

PSALM STYLES: USING SELECTED PSALMS IN A LENTEN BIBLE  
STUDY AS AN INTRODUCTION TO READING AS A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE  
FOR ELEMENTARY STUDENTS AT SHILOH BAPTIST CHURCH IN TRENTON,  
NEW JERSEY

A professional project submitted to the Theological School of  
Drew University in the partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree,  
Doctor of Ministry

Advisor: Melinda Contreras-Byrd, Psy.D

Marella McMillon-Holmes

Drew University

Madison, New Jersey

May 2015

Copyright©2015 Marella McMillon-Holmes

All rights reserved

## ABSTRACT

PSALM STYLES: USING SELECTED PSALMS IN A LENTEN BIBLE  
STUDY AS AN INTRODUCTION TO READING AS A SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE  
FOR ELEMENTARY STUDENTS AT SHILOH BAPTIST CHURCH IN TRENTON,  
NEW JERSEY

Marella McMillon-Holmes

Shiloh Baptist Church, Trenton, New Jersey

Psalms Styles was a six week youth Lenten bible study for elementary aged students residing in Trenton, New Jersey. The bible study was held at Shiloh Baptist Church. Thirty six youth attended the bible study over the six week period. The Wednesday night youth bible study used one verse of a selected Psalm to introduce elementary aged students to reading as a spiritual discipline. Learning stations were used to present the key verse in different learning styles. Three learning modalities were used to engage students in their preferred learning styles. The bible study provided an introduction to different ways of reading as a spiritual discipline while learning about God and developing a foundation for spiritual formation.

The main goal of Psalm Styles was to present reading as a spiritual discipline using learning modality stations. Four objectives shaped the concept, development, design and implementation of the bible study. The first objective was to provide the

youth with a brief overview of basic reading mechanics, context clues and sight words. The second objective was to create a context for understanding reading as a gift to the reader and listener. The third objective was to provide students with an introduction to the Word of God using verses from selected Psalms. The fourth objective was for the youth to develop a sense of community. These objectives are roadmaps towards the development of a foundational understanding of reading as a spiritual discipline for elementary aged children.

## DEDICATION

I am thankful to God for giving me the vision to marry my vocation as a child study team social worker and my calling as a youth minister to develop a Lenten bible study to introduce reading as a spiritual discipline for youth. I am thankful to Dr. Melinda Contreras-Byrd for her commitment to excellence and meaningful and transformative ministry.

I am blessed to have a wonderful and supportive family. My family shared me for three years as I journeyed through the halls of Drew University Theological School. I would not have been able to develop the bible study, research the subject matter and write this paper without the love and support of my family.

I am grateful to Shiloh Baptist Church in Trenton, New Jersey for allowing me to conduct the Lenten Bible study. I am indebted to the leadership of Reverend Darrell L. Armstrong. Reverend Armstrong's support and commitment to the youth in Trenton, New Jersey is immeasurable. Minister Jayne Wyche and the advisory committee were instrumental in designing the bible study to meet every educational, spiritual, and emotional need of the youth. The advisory committee's mindful considerations for the needs of youth were invaluable to the bible study.

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER1: PSALM STYLES .....	1
The State of Urban Education.....	1
The Development of Youth Ministry.....	3
Importance of Reading.....	6
Mechanics of Reading.....	7
Learning Styles .....	10
Engaging Young Believers: Psalms Styles .....	11
CHAPTER 2: THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION.....	17
The Importance of Spiritual Formation .....	17
Spiritual Disciplines.....	20
Reading as a Spiritual Discipline .....	23
The Gift of Reading for Spiritual Formation .....	25
The Hermeneutics of Reading for Spiritual Formation .....	26
CHAPTER 3: OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE STUDY .....	28
The Purpose of the Bible Study .....	28
The Design of the Bible Study.....	31
Psalm Style Objectives .....	32
The Implementation of the Bible Study.....	33
The Assessment of the Bible Study .....	36
The Evaluation of the Bible Study by the Advisory Team.....	38

CHAPTER 4: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH.....	41
The Implication for Christian Youth Ministry.....	41
Development of a Christian Education Curriculum.....	44
Engaging Different Learning Styles for Spiritual Formation .....	46
Implication for Community Partnerships.....	48
The Changing Role of Christian Education .....	49
CHAPTER 5: SELF-ASSESSMENT .....	53
Review of the Psalm Styles.....	53
Strengths of the Psalm Styles.....	56
Areas of Development for Psalm Styles .....	57
Affirmation of My Call to Ministry .....	62
APPENDIX A: PRE/POST TEST .....	65
APPENDIX B: LESSON PLAN .....	68
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	70

## CHAPTER 1

### PSALM STYLE

#### **The State of Urban Education**

As an associate minister in an urban church and a child study team social worker in an urban school district, I am keenly aware of the challenges youth face when trying to access information in a traditional educational setting. The traditional educational setting found in urban educational settings extends into the Christian education classroom of the urban church. Urban education is defined in many different ways. For the purposes of this bible study, urban education refers to schools in metropolitan communities that typically are diverse and characterized by large enrollments and complexity; many students are struggling and have lower standardized test scores<sup>1</sup>. The public schools in these urban communities often serve students representing many ethnic minorities, multiple languages, and have a greater concentration of the poor or residents living below the national poverty average with limited education<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Frank Brown, "Funding Urban Education in the Globalization and Post-Brown Era," *The National Journal of Urban Education and Practice*, Norvella Carter ed. (Texas Southern University, TX) vol. 1 #1, Summer 2007, 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.



Though there are many differences among children attending urban schools and living in metropolitan cities, the constant factor is that many of the students in the urban context have a similar socioeconomic profile. Many of the children in urban public schools are the children of generational poverty. Generational poverty affects children adversely, affording them little opportunity to independently change their individual circumstances.

Urban public schools face issues of drug and alcohol abuse, violence, and crime in the surrounding communities<sup>3</sup>. Societal challenges such as drugs, crime, violence, and family issues impact urban children, and often result in psychological impact such as lowered self-esteem, feelings of hopelessness and lower educational achievement among the children and youth. Students in urban public schools may need different types of support to assure their learning as they represent different cultures, ethnicities, and socioeconomic profiles.

Today's urban schools dwell within the economic, social and demographic changes transpiring over the last sixty years. The development of new construction and the gentrification of older neighborhoods often exist side by side with areas of deteriorating older housing in most urban cities. Middle class income earners may choose to live in metropolitan communities today but do not choose to send their children to public schools, seeking instead private schools that provide safety, vast resources and a

---

<sup>3</sup> James D. Anderson, "The Historical Context for Understanding the Test Score Gap," *The National Journal of Urban Education and Practice*, Norvella Carter ed. (Texas Southern University). TX vol. 1 #1 Summer 2007, 9.

more homogeneous student body<sup>4</sup>. This division also may be found in local churches within the urban city perimeter.

### **The Development of Youth Ministry**

As a youth minister in an urban setting, the engagement of youth in the church setting is paramount to the development and continuation of most faith communities. The notion that youth are an important part of the local church was expressed in 1524 when Martin Luther addressed the civil magistrates. He said “it is a serious and great matter that the heart of Christ and all mankind, that we help and advise the young people<sup>5</sup>”. In America, youth ministry is traced back to 1724 when a devout and zealous pastor named Cotton Mather organized youth societies to sustain the faith of young people in colonial America. These youth societies met for weekly prayer, Bible study and singing. The Puritan fathers frowned upon these youth societies because they viewed them as a dangerous innovation<sup>6</sup>.

The Southern Baptists were unhappy with the Christian youth societies. They felt that the societies failed to link young people with the local church. They feared a loss of loyalty among their own youth and a lack of affiliation with the denomination<sup>7</sup>. In 1884, the Southern Baptists formed the Baptist Young People’s Union, which later

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Merton Strommen, *Youth Ministry That Transforms* ( Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI 2011), Kindle Edition, Location 349.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., location 362.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., location 390.

became Baptist Training Union (BTU). This youth organization was officially recognized and established by the denominational organization in 1893<sup>8</sup>.

As youth ministry became a part of mainstream denominations, so did parachurch organizations aimed at evangelizing youth. Parachurch organizations are Christian faith-based organizations that usually carry out their mission independent of church oversight<sup>9</sup>. In the 1941, Jay Rayburn launched Young Life. He used a leader centered and evangelism focused approach to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with youth. Rayburn was most interested in reaching youth who were untouched by any knowledge of Jesus Christ. He was interested to sharing the gospel with “those youth that stayed carefully and stubbornly away from churches”.<sup>10</sup> According to ministry statistics, Young Life had 5,000 United States focused ministries in 2010-2011<sup>11</sup>.

In contrast to the parachurch, the traditional youth ministry is linked to the environment in which the youth lives. There are four commonly used paradigms to categorize the function of youth ministry in the church context. The four paradigms are: 1) traditional, 2) liberal, 3) activist, and 4) prophetic. These four paradigms may be applied to urban youth ministry. The traditional paradigm is most common in urban youth ministry. This paradigm is focused on developing a ministry center program for youth.

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., location 404.

<sup>9</sup> Norman H. Maring and Winthrop S. Hudson, *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice* (Judson Press: Valley Forge, PA, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Strommen, location 458.

<sup>11</sup> The annual statistics from Younglife 2012, accessed May 2013, <http://www.Younglife.org/Pages/default.aspx>.

The traditional paradigm focuses on the spiritual formation of the youth<sup>12</sup>. The use of bible studies, worship services, and Sunday School are spiritual components of the traditional youth ministry paradigm. These spiritual components are used to help urban youth nurture their relationship with Christ.

The liberal paradigm of youth ministry is most popular with mainline denominational churches in middle and upper class communities. This paradigm may be found in urban churches with theologically liberal pastors<sup>13</sup>. The emphasis of this paradigm is on compassionate ministry for urban youth. The goal of this paradigm is developing a felt-needs ministry-centered programming for urban ministry.<sup>14</sup> The liberal paradigm is concerned with the personal and emotional needs of urban youth. Liberal youth ministries will have inter/intra relational therapeutic ministry programs. Ministry programming may include support groups, mentoring programming, family-based initiatives, inter-generational activities, trips, arts and crafts and choirs.

The activist paradigm of urban youth ministry focuses on identifying urban issues affecting youth and then develops youth ministry programs<sup>15</sup> that address issues relevant to the youth. The primary concern of this paradigm is to address the social needs of urban youth. Activist youth ministry programming may include after school programs, economic development programs, job training and social justice initiatives.

---

<sup>12</sup> Fernando Arzola, *Towards a Prophetic Youth Ministry: Theory and Praxis in the Urban Context* (InterVarsity Press:Downers Grove IL, 2008), 42.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

The prophetic paradigm is considered the most effective and holistic in developing urban youth ministry programming<sup>16</sup>. The primary emphasis of this paradigm is Christ-centered ministry. It stresses three interlocking philosophical and theological components: a traditional understanding of the bible and Christian principles; spiritual, personal and emotional development of youth; and social justice<sup>17</sup>.

All of the most commonly used paradigms of youth ministry have an educational component to the implementation of youth ministry programming. The educational structure inherent in urban youth ministry program is the bridge which connects church involvement, activities, evangelism and spiritual formation for youth. If a child cannot read, the child's ability to learn more about God may be hindered; a faith-building activity may become an activity of confusion and shame. All youth ministry programming should include an emphasis on the process of reading.

### **Importance of Reading**

In the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, Malcolm X stated “the ability to read awoke inside me some long dormant craving to be mentally alive.<sup>18</sup>” This statement shows the impact reading can have on a person's life. Reading is more than a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols in order to construct or derive meaning. Reading may be considered a spiritual discipline. Reading the Bible allows the reader to learn about God and interact with God. In reading the bible, God awakes the longing to know more about

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>18</sup> Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Grove Press: New York, 1965), 179.

God and how to be in relationship with God. Reading is the process in which the reader becomes spiritually alive and enlightened.

Reading is not a simple process. Reading is more than words on a page. It is a complex process of problem solving in which the reader works to make sense of the words and the sentences the words form. As the reader reads the words the reader is forming ideas, memories, recalling information and knowledge evoked by the words and sentences on the page. Reading is a complex, interactive blend of the author, the reader and the other information the reader has heard, seen, read about or experienced in their life.

### **Mechanics of Reading**

One of the most foundational disciplines of Christian living is scripture reading. Scripture reading makes a the difference in the lives of the faith community, particularity youth. The process of reading is an exercise of sharing and giving that can transform the life of the individual and the faith community. Reading is a spiritual discipline. This spiritual discipline can be considered a form of worship and sacred to the reader and the listener of the Word of God. Reading as a spiritual discipline is the manifestation of *lectio divina*. The *lectio divina* is the reading, meditating, praying and contemplating of the Word of God as a means to learn more about God and grow spiritually. We develop, maintain, and nurture our relationship with God through scripture reading. Membership in the faith community requires us to read scripture to be in relationship with God and for God to be in relationship with the members of the faith community.

The faith community must read scripture to understand their faith and spirituality. This understanding allows for the faith community to believe and have faith in God. This faith and belief influences the way the faith community governs their lives. Scripture reading provides opportunities for the faith community to enter into a dialogue with God. This type of dialogue is a real, tangible and a spiritual experience. Maya Angelou stated, “any book that helps a child to form a habit of reading should make reading one of (their) deep and continuing needs<sup>19</sup>”. Scripture reading makes a difference in the lives of the people who read the Word of God. These differences change their life forever. On May 29, 2013, a New York Times article reported that educational experts say that reading development requires that students spend more time practicing reading to be successful at reading than any other subject in school<sup>20</sup>. The Christian community has a responsibility to teach and model how to read the Word of God for the youth within the faith community. A viable youth ministry should have a solid understanding of the importance of reading as a spiritual practice.

To understand the importance of reading as a spiritual discipline, Christian educators in the faith community should understand reading mechanics. The mechanics of reading includes phonemic awareness, word analysis and sight words. Sight word reading is often referred to as functional reading. This type of reading teaches certain sight words with the intent that the youth will be able to use the sight words to function as independently as possible in their environment and in the community. One of the ways to verify that students will generalize what they learn is to have them see and practice the

---

<sup>19</sup> Goodreads, <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/35684>, accessed October 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Motoko Rich, 2013. In Raising Scores, 123 is Easier Than ABC, *New York Times*, May 29.

skills in different environments. Sight word reading is the most commonly used method Christian educators use to provide instruction to youth within the local church setting.

In a 1999 study completed by Kyhl, Alper, and Sinclair, researched whether videotaped instruction of functional sight words within community grocery stores was effective for students who learned differently. According to the authors, “videotaped instruction combines the advantages of flash cards (i.e., mass trials, easy use) in a simulation that more closely approximates the natural environment”<sup>21</sup>. The students were trained with the selected sight words using the videotape, then after mastery (as defined by the criteria in the study) of the words, the students were taken to community grocery stores to assess generalization. As reported by Kyhl, videotaped instruction set in a community grocery store was an effective method of acquisition and generalization of functional sight words for the students in the study. This method was more effective than learning sight words without a context or in an unfamiliar setting.

In 1997, Mosley, Flynt, and Morton completed a study in which they compared the effectiveness of two strategies of teaching functional reading skills and community-based instruction<sup>22</sup>. Classroom training was simply reviewing the sight words was not always effective strategy to introduce reading. The research study comparing classroom instruction with community-based instruction showed that both methods of instruction

---

<sup>21</sup> Rebecca Kyhl, Sandra Alper and Thomas Sinclair, “Acquisition and Generalization of Functional Words in a Community Grocery Store Using Videotaped Instruction,” *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, v22, Spring 1999.

<sup>22</sup> April Scruggs, “Effective Reading Instruction Strategies for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities,” *Electronic Journal for Inclusive Education*, 2 (3), 2008. 6.



were effective and that neither approach had a statistically significant difference in performance especially in terms of acquisition.

These two studies provided background knowledge for preparing a bible study for youth within the natural context of their local church. The local church provides the youth with a natural setting to learn and apply their faith and shape their spiritual formation among their peers. The research provided a rationale for developing a bible study for youth who learn differently while creating a setting for youth to receive a meaningful experience with God through reading.

### **Learning Styles**

Psalm Styles was a bible study designed to include three learning modalities to introduce reading as a spiritual discipline to youth with a different delivery system rather than the traditional educational delivery system used in most urban educational settings. The bible study used the youth's natural setting and functional application activities to expose youth to the concept of reading as a spiritual discipline. The three learning modalities used in the bible study were visual, auditory and kinesthetic (VAK). Visual learners prefer to see what they are learning. Auditory learners prefer to hear or listen to what they are learning. Kinesthetic learners prefer to learn via experience i.e. moving, touching and doing. As a child study team social worker in an urban school district, I noticed that most of my students retained the most information when the information is presented in a multi-modal delivery system.

Psalm Styles used a multi-modal delivery system to introduce reading as a spiritual discipline in the youth's natural setting. Psalm Styles was presented in an urban

Baptist church in Trenton, New Jersey. Shiloh Baptist Church is a historic Baptist Church in the city of Trenton with 2,000 members. The church was organized in 1886. The year of 2013 was a challenging year for the capital city of New Jersey. The city buried more than twenty-five young people under the age of 25 due to violence. The Trenton public school district is one of the lowest performing school districts in Mercer County and the state of New Jersey. The city's public school reading test scores are below the state's average.

Psalm Styles was designed to address two of the challenges youth in Trenton encounter in school and the community, reading and productive engagement. It combined paradigms of youth ministry, learning styles and learning modalities to approach reading the Psalms as an introduction to reading as a spiritual discipline.

Psalm Styles was envisioned to introduce elementary aged students to reading as a spiritual discipline. It used a verse from selected Psalms to introduce reading as a spiritual discipline to students during the Wednesday night bible study during the Lenten season. The presentation of the Psalm included corporate reading, musical interpretation of the Psalm verse and a visual presentation of the selected Psalm verse.

Psalm Styles used four learning stations to provide reading instruction during the six week bible study. The stations focused on different learning modalities to allow the student to read, hear and experience the selected Psalm verse in their preferred learning modality. The first station presented the Psalm in the traditional rote learning style. The instructor read the verse and the students repeated after the instructor. Another station focused on the visual learning modality. This station presented the Psalm verse with pictures and words. The next station focused on the tactile learning modality. This

was an arts and crafts presentation of the Psalm verse. The last station focused on the kinesthetic modality of learning. This was a physical activity of the Psalm verse.

### **Engaging Young Believers: Psalms Style**

Four objectives shaped the development and implementation of the bible study to engage the youth. These objectives were roadmaps to help navigate youth in an urban church youth ministry setting with a contextual application for reading as a spiritual discipline. The first objective was to develop a bible study with an understanding of the mechanics of reading. The second objective was to create a context for understanding reading as a gift to the reader and listener. The third objective was to provide a functional application to deliver the Word of God to youth as the framework for the foundation of faith development. The last objective was to develop a sense of Christian community among the youth attending the bible study. These four objectives led to the goal of introducing reading as a spiritual discipline.

Youth who attend the church are diverse and come from varying socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and learning styles. They share a common desire to learn more about God. The bible study provided a community for the youth in the neighborhood as well as the children of church members. Psalm Styles employed reading mechanics, reading as a gift, reading as an orientation to God and reading as community to engage urban youth in a contextual setting to develop a relationship with God using a verse of a selected Psalm.

#### *Reading Mechanics*

Reading as a spiritual discipline encompasses all of the senses as it transforms the physical space where reading occurs into a sacred space of communion with God.

Reading mechanics involves the marriage of orthographical and phonological processing of information for the reader to understand written and visual texts. The orthographic process of reading uses a mental dictionary of word meanings to understand the visual text. The phonological process of reading deciphers the letter string, then converts it into pronunciation and attempts to assess prior knowledge before the reader can assess the appropriate sounds, words and meanings<sup>23</sup>. This process is called visual literacy. Visual literacy is helpful in understanding how the students will process the meaning of the selected Psalms for the bible study. Psalm Styles used visual literacy to engage the students in meaningful dialogue about the selected Psalm verse. Visual literacy aids the youth's understanding of the Psalms using sight words, context cues, recall, prior knowledge within their individual and cooperate setting to learn about God.

Visual literacy allows the students to read the words in the Psalm verse and visualize how the words are in relation with each other<sup>24</sup>. Visual literacy turns one image into many different texts. It imposes a new mode of control over the meaning and turns the image into a more powerful use of words<sup>25</sup>. Visual literacy sets the environment for the bible study for elementary aged youth. This environment allows the youth to engage and interpret the Psalm verse using their sense of sight, recall and memory in multiple ways.

### *Reading as a gift*

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Cobley, *The Communication Theory of the Reader* (Routledge: London 1996) 177.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 176.

Alan Jacobs describes reading as the reception of a gift<sup>26</sup>. Reading is the gift that is both offered and received with the context of interpretation and understanding. The readers and listeners of the Psalms in the bible study will learn the importance of giving and receiving the gift of reading. As youth begin to learn about God via reading the Psalms in a multi modal format, they will learn how reading is a gift to the reader and the listener. The interaction of giving and receiving the gift of reading will be shared throughout the six week bible study using a multi-modal delivery system. The importance of reading as a gift giving is a process of allowing the selected Psalm verse to have the maximum transformative purpose and interpretation in creating a longing to be in relationship with God and one another for the youth. This was achieved through conversation and sharing about the words of the Psalm verse. The gift of reading is [the] constant and loving attentiveness of the reader and the listener<sup>27</sup>. This dual participation of the reader and listener in the reading process demonstrates faithfulness to the interpretation and meaning in reading of the selected Psalm verse. The goal of reading as a spiritual discipline hopes that the youth will become Quixotic readers. Quixotic readers see themselves as a mirrored reflection of the text<sup>28</sup>. As members of the faith community, youth are a mirrored image of God. The selected Psalm enabled the youth to comprehend their faith within the natural setting of their shared reader/listener context as the gift reading was intended to be through learning about God in the Psalms. The shared

---

<sup>26</sup> Alan Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading: The Hermeneutics of Love* (Westview: Colorado 2001) 87.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

reading experience created a space for the youth to become a mirrored image of God by reading and sharing the Psalm.

*Reading as an orientation to God*

The Psalter is the voice of the good news, God's good word addressed to God's faithful people. The bible study used selected Psalms to meet the youth at the depths of need and the heights of celebration<sup>29</sup>. The selected Psalms served to assure, affirm, inform and strengthen the youth's relationship to God. Using the selected Psalm as an orientation to God was the foundation for the youth to understand their identity in the Christian family (faith community).

The Psalter affirms the orientation of the youth's context and the world as a life giving system because God has ordained it that way and continues to preside effectively over the process<sup>30</sup> as related to the Psalter. Psalms are used to establish the function and role of God for the people of God. The Psalms create a sacred canopy under which the faith community can live out its life with freedom from anxiety<sup>31</sup>. This is one of the perspectives of the theology of the Psalter. Freedom from anxiety allows the youth to freely praise and give thanks to God. The Psalter provides youth with a functional context, application and maintenance that leads to transformation and new creation<sup>32</sup>. This orientation is essential in the formation of reading as a spiritual discipline within their neighborhood, city, church, school and the youth's natural context.

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 21.

*Reading the Psalms as community*

Psalms 133 begins with, “how very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity... for there the Lord ordained his blessings<sup>33</sup>”. There is a blessing when God’s people come together and live in unity. For the purposes of the project, living in unity is defined as shared life experiences. The reading of the Psalms in the physical presence of other members of one’s faith community is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer<sup>34</sup>. The shared communal experience of the youth added to their individual understanding of God and affirmed his or her corporate understanding of God. “It is very good and pleasant” for youth to seek and find God’s living word in the testimony of other Christians<sup>35</sup>. Youth need to be surrounded by other Christians who read the Word of God to and with them. The bible study helped to facilitate the spiritual love that Bonhoeffer mentions in his book the *Life Together* as the goal of Christians having a shared experience. The shared experience of reading selected Psalms together limits thoughts of self-centeredness of the individual. Every bible study lesson reminded the youth of the blessing of community as a shared experience when reading and interpreting scripture together.

---

<sup>33</sup> Psalm 133:1-3 NIV.

<sup>34</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together Prayerbook of the Bible* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis 1996), 27.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

#### **The Importance of Spiritual Formation**

Faith formation calibrates one's moral compass. This moral compass for youth is essential for the continuation of faith within society. The deliberate and intentional religious education of youth is necessary because an individual's relationship with God begins at birth, is nurtured through childhood, questioned in early adulthood and matured in later adulthood. The Bible instructs the faith community as to how it is to provide its children their initial introduction to God, "teach your children, talking about them (commandments) when you sit at home and when you walk along the road when you lie down and when you get up"<sup>1</sup>.

The biblical witness denotes that a child's relationship with God is nurtured and developed by knowing who God is within the Christian faith community. Deuteronomy states that "God directed (Moses) to teach you to observe in the land... so that your children and their children may fear the Lord and live a long life."<sup>2</sup> I believe that all

---

<sup>1</sup>Deuteronomy 11:19 NIV.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. 6: 1-2 NIV.



faith communities have a responsibility to share who God is with their youth. The challenge becomes how will the church explain faith in simple terms and concepts for youth to understand. The methods used to convey biblical terms and concepts should consider educational developmental theories as well as faith formation theories. Psalm Styles considered both faith development stages as well as the educational developmental stages when designing the bible study used in this project. The bible study introduced reading as a spiritual discipline using verses of selected Psalms.

James Fowler was foundational in providing a framework to understand the development of faith for all ages. While there have been recent adaptations to his framework, this paper will use three of his stages as part of the theological foundation for the youth bible study. For the purposes of this paper, stages one, two and three<sup>3</sup> were used as the framework to provide insight into the theological relevance of the bible study. Fowler's first stage is "intuitive-projective" faith. This stage corresponds with the chronological ages of 2- 6. This stage is primarily a reflection of the parent's faith. During this stage fantasy and imagination are powerful images that are used to shape a child's first faith experience. Fowler's second stage is the "mythic-literal" faith. Children in this stage are between the ages of 6 and 12. At this stage children believe strongly in what they are told. Their faith is black and white. Their faith is no longer solely shaped by their parents, by others can influence their beliefs as well. The last stage used for this project is Fowler's third stage, "synthetic-conventional" faith. This stage usually begins at age 12. At this stage, belonging to a group is key. Developing a lasting sense of

---

<sup>3</sup> James Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (Harper: San Francisco 1981).

belonging to the Christian family /community is paramount. The use of Fowler's framework is helpful in understanding the way in which youth may encounter God during the bible study. One of the objectives of the bible study is to provide a functional context to create a canvas upon which spiritual disciplines may be shaped and formed into spiritual formation of elementary aged students. Understanding how one experiences God is instrumental in developing a bible study to nurture and develop one's relationship with God.

Although Fowler provides a framework for understanding faith development, to fully understand how a child might experience God, one has to consider learning developmental stages in partnership with faith developmental stages. David Kolb's framework for the stages of learning development was used in partnership with Fowler's stages of faith development in creating Psalms Styles. Kolb's model is helpful in understanding how to provide instruction for spiritual formation. Kolb's model allows for individual differences found in the learning process.<sup>4</sup> His model contains four interdependent and interconnected quadrants. The first quadrant is the "concrete" quadrant. In this quadrant one's experience of learning is based on feelings. The second quadrant is the "reflective observation" stage. During this stage one reviews and reflects on their experience. The third quadrant is "abstract conceptualism" stage. In this stage the learner develops conclusions about their experience. The last quadrant is the "active experimentation" stage. This is the stage when the learner is incorporating what was learned into a meaningful experience.

---

<sup>4</sup> Holly Allen Catterton, *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: How Parents Nurture the Spiritual Development of the Children* (Cascade Books: Eugene, OR 2008),186.

Kolb stated, “learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.”<sup>5</sup> Psalm Styles combined faith development stages with learning developmental stages of youth to create a Lenten bible study. The goal of the bible study was to create a six week experience that would afford youth a meaningful and transformative encounter with God. The process of spiritual formation and learning about God is personal and no one description fits all youth. Children come to church to learn and experience God in unique and individual ways. The beginning of all spiritual formation is the interaction between experiencing and knowing God. Spiritual disciplines aid in the maintenance of one’s relationship with God and matured spiritual formation.

### **Spiritual Disciplines**

To be successful in life requires discipline, practice, good instruction and modeling. The same applies to how we develop a successful relationship with God. Spiritual disciplines are intentional activities in which one experiences God and matures their relationship with God. Spiritual disciplines are activities of engagement in which one gets to know and commune with God. This is a continual process of being in relationship with God. There are several activities that constitute a spiritual discipline.

In Richard Foster’s book entitled, *Celebration of Discipline*, he divides spiritual disciplines into three parts: inward, outward and corporate disciplines. Inward spiritual disciplines include meditation, prayer, fasting and study. Outward disciplines are simplicity, solitude, submission and service. Corporate disciplines are confession,

---

<sup>5</sup> David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the source of learning and Development*” accessed October 2014, <http://www.infed.org/mobi/david-a-Kolb-on-experiential-learning/>.

worship, guidance and celebration. Psalm Styles incorporated a facet of each of the Foster's triad of spiritual disciplines: prayer and study, simplicity and worship and celebration.

Prayer and study are foundational disciplines for bible study. Prayer is the most central of the disciplines because it allows the believer to commune with God and study to transform our minds.<sup>6</sup> The discipline of prayer is learned. The disciples asked Jesus, "Lord teach us how to pray."<sup>7</sup> One goal of prayer is to learn about God's thoughts. The Psalms offer a glimpse into the thoughts and ways of God. Using selected verses of a Psalm introduced reading as a spiritual discipline to elementary aged youth. The book of Psalms provides the language and knowledge of God for the people of God. Psalm Styles provided an introduction to the language and knowledge of God in an appropriate developmental and spiritual context for elementary youth. The bible study created a place for youth to learn more about God to be transformed by God. Foster listed four steps of prayer. The first step is repetition. The second step is concentration. The third step is comprehension and the last step is reflection. These four steps were used in designing Psalm Styles to introduce youth to spiritual discipline of prayer and study within the context of reading.

The next aspect of Foster's spiritual discipline used in Psalm Styles was simplicity. Simplicity "is an inward reality that results in an outward lifestyle."<sup>8</sup> Inward changes affect outward actions. Simplicity also involves the community. As the youths

---

<sup>6</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (Harper: San Francisco 1998) 33.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 11:1 NIV.

<sup>8</sup> Foster, 79.

used the verses of the selected Psalms to learn more of about God's language and God's love they felt connected to and with God. There was a change in their verbal responses and behavior before, during and after the six week bible study. Because of their new relationship with God the youth had a new sense of communal responsibility. Using three different learning modalities to engage youth in meaningful ways was helpful in understanding the spiritual discipline of simplicity. The youth developed a habit of giving (sharing) things<sup>9</sup> and a deeper appreciation for (God's) creation.<sup>10</sup>

The final spiritual disciplines cited by Foster and adapted in Psalm Styles were worship and celebration. As we mature in our relationship with God, so does the level of God's requirement for us. One of God's requirements is that we worship God. Jesus declares, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."<sup>11</sup> Worship is humanity's response to the love of God and God's love is recorded throughout the book of Psalms. The natural progression of Psalm Styles was to incorporate worship into the bible study. The design of the bible study was mindful to note that it is the Spirit that frees us for worship. Worship is important because it is "an ordered way of acting and living that sets us before God so God can transform us."<sup>12</sup>

The last spiritual discipline incorporated into Psalm Style was celebration. Celebration brings us joy in the Lord. Nehemiah states, "the joy of the Lord is our

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>11</sup> Matt. 4:10 NIV.

<sup>12</sup> Foster 167.

strength.”<sup>13</sup> Joy allows us to continue in our faith journey with God. Joy is to be shared in and with community. Celebration may come in the form of dancing, singing or any expressions of joy. Celebration provides the faithful with the strength and joy to continue their faith journey.

Foster states that the goal of the spiritual disciplines is the complete transformation of the total person. To change one’s behavior one must replace the less desired behavior with a more desired behavior. The behavior of reading to know more about God and to be transformed by the Word of God replaces the behavior of not reading and not knowing about God. As one reads and is transformed by knowing who God is, God will draw them closer. In the book of Romans, Paul encourages the reader to be “transformed by the renewing of your mind.”<sup>14</sup> To transform one’s mind, one needs to read.

### **Reading as a Spiritual Discipline**

Reading as a spiritual discipline builds upon one’s prior knowledge and experiences within their natural context and the bible. Reading is more than phonics and word blends. Reading requires understating, interpreting and assessing. Reading is one of the cornerstones of the foundation of faith formation and development. Reading as a spiritual discipline is informative and reflective. Reading affects the reader inwardly and outwardly.

The second way in which reading is a spiritual discipline is that the reader develops and uses a specialized vocabulary. The reader uses their specialized vocabulary

---

<sup>13</sup> Nehemiah 8:10 NIV.

<sup>14</sup> Romans 12:2 NIV.

to construct their faith story, communicate their faith experience and create an understanding of God. This specialized vocabulary provides a dialogue between the reader and God.

The third aspect of reading as a spiritual discipline is that the reader uses their specialized vocabulary to deconstruct complex allegories, metaphors, and sentence structure and word placement within the biblical text. As the reader uses their specialized vocabulary to communicate with God that same vocabulary unlocks some of the symbols, images and metaphors God uses as instructions and examples in the Bible.

The fourth aspect of reading as a spiritual discipline is the use of mapping graphics as representations and explanations of the biblical text. Like most maps, the Bible has historical and cultural context clues that give the reader a multi-dimensional encounter with God's active participation in reader's shared faith historical record.

The fifth way in which reading can be seen, as a spiritual discipline is the use of faith knowledge of the Bible's genres, formatting and structure. This allows the reader to have an encounter with God. Prior faith knowledge allows the reader to predict, anticipate and value the involvement of God in the reader's life and faith journey.

The last way in which reading can be viewed as a spiritual discipline that differs from general reading is the use of faith norms and beliefs to evaluate the biblical text. This aspect of spiritual reading helps the reader identify key faith concepts and focuses on lessons from God. Without these faith norms, the reader would be without focus and unable to differentiate between the relevant and irrelevant and critical details in his or her faith formation. These faith norms help to identify, analyze, predict and assess individual faith experience as they grow closer to God.

As the reader gains more confidence in the spiritual reading of the Word of God their biblical literacy increases and the faith deepens. Faith confidence is the process of knowing what you believe and trust in God. This confidence comes from daily engagement of reading as a spiritual discipline. One's faith confidence is a gift to the entire community of faith.

### **The Gift of Reading to the Faith Community**

The idea of reading as a spiritual discipline that incorporates Fosters' spiritual disciplines triad: inward, outward and corporate. The engagement of the Word of God through reading increases the connection of the youth as member of the faith community. Reading is a gift to the reader and the listener. In Colossians, Paul encourages the early church to "let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom."<sup>15</sup> Reading provides the conduit for which the Word of God dwells among faith believers in a faith community.

Children's faith formation is to be lived out in their natural faith community. The faith community nurtures the faith of children. A child's spirituality is the development of a conscious relationship with God, Jesus the Christ and the Holy Spirit within the context of a community of faith.<sup>16</sup> This relationship with the triune God develops

---

<sup>15</sup> Colossian 3:15 NIV.

<sup>16</sup> Kevin Lawson, *Understanding Child's Spirituality* (Cascade Books: Eugene, OR 2012).



understanding and affords a context for a relationship with the triune God. Robert Coles describes a child's spirituality as one that "grows, changes and responds constantly."<sup>17</sup>

Children learn best in a natural environment. Learning in their natural environment also applies to their faith development. A child's spirituality is developed in the midst of relationship(s)<sup>18</sup> within their faith community and peer group. The basic requirement for entering the journey of spiritual formation is a longing after God<sup>19</sup> within the child's natural faith environment.

### **The Hermeneutics of Reading for Spiritual Formation**

The reading of the Bible is essential to the daily faith formation and experience of children. The Bible informs our understanding of who we are to God and who God is to us. An important effect of developing an understanding of reading as a spiritual discipline is the intellectual benefit reading affords the reader<sup>20</sup>. Jeynes's research found a correlation between Bible literacy and academic achievement. Students with high biblical knowledge had higher academic averages and the converse was true that students with limited biblical literacy had lower academic averages.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> LaVerne Tolbert, ed., *Exploring and Engaging Spirituality for Today's Children* (WIPF and STOCK: Eugene, OR), 16.

<sup>18</sup> Foster, 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Tolbert, 131.

<sup>21</sup> William Jeynes, "A Meta Analysis: The Effects of Parental Involvement on Minority Children's Academic Achievement, Education and Urban Society (2003), accessed October 2014, <http://eus.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/35/2/202>.

In the city of Trenton, New Jersey where students' reading scores are below the state and national average, Psalm Styles provided elementary school students with a spiritual connection to God through reading. Understanding reading as a spiritual discipline may improve grades and test scores of youth who attended the bible study. As the youth learned more about God in key verses of selected Psalms, they deepened their relationship with God and enjoy reading. The youth discovered the dynamic nature of God when they interacted in a developmentally appropriate way with the Word of God. Psalm Styles considered their individual learning style in juxtaposition to their stage of faith.

## CHAPTER 3

### OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE STUDY

#### **The Purpose of the Bible Study**

Shiloh Baptist Church has a membership of about 2,000 members. The church is 90% African American, 8% African and 2% other. The church is a historical church in the city of Trenton, New Jersey organized in 1886. It is affiliated with the National Baptist Convention and American Baptist of Churches of New Jersey and has an active youth ministry. There are two weekly youth bible studies. The elementary bible study is held on Wednesday night. The high school bible study is held on Thursday night. Psalm Styles replaced the Wednesday elementary bible study from March 5, 2014 to April 16, 2014.

*Psalms Styles* was introduced to the congregation during the 8 AM and 11 AM worship services on February 9, 2014. This introduction allowed families of potential youth to ask questions about the bible study and to sign the consent paperwork to be a part of the bible study. An additional parent meeting was held in February to allow families from the community and neighborhood school to come to the church and learn more about the objectives of Psalm Styles. Volunteers were recruited to assist with the logistics of the bible study engage the youth at the learning stations. Minister

Wyche, the youth minister at Shiloh Baptist Church, assisted with soliciting volunteers from the ministerial staff, Christian educators and parents at the church to be teachers at the learning stations during the bible study. Two high school students from local high schools volunteered to help the youth transition from one learning station to another. They assisted the youth in completing some of the tasks at the learning stations. In addition to the high school volunteers, two college students from Monmouth University volunteered during the bible study. The college students have family members who attend the church. Their family members told them about the Lenten bible study and they wanted to help. Both of the college students are education majors and want to become teachers.

There were four pre-kindergarten and kindergarten youths (one male and three females), ten first and second grade youth (seven females and three males), fifteen third and fourth grade youth (eight females and seven males) and seven fifth and sixth grade youth (all girls) who attended the bible study. In total, there were thirty six youth attending the bible study. All of the students were given the pre-test on the first night. Modifications to the pretest were made for the pre kindergarten, kindergarten and first grade students. The students had varying academic levels. Seventy five percent of the youth attending the bible study attended Trenton Public Schools, ten percent of the youth attended parochial school, ten percent of youth attended public school but not in Trenton and the last five percent of the youth attended charter schools in Trenton.

The year of 2013 was a challenging year for Trenton, the capital city of New Jersey. The city buried more than twenty-five young people under the age of 25 due to

violence<sup>1</sup>. The Trenton public school district is one of the lowest performing school districts in Mercer County and the state of New Jersey. The school district's reading test scores on the New Jersey Assessments Test are below the state's average<sup>2</sup>.

Psalm Styles was envisioned to address two of the challenges facing youth in Trenton, reading and positive engagement. The innovative design of the bible study was to introduce reading as a spiritual discipline using learning stations to engage the youth during six weeks of Lent. The goal of Psalm Styles was to awaken the spiritual mind of the youth using three learning styles (visual, auditory and kinesthetic).

The learning station format was designed to introduce the Psalms in three of the most common learning modalities for elementary age students. Educational research disclosed that everyone uses a mixture of learning styles to acquire new knowledge. One's learning style guides the way one learns. One's learning style affects the way one understands experiences, recalls information, and shapes one's actions and word choice. Research further shows that different learning styles use different parts of the brain. By using more parts of the brain, one can remember more of what is being learned<sup>3</sup>. As a youth minister I noticed the lack of connection between learning styles, biblical understanding and spiritual formation in bible study and youth discipleship. Psalm Styles

---

<sup>1</sup> "Trenton sees record murders in 2013," Homicide Watch Trenton, accessed Winter 2014, <http://trenton.homicidewatch.org/2013/12/20/top-stories>.

<sup>2</sup> New Jersey Department of Education, Annual School test scores (2012), accessed Spring 2014, [www.state.nj.us/education/news/2014/1105results.htm/](http://www.state.nj.us/education/news/2014/1105results.htm/)

<sup>3</sup> Stanislas Dehaene, *Reading and the Brain: The Science of Evolution of the Human Invention* (Penguin Group 2009).

was developed to provide the youth with an opportunity to connect reading the bible and reading comprehension to spiritual formation.

### **The Design of Bible Study Psalm Styles**

Psalm Styles introduced elementary school students to reading as a spiritual discipline using a key verse and words from selected Psalm in three learning modalities. The bible study included learning stations that incorporated prayer, seeing pictures of the key words of the verse (visual), an arts and crafts project (kinesthetic) and musical interpretations of the key verse (auditory). The youth agreed at the beginning of the bible study to remember the key verse and words from the selected Psalms for the six weeks of the Lenten Season.

The bible study was one hour long. It began at six o'clock and ended at seven o'clock. There were four learning stations, visual, auditory, kinesthetic and snack. The youth had ten minutes at each learning station with five minutes to transition from one learning station to another learning station.

One verse and key words from that verse were used in the learning station during the bible study. A new key verse of a Psalm was presented each Wednesday. The bible study began with a general introduction of the Psalm. After the introduction of the Psalm the key words from the verse were presented. The bible study teacher /leader read the Psalm aloud focusing on the key words. The teacher/leader alternated reading the weekly Psalm verse aloud three times. This was done in a round robin format. The youth repeated the Psalm after the group leader then afterwards the youth read the verse silently. After the entire group learned general information about the Psalm, the youth

were divided in age appropriate groups. The age appropriate groups rotated to each of the learning stations. The youth experienced the weekly key verse and words of the Psalm in all three of the learning modalities. One station focused on the visual learning modality. At this station the Psalm was presented with pictures and words. Another learning station focused on the kinesthetic modality of learning. At this station there was a physical activity (arts and crafts) that presented the verse and key words of the Psalm. The last station was the auditory station. This station focused on using music to present the verse and key words of the Psalm.

### **Psalm Styles Objectives**

There were four guiding objectives that shaped the framework of the bible study. The goal of Psalm Styles was to introduce reading as a spiritual discipline using different learning modalities. These objectives provided direction for introducing youth at Shiloh Baptist Church to the idea that reading is a spiritual discipline. The first objective was to provide a basic review of reading mechanics e.g. decoding, comprehension and context cues within the church setting reading the psalms. The second objective was to create a context for understanding reading as a gift to the reader and listener in a faith community. This is one of the cornerstones of living in a Christian community; the giving and sharing of the gift of reading scriptures. The third objective was to provide an introduction to the Word of God using selected Psalms as a foundation and faith development. The psalter provides a rubric for who God is, how we are to respond to God, and how God responds to us. This understanding is key when

developing a relationship with God. The last objective was to develop a sense of Christian community among the youth.

Christian community was essential to the bible study because of the diverse composition of the youth group. The youth bible study was comprised of youth from different socio-economic backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, biblical understanding and learning styles. The common factor uniting the youth was their desire to attend bible study and learn more about God. Their shared common desire to learn more about God and to be in relationship with God was the strength of Psalm Styles.

### **The Implementation of the Bible Study**

The bible study began on Ash Wednesday 2014. The Psalm Styles ran for six weeks during the Lenten Season. Psalm Styles was presented to the entire Wednesday night elementary bible study (Pre-Kindergarten to 6<sup>th</sup> grade). The bible study was modified to accommodate the younger students. On March 5, 2014 the first bible study was abbreviated to accommodate the church's Ash Wednesday service. A verbal pre-test was administered to the students to introduce the purpose of the bible study (see appendix A). The pre-test provided a baseline of the student's foundational understanding of the bible, attitudes regarding reading, the role of reading in the family and their relationship with God.

The first bible study was on Psalm 107:1. The theme of the lesson was 'Give Thanks'. The key words for the night's bible study were love, endures and forever. This abbreviated presentation of the bible study lesson was due to the church's Ash Wednesday service, there were only two learning stations; a song and a review of the key



words. The students used creative movements to show love, endures and forever. The concept of forever was difficult for the youth to visualize and apply within their natural setting. The bible study concluded with a question and answer session regarding the bible study format, weekly expectations and sharing what you learned.

Psalm Styles was cancelled on March 12, 2014 due to the Pastor's Anniversary Service. This was an accommodation made due to the church calendar. The bible study resumed the following week. The youth wanted to have bible study the week of the Pastor's Anniversary.

On March 19, 2014 the bible study resumed. The second bible study was on Psalm 19:14. The theme of the bible study was 'Hiding God's Word in your Heart'. The focus words for the bible study were hide, word and heart. At the visual learning station, there was a picture of the bible and a picture of a young student with an enlarged heart. The instructor used the picture of the bible to explain the Word of God. The picture of the young student was used to show how to live with the Word of God in your heart. The instructor asked the students to give examples of how they could hide the Word of God in their heart. The kinesthetic learning station used construction hearts and the same picture of the bible from the visual learning station to show how to hide the Word of God in your heart. The auditory station used the song, 'I will hide your word in my heart' for the lesson.

The third bible study was held on March 26, 2014. The Psalm was 139:14. The theme of the bible study was 'How We are Made'. The focus words for the bible study were fearfully, wonderfully and made. The visual learning station had picture of a girl and boy looking scared, a beautiful sunset and a group of young people on a pottery

wheel. The group shared what the pictures meant to them and related the picture to the key verse. The auditory station played a song with the words to Psalm 139. The students laughed and danced. At the end of the session they were asked to connect the song to the key verse. The last learning station was the kinesthetic learning station. At this station the youth made a mirror from foil and paper plates. This was a symbolic reminder that the youth are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God.

The fourth bible study was held on April 2, 2014. Psalm 27:1 was the selected Psalm. The theme of the bible study was 'The Light'. The key words were light, fear, Lord and stronghold. The arts and crafts project at the kinesthetic learning station was to make paper candles from cardstock and tissue paper to remind the youth that Jesus is the light of the world. The visual learning station displayed picture of a room with a light on and a room with a light off, a picture of Jesus, and a parent holding child. The youth discussed the pictures and how they related to the key verse. The youth were asked to apply the key words to their individual life. The auditory learning station played a musical rendition of Psalm 27. The students danced and created a line dance to the song. The students were asked to talk about how the music connected to the key verse and how they felt about Jesus being their personal light.

The fifth bible study was held on April 9, 2014. Psalm 23:1 was the selected Psalm. The theme of the bible study was 'The Shepherd'. The focus words were sheep, shepherd and lacking nothing. At the kinesthetic station, the students made a sheep with cotton balls and glued them to a paper cutout of a sheep. The students discussed how they were like sheep. Many of the students had never seen a sheep in real life. The auditory learning station played a contemporary version of Psalm 23. The students were

very still during the playing of the song. Some of the students commented that they were trying to see the imagery of the song. The visual learning station showed a reenactment of the Psalm using Lego figures. The students commented that the Lego figures helped them to understand the Psalm in a different way.

The last bible study was held on April 16, 2014. The selected psalm was Psalm 150:6. The theme of the bible study was ‘ Every Praise’. The key words were praise, breath and everything. The auditory learning station played a current praise and worship song. The students were familiar with the song and they were able to connect the song with the key verse. The visual learning station used pictures of young people praising God in the church. The youth discussed what they thought about the pictures of people praising God. The younger students had a difficult time formulating a concrete concept of praise. The pictures were helpful for the younger students to understand praise. The kinesthetic learning station made a bookmarker showing a picture of young people singing in a church. The bookmarker was to encourage the youth to continue reading the Psalter after the six week Lenten bible study was completed.

### **The Assessment of the Bible Study**

The pre-test was re-administered during the midway point of the bible study on April 2, 2014. An additional station was added to the rotation. The additional station was a snack station for the younger students. One of the high school volunteers reviewed the key verse and words during the snack station with all of the age groups. The same test was administered as a post-test the last night of the bible study on April 16, 2014.

The pretest was given to the youth on the first night of the bible study. The pretest provided a baseline of the student's learning style, knowledge of the bible, reading habits, knowledge of the book of Psalms, spiritual discipline knowledge and basic theological concepts and terms. The pre/post test had four sections. The first section was on reading practices. The second section was on general bible knowledge. The third section was on God. And the last section was one's relationship with God. The information collected from the pretest was helpful when adapting the bible study to meet the needs of the younger students. At the end of the third week the same test was given to the students again. The goal of the mid- bible study testing was to assess the effectiveness of the bible study and address concerns with the presentation of the bible study material. The mid-assessment during the bible study indicated a need for age appropriate music and kinesthetic activity for the fifth and sixth grade students. The fifth and sixth grade students did not feel as engaged as the younger students. They enjoyed the learning stations, but wanted more advanced learning material. There was also a need to add a snack station during the bible study for the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students. The younger students reported that they were hungry after the kinesthetic learning station.

A post-test was given at the end of the six week bible study. The test provided information regarding the student knowledge of God, spiritual formation and attitude about reading. The students were able to recall the key words from the bible study lessons. The students were able to share how the key words helped them understand God. The post -test documented the student's sense of community, biblical knowledge, theological concepts and themes and understanding of faith formation.

Each lesson was designed to maximize the student's learning in the learning stations. The learning station lesson lasted ten minutes. The last two minutes of the learning station reinforced the key verse and words. The review at the end of each learning station lesson provided feedback regarding content modifications and the delivery of the key verse and words. This feedback ensured the objectives of the bible study were being met. The advisory team was helpful in designing a bible study with current educational theory and biblical knowledge to meet the objectives.

### **The Evaluation of the Bible Study by the Advisory Team**

The advisory team was helpful in the design and evaluation of the bible study. The team was comprised of church leaders, educational leaders and parents. The advisory team was knowledgeable about child development, educational practices and spiritual formation. Members of the advisory committee were: Reverend Darrell Armstrong, Senior Pastor; Minister Jane Wyche, Youth Minister; Dr. Danielle Narkaus, School Psychologist, Vonita Smith, Speech Pathologist; Shelia Polite, Deacon, reading specialist and Learning Consultant; Lenora Ross, parent and Shirley Miles Bell, special education teacher.

The advisory team and I met twice as a group to review and discuss educational theories and their influence in developing the bible study. Minister Wyche and Dr. Narkaus were helpful in shaping how the educational theories would marry with the theological theories and objectives of the bible. The team reviewed the pre and post-test to ensure the questions were appropriate and elicited a measurable response to the goals and objectives of the bible study in terms of introducing reading as a spiritual discipline.

The team met three weeks after the bible study was completed to assess the bible study format and make suggestions for future bible study lessons. The team reviewed the effectiveness of the bible study as an introduction to reading as a spiritual discipline as ways the church could incorporate the findings from the bible study.

The advisory team assessed the planning, preparation and delivery of the bible study. They offered suggestions regarding the placement of the learning stations. The team reviewed the following aspects of the bible study with the purpose of answering these questions: Was the bible study original, creative, engaging, insightful and significant to the field of youth ministry? What was the impact of the bible study on youth ministry at Shiloh Baptist Church? Did the bible study introduce the understanding of reading as a spiritual discipline?

The advisory team assessed the organization of the bible study and the seamless way in which all of the components were connected to achieve the goal and objectives of the bible study. The committee asked and answered the following questions: Were new questions asked or did the bible study address an important need in teaching youth ministry at Shiloh Baptist Church? Did the bible study change their views regarding reading? The team assessed the application of the objectives for the project and its relevancy to youth ministry and the bible study overall goal of using selected psalms verses to introduce reading as a spiritual discipline for elementary aged youth.

The advisory team assessed the bible study's introduction of reading as a spiritual discipline and the understanding of the theological relevance and educational theory of reading. Did the project display a deeper understanding of God and being in relationship with God? Did the bible study provide documentation to support the goal of the bible

study? Did the bible study develop relevant conclusions regarding spiritual formation in elementary aged youth at Shiloh Baptist Church? Did the bible study encourage the Shiloh Baptist Church to explore different teaching methods for biblical reading within the Christian Education department regarding youth? All of the questions were answered during the final session with the advisory team in May 2014.

## CHAPTER 4

### IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH

#### **The Implications For Christian Youth Ministry**

The goal of a good youth ministry is to develop a four dimensional faith in the lives of the youth who attend the church and or church programming. A four dimensional faith weaves a thread connecting their mind, heart, spirit and community when living out their faith in Jesus Christ. As youth develop their relationship with God, their thoughts are influenced by the Word of God. Their heart is connected to the heart of God. This connection allows them to share God in their actions and deeds in their community.

If the church is to engage, develop and implement programs that help nurture the spiritual development of its youth, the church should consider the environment that nurtures this type of development. Understanding the impact the environment may have on the spiritual formation of youth, Rebecca Nye's S.P.I.R.I.T<sup>1</sup> for spiritual formation provides a framework for reflection. In her framework, the S is for space. The P is for process. The I is for imagination. The R is for relationship. The I is for intimacy. The T is for trust. My project used this conceptual framework to evaluate Psalm Styles. Nye's

---

<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Nye, *Children's Spirituality*, Church House Publishing (London 2009), Kindle Edition, location 1024.



conceptual framework was useful in assessing the way Psalm Styles addressed different learning styles to give students the best opportunity to engage the word of God.

Educational research encourages educators to use multi-modal techniques to engage and facilitate learning.

Space includes physical, emotional and auditory space within the church. A child's space to encounter God should be holy, safe, friendly, warm and inviting. The physical space for a child to encounter God should allow the child to feel as though God is present in their space. This attention to the physical space, aids in the "meaningful discovers"<sup>2</sup> when learning about God. The key is to ensure the physical space "reflects the spiritual principles at work"<sup>3</sup>.

The emotional space of a youth's spiritual formation should allow the child to feel safe and affirmed. This emotional space may mirror the emotional space with God as the youth matures in his or her faith and relationship with God. Use of the concept of auditory space occurs when the Christian educator in the church allows the youth to reflect on the lesson, ask questions and then the Christian educator may assess the non-verbal communication of the youth to encourage spiritual conversation with God and faith community.

The next concept of Nye framework is process. As the youth learns more about God in the bible lesson, the process of spiritual formation should be cultivated. Spiritual formation is a process. Prayer, worship and reading are part of the spiritual formation process. The church should value a child's process in spiritual formation because the

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., location 1049.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., location 1064.

process of learning should be that “teaching is less concerned with getting to a fixed learned outcome<sup>4</sup>”, but more about experiencing God in new, insightful and personal ways. Using the different learning styles the youth experienced the process of spiritual formation. The arts and crafts (kinesthetic) learning station in the bible study was a process of using the tactile method of learning to invite youth to “work creatively, reflectively with Christian language<sup>5</sup>” and to have an encounter with God.

Another concept of Nye’s framework is the creation of an instructional environment that encourages the child’s imagination. Imagination can be used to allow the youth to ask questions about God and delve into knowing God in meaningful ways. Imagination can be used to introduce denominational beliefs and religious principles. Often, Jesus used images to teach complex biblical teaching. When educating Christian youth, teachers should allow youth to use their imaginations to understand, interpret and express who God is. Encouraging youth to use their imaginations is key in their spiritual formation because it helps to develop spiritual skills to sift through layers of biblical meaning and encounter God in his of her own way.

Relationship is the concept of Nye’s framework that reminds the faith community of how it is to live in community. The existence of a triune God, which is the Christian concept of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, reminds the faith community that we are to be in relationship with one another. It is important for the youth ministry of the church to offer authentic models in how the faith community relates to and with one another. Our interactions with one another reflect our relationship with God that informs our spiritual

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., location 1154.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., location 1154.

formation. Community is very important to youth. This is evidenced in the value they assign to the opinion of their peers. Youth learn how to relate in their community. Youth learn how to share, show respect and how to get along with one another through relationships. Six of the Ten Commandments are instructions for how the faith community should live relating to one another.

Relationships are strengthened with intimacy. Intimacy is the next concept used in assessing the bible study. Intimacy involves getting closer and trusting God. The best instructional environments should allow for the child to be safe and comfortable to ask and seek answers when developing his or her faith. Intimacy is the prerequisite to trust in spiritual formation.

Trust, the last concept, is key in spiritual formation because trust in God is not based on facts or empirical evidence. Trust is based on how God has revealed God's self to the individual. Trust is essential to faith development, maintenance and maturation. Christian education flows two ways, trusting the teacher to student and trusting the student to teacher. This is modeled in our relationship with God. We trust God and God trusts us. The relational intimate environment of the instructional setting in church relies on God's presence to help, lead, guide, direct and reveal who God is and how to be in relationship with God while growing spirituality.

### **Development of a Christian Education Curriculum**

Conducting Psalm Styles during the Lenten season of the liturgical calendar allowed the youth to experience their life of faith community in an intentional and pragmatic way. This connected their faith journey to the on going life of the faith

community. Conducting Psalm Styles during the Lenten season helped introduce the youth the liturgical calendar, which created a natural backdrop in understanding the humanity and sacrifice of Jesus.

Biblical teachings help to develop relevant ways of engaging and teaching the Word of God. Bible lessons that are lively and encourage the children to express the religious imagination create a personalized faith experience for the youth. Biblical instruction that incorporate hands on experiences, which encourage children to individually interact with the Bible and develop a personal relationship with God have a lasting impact on the youth's spiritual development. The Bible was the only source from which Bible lessons for Psalm Styles were developed. Using Nye's conceptual framework added in the development of a multi-modal learning experience for youth.

The original intention of Psalm Styles was to introduce reading as a spiritual discipline to elementary aged students in an urban setting. Elementary aged students were selected because students in the second and third grade transition from learning how to read to reading to learn. In the church the Bible is used as one of the authentic reading texts to assist in the teaching of early language literacy<sup>6</sup> within the faith community. Employing a multi modal approach to biblical instruction within elementary aged youth engaged all learning styles among the youth. The S.P.I.R.I.T framework facilitated ways to teach foundational theological and religious beliefs in developmental and spiritual appropriate concepts for elementary aged youth. These key concepts can be the cornerstones of biblical instruction and spiritual formation for youth.

---

<sup>6</sup> Tolbert, 132.

### **Engaging Different Learning Styles for Spiritual Formation**

Youth learn in different ways using various strategies to retain learned information for application and future learning. Using multi-modal ways of learning in Psalm Styles “had an impact on (how the youth) access to instruction of their faith and their ability to recall what they are taught.”<sup>7</sup> The learning stations in the bible study provided the space for the youth to learn about God in his or her preferred learning modality. The bible study used developmentally appropriate materials and learning styles to increase the youth’s opportunity to have an individualized encounter with God. Christian education for youth is most beneficial when it incorporates developmentally appropriate materials with attention to the different learning styles because “the quality of the youth’s Christian education setting is vital to enhancing the appropriate development”<sup>8</sup> which aids to his or her spiritual development.

The optimal Christian educational setting encourages youth to have a meaningful and impactful encounter with God. This educational setting allows the child to use their imagination to learn about God. A child’s religious imagination nurtures the true nature of the child’s spirituality. The child’s religious imagination is “active, creative, emotional and needs the adequate space to grow.”<sup>9</sup> Youth are “equipped with an

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>8</sup> Joyce Ruppell, “Using Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Faith Based Early Childhood settings,” *Children’s Spirituality*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Cascade Books: Eugene, OR) (2004), 343.

<sup>9</sup> Tolbert, 59.

amazing array of capacities that make thoughtful ministry a necessity<sup>10</sup> for their spiritual development. All youth benefit from sensory, multi-modal learning experiences to learn more about God.

In my opinion, the best approach to enhancing the delivery of Christian education for youth is to use a multi-modal approach to learn about God and have a personalized encounter with God. There are several aspects to consider when planning a multi-modal environment. A multi-modal bible study provides a learning environment in which the bible is accessible to all youth. Christian educators and church leaders should consider all learning styles and learning differences when developing lesson plans and curriculum for youth. Another way to create accessibility to the Word of God is selecting a biblical translation that is child friendly. The same biblical translation should be used for all instruction and presentation of Christian educational materials.

Christian educators can learn how to embrace youth by following the words of Jesus as recorded by Mark, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.”<sup>11</sup> Children have a natural inclination to want to know more about God. The adults create unnatural environments for learning about God because the delivery of the biblical instruction does not consider their learning styles. Youth learn best using a multi-modal delivery system of biblical instruction in a developmental appropriate framework to instruct them about God. This delivery system of instruction allows the youth to be unhindered in the spiritual formation and acquisition

---

<sup>10</sup> Ruppell, 343.

<sup>11</sup> Mark 10:14 NIV.

of knowledge about God. Creating the space for youth to freely explore God and God's meaning to and in their lives is reflected in their relationships.

### **Implication for Community Partnerships**

Relationships are a natural context for youth to understand God. Youth are shaped by their experiences and educational opportunities in their faith community. The first partners in the spiritual formation of youth are their parents. Parents are essential to the continuation of youth spiritual formation of their children. Youth grow spiritually when there is partnership between the parent and the Christian educator/church. The partnership between the parent and church allows the youth to build upon “learning experiences that occur in the home, school, community and church.”<sup>12</sup> The church has the responsibility to learn about how youth learn and the parents have the responsibility to share with the church information which helpful in creating an individual and personal encounter with God for the youth. The partnership between church and parent helps the youth to sustain their spiritual formation.

How youth interact with their peers is another partnership in the development of their spiritual formation. The faith community of learners assists in one another's spiritual formation. Youth help each other learn about God. The multi-modal learning setting provided an environment for all youth to learn and to share what they learned in the bible study. This type of environment provides an intentional encounter and an opportunity to understand and get to know God via relationships, intimacy and trust.

---

<sup>12</sup> Ruppell 355.

Another vital partnership is the members of the faith community in which the youth participates and receives biblical instruction. The faith community plays a vital role in the spiritual development of youth. The book of Romans states “in Christ we, though many, form one body, each member belongs to all the others.”<sup>13</sup> The faith community has a responsibility to care for and educate the youth. As members of one body, the faith community needs to provide instruction and guidance for the youth. The adults who have been given the responsibility to nurture and develop youth in the faith community must model and provide examples of spiritual maturity as well as provide “moral sensibilities, character and virtue”<sup>14</sup> so that the youth can love God and develop a relationship with God. These partnerships are essential for shaping Christian education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The Changing Role of Christian Education**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, educational needs of youth are more diverse and complex. Today’s youth have access to information at their fingertips with their smartphones. In their fast paced culture multi-modal ways of learning are used everyday. Whether it is learning how to do something while watching a YouTube video or listening to music while completing their work in home or school, how youth learn and retain information has changed. The faith community has to evolve to incorporate some of the youth’s learning styles to encounter God in Christian education. Christian education needs to

---

<sup>13</sup> Romans 12:5 NIV.

<sup>14</sup> Marica Bunge, “Historical Perspectives on Children in the Church: Resources for Spiritual Formation and Theology of Childhood Today,” *Children’s Spirituality*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Cascade Books: Eugene, OR, 2004), 48.



evolve to meet the needs of all youth. Christian education for youth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should consider four norms when developing a learning environment. The first norm is the church must become intentional when selecting teachers/models of Christian instruction and understanding for the importance of children's ministry. Christian educators need to create "better experiences and guide youth in an intentional manner so that spiritual growth will be fostered<sup>15</sup>". Training and developmentally appropriate materials used by Christian educators aid the youth's spiritual formation foundation.

The second norm the church should consider is to be intentional about selecting and providing experiential multi-modal activities during Christian education lessons and activities. This allows for all children to learn about God and have a personal relationship with God in ways they understand. This method of biblical instruction allows Christian educators to ensure that all youth develop an understanding and relationship with God. The presentation of biblical knowledge in the preferred learning modality of the youth builds upon their existing knowledge of God and creates opportunity for more advanced understanding Word of God.

The third norm is to develop an individual faith formation plan (FFP) for every child in the youth ministry. This plan would be called a FFP. This plan would include the youth's preferred learning style and which instructional delivery style engages the youth effectively. The FFP would chart and assess the youth's understanding of biblical and theological concepts and monitor the youth's spiritual formation. The FFP would chart areas of growth and review it from a faith formation perspective.

---

<sup>15</sup> Ruppell, 347.

The last norm is to provide the basic understanding to help youth to problem solve in the context of their faith within their community. Using the FFP as the rubric for the youth's preferred learning style, the Christian educator can develop contextually appropriate faith examples and scenarios that create an individualized understanding of God. The FFP would encourage the youths' personal relationship with God within their personal context. This contextualized encounter with God is based on where the youth is spiritually and what the youth understands theologically. A God encounter within an understandable context for youth builds a lasting impression of who God is and how God loves and cares for them. The youth learn how to see God within a real and meaningful perspective that is their perspective.

Psalm Styles was an example of implementing a bible study considering the learner and the learner's environment. The development of the bible study considered the educational needs of the youth in Shiloh Baptist Church in Trenton, New Jersey. The neighborhood elementary school located near the church struggles in reaching the state's proficient level in reading. Also, the neighborhood is plagued with crime and inner city blight. Yet on Wednesday night for one hour, the church offers hope by way of a bible study for the youth. For six weeks during Lent the youth at the church were introduced to reading as a spiritual discipline. The youth learned about God in different ways. The youth made arts and crafts projects, danced and listened as verses from selected Psalms came alive. Christian education should be an experience that considers all developmental stages, environmental conditions and the spiritual readiness of all youth. Attention to these areas in Christian education is essential for spiritual formation for youth. Spiritual

formation begins from infancy to nursery, preschool, elementary, middle and high school and does not end.

## CHAPTER 5

### SELF-ASSESSMENT

#### **Review of the Psalm Styles**

Psalm Styles was a Wednesday elementary night bible study held during the Lenten season of 2014 at Shiloh Baptist Church in Trenton, New Jersey. The Wednesday night bible study at the church is dedicated to providing elementary aged youth from pre kindergarten to sixth grade with supplemental biblical instruction. The bible study is divided into age appropriate groups and those groups last for the duration of the hour-long bible study. The classes dismiss at the end of the evening from their individual classrooms. Psalm Styles differed from the normal bible study in several ways. The first difference was the format of the bible study. The bible study began with praise and worship and the entire group read the key verse of the psalm together. The second difference of Psalm Styles was the delivery of the information to the youth. The students were introduced to learning stations and each learning station focused on the key verse. The groups cycled to the assigned learning stations, which presented the Psalm verse in different learning modality. The last difference of Psalm Styles was that all of the students came together at the end of the night to review the verse and share what they learned about the verse.

The advisory committee was instrumental in the development and implementation of the bible study. Members of the committee had backgrounds in education that was helpful in the project design. They assisted with the creation and development of educationally appropriate material for each of the learning stations in the bible study. The reading consultant ensured that every reader in each age grouping would be engaged and not feel left out due to reading weaknesses.

One of the things I learned about myself was the importance of the need to ask for help. Members of the advisory committee were happy to help me. In my ministry career, I was the person who offered the help and never the person to ask for help. The committee wanted the project to be successful for the youth. Their commitment to youth was invaluable and their assistance was deeply appreciated.

As a youth minister for many years I was never able to select the church volunteers to assist me with the youth activities. While designing the project, I learned that it is acceptable to ask for what you want when selecting people to assist me in bringing my ministerial vision to fruition. Over my years in youth ministry I have come in contact with at least two types of volunteers. The first group of volunteers are the parents of the youth attending the youth event or organized youth activity. This group is only interested in the youth activity because their child is a part of the activity. After their child ages out of the group their parent involvement stops. The second group of volunteers are people who love youth but do not have the skill set to work with youth. I selected my advisory committee to be a mix of educators, parents, clergy committed to youth who possess the skill set to work with youth. The diversity of the committee helped me not to feel guilty about being selective when it came to the youth of the

church. I was careful to use everyone who wanted to volunteer with the youth during my project. After I selected the advisory committee I was able to use the additional volunteers in other ways. This was a group of volunteers with a lot of zeal but little training. They were essential to the logistics of the bible study. They helped prepare the arts and crafts projects, made snacks, escorted the youth to their learning stations and assisted with the closing activity. Everyone played a role in creating an inviting space for the spiritual development and formation of the youth.

As a youth minister you must be flexible and willing to make adjustments at the last minute. The first session of the bible study was abbreviated due to the Ash Wednesday service at the church. I was not informed about the service until one hour before the bible study was to start. I was able to amend the bible study lesson and no one was aware of the change. A minister must be prepared for change. Although I was not comfortable with the last minute notice regarding the service, I was able to be flexible and put the needs of the youth before my need to control everything about my project. I modeled flexibility and the youth were able to be flexible during the first session of the bible study.

The modeling of flexibility was an example for the youth attending the bible study. The youth were not accustomed to the format of the Psalm Styles but they were patient and adjusted to the bible study format. After the first night of the bible study, I had to be flexible and make changes to the length and presentation of the original bible study lesson plans. The original project did not include the pre school age group. I had to modify the lesson plans because the youth minister wanted to include the entire Wednesday night youth bible study. I learned to be aware of all the needs of youth. A

snack station was added because the pre school group would become hungry after the first two stations. I was able to design the snack station to incorporate the key points of the weekly bible study. I learned that God is in control and to be prepared and trust God.

The last two weeks of the project, the advisory committee suggested that I modify the closing station. A member of the advisory team suggested that I provide the youth a fun way to review the material, learn from their peers and learn about God. I added a relay race as a way to assess if the students retained the main theme of the weekly bible study. Week five we used a scooter relay to assess the retention of the key concepts of the weekly lesson. Week six we used a version of the game hot potato to assess key concept retention. All age groups were involved in each of the activities. During the evaluation of the project, the advisory committee thought the fun activity at the closing of the bible study was a better way to assess if the students retained the information from the bible study rather than the traditional question and answer format they were accustomed to in school. The students appeared to enjoy the closing activity when it was modified to a game format. On the last night of the bible study several parents commented about how their children enjoyed the bible study and asked if the church would continue the bible study during next year's Lenten season. In general the project was well received by the church, church leadership, advisory committee, the parents and the students.

### **Strengths of the Psalm Styles**

The African American church is a major part of the life of the African American community. The black church serves a variety of functions in the life of its congregants.

The church can function as a place of social activities, health education classes, day care centers, economic development initiatives, support groups, crisis intervention and tutoring programs.<sup>1</sup> The historical function of the black church as a place for tutoring aided in the acceptance of Shiloh Baptist Church to embrace the format and purpose of my project. The proximity of the church to an elementary school, affordable housing complex and densely populated neighborhood was helpful in engaging neighborhood youth to attend the bible study. This was a strength of the bible study.

The second strength of the bible study was the ability to assign abstract theological concepts to concrete examples using different learning styles. Using various learning stations, the youth were able to apply theologically abstract concepts and complex biblical language and images to concrete concepts and then apply the concepts to ways to learn about God.

The bible study achieved the outlined objectives utilizing instructional strategies of: using mental and tactile models, building a spiritual vocabulary, direct teaching of the biblical content, making learning about the bible relational and making the biblical comprehension relevant to their current life situation.

### **Areas of Development for Psalm Styles**

Overall the bible study met the objective in the project's prospectus. There were three areas in which further development was demonstrated during the bible study. The areas were: additional training for all teachers/teaching staff for the bible study, focus on

---

<sup>1</sup> Monica McGoldrick, Joe Giordano and Nydia Garica-Preto eds. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, *Ethnicity and Family Therapy*. (Guilford Press: New York, 2005) 93.



involving parents in the spiritual formation of the children and a clear and concrete understanding of what is a spiritual discipline.

Youth who live in high poverty and lower socio-economic regions of the United State are more likely to show academic gains if they attend church on a regular basis<sup>2</sup>. Intentional and meaningful religious engagement can have a positive spiritual and educational effect on the lives and choices of inner city youth. The instruction of youth in the church should reflect the same quality of instruction they receive in school. When I was younger and attended bible study and Sunday school in my home Baptist church in Atlanta, Georgia I received biblical instruction from teachers and school administrators. After surveying the Christian educators at Shiloh Baptist Church, I discovered there were no teachers or school administrators who are a part of the teaching corps of the church. Although I provided training for the teachers regarding the lessons plans for each bible study, I did not provide the teachers with rudimentary educational foundation that most teachers complete in an undergraduate teaching preparation program.

The limited understanding of educational principles and learning styles may have limited the teachers' understanding of the value of the learning stations to the learning experience. I do not believe that you need to be an educator to teach youth in the church. I do believe that Christian educators should have training in educational principles and learning styles. The church should provide opportunities for Christian educators to have the church equivalent of professional development of its instructors, particularly the youth instructors. My project revealed the importance of teacher training for the youth in

---

<sup>2</sup> M.D. Regnerus and G.H. Elder, "Staying on track in school: Religious influences in high-and low risk settings," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 42, 633-49 (2003).

the church. The church should place a high value on the development and training of church members who provide instruction to youth.

After each session, the teachers and I would have a review of the night's lesson. During our review of the weekly bible study some of the teachers used their personal experience and not proven educational theories to deliver the bible study lesson plan. In retrospect I would have provided more comprehensive educational training for the teaching staff for the project as well as shared the educational theory behind the development of the bible study lesson plans.

Another area of development was increasing parental involvement in the spiritual formation of their child(ren). In Annette Lareau's study, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race and Family Life*, she explores how socio economic factors influence parents' interactions with their children. She divided the parent's interaction into two categories: concerted cultivation and accomplishment of natural growth<sup>3</sup>. Parents in the concerted cultivation category actively foster and assess their child's talents, opinions and skills<sup>4</sup>. Parents in the accomplishment of natural growth category care about their child and allow the child to grow<sup>5</sup>. For the entire six weeks of the project it was a struggle to get parents to participate in the parental portion of the project. My project was designed so that parents would engage their child (ren) in dialogue about the weekly bible study. The intention was to have the parents discuss the psalm with the child at home. Although

---

<sup>3</sup> Annette Lareau, *Unequal childhoods: Class, Race and Family Life* (Berkeley CA:University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Ruby K. Payne, *A Framework for Understand Poverty: A Cognitive Approach* (Aha Press: Highland TX, 2013) 99.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.,

parents stated their child (ren) enjoyed the bible study, they did not follow up on the parental participation part of the project design.

Some parents reviewed and discussed the key verse, the song which accompanied the verse and asked questions about the arts and crafts projects. These parents were in the minority. It is my opinion that some of the parents were depended upon the church to provide religious education to their children. The same conclusion could be drawn from parents who leave their child's education solely to the school district. At the neighborhood school, which is closest to the church, an average of twenty to twenty five percent of the parents attend back to school night or parent teacher conferences during the school year<sup>6</sup>.

Socio-economic status may have played a role in the parents' limited involvement in the bible study. Most parents of the youth participating in the bible study dropped off their children at the beginning of the bible study and came back to pick them up at the end of the session. On average two to three parents remained for the entire bible study. These parents were members of the church. The same number of parents self-reported that they engaged their children about the bible lesson on the ride home and several days after the bible study. Based on the limited parent involvement during the project, the project design should have included an at-home study plan. The at-home study plan may have been helpful as an aid to encourage parent- child discussion and the parents' participation in their child's spiritual formation. My project may have benefited from creative ways for parents to engage their child(ren) at home.

---

<sup>6</sup> The percentage of parents that attended back to school night and parent conferences at Monument Elementary school 2013-2014 school year for the school office.

The last area of development for the project was my inability to collect information regarding the student's understanding of a spiritual discipline. The last objective of the project was to develop a foundation for spiritual formation and an introduction to reading as a spiritual discipline. The questionnaire used during the pre and post testing did not provide enough information on the student's understanding of reading as a spiritual discipline. I was able to collect qualitative information about how the children felt after the six weeks of bible study, their understanding of God, their reading habits and general bible knowledge. It was difficult to translate their narrative response into a quantifiable measurement of their understanding of reading as a spiritual discipline for spiritual formation. The students made the connection to reading and the different ways to learn about God ,however, they were not clear on connecting reading as a spiritual discipline. In the future I would love to revisit the youth who attended the bible study to determine if teaching the Psalm verse in different learning modalities aided with their relationship with God.

The bible study began on Ash Wednesday, which is the beginning of the Lenten season for the Christian church. I presented the youth with an understanding of Lent and the importance of being in relationship with God but I did not make a concrete connection to learning and reading the key verse of the psalm to the introduction to reading as a spiritual discipline. The youth may have benefited from a separate lesson on spiritual discipline and how reading aids in developing a relationship with God. Although the design of the project demonstrated that learning the key verse of the selected Psalm would develop an understanding of who God was and how we are in relationship with God, I should have reinforced the connection that reading is a spiritual discipline. The

youth did grow in their understanding of God and language to talk to God, but needed a concrete explanation of why they should continue reading the Psalter after Lent. This may be one of the challenges many youth leaders face when delivering the message of God to youth. Youth leaders have good intentions but sometimes do not present their intention in terms and ways youth will understand and continue a relationship with God. It may have been helpful to have an upper elementary student on the advisory committee to ensure the intention of all aspects of the project would be understood and continued by the youth.

### **Affirmation of My Call to Ministry**

As I grow in my faith walk and yielding to God's will and plan for my life, I questioned how to merge my two vocations, educator and minister. Psalm Styles solidified my call. My project allowed me to marry my passion for educating children in school and church. The psalter demonstrates who God is and provides examples of how we should be in relationship with God. The psalter provided the perfect backdrop to introducing reading as a spiritual discipline. The psalter has beautiful prose, imagery, and descriptive language that is ideal for reading and using different modalities to introduce reading as a spiritual discipline.

Reading is powerful and can transform your life. If you know how to read you have access to change your destiny. The ability to change your destiny by reading is why reading is essential for spiritual formation. This is the reason I wanted do to a bible study combining the psalter and reading as a spiritual discipline for elementary aged youth. As an educator I see the disparity between readers and nonreaders. I see how readers

experience the world and nonreaders do not have the same opportunities. As a youth minister, I observe the same phenomena in the church setting. Methods used to teach reading in school should be used to teach reading about God in the church. Educators are required to attend and implement knowledge learned from professional development to stay current on the latest methods and best practices in education. The church would benefit from mirroring education strategies in how Christian education is developed and implemented within the church setting.

As a youth pastor and an educator in an urban city in the state of New Jersey, it is imperative for faith leaders to play a vital role in the education of the youth. School districts in underfunded urban communities are faced with lower test scores and high school drop out rates. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) named urban school districts as the school -to -prison pipeline due to the poor educational instruction and zero tolerance policies which unfairly target at risk students. The church needs to be a change agent in the plight of urban youth. As urban school districts continue to cut funding for counseling and special education, the church must create programming in the church to meet both the educational and spiritual needs of youth.

My project was a vision from God to start the conversation with church leadership to address youth spiritual and academic deficiencies. The project was a way to introduce Christian educators to the need to develop and implement new ways to engage youth about the Bible, reading and spiritual formation. The church has a wealth of talent and knowledge, yet members are not willing to commit or invest in the youth because they are different and do not react or respond the way we think they should or how we would respond. Youth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would benefit from opportunities to learn and grow

within a spiritual context just like the African American church offered youth fifty years ago.

Public education is under attack and there is a need for the church to supplement the education of youth. Only twenty eight percent of third graders in the Trenton public school system receive a score of proficient and above in reading on the NJASK testing in 2012<sup>7</sup>. Churches across all denominations are seeing a decline in the numbers of youth attending church and youth activities. There is a need to build a bridge between the school and the church for improving the education of urban youth. Psalm Styles was an attempt to provide a blueprint for that bridge. Youth are changing and the church must diversify the ways in which it designs and implements Christian education instruction. Psalm Styles was effective in addressing the need to develop a different delivery system for Christian education. Psalm Styles presented reading the Bible in fun and engaging ways and the youth learned about God. Reading is the foundation to learning and knowing more about God. Reading is a gift to the reader as well as the person who hears the Word of God.

---

<sup>7</sup> “NJ State Test scores”, Fall 2014, [http:// www.nj.gov/cgl-bin/education/csg/14/csg.pl?string=](http://www.nj.gov/cgl-bin/education/csg/14/csg.pl?string=).

**APPENDIX A**  
**PRE/POST TEST**

Name:	Age:	
Grade:		
<b>Section One: Reading Practices Please circle your answer.</b>		
Do you read at home?	Yes	No
Do you read at school?	Yes	No
Do your parents read to you?	Yes	No
Do you read to your parents?	Yes	No
Do you have books at home?	Yes	No
Do you have a library card?	Yes	No
Do you have an e-reader?	Yes	No
Do you listen to audio books?	Yes	No
Do you read for fun?	Yes	No
Do you like to read?	Yes	No
Do you have a bible?	Yes	No
Do you read the bible?	Yes	No



**Section Two: General Bible Knowledge. Please circle your answer**

The Bible is the Word of God.	Yes	No
There are 66 books in the bible.	Yes	No
Genesis is the first book of the bible.	Yes	No
Matthew is the son of God.	Yes	No
There are two testaments in the bible.	Yes	No
There are 150 Psalms.	Yes	No
The Psalter is another name for the bible.	Yes	No

**Section Three: God. Please circle your answer**

Does God live in heaven?	Yes	No
God has one son.	Yes	No
Jesus is the son of God.	Yes	No
Did God create the universe?	Yes	No
	Yes	No

**Section Four: Relationship with God. Please circle your answer**

Do you love God?	Yes	No
------------------	-----	----

Does God love you?	Yes	No	
Do you pray?	Yes	No	
Do you know the Lord's Prayer?	Yes	No	
Do you say grace before a meal?	Yes	No	
Do you praise God?	Yes	No	
Do you attend church?	Yes	No	

## APPENDIX B

### LESSON PLAN

#### Overview

To introduce youth to the idea of the guiding presence of God.

To introduce the youth to the concept of salvation.

To introduce Jesus as role model for Christian living.

#### Objectives

To provide the youth with a context to understand the presence of God in their life.

To develop a spiritual confidence in living a Christian life.

#### Activities

**Visual Station:** Using the memory words to create a pictorial presentation of Psalm 27:1.

**Kinetics Station:** Using the craft project of the paper candle to represent t Psalm 27:1 in a different modality to connect to the spiritual formation of the guiding presence of God

#### Materials

- Copy of the song:  
The Lord is my Light
- Materials to make a paper candle
- Copy of Psalm 27
- Copy of the memory words

#### Other Resources

Read the entire Psalm 27 to provide the context of the bible study.

Ask the youth for examples of times they were afraid?

Allow for age appropriate fears to be discussed in the group and show how God was presence

Salvation is a complex subject. The lesson is to introduce the relationship of God and salvation

Allow the youth to ask questions about salvation. Be prepared to journey with them on their spiritual formation journey.

**Auditory Station:** Using the song, The Lord is my Light to present Psalm 27:1 in a different modality to engage the youth to understanding the gift of salvation.

**Key Words for Spiritual Formation**

Jesus, light, salvation and fear

**Evaluation**

The youth will be introduced to the concept of Jesus as our Savior and the symbolism of the light as the presence of God.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, James. "The Historical Context for Understanding the Test Score Gap." *The National Journal of Urban Education and Practice*. ed. Norvella Carter. Texas Southern University:TX vol. 1 #1 Summer 2007.
- Allen, Holly Catterron. *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: How Parents Nurture the Spiritual Development of their Children*. Cascade Books: Eugene,OR. 2008
- Arzola, Fernando. *Towards a Prophetic Youth Ministry: Theory and Praxis in an Urban Context*. InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL 2008.
- Bateman, Herbert W. and Sandy Brent. *Interpreting the Psalms for Teaching and Preaching*. Chalice Press: St. Louis, MO. 2010.
- Bible: New International Version.
- Brown, Frank. "Funding Urban Education in the Globalization and Post-Brown Era." *The National Journal of Urban Education and Practice*. ed NovellaCarter. Texas Southern University:TX. Vol 1. #1 Summer 2007.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*, 2nd edition. Cascade Books. 2007.
- Bonheoffer, Dietrich. *Life Together Prayerbook of the Bible*. Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 1996.
- Bunge, Marica. "Historical Perspectives on Children in the Church: Resources for Spiritual Formation and Theology of Childhood Today." *Children's Spirituality*. ed. Donald Ratcliff, Cascade Books: Eugene, OR. 2004 48.
- Cobley, Paul. *The Communication Theory of the Reader*. Routledge: London 1996.
- Dehaene, Stanislas. *Reading in the Brain: The Science of Evolution of the Human Invention*. Penguin Group: New York 2009.
- Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline*. Harper: San Francisco 1998.
- Fowler, James. *Stages of Faith*. Harper: San Francisco 1981.
- Haley, Alex. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. Grove Park Press: New York 1965.

- Jacobs, Alan. *A Theology of Reading: The Hermeneutics of Love*. Westview Press: Colorado: 2001.
- Jeynes, William. "A Meta Analysis: The Effects of Parental Involvement on Minority Children's Academic Achievement." *Education and Urban Society*. Accessed October 2014. <http://eus.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/35/2/202>.
- Keeley, Robert. *Helping Our Children Grow in Faith*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI 2008.
- Kolb, D.A. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*, accessed October 2014, <http://www.infed.org/mobi/david-a-Kolb-on-experiential-learning/>.
- Kyhl, Rebecca, Sandra Alper and Thomas Sinclair. "Acquisition and Generalization of Functional words in a Community Grocery Store Using Videotaped Instruction," *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*.v22. Spring 1999.
- Lareau, Annette. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race and Family Life*. Berkeley CA:University of California Press. 2003.
- Lawson, Kevin. *Understanding Children's Spirituality*. Cascade Books: Eugene OR. 2012.
- Maring, Norman and Hudson, Winthop S. *A Baptist Manual of Polity and Practice*. Judson Press:Valley Forge, PA. 1991.
- McGoldrick, Monica, Joe Giordano and Nydia Garcia-Preto ed. *Ethnicity and Family Therapy*. The Guilford Press: New York. 2005.
- Nye, Rebecca. *Children's Spirituality*. Church House Publishing: London 2009  
Kindle Edition.
- Payne, Ruby. *A Framework for Understanding Poverty: A Cognitive Approach*. Aha Press Inc.: Highlands, TX. 2013.
- Ratcliff, Donald ed. *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research and Applications*. Cascade Books: Eugene, OR. 2004.
- Regnerus , M.D. and Elder, G.H., "Staying on track in school: Religious influences in high-and low risk settings." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. pg.42, 633-49. 2003.

- Rich, Motoko. 2013. "In Raising Schools, 123 Is Easier Than ABC." *New York Times*. May 29.
- Ruppell, Joyce. "Using Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Faith Based Early Childhood Settings." *Children's Spirituality* ed. Donald Ratcliff. Cascade Books: Eugene, OR. 2004.
- Scruggs, April. "Effective Reading Instruction Strategies for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities." *Electronic Journal for Inclusive Education*. 2 (3). 2008. pg. 6.
- Silver, Harvey, Richard W. Strong and Matthew J. Perini. *So Each May Learn: Integrating Learning Styles and Multiple Intelligences*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development: Alexandria, VA 2000.
- Stonehouse, Catherine and Scottie May. *Listening to Children on the Spiritual Journey*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. 2013.
- Strommen, Merton. *Youth Ministry That Transforms*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI. Kindle Edition. Location 349. May 2011.
- Tolbert, LaVerne ed. *Exploring and Engaging Spirituality for Today's Children*. WIPF and STOCK: Eugene, OR. 2014.
- Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertation* 7th edition. University of Chicago Press: 2007.
- Wimberly, Anne E Streaty, Sandra L. Barnes and Karma D. Johnson. *Youth Ministry in the Black Church*. Judson Press:Valley Forge, PA. 2013.