qualitative section, bottoming out at 14 participants on the final prompt. It is possible that some quantitative data became skewed after the loss of 2 participants, which represented 11% of total responders.

Like Week 1 (“Character and Setting”), most quantitative data began at a relatively high average point with little room to garner positive movement. However, one particular data point stood out due to its average increase between the pre-session survey (Survey 4A) and Survey 4B. The prompt, “when I personally reflect upon the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of the plot-lines which affect the work of this congregation” saw an increase of 1.3 points between both surveys as visualized in Figure 13. Even with 2 less responders in Survey 4B, we observe significant increases among participants’ regard for the “plot-lines” contained in their story at First Baptist Church.

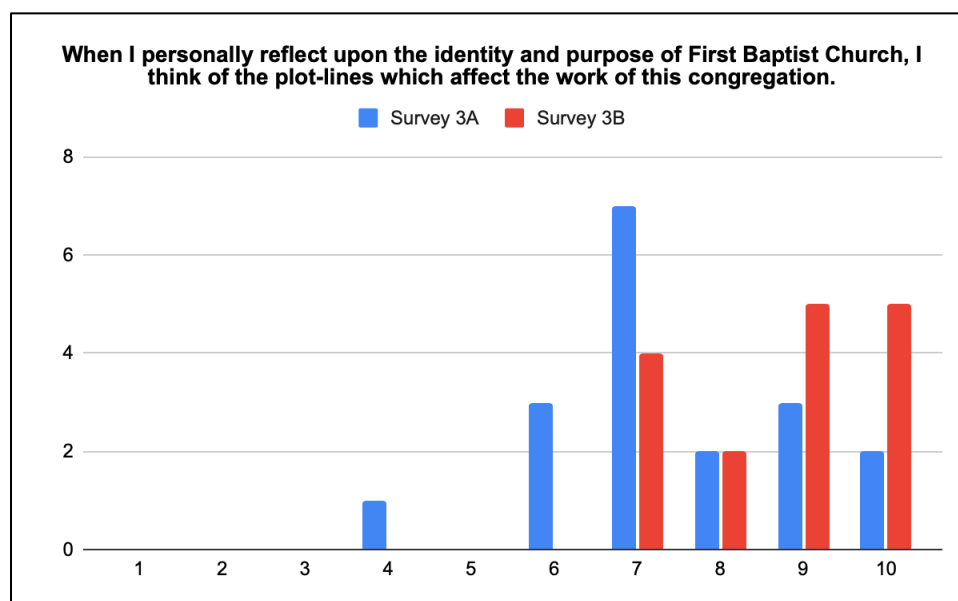


Figure 13 – Utilizing Plot (Personal) (Surveys 4A and 4B)

Though the Survey 4A qualitative responses appeared to suggest pre-existing openness to the utilization of plot in an ecclesial setting, Survey 4B articulated the desire to incorporate “plot” into the life of the church more directly. One participant stated, “Understanding the plot-line of groups in our community might inform us of how we can fold in to the work that is available to us to serve our community...Understanding this plot-line helps us see how we can meet a need that may not even be recognized.” Another respondent offered the following insights:

“As a relative newcomer to a church that has members whose families have been a part of the church for generations, I don't have the personal recollection and knowledge of history that many do. I'm interested in understanding how the unique nature of this church as a representative of the Baptist tradition in this community came about, so focusing on plot line might help me discover that.”

One participant said, “Now that we have talked about the role of plot-lines, it is much clearer to me how beneficial clear and well-organized plot-lines could be in evaluating the impact of the church's story on me personally, and especially as I try to relate my experience to others who may benefit from my story.” A final, most-helpful post-session response said the following: “I think of the way Jesus interacted with people and what he focused on in his teachings. It's easy for me to see the similarities to today's life in some biblical contexts and not others. I could benefit from a more in depth look at the conflict and plot in some settings in drawing comparisons with today.”

Data Analysis: Theme

“Theme” marked the final story-based element for active reflection and consideration, and like each of the previous weeks, responders showed an increasing

appreciation of this week's particular story-based element. No prompt showed particularly significant movement (each prompt yielded a less-than-1-point shift), but the qualitative data provided helpful insights. As was the trend since Week 2, fewer respondents participated in the post-session survey (Survey 5B). 2 participants did not complete Survey 5B, and the final question of Survey 5B bottomed out with 12 total responses, which represented 66% of total project participants. I will offer my personal insights into this decrease in the section entitled, "Methodological Critiques."

Because Week 5 produced no significant data shifts between the pre-session survey (Survey 5A) and Survey 5B, I heavily relied on qualitative data to determine whether or not Week 5 generated increased understanding and appreciation of the utilization of "theme." Fortunately, the data revealed significant distinctions in the qualitative data from before and after the interactive video session. While participants expressed an inherent understanding and appreciation for theme as a "sense-making device," several responded with uncertainty or ambivalence in regards to their personal affection for "theme" as a helpful framework. While reflecting on "theme" through individual, biblical and ecclesial lenses, participants said "I don't place as much importance on theme as I do the other elements of storytelling," "I see the purpose of a theme I'm just trying to grasp the importance," "I don't consider a focus on theme when developing an opinion of the local church" and "I'm not sure if a focus theme benefits my personal work." These pre-session responses suggest that this particular story-based element might be the least helpful in understanding ecclesial identity and purpose.

That being said, the qualitative data in Survey 5B indicated a greater awareness of and desire to frame ecclesial identity and purpose in terms of "theme." One participant

said, “Understanding and articulating the theme of a project/event/activity can put everyone on the same page, which can provide guidance on making decisions regarding the activity. The theme could serve as the foundation on which all decisions are made.” Another stated, “Themes can help explain our history, and how we got to where we are. We can study our past themes to gain a sense of identity, and we can establish new themes that show where we are headed and what is important to us as a church.” These responses affirm the quantitative data’s movement towards a higher regard for theme despite its ethereal nature as compared to other story elements.

Post-project Data Analysis

Participants were asked to complete a post-project survey (Survey 6) after the completion of the Week 6 collaborative session, which marked the concluding activity of the project. This survey invited participants to reflect on the final exercise and the entire project experience in order to determine whether or not this story-based framework is beneficial for ecclesial identity and purpose. Quantitative prompts were identical to those in Survey 1, but the qualitative questions specifically asked the participants which of their personal sentiments had changed throughout the project, if any had changed at all. It should be noted that the number of responders dropped significantly from Week 1. Whereas Survey 1 received 17 responses, Survey 6 received 13 responses. As with the previous analyses, the best possible data was likely skewed due to the decreased number of respondents.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ The total number of active participants in the Week 6 collaborative session outnumbered the total number of responses provided in Survey 6.

When participants were asked if “the manner in which you think about the work of the local church changed throughout the course of this project,” most participants expressed that the project did change their perspective in a positive way. One participant stated, “I have given further thought to each of the story elements in isolation (key characters, setting and context around certain events, etc.) and it has given me deeper understanding of who we are.” Another participant wrote, “Contextually, yes. After participating in the group session, and seeing what was listed under the 5 story elements, there’s a much greater richness to be considered in the Bible stories and in our church’s story than I had thought of.” Another response included, “I have begun to look at the work of the local church in a slightly different way, with more thought as to its history and place (setting) within the community and how that impacts its ongoing role and influence.” A couple of responses provided milder or more neutral feedback, claiming, “Nothing has changed because I thought that story-based elements of biblical stories were important from the beginning” and “No significant changes in my concept of the work of our church. Maybe a bit more aware of the concepts discussed throughout the project.” A corresponding Likert-scale question confirmed the positive reception of this concept (See Figure 14). All respondents gave this question high marks, with the composite average equaling 9.4 points.

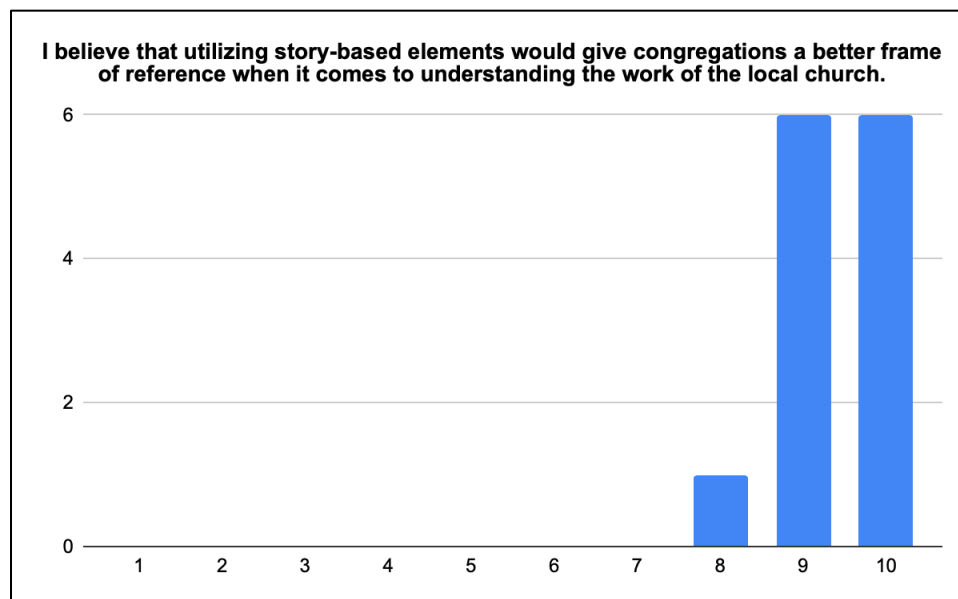


Figure 14 – Frame of Reference (Congregation) (Survey 6)

In addition to considering a general framework for churches, participants were asked to reflect specifically on the work of First Baptist Church as they explored story concepts. A majority of participants said that their views regarding the work of First Baptist Church had changed for the better as a result of this project. One participant stated, “I believe considering the individual story elements in isolation helps derive a deeper understanding of how we got to where we are as a church...Thinking of the work in terms of a story has helped me gain a better picture of what we should be doing in the future as well.” Another said, “It has illuminated some potential new avenues to approach the relationship with the greater community surrounding FBC, and to potentially reframe the position of others in relation to FBC.” Another wrote, “Yes, while I feel fairly familiar as an involved member with the working of the church, I believe I’m developing a deeper application of our church’s “story” by considering the 5 elements (and others, e.g., the milieu outside of the church).” These responses, along with others not referenced in this project writeup, indicated the potential to adopt a new manner of thinking and

understanding of the work of First Baptist Church. Even more, this question's corresponding Likert-scale evaluation revealed a strong collective belief that a story-based framework could benefit First Baptist Church, as shown in Figure 15.

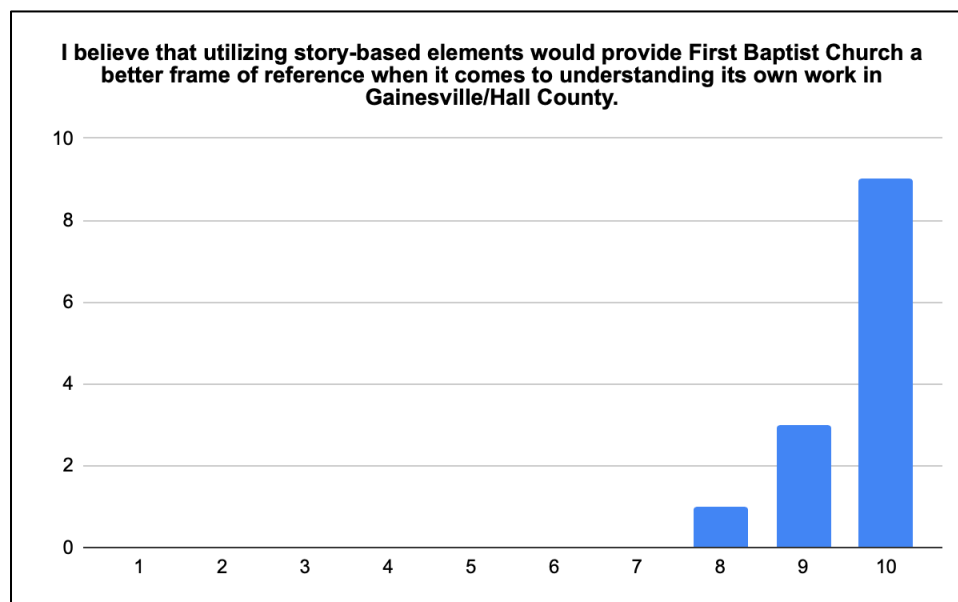


Figure 15 – Frame of Reference (FBC) (Survey 6)

It is worth noting a few participants' shared opinion that the project did not change their outlook on the work of First Baptist Church, even where the content was well-received. These participants expressed little-to-no movement in their thinking due to an already-high regard for their work and purpose at First Baptist Church. They expressed, "Not sure my attitude toward stories has changed, it has always been positive" and "I was already getting a great deal of this in my Sunday school, Bible study, and through the music program." In my view, this consideration does not compromise the effectiveness of the project as it does not suggest that the story-based framework is unwanted or without merit.

I was especially curious to return to the sentiments surrounding the participants' regard for their own value and importance at First Baptist Church. Though I did not

attempt to suggest that a “straight line” could (or should) be drawn between the use of a story-based framework and one’s personal sense of value within a congregation, I did hope that an awareness of one’s place in “the story of First Baptist Church” might bring about a deeper connection to the work of the congregation. I was glad to see that potential connection validated as this prompt saw a significant increase in the participants’ individual and collective sense of value at First Baptist Church, as shown in Figure 16.⁶⁰

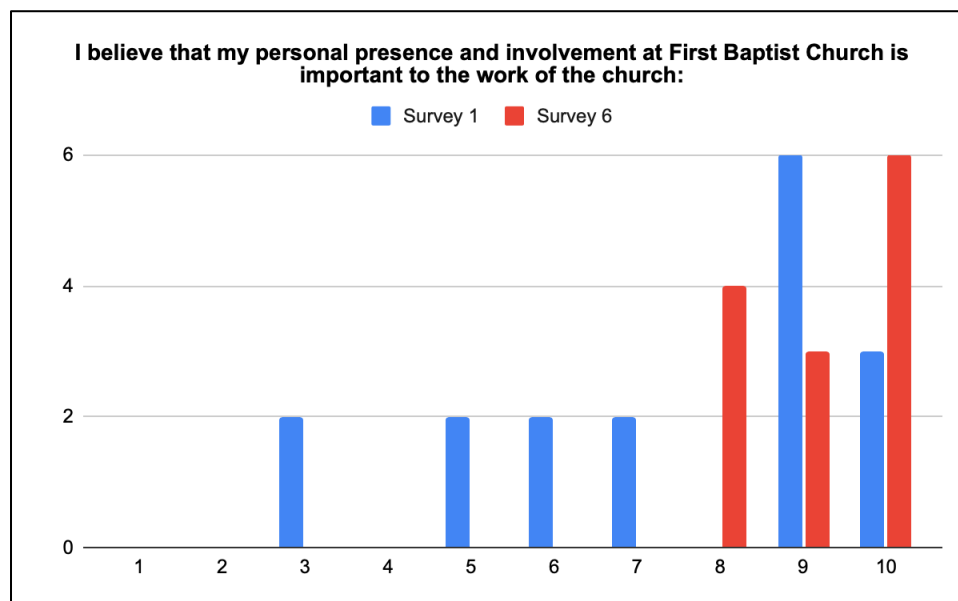


Figure 16 – Personal Presence and Involvement (Surveys 1 and 6)

It is impossible to know the underlying reasons which contributed to such a significant data shift. Some insights could be drawn from another qualitative question regarding the participants’ own involvement at First Baptist Church and whether or not the project provided a new means of self-understanding. For this question (“Has the manner in which you think about your personal involvement at First Baptist Church changed throughout

⁶⁰ Notably, the data is skewed due to the reduced number of respondents in Survey 6. Still, the average score for this data set increased from 7.4 in Survey 1 to 9.2 in Survey 6, which represents one of the largest data shifts for the project.

the course of this project?”), one participant said, “It has changed, because it has made me want to increase my involvement. When I think of FBCG as having a story, it makes me want to become a key part of the story to impact it for the better. It has helped me realize how connected each of the story elements are, and that different events do not occur in total isolation from each other.” Another stated,

“The way I think about my personal involvement at FBC has changed through the course of this project. I see how our church is a part of the greater story. I am a character in the story and my church is a character in the greater story. Engaging with the stories of the bible in this way has helped me understand the greater themes of the church in our town.”

Another respondent gave this thorough and insightful piece of feedback:

“I have been inspired to take a second look at what drew me to this church and how I see my role as an active member. Where do I fit into the greater story of this church? What do I see or desire to see as the future of this church and what do I, as a senior adult, have to contribute? How can I best serve and represent the gospel as I understand it while respecting and loving those who have a different understanding?”

These types of responses suggest that the project, and its corresponding material, had some success in inviting individuals into a deeper self-awareness about their place at First Baptist Church. Still, a several qualitative responses suggested little-to-no change regarding the participants’ views of their own personal involvement at First Baptist Church.⁶¹ Perhaps the project, in its totality, helped individuals feel more connected to the story of First Baptist Church without prompting any sort of new action or involvement. This is not inherently negative as increased activity does not necessarily correlate with deeper engagement in the life of a church.

⁶¹ 6 individuals indicated that they did not feel differently about their personal involvement.

The final section of this post-project data analysis will examine the direct impact of story-based elements on participants' understanding of the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church. Because the number of responders dropped between the Week 1 pre-project survey (Survey 1) and the Week 6 post-project survey (Survey 6), I will only display the numerical averages so as not to misrepresent data with a skewed visualization. The quantitative data can be seen in Figure 17.

Likert-scale Prompt	Survey 1 Average	Survey 6 Average
When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of specific individuals and personalities which affect the work of this congregation:	Average Score: 8.1	Average Score: 9.2
When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of the structural/contextual/cultural setting(s) within the church and the greater Gainesville/Hall County Community:	Average Score: 7.5	Average Score: 9.2
When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of the past history, present circumstances & future direction of this congregation:	Average Score: 8.2	Average Score: 9.2
When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of those forces (individual, societal, cultural, etc.) which prevent us from fulfilling the God's call for our church:	Average Score: 7.3	Average Score: 8
When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of a deeper & more transcendent reality which must be continually acknowledged and celebrated:	Average Score: 7.0	Average Score: 8.9

Figure 17 – Participant Utilization of Story (Surveys 1 and 6)

This data revealed an overwhelming receptivity to adopting story-based elements when considering the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church. There was an average increase of 1.3 points across all elements, significantly surpassing the average data swings during the weekly pre-session and post-session surveys. The lowest point swing and lowest “final score” involved “conflict,” which is unsurprising given the amount of quantitative and qualitative data expressing trepidation in this area. The two largest point swings involved the participants’ regard for “setting” and “theme,” a curious mixture of two distinct story-based elements. There were indications in the data from Week 2 and Week 5 that “setting” and “theme” were not as readily received as other elements like “character” and “plot.” Still, the positive movement with both of these elements confirm the potential impact of these story-based elements, even where there was initial hesitation.

It is difficult to determine whether any particular element was more-readily understood, appreciated or adopted over-and-above the others. Because all final averages (except for “conflict”) fell within a range of 8.9 points to 9.2 points, it would be hasty to single out any one data point for the purpose of identifying the most impactful element. Perhaps the most accurate analysis that can be garnered from this project is that of a widespread openness or outright desire to adopt a story-based framework in a personal, communal and theological manner. This analysis will be expounded upon in Chapter 5.

Methodological Critiques

The project began with the desire to further analyze certain data within smaller subsets, especially with regards to generational and gender identification. I quickly

determined that a comprehensive analysis of these demographics in relation to overall data would be excessive, and perhaps most importantly, subject to significant data skewing. The optional nature of answering the demographic questions in each survey, along with the inconsistent participation of certain demographic groups at any given moment created an impossible scenario for analyzing subsets with precise accuracy. For example, the number of responses collected during Week 4 differed between the pre-session survey and post-session survey. More specifically, the Week 4 pre-session survey (Survey 4A) resulted in 2 responses from the 80+ demographic while the post-session survey (Survey 4B) resulted in only 1 response from said demographic:

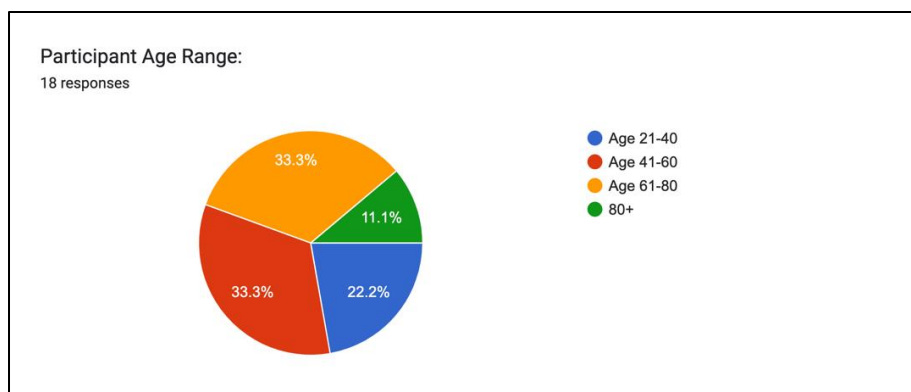


Figure 18 – Participant Age Range (Survey 4A)

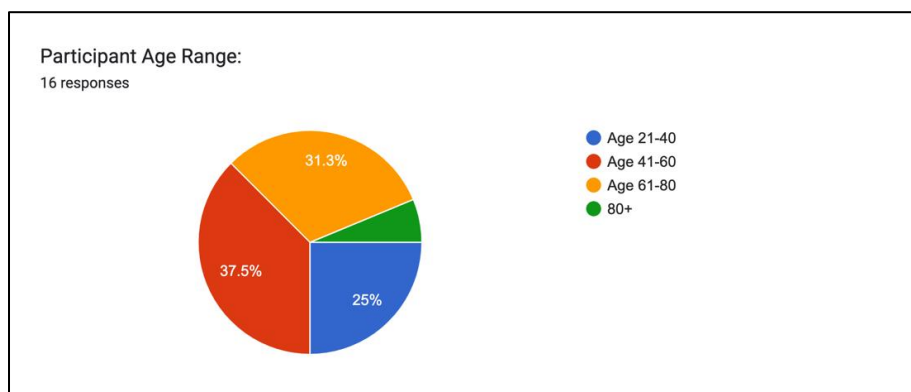


Figure 19 - Participant Age Range (Survey 4B)

This type of inconsistency, which occurred multiple times throughout the project, created the potential for inaccurate data analysis. For this reason, I primarily focused on data received from the entire group of participants.

A second critique I came to hold regarding this project's methodology relates to the sheer number of questions and prompts that were given to participants. The weekly prompts required a significant amount of qualitative feedback in order to fully participate. Certain prompts were given four or more times across multiple surveys, which likely exhausted the participant of insights as they moved forward through the project. This reality, along with the presence of several relatively similar questions led some participants to skip questions altogether or to write something along the lines of "See previous response." I ultimately believe that compelling the participants to engage in mental work *before* the interactive sessions lessened the impact of the sessions themselves, potentially resulting in compromised feedback. Were I to conduct the project again, I would only issue a post-project survey for each week's individual sessions and ask a limited number of pointed questions about the participant's changing sentiments toward the individual story elements. This would also involve the creation of a research control group.

A final methodological critique involved the inability to ensure mutual understanding and interpretation of the project material from one participant to the next. In the early stages of project preparation, I decided not to spend any time fleshing out concepts related to the story elements for two primary reasons: (1) my relative lack of expertise in fields related to "story"⁶² and (2) the desire to maintain a focus on biblical

⁶² I did not receive any formal education in Literature or English.

and ecclesial concepts. Because there was no initial study or emphasis on the definition of “story” and its corresponding elements, there was likely inconsistency in the understanding of project content, not least of which included the participants’ interpretation of survey questions and prompts. While no participant expressed any confusion or bewilderment about the project or its contents therein, I should have provided limited definitions and commentary regarding the respective story elements.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This project commenced with the hopes of seeing a story-based framework create a sense of identity, commonality and purpose within a diverse group of First Baptist Church Gainesville members. The pursuit of this goal took individuals on a journey which articulated the importance of storytelling in the scriptures and challenged participants to flesh out concepts of character, setting, conflict, plot and theme through journaling exercises. The final portion of the project invited participants into a common space to hear each other's personal story-based elements from their time at First Baptist Church.

The commencement of the project showed participants were curious about the potential for developing a new framework for the life of the church. Though the project idea was initially received without concern or hesitation, participants engaged in the work of discerning the impact of story-based thinking on their personal involvement at First Baptist Church. Though several participants were unable to contribute on a weekly basis, the average weekly participation of 16.2 out of 18 total participants showed that participants were nearly fully engaged in the project content. The participants offered substantial qualitative and quantitative feedback throughout the course of the project, and the results returned enough significant data to draw certain conclusions about the effectiveness of utilizing story-based elements in a congregational setting.

As shown in Chapter 4, the utilization of a story-based framework was well-received throughout the course of the project. If the impact of the project could be

summed up through one piece of data, it would be in a particular prompt from Surveys 1 and 6 which reads, “When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think in terms of “story.” The results of this survey prompt can be seen in Figure 20.

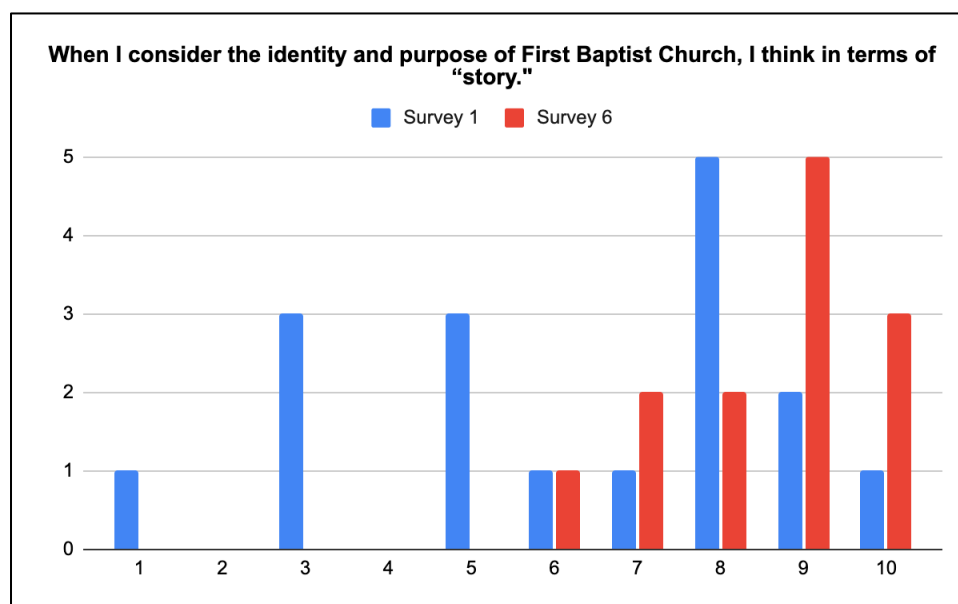


Figure 20 – Utilizing Story For FBC Identity (Surveys 1 and 6)

I believe that this movement, which is indicative of the trajectory in almost every data point of the project, reveals an appreciation of and desire to adopt a story-based framework within one’s personal theology and as a broader guiding principle at First Baptist Church. The fact that many, if not all, participants expressed the desire to utilize a story-based framework in forming congregational identity suggests that, at a very high level, the project goal was met.

It should be noted that the qualitative data suggests greater divergence and uncertainty as participants progressed into more specific areas. For example, the concept of focusing on “conflict” as a necessary component of a congregation’s identity was met with some hesitation. The qualitative feedback reenforced an existing reality within many congregations: conflict is inherently negative and damaging to the work of the church. It

is my belief that this sentiment further solidifies the need to utilize story-based elements as healthy, redemptive conflict resolution is critical for the work of the church. Perhaps a story-based framework has the power to challenge the common belief that conflict must either be avoided or pursued with damning consequences.

Another marker indicating the success of the project involved consistency between the participants' personal regard for the utilization of a story-based framework and the desire to see the church, as a collective whole, pursue such a framework. I was slightly concerned that participants would, for example, accept a story-based framework on a personal level while not believing that such a concept could benefit the work of the church. The data, however, suggests that participants were open to or enthusiastic about the pursuit of a story-based framework on an individual and collective level, which is critical to the success of any congregational project seeking to bridge the gap between personal devotion and corporate practice.

Though the weekly video sessions and corresponding journaling exercises were well-received by all participants, the Week 6 collaborative exercise proved to be even more helpful and energizing. When asked to provide thoughts from their reflections on the Book of Jonah, participants shared insights with enthusiasm and excitement. Organic discussions ensued, and a combination of shared viewpoints and surprising individual takes on elements within the Book of Jonah provided a healthy framework for discussing the biblical text. This energy carried over into the discussion which invited participants to identify the characters, setting), conflicts, plotlines and themes within their own personal stories at First Baptist Church Gainesville. This activity highlighted great diversity of

thought within the group while revealing shared sentiments about the identity and work of First Baptist Church.

The variety of feedback collected during these final exercises strongly suggests that a point person (i.e. pastor, consultant, task force, etc.) must take the lead in drawing out common elements from the expressed individual experiences.⁶³ Just as the biblical authors played a significant role in identifying the overarching narrative of God's redemptive work in the world, so must one individual (or authoritative body) find the thread (or threads) connecting the variety of stories within a faith community.

I have concluded that an intentional focus on story elements provides a surprisingly beneficial alternative to the traditional means of congregational identity formation, which involve asking questions like, "What is going well in this congregation? What is going poorly? What ministries are most successful? What should we do about worship style?" These questions tend to confine the creative spirit of the local church and risk sowing further discord within a congregation. Perhaps questions like, "What characters in the story of First Baptist Church have had the most impact on you?" or "What is unique about the setting to which God has called us to be the church?" or "How will this unique congregation share the story of God's redemption and grace in the future?" are better suited for the pursuit of congregational identity amidst a changing cultural landscape. I look forward to utilizing story-based elements in my work and pray that others will discover its benefit in ministry and mission.

⁶³ See Appendix D.

APPENDIX A
INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Greetings!

Thanks again for your interest in being a part of my D.Min. project at Gardner-Webb University!

I am now extending a formal invitation for you to join me in this endeavor. I have attached a document known as “Informed Consent,” which provides information about the project and your expected participation in said project. Before fully agreeing to participate, I need you to:

1. Read the attached Informed Consent in its entirety.
2. Contact me with any questions or concerns (if needed).
3. Sign the Informed Consent and return to me by (a) attaching the signed document to this email or (b) handing me a signed hard-copy of the Informed Consent within 1 week of receiving this invitation.

By following the steps above, you will officially agree to participate in my D.Min. project. Should you determine that you are unable to participate, please let me know and I will remove you from the “potential participants” list without hesitation or question.

I appreciate your time. Please let me know what questions or concerns you might have.

Peace,

Reverend Jeremy Shoulta

APPENDIX B

PROJECT CONSENT FORM

Jeremy Shoulta is asking you to participate in a research study titled: “Developing A Shared Ecclesial Identity Utilizing Story-Based Elements at First Baptist Church”.

What the study is about

The purpose of this project is to determine whether or not a focus on story creates a greater sense of collective purpose, or “meta-narrative,” amongst a sampling of lay people at First Baptist Church.

What you will be asked to do

This project will invite you to participate in a multi-week, interactive process with the intent of developing a shared ecclesial narrative utilizing story-based elements. Over the course of six weeks, you will:

1. Experience a series of short videos containing teachings, guided reflections and writing challenges centered around: (1) the power and effect of storytelling, (2) the impact and importance of storytelling in the scriptures, (3) the presence of story elements in biblical stories, (4) the “elements” within your “story” at First Baptist Church. You will be asked to keep a journal of these reflections with the intent of sharing said reflections in a collaborative exercise at the completion of the study. These first 5 weeks (Video Sessions) of the study will take anywhere between 20 and 30 minutes (per week) at a time of your own choosing.
2. Participate in a one-time group exercise at the completion of the study with the goal of crafting a shared story with other individuals/participants of the study. You will be invited to share your reflections from the previous few weeks as part of the exercise. **Note: you are encouraged, but not required, to participate in the sharing of these journaling exercises, and there is no penalty or incentive for sharing or not sharing your reflections.** This group exercise will last 2 hours and take place on a Sunday afternoon immediately following the 11:00am worship service or at an alternate time of the group’s choosing.
3. Participate in anonymous, confidential surveys throughout the study to “track” your personal reflections on the subject matter. This is the data which will help the researcher determine whether utilizing story-based elements are helpful in establishing a congregational identity. These surveys will be offered through the Google Forms service, which makes data collection easy, safe and secure. Each survey will take between 5 and 10 minutes.
4. Participate in an anonymous, confidential evaluation of the researcher’s project. This evaluation will be offered through the Google Forms service, which makes data collection easy, safe and secure. This evaluation will take between 5 and 10 minutes.

Risks and discomforts

The risks associated with this project are minimal and resemble those you might experience while participating in a Bible Study at First Baptist Church. Specifically, there exists the possibility of

nervousness or anxiety while group sharing. However, there is no requirement to speak publicly throughout the course of this project.

Benefits

The potential benefits of this project include (1) personal growth in Christian discipleship and community and (2) the possibility of discovering a helpful framework for congregations seeking to discover their identity and purpose in the community.

Compensation for participation

There is no compensation for participation in this research project.

Audio/Video Recording

No audio/video recording will take place during the course of this study.

Privacy/Confidentiality/Data Security

While you are invited to share your journaling & reflections in the group setting, your participation in project surveys and evaluation will be kept anonymous and confidential. You will be invited to signify certain demographic items such as gender and frequency of attendance in worship at First Baptist Church. These demographic identifiers are optional to disclose.

Please note that the survey(s) [are] being conducted with the help of Google Forms, a company not affiliated with Gardner-Webb University or First Baptist Church Gainesville. Google Forms contains its own privacy and security policies that you can find at its website. We anticipate that your participation in this survey presents no greater risk than everyday use of the Internet.

Please note that email communication is neither private nor secure. Though I will take all precautions to protect your privacy, you should be aware that information sent through e-mail could be read by a third party.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement is voluntary and you may refuse to participate before the study begins, discontinue at any time, or skip any questions/procedures that make you feel uncomfortable, with no penalty to you, and no effect on your standing or relationship with the researcher, Gardner-Webb University or First Baptist Church Gainesville.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Jeremy Shoulta, a Doctor of Ministry student at Gardner-Webb University. If you have questions, you may contact Jeremy at jeremy.shoulta@fbcgainesville.org or at 770-674-8286.

The Faculty Research Advisor for Jeremy Shoulta and for this study is Dr. Herbert Palomino, Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling, School of Divinity, Gardner-Webb University. You may contact Dr. Palomino at (704) 406-2354 or hpalomino@gardner-webb.edu.

If the research design of the study necessitates that its full scope is not explained prior to participation, it will be explained to you after completion of the study. If you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, or if you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact: Dr. Sydney K. Brown, IRB Institutional

Administrator, Gardner-Webb University. Telephone: 704-406-3019. skbrown@gardner-webb.edu

I have read the above information and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature_____Date_____

Your Name (printed)_____

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for three years beyond the end of the study.

APPENDIX C
SUMMARY OF WEEKLY INTERACTIVE CONTENT

Week 1 Video & Writing Exercise

Introductory remarks & reminder to take survey 1 prior to experiencing this video.

Journaling Exercise: What biblical story (or stories) has impacted your faith journey? What about the story was so meaningful for you?

Comments and rhetorical questions on the Impact of story and story elements in relation to understanding identity and purpose

Journaling Exercise: Read the Book of Jonah (or recall the Book of Jonah) and journal about the parts of the story that grab your attention or have impacted you in a prior reading/study of Jonah.

The Book of Jonah, along with the entirety of our biblical cannon, suggest that God's people have often self-identified in terms of "story," perhaps more so than we acknowledge. What if the local church – including First Baptist Gainesville – considered our congregation's identity and purpose utilizing story-based elements?

Journaling Exercise: Consider the "story" of your time at First Baptist Church. How might you describe that story even now?

Concluding remarks & information about next session.

Week 2 Video & Writing Exercise

Introductory remarks & reminder to take surveys prior to and after experiencing this video.

Journaling Exercise: Can you name the characters and settings present in the biblical story or stories which have most impacted you?

Comments and rhetorical questions on the impact of “character” and “setting” in relation to biblical interpretation and application. Comments focused particularly on the story of David and Goliath.

Journaling Exercise: Read the Book of Jonah (or recall the Book of Jonah) and name the character(s) and setting(s) within the story.

Journaling Exercise: Consider the “story” of your time at First Baptist Church. Who and what are the character(s) and setting(s) present during your time at First Baptist Church?

Concluding remarks, reminder to take post-session survey & information about next session.

Week 3 Video & Writing Exercise

Introductory remarks & reminder to take surveys prior to and after experiencing this video.

Journaling Exercise: Can you name the conflict(s) present in the biblical story or stories which have most impacted you?

Comments and rhetorical questions on the impact of “conflict” in relation to biblical interpretation and application. Comments focused particularly on the story of the Warrior Christ in Revelation 19.

Journaling Exercise: Read the Book of Jonah (or recall the Book of Jonah) and name the conflict(s) within the story.

Journaling Exercise: Consider the “story” of your time at First Baptist Church. What is the conflict (or what are the conflicts) present during your time at First Baptist Church?

Concluding remarks, reminder to take post-session survey & information about next session.

Week 4 Video & Writing Exercise

Introductory remarks & reminder to take surveys prior to and after experiencing this video.

Journaling Exercise: Can you outline the plot present in the biblical story or stories which have most impacted you?

Comments and rhetorical questions on the impact of “plot” in relation to biblical interpretation and application. Comments focused particularly on the story of the Testing of Abraham.

Journaling Exercise: Read the Book of Jonah (or recall the Book of Jonah) and name the plot (or plots) within the story.

Journaling Exercise: Consider the “story” of your time at First Baptist Church. What is the plot (or what are the plots) present during your time at First Baptist Church?

Concluding remarks, reminder to take post-session survey & information about next session.

Week 5 Video & Writing Exercise

Introductory remarks & reminder to take surveys prior to and after experiencing this video.

Journaling Exercise: Can you articulate the themes present in the biblical story or stories which have most impacted you?

Comments and rhetorical questions on the impact of “theme” in relation to biblical interpretation and application. Comments focused particularly on the parables of Luke 15.

Journaling Exercise: Read the Book of Jonah (or recall the Book of Jonah) and articulate the theme (or themes) within the story.

Journaling Exercise: Consider the “story” of your time at First Baptist Church. What is the theme (or what are the themes) present at First Baptist Church?

Concluding remarks, reminder to take post-session survey & information about next session

Week 6 Presentation & Group Exercise

Introductory remarks & reminder to take final survey & to complete facilitator evaluation after today's session, which will be sent via email within 1 day.

Group Exercise: What are the story elements present within the Book of Jonah? Test subjects are invited to share from previous weeks' journaling exercises.

Comments, teaching and rhetorical questions on the metanarrative of scripture.

Group Exercise: What are the elements present within your story at First Baptist Church? Can we find overarching, common story elements? Can we articulate a common story based on everyone's story at First Baptist Church?

Concluding remarks, reminder to take post-session survey & facilitator evaluation.

APPENDIX D
DATE FROM COLLABORATIVE EXERCISE

Story Elements in the Book of Jonah

Prompt: Identify the character(s) in the Book of Jonah

Jonah	Sailors	Captain	Ninevites
God	Fish	Worm	Tree
The Sun & Wind	Storm	Sea	King

Prompt: Identify the setting(s) in the Book of Jonah

Nineveh	Belly of the fish	Tarshish	Ship
Sea	Sea	Port	East

Prompt: Identify conflict(s) in the Book of Jonah

Jonah vs. God	Obedience to God's	Jealousy	Jonah's internal
Sailors' struggle	Will	Storm – what to do?	conflict
Conflict between gods	Jonah vs. Nineveh	Danger/Safety	Jonah vs. mariners
	Sins of Nineveh		

Prompt: Identify the plot(s) of the Book of Jonah

Jonah's calling	Storm	Redemption	Inadequacy
Jonah's obedience	Forgiveness	Timeline	

Prompt: Identify the theme(s) of the Book of Jonah

“Not about you”	Sin/Forgiveness	Owning up to poor choices	Taking easy/difficult path
Consequences	Always follow God’s commands	Lord works in mysterious ways	God’s salvation for everyone
Repetition of Sin/Forgiveness	Accommodation to internal conflict	Control vs. giving up	God gives 2 nd chances

Participant Involvement with First Baptist Church as Understood Through A Story Framework

Prompt: Identify the character(s) in your story at First Baptist Church

Mark Green	Music Ministry	FBC “Natives”	Influential women
Inviters	Malcolm Tolbert	M. Ellerd	Caretakers
Volunteers	City of Gainesville	Youth Minister	People in need
Pastors/Teachers	Community/Friends	Other churches	My cohort
Children	Visionary leaders	Change/Resistance	Outsiders/Insiders
Me	Ministers	Larger community	“Elites”
Family of God	Peacemakers	Gatekeepers	Encouragers

Prompt: Identify the setting(s) in your story at First Baptist Church

Time Period: 1960s -	Time Period: 1980s	Building of FLC	Women in leadership/ministry
2020 (COVID)	SBC/CBF controversy	Traditional church	Hall County, GA
Bible belt	Economy	Age	Lake town & setting
I-985 addition	Stagnation	Revitalization	

Prompt: Identify the plot(s) of your story at First Baptist Church

Loving & leading people to Jesus	Learning to love	Grace discovered & traditions renewed	Work towards respecting others
The struggle for unity	Creating sincere space of hospitality	Manifest love through kindness	Theological & cultural tension

Prompt: Identify the conflict(s) in your story at First Baptist Church

Theological & cultural tension	Ability to see the humanity in things	Covid/cultural change	Conflict is the conflict
--------------------------------	---------------------------------------	-----------------------	--------------------------

Prompt: Identify the theme(s) in your story at First Baptist Church

God's story is our story	Change	Biblical application	Accepting people & their differences
Make a joyful noise	Church family	Grace	Hospitality
Doing Xtian work	Loving our neighbor	Community	Discover
A Christ-like vision	Spiritual maturity	Rebuilding	Connection
Belonging			

APPENDIX E
PRE-PROJECT & POST-PROJECT SURVEYS

Survey 1 (Pre-project Survey)

General Information (Optional)

The following section contains optional demographical disclosures.

(1) Participant age range:

21-40 _____ 41-60 _____ 61-80 _____ 80+ _____

(2) Participant gender:

Male _____ Female _____

(3) Participant's participation in congregational worship:

3+ Times/Month _____ 1-2 Times/Month _____ Less than 1 Time/Month _____

(4) Participant's participation in Sunday school, small group, etc.:

3+ Times/Month _____ 1-2 Times/Month _____ Less than 1 Time/Month _____

(5) Participant's participation in volunteering or community service (can be non-FBC participation):

1+ Times/Month _____ 1+ Times/Quarter Year _____ 1+ Times/Year _____

Questions Related to Content of Project

Please answer the following questions honestly and thoroughly. Responses are collected anonymously. For scale/spectrum questions, please note:

- 1 implies, "Not at all"
- 5 implies, "Neutral" or "No opinion"
- 10 implies, "Completely"

(6) In 5 sentences or less, please describe the work of the local church (in a general sense; not necessarily specific to FBC Gainesville):.

(7) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that congregations needs a better frame of reference when it comes to understanding the work of the local church.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(8) In 5 sentences or less, please describe the work of First Baptist Church in Gainesville/Hall County.

(9) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that First Baptist Church needs a better frame of reference when it comes to understanding its own work in Gainesville/Hall County.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(10) In 5 sentences or less, please describe your personal involvement at First Baptist Church (in the most general sense).

(11) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that I could personally benefit from a better frame of reference when it comes to understanding the work of First Baptist Church.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(12) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): "I believe that my personal presence and involvement at First Baptist Church is important to the work of the church."

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(13) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that the work of First Baptist Church is important to the well-being of Gainesville, Georgia.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(14) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): "When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think in terms of "story."

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(15) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of the individuals and personalities which affect the work of this congregation.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(16) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of the structural/contextual/cultural setting(s) within the church and greater Gainesville/Hall County community.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(17) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of the past history, present circumstances & future direction of this congregation.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(18) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of those forces (individual, societal, cultural, etc.) which prevent us from fulfilling the God's call for our church.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(19) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of a deeper & more transcendent reality which must be continually acknowledged and celebrated.

1———2———3———4———5———6———7———8———9———10

Project Survey 6 (Post-project Survey)

General Information (Optional)

The following section contains optional demographical disclosures.

(1) Participant age range:

21-40 _____ 41-60 _____ 61-80 _____ 80+ _____

(2) Participant gender:

Male _____ Female _____

(3) Participant's participation in congregational worship:

3+ Times/Month _____ 1-2 Times/Month _____ Less than 1 Time/Month _____

(4) Participant's participation in Sunday school, small group, etc.:

3+ Times/Month _____ 1-2 Times/Month _____ Less than 1 Time/Month _____

(5) Participant's participation in volunteering or community service (can be non-FBC participation):

1+ Times/Month _____ 1+ Times/Quarter Year _____ 1+ Times/Year _____

Questions Related to Content of Project

Please answer the following questions honestly and thoroughly. Responses are collected anonymously. For scale/spectrum questions, please note:

- 1 implies, "Not at all"
- 5 implies, "Neutral" or "No opinion"
- 10 implies, "Completely"

(6) Has the manner in which you think about the work of the local church changed throughout the course of this project? If so, please explain how in 5 sentences or less. If nothing has changed, please state this in your response.

(7) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that utilizing story-based elements would give congregations a better frame of reference when it comes to understanding the work of the local church.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

(8) Has the manner in which you think about the work of First Baptist Church in Gainesville/Hall County changed throughout the course of this project? If so, please explain how in 5 sentences or less. If nothing has changed, please state this in your response.

(9) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that utilizing story-based elements would provide First Baptist Church a better frame of reference when it comes to understanding its own work in Gainesville/Hall County.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

(10) Has the manner in which you think about your personal involvement at First Baptist Church changed throughout the course of this project? If so, please explain how in 5 sentences or less. If nothing has changed, please state this in your response.

(11) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that I could benefit from utilizing a story-based framework when considering my personal involvement at First Baptist Church.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(12) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): "I believe that my personal presence and involvement at First Baptist Church is important to the work of the church."

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(13) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that the work of First Baptist Church is important to the well-being of Gainesville, Georgia.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(14) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): "When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think in terms of "story."

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(15) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of the individuals and personalities which affect the work of this congregation.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(16) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of the structural/contextual/cultural setting(s) within the church and greater Gainesville/Hall County community.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(17) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of the past history, present circumstances & future direction of this congregation.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(18) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of those forces (individual, societal, cultural, etc.) which prevent us from fulfilling the God's call for our church.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(19) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): When I consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of a deeper & more transcendent reality which must be continually acknowledged and celebrated.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

APPENDIX F
WEEKLY PRE-SESSION & POST-SESSION SURVEYS

Week 2 Pre-session & Post-session Surveys (Surveys 2A & 2B)

General Information

(1) Participant age range:

21-40 _____ 41-60 _____ 61-80 _____ 80+ _____

(2) Participant gender:

Male _____ Female _____

(3) Participant's participation in congregational worship:

3+ Times/Month _____ 1-2 Times/Month _____ Less than 1 Time/Month _____

(4) Participant's participation in Sunday school, small group, etc.:

3+ Times/Month _____ 1-2 Times/Month _____ Less than 1 Time/Month _____

(5) Participant's participation in volunteering or community service (can be non-FBC participation):

1+ Times/Month _____ 1+ Times/Quarter Year _____ 1+ Times/Year _____

Questions Related to Content of Project

Please answer the following questions honestly and thoroughly. Responses are collected anonymously. For scale/spectrum questions, please note:

- 1 implies, "Not at all"
- 5 implies, "Neutral" or "No opinion"
- 10 implies, "Completely"

(6) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that a thorough understanding of character and setting is critical to gaining a deep appreciation of any story.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

(7) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that the Scriptures prioritize strong characters and vivid settings in order to convey meaning, purpose & truth.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

(8) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe the local church should make an effort to explore the characters and settings present within Scripture in congregational worship, Bible study, small groups, etc.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(9) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): Generally speaking, churches should explore real-life "characters" and "settings" within their contexts of ministry and mission.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(10) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that a thorough understanding of the "characters" and "settings" within a ministry context can help a church understand and pursue its calling.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(11) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that a church should explicitly utilize "characters" and "settings" when attempting to articulate its identity and purpose.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(12) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): When I personally reflect upon the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of the individuals and personalities which affect the work of this congregation.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(13) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): When I personally consider the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of the structural/contextual/cultural setting(s) within the church and greater Gainesville/Hall County community.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(14) In 5 sentences or less, describe how a focus on “character” and “setting” in the biblical narrative could benefit the work of the local church, if at all. If you don’t believe this would benefit the church, please explain why.

(15) In 5 sentences or less, describe how a focus on specific “characters” and “settings” within the church’s local context could benefit its work, if at all. If you don’t believe this would benefit the church, please explain why.

(16) In 5 sentences or less, describe whether or not a focus on “characters” and “settings” affects your personal regard for the work of the local church. If this framework does not benefit you, please explain why.

Week 3 Pre-session & Post-session Surveys (Surveys 3A & 3B)

Please complete this survey [PRIOR TO/AFTER] viewing & experiencing the Week 3 Project Video. You are asked to refrain from identifying yourself in this survey.

General Information

(1) Participant age range:

21-40 _____ 41-60 _____ 61-80 _____ 80+ _____

(2) Participant gender:

Male _____ Female _____

(3) Participant's participation in congregational worship:

3+ Times/Month _____ 1-2 Times/Month _____ Less than 1 Time/Month _____

(4) Participant's participation in Sunday school, small group, etc.:

3+ Times/Month _____ 1-2 Times/Month _____ Less than 1 Time/Month _____

(5) Participant's participation in volunteering or community service (can be non-FBC participation):

1+ Times/Month _____ 1+ Times/Quarter Year _____ 1+ Times/Year _____

Questions Related to Content of Project

Please answer the following questions honestly and thoroughly. Responses are collected anonymously. For scale/spectrum questions, please note:

- 1 implies, "Not at all"
- 5 implies, "Neutral" or "No opinion"
- 10 implies, "Completely"

(6) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that a thorough understanding of conflict is critical to gaining a deep appreciation of any story.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

(7) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that the Scriptures prioritize explicit conflict in order to convey meaning, purpose & truth.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

(8) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe the local church should make an effort to explore the conflicts within Scripture in congregational worship, Bible study, small groups, etc.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(9) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): Generally speaking, churches should explore real-life "conflicts" within their contexts of ministry and mission.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(10) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that a thorough understanding of the conflicts within a ministry context can help a church understand and pursue its calling.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(11) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that a church should explicitly utilize conflict when attempting to articulate its identity and purpose.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(12) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): When I personally reflect upon the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of the conflicts which affect the work of this congregation.

1——2——3——4——5——6——7——8——9——10

(13) In 5 sentences or less, describe how a focus on conflict in the biblical narrative could benefit the work of the local church, if at all. If you don't believe this would benefit the church, please explain why.

(15) In 5 sentences or less, describe how a focus on specific conflicts within the church's local context could benefit its work, if at all. If you don't believe this would benefit the church, please explain why.

(16) In 5 sentences or less, describe whether or not a focus on conflict affects your personal regard for the work of the local church. If this framework does not benefit you, please explain why.

Week 4 Pre-session & Post-session Surveys (Surveys 4A & 4B)

Please complete this survey [PRIOR TO/AFTER] viewing & experiencing the Week 4 Project Video. You are asked to refrain from identifying yourself in this survey.

General Information

(1) Participant age range:

21-40 _____ 41-60 _____ 61-80 _____ 80+ _____

(2) Participant gender:

Male _____ Female _____

(3) Participant's participation in congregational worship:

3+ Times/Month _____ 1-2 Times/Month _____ Less than 1 Time/Month _____

(4) Participant's participation in Sunday school, small group, etc.:

3+ Times/Month _____ 1-2 Times/Month _____ Less than 1 Time/Month _____

(5) Participant's participation in volunteering or community service (can be non-FBC participation):

1+ Times/Month _____ 1+ Times/Quarter Year _____ 1+ Times/Year _____

Questions Related to Content of Project

Please answer the following questions honestly and thoroughly. Responses are collected anonymously. For scale/spectrum questions, please note:

- 1 implies, "Not at all"
- 5 implies, "Neutral" or "No opinion"
- 10 implies, "Completely"

(6) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that a thorough understanding of plot is critical to gaining a deep appreciation of any story.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

(7) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that the Scriptures prioritize clear plot-lines in order to convey meaning, purpose & truth.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

(8) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe the local church should make an effort to explore plot-lines within Scripture in congregational worship, Bible study, small groups, etc.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

(9) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): Generally speaking, churches should explore real-life "plot-lines" within their contexts of ministry and mission.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

(10) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that a thorough understanding of the plot-lines within a ministry context can help a church understand and pursue its calling.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

(11) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that a church should explicitly utilize plot-lines when attempting to articulate its identity and purpose.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

(12) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): When I personally reflect upon the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of the plot-lines which affect the work of this congregation.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

(13) In 5 sentences or less, describe how a focus on plot-lines in the biblical narrative could benefit the work of the local church, if at all. If you don't believe this would benefit the church, please explain why.

(15) In 5 sentences or less, describe how a focus on specific plot-lines within the church's local context could benefit its work, if at all. If you don't believe this would benefit the church, please explain why.

(16) In 5 sentences or less, describe whether or not a focus on plot-lines affects your personal regard for the work of the local church. If this framework does not benefit you, please explain why.

Week 5 Pre-session & Post-session Surveys (Surveys 5A & 5B)

Please complete this survey [PRIOR TO/AFTER] viewing & experiencing the Week 5 Project Video. You are asked to refrain from identifying yourself in this survey.

General Information

(1) Participant age range:

21-40 _____ 41-60 _____ 61-80 _____ 80+ _____

(2) Participant gender:

Male _____ Female _____

(3) Participant's participation in congregational worship:

3+ Times/Month _____ 1-2 Times/Month _____ Less than 1 Time/Month _____

(4) Participant's participation in Sunday school, small group, etc.:

3+ Times/Month _____ 1-2 Times/Month _____ Less than 1 Time/Month _____

(5) Participant's participation in volunteering or community service (can be non-FBC participation):

1+ Times/Month _____ 1+ Times/Quarter Year _____ 1+ Times/Year _____

Questions Related to Content of Project

Please answer the following questions honestly and thoroughly. Responses are collected anonymously. For scale/spectrum questions, please note:

- 1 implies, "Not at all"
- 5 implies, "Neutral" or "No opinion"
- 10 implies, "Completely"

(6) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that a thorough understanding of "theme" is critical to gaining a deep appreciation of any story.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

(7) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that the Scriptures explicitly articulate themes in order to convey meaning, purpose & truth.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

(8) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe the local church should make an effort to explore the themes within Scripture in congregational worship, Bible study, small groups, etc.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

(9) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): Generally speaking, churches should explore real-life "themes" within their contexts of ministry and mission.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

(10) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that a thorough understanding of the themes within a ministry context can help a church understand and pursue its calling.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

(11) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): I believe that a church should explicitly utilize "theme" when attempting to articulate its identity and purpose.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

(12) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): When I personally reflect upon the identity and purpose of First Baptist Church, I think of the themes which affect the work of this congregation.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

(13) In 5 sentences or less, describe how a focus on theme in the biblical narrative could benefit the work of the local church, if at all. If you don't believe this would benefit the church, please explain why.

(15) In 5 sentences or less, describe how a focus on specific themes within the church's local context could benefit its work, if at all. If you don't believe this would benefit the church, please explain why.

(16) In 5 sentences or less, describe whether or not a focus on theme affects your personal regard for the work of the local church. If this framework does not benefit you, please explain why.

APPENDIX G FACILITATOR EVALUATION

Please complete this survey within 1 week of the final group exercise. You are asked to refrain from identifying yourself in this survey.

General Information

(1) Participant age range:

21-40 _____ 41-60 _____ 61-80 _____ 80+ _____

(2) Participant gender:

Male _____ Female _____

Evaluation & Feedback

Please answer the following questions honestly and thoroughly. Responses are collected anonymously. For scale/spectrum questions, please note:

- 1 implies, "Not at all"
- 5 implies, "Neutral" or "No opinion"
- 10 implies, "Completely"

(3) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): The facilitator adequately explained the purpose and expectations for the project.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

(4) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): The facilitator adequately answered any and all questions pertaining to the project.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

(5) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): The facilitator was adequately prepared for each session.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

(6) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): The facilitator appeared knowledgeable on the subject matter pertaining to the power of story-based elements.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10

(7) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): The facilitator appeared knowledgeable on the subject matter pertaining to story-based elements in the Scriptures.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

(8) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): The video-based interactive presentation was, at the very least, adequate for engaging the subject matter.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

(9) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): The "Jonah Exercise" invited me into deeper reflection on the subject of story-based interpretation of the scriptures.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

(10) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): Reflecting on my personal "story" within the life of First Baptist Church helped me sense a deeper connection to the church.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

(11) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): The final exercise (Session 6) provided a healthy & comfortable space to collaborate with fellow members of First Baptist Church.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

(12) Please answer the following on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "not at all" and 10 being "completely"): The final exercise (Session 6) brought the entirety of the project together, regardless of my personal view of the effectiveness of a story-based approach.

1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

SOURCES CONSULTED

- “About Our Church.” First Baptist Church Gainesville. November 2021.
<https://www.fbcgainesville.org/about>.
- “Atlanta--Athens-Clarke County--Sandy Springs, GA-AL CSA.” Census Reporter. November 2, 2021. <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/33000US122-atlanta-athens-clarke-county-sandy-springs-ga-al-csa/>.
- Birch, Bruce E. “The First and Second Books of Samuel.” In *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 2. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.
- Brueggemann, Walter. “First and Second Samuel.” In *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary*, vol. 9. Louisville: John Knox, 1990.
- Cartledge, Tony. “1 & 2 Samuel.” In *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary*, vol. 30. Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, 2001.
- Childs, Brevard. “Isaiah.” In *Old Testament Library*, vol. 3. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000.
- “Comparison Chart.” The Baptist Faith and Message. Southern Baptist Convention. November 2, 2021. <https://bfm.sbc.net/comparison-chart/>.
- Craddock, Fred. “Luke.” In *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary*, vol. 29. Louisville: John Knox, 1990.
- Fitzmyer, Joseph A. “The Gospel According To Luke X-XXIV” In *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 28A. New York: Doubleday, 1985.
- “Gainesville, Georgia Population 2021.” World Population Review. November 2, 2021. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/gainesville-ga-population>.
- Gonzalez, Catherine Gunsalus and Justo L. Gonzalez. “Revelation.” In *Westminster Bible Companion*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997.
- Hultgren, Arland J. “Commentary on Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32.” *Working Preacher*. March 10, 2013. <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-in-lent-3/commentary-on-luke-151-3-11b-32-3>.
- Jacobson, Karl. “Psalm 106.” In *Psalms For Preaching and Worship: A Lectionary Commentary*, edited by Roger E. Van Harn and Brent A. Strawn, 278-280. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009.

- Johnson, Luke Timothy. "Hebrews: A Commentary." In *The New Testament Library*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006.
- Kelley, Page H. "Isaiah." *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, vol. 5. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1971.
- Lodahl, Michael. *The Story of God*. Kansas City: Beacon Press, 2008.
- McCarter, Jr., P. Kyle. "1 Samuel." In *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 8. New York: Doubleday, 1980.
- McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001.
- Migliore, Daniel. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2004.
- Miller, Donald., *Building a Storybrand*. Nashville: Harper Collins, 2017.
- Nolland, John. "Luke 9:21-18:34." In *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 35B. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993.
- O'Connor, Kathleen M. "Genesis 1-25A." In *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary*, vol. 1A. Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2008.
- "QuickFacts: Gainesville city, Georgia; Hall County, Georgia." United States Census Bureau. November 2, 2021.
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/gainesvillecitygeorgia,hallcountygeorgia/PST045219>.
- Reddish, Mitchell. "Revelation." In *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary*, vol. 30. Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2001.
- Shoulta, Jeremy. *An Exposition of Revelation's Letter to the Church at Philadelphia*. Gardner-Webb University, 2019.
- Spiser, E.A. "Genesis." In *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 1. New York: Doubleday, 1964.
- "Theme." Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Merriam-Webster, September 10, 2021.
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theme>.
- Vinson, Richard B. "Luke." In *Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary*, vol. 21. Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2008.
- Wenham, Gordon J. "Genesis 16-50." In *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 2. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.
- Wright, N.T. *Simply Christian*. New York: HarperOne, 2006.

