



How Young People Engage with The Bible Through Biblical Narrative

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Abstract

Christian young people face a number of challenges growing up in a technological world. Opportunities for young people to pause, reflect and contemplate are limited in the busyness of western culture. Now more than ever, young people need to have an encounter with the Trinitarian God who brings about peace, wellbeing and transformation.

This Study explores how a group of young people who regularly attend an evangelical church engage with the bible and how this helps them with their faith formation. I have explored the importance of understanding how the micro-narratives of the bible fit into the meta-narrative of God's salvation story.

This is a small-scale research project, based in one location but draws knowledge and insight from a biblical narrative passed on over thousands of years to traditional development theorists, academic thinkers, fathers of the faith but equally importantly a small group of 11-18 year old young people. I've endeavoured to collate this information into something that is of relevance to my own localised context but also add value to other youth work practitioners.

This study is part of ongoing action research that should not only focus on young people but has a relevance to the all generations that are representing in and out of the church context.

I hope this study has demonstrated that by giving young people a voice, allowing them to engage their imagination, immerse themselves in the narrative, reflect and share in a supportive environment the biblical study can become a rhythm of life and important habit that keeps young people engaged and growing in wisdom, stature and favour (Luke 2:52).

Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Abstract.....	3
Contents.....	4
List of Figures	5
Introduction	6
Literature Review	9
Chapter 1 : Methodology and Findings	14
Chapter 2 : Engaged in the Narrative.....	21
Chapter 3: Faith Formation	28
Conclusion.....	33
Appendix 1	1
Bibliography	36
Ethical Clearance Forms	

List of Figures

Figure 1 Bible Reading Time	14
Figure 2 Participant Age Figure 3 Male and Female	15
Figure 4 Understanding	16
Figure 5 Why do you read the bible? Figure 6 Importance	17
Figure 7 Tuckman's Groupwork Stages	18
Figure 8 Lost Sheep	19
Figure 9 Unpopular Figure 10 Heaven	20
Figure 11 Hutson, N. (2019)	35

Introduction

*“The bible tells a story. A story that isn’t over.
A story that is still being told.
A story that we have a part to play in”*

(Rob Bell 2012:58).

The bible is described as a meta-narrative, it describes how the relationship of the triune God and the rest of the world was broken through sin and God’s subsequent restoration plan of community. Drane (2000:21-27) talks about how in the Old Testament ‘faith’ and ‘story’ are interwoven together and that these narratives are so cleverly developed. These stories are passed on down the generations but still have relevance today and young people should have the opportunity to learn and engage with them. Throughout the bible God gives a clear desire to be remembered seen clearly after the Israelites left the captivity of Egypt they were told to teach the law- “Teach them to your children. Repeat them when you are at home and when you are away, when you are resting and when you are working” (Deuteronomy 6:7 GNT).

Moltmann (Mcgrath 2012:132) describes a theological concept of community defined in the ‘Trinity’ perfectly interacting interdependently, in the form of a Greek dance, this has the theological term ‘*Perichoresis*’. As a youth worker I desired to consider how the young people engaged within this dance with the Father, Spirit and Word (John 1:1-14).

As Bell (ibid) shared insights of the exciting opportunities within the bible these are held alongside the challenges that youth workers face in promoting spiritual disciplines in a post-modern era whilst keeping young people engaged in youth work activities. The National Youth Work agency (NYA) defines youth work as enabling “*young people to develop holistically, working with them to facilitate their personal, social and educational development, to enable them to develop their voice, influence and place in society and to reach their full potential*”. (NYA 2019:14). Whilst secular in source this definition sits well with a value for youth ministry seen in the narrative of Luke - a key aspect of Jesus’ ministry was to see the potential in people (Roberts 2018:7) and bring life in all its fullness (John 10:10).

The Growing Faith document (General Synod 2019:2) highlighted that 76% of people come to faith before the age of 18 of which 20% made a decision between 11 and 18. If Bell’s (ibid) opinion is to be valued then learning bible stories should be key in faith development. Passing on biblical narrative and the importance of training young people in spiritual quest is part of the early church movement in the New Testament (Ephesians 6:4 GNT). This study wanted

to look at how youth work plays a role within faith development and how we can nurture opportunities to help young people in their Christian journey. The General Synod document (ibid) also highlighted the integrated needs of realising the roles of families, parents and grandparents in sharing the narratives of faith. This research sought to consider where and if this was happening and the role of the local faith community which Gough (2019:29) says carries responsibility and whether this does have an influence on the young person's life.

My passion for doing this research project is that I believe positive biblical engagement increases knowledge and nurtures wisdom and that teenage years offer a rich opportunity to develop opportunities and lifelong behaviour patterns. Emery-White (Nash and Whitehead 2014:11) describes adolescence as a "God created special time in people's lives when they would developmentally be spiritual seekers". This is seen reflectionally in the bible through Samuel (1 Samuel 2:26) and Jesus (Luke 2:52) who were both described as growing "in stature, favour with man and God". The NYA principles seek to enable young people to develop favourably with people through personal achievement, our distinctiveness as Christians is also desiring to encourage young people to grow in their relationship with God. A Barna survey (2016) found that 54% of young people stated that reading the bible brings them closer to God and so my desire was to look at how we are developing opportunities to equip them to do this effectively.

Adolescent faith development is demonstrated in the biblical story of Josiah (2 Chronicles 34), he began searching for God, rebuilding the temple and during this process the law given to Moses was discovered. His response was to tear his clothes, repent and implement an intense period of study, dedication and exploration. Rather than rip my clothes I hope my research will help tear down some barriers that prevent young people engaging in the meta-narrative, inspiring them to become dedicated and passionate about their faith and enable their lives to become temples of the living God (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Bloom's Taxonomy (Bates 2019:280) describes the process that young people go through when gathering knowledge through reading, I see parallels from this theory to the process of theological reflection. When supporting young people to read the bible, we need to allow those contemplative moments that enable deeper discovery of understanding and meaning. As the young people start and shape their theological thoughts they can apply and test these in their situation and then start the process again with evaluation. The end result should be young people with a passion and desire to engage in scripture.

The Department for Education Report (2012) suggests that reading for pleasure is strongly influenced by relationship between teachers and children and children and families. This study seeks to explore how youth workers can relationally develop an interest and desire in engaging with the bible and seeks to show how knowledge and comprehension of scriptures may have a positive impact on how young people apply them to life in their everyday context. I want to try and establish a link to discover how young people move up the levels in bible study and the effect this has in enabling a positive transition through adolescence in the synthetic-conventional faith formation stage (Fowler 1981:174).

The study aims to demonstrate the journey of discovery that the young people went through whilst reading the narrative but hopefully identifies the importance of having a strong faith community surrounding them as they grow and develop into the people that God has called them to be.

Literature Review

The book that is the most stolen yet the biggest selling book is the bible, despite many versions, translations, styles and commentaries and links to social media it seems young people struggle to engage, gain knowledge and understand it.

Introduction

The writer Donovan (2009) encourages us to be brave and journey to new places with young people, beyond our own comfort and discover afresh together - but for parents, churches and young people alike where to start with bible exploration can be a challenge.

Meek believes that “reading is a process of discovery and not a programme of instruction” (Briggs 2017:49) and Briggs’ pioneering research into how young people read the bible is both challenging and inspirational - advising the church about engaging young people to achieve biblical study and ‘faith development’. Her research of getting children and young people to read Luke’s gospel doesn’t have the traits of a traditional youth work approach but promotes more of a philosophy of discovering hidden treasures than a curriculum based on adult-led intervention. Her findings give opportunity for the youth work practitioner to be brave and journey with young people, whilst still embracing the four key traditional NYA principles of Empowerment, Education, Participation and Equal opportunities (Dolby in Nash and Whitehead 2015:7). One of the ways that she does this is through dialogical questioning and enabling space for young people to reflect.

Engaging in the narrative

Briggs invites readers to allow young people to use their imagination, to allow the readers to become the actor or transporter and help develop their own epistemological thinking. The book includes comprehensive research findings and theories that support the view that young people can become so engrossed in the story line that they start to develop hermeneutics. Her findings demonstrate evidence of young people not just reading the scripture but engaging in it in profound ways. Briggs outlines two ways that young people can process narrative ‘language based’ and ‘association based’ (2017:48).

Young People as Theologians

Hyde introduced me to Jerome Berryman who suggests “children are, in fact, theologians who seek meaning and direction in life in relation to their existential issues and concerns” (Hyde in Cupit et al. 2012:14). Hyde’s article talks about the importance of understanding the role of children and young people in the church and their own spirituality of the present not the future. Berryman has an approach that is about discovery and exploration, this draws similarities to the approach of Briggs. He argues that children are often not recognised as practical theologians and don’t always have input into education and pastoral care (2009:175). He gives a very comprehensive review of the history of child theology including how Anselm (2009:71) often engaged his pupils with “conversation to sharpen his thoughts’ rather than restricting them by adult boundaries. Lawrence argues that teachers encourage young people to ‘critically tear apart arguments, sub text, theories, and historical narrative’ and we need to start using those skills engaging young people with the bible. Pimlott (2015:152) urges educators to promote critical thinking and curiosity with young people. He provides constructive ways of how young people can demonstrate their voice and influence society in the form of social action and politicking from a theological and contextual point of view.

Child Development

Berryman looks at child development including child attachment theory, human development and how that relates to practice. Using Gardner’s ‘Seven ways of knowing’ (Berryman 2008:240-41) he suggests people operate in the four steps to imaginative discovery –

- Scanning process,
- Insight,
- Development of the insight
- Closure

Considering learning styles and presentation of the gospel Spindle (2012:59-61) sees engaging in scripture using the imagination as key with adolescents, this could be the environment you choose to engage with scripture, helping provide experiential learning or just the opportunity to experience scripture through play. He describes imaginative ways that you can engage young people with biblical narrative, his approach is not based on reading as a narrative but engagement in the story in a deep way.

He challenges the model of ‘flashy, high energy programmes and Thursday night camp alter calls to a more contemplative approach that creates deep lasting joyful passionate relationship

with the living God' (2012:99). He sees authentic play in youth work as the opportunity to enable young people to become "deep, grounded and spiritual". Youth work should offer the opportunity to explore the biblical narrative in ways that cater for different learning styles.

Hoggarth (2011) presents a great easy-to-read handbook for engaging with the bible that touches on human development. It explains key concepts, giving practitioners insights into alternative ways to engage with the bible, effectively use it and support others to engage with it. In her chapter on 'Young Word' she discusses hermeneutics in light of developing the theme of allowing young people to interpret the bible, using Cupit's Ladder (2011:108) as a point of reference she demonstrates a positive way that practitioners can measure engagement of the bible.

- Enjoyment
- Emotion
- Imagination
- Familiarity / memory
- Personal relevance
- Coercion
- Implication
- Context

This approach is allied with theories of human development and takes into consideration young people developing abstract thoughts from the age of 11. Her drive in this chapter is to see young people inhabit the scriptures and the importance of valuing their theological insight.

Fowler (1987) in his classic piece of work 'Faith Development' suggests developmental stages linked into classic theories of human development such as Erickson and Piaget. He celebrates that humans are formed with the imagination from the Creator's image and encourages the church to help faith formation by giving gifts to the imagination, particularly in the early stages of formation. He encourages that bible stories are told in a way that helps children and young people explore who God is creatively claiming that it is the community of God that does practical theology.

Sudbury (2015:124-132) and Crawford and Walker (2003:25-28) provide a social science perspective on human development of how a teenager's world view is shaped. Thompson

(2001:21) and Nash (2007:5) build on this to suggest a young person's world and theological viewpoint is also shaped through personal circumstances and the culture surrounding them. Youth workers need to develop practice that challenges and engages young people but supports them through the developmental stages of adolescence.

Nash and Whitehead (2014:138) have edited a Handbook of Christian Youthwork that is informative and packed with wise guidance on how youth workers can develop programmes and good practice. The book has two chapters key for this essay on 'Identity' and 'Faith Formation' each has an equally informative response and critique to the theories. Whitehead challenges traditional views of faith formation and thinking suggesting an approach that nurtures young people to living a life of fullness. She encourages youth workers to engage young people's imagination to enable them to understand the deeper narrative of the bible, develop rhythms and disciplines that lead to transformation. Within this study this will be considered through the methodology but in considering if offering a narrative approach helps young people in these two areas.

Spiritual Reading

Nick Shepherd (2016:100) developing this argument further talks about a 'faith habitus' the practice of prayer, bible reading and worship. His book develops the theme of creating environments that nurture young people into faith from churched and unchurched backgrounds. I believe exploration in how young people engage in spirituality is key in enabling young people to form their faith, his research interests me because it focusses on a secular youth work and a church-based context. His book draws parallels to faith formation in a secular age by Andrew Root (2017), both authors aim to address the challenges the church is facing of young people leaving, the generation gap and provide insight into how the church can respond to this. Root looks into the history of western culture and how the church has moved into "moral, therapeutic, deism". He suggests that the solution is a Christological model that encounters God as young people go through a process of kenosis that brings about transformation. Both writers warn a belief in God is no longer 'plausible' for a section of society and that testimony or story is an important part of faith development. Root (2017:201) encourages youth workers to reconsider approaches that simply entertain young people. Both books highlight the importance of faith formation and the youth worker's role.

The idea of sharing the story is developed by Weaver (2018) who reinforces reading the bible as a spiritual discipline and encourages teenagers to look at context, word meaning, connections and application and practice such as Lectio Divina. Helman (2019) encourages teenagers to read a Psalm a day and look at reading other books in large chunks using narrative, arguing that they get a feel of the story by doing this. Taylor (2015) and Paul's (2003) books on biblical engagement present a knowledge of theory with practical suggestions to help people understand how to engage and interpret the bible. Paul explains the importance of reading the bible with an understanding of the meta-narrative and Taylor devotes a section outlining the story in the form of scenes from Genesis to Acts. The number of author's articulating good ideas that are practical and seem realistic show a desire to engage young people, but if they themselves do not engage with reading then to suggest any of these remain dated and disconnected to the reality of this generation.

The Journey

Ward (2017:136) cites Donavon and his missionary passion for telling the Gospel story in a contextual way that seemingly made God plausible to the people he was reaching out to. Ward gives a detailed explanation about practical theology, outlining how it is developed and highlights the importance of having practitioners who are educated and able to facilitate practical theology as a way 'to nurture, discipline and provide resources to the church' (Ward 2017:75).

Roberts (2018) brings a theological perspective of fruitful youth ministry inviting his readers to help young people grow in wisdom, stature and in favour with God and humanity (Luke 2:52). Briggs (2016:23) develops this opinion further by suggesting through reading the gospel narrative young people can start the process of interpreting the bible, applying it to their context and enable teenagers to imagine and experience who Jesus is. I believe reading Luke's Gospel as a narrative can introduce young people to a foundational knowledge of who Jesus is, what He thought about justice and how He demonstrated an existence of being fully human and divine. The hope is through reading and engaging with part of the story the young people develop that passion and we as youth workers develop new ways to adventure with them in the timeless story in which we all take part.

Chapter 1: Methodology and Findings

The context of this study is young people in an evangelical church in North Nottinghamshire who regularly attend a weekly bible study led by youth workers. My empirical research provided the opportunity for young people to choose two journeys of discovery- take the challenge of reading the whole of Luke's Gospel (Group 1) or engage with five short key readings (Group 2) over a period of five weeks. Young people were given a small Good News version of Luke's gospel, this method was chosen to make the narrative easy to read and allow the young people to develop their own thoughts and reflections.

My inspiration for research was to explore - "reading is a process of discovery and not a programme of instruction" (Briggs 2017:48). Lodge, states "despite an interest in spirituality, ethics and social justice, over 70 per cent of young people never read the Bible" (Lodge 2014) which sits alongside teenagers in Western Society having freedom in their expression of religion and spirituality. When asked, young people in this survey indicated that they didn't spend enough time reading the bible although this question could have had better definition.

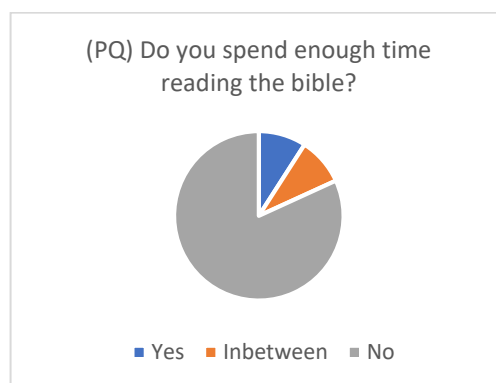


Figure 1 Bible Reading Time

My research aims to establish.

- Has reading Luke's Gospel developed their faith formation?
- Have they gained new knowledge of scriptures and can they use this theologically?
- Do young people engage in shorter forms of biblical narrative?
- Is this a way to read the bible?

Data Gathering Methods

I chose to conduct a mixed-method approach of empirical research with the group of 13 young people including questionnaires, focus groups with activities and informal interviews. I wanted to give them a voice and audience (Lundy 2013) to share their views whilst creating opportunities for them to feel they could be honest, sharing ideas with confidence and without fear. Davies (Nash 2011:28) and Lundy (2013) warn about making consultation tokenistic, and to avoid this I produced activities that the young people would benefit from spiritually whilst feeling their views were valued. Voluntary participation was key in the consultation, so occasionally young people opted not to fill in the questionnaires, this has created gaps in the research but hasn't affected the overall outcome. The study desired to offer an environment that was ethical, appropriate and allowed the possibility for young people to feel this was meaningful through participation, being heard and influence. Young people were given information verbally and in written form as to understand the process taking place.

Sampling and Selection of Participants

The sampling process would be classified as convenience and purposive approach by Dahlberg and McCaig (2010:127). This is because the group was selected from a group of 20 young people who access the youth provision already, the young people were given the choice of what method to engage with. It is purposive because they all have a level of Christian belief and will be taking part in activities that they would usually do in a youth club setting

The sample group had the following breakdown of ages and gender, this wasn't a planned approach, although Bell (2005:164) would argue there is value in this.

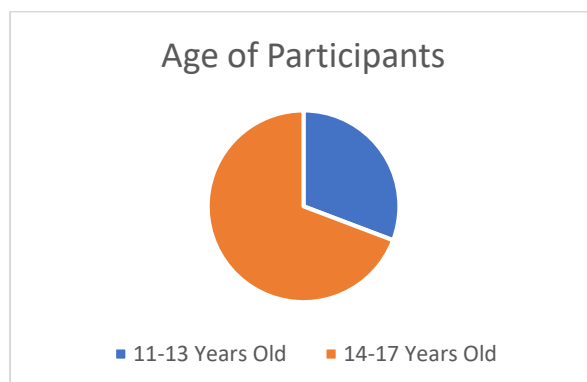


Figure 2 Participant Age

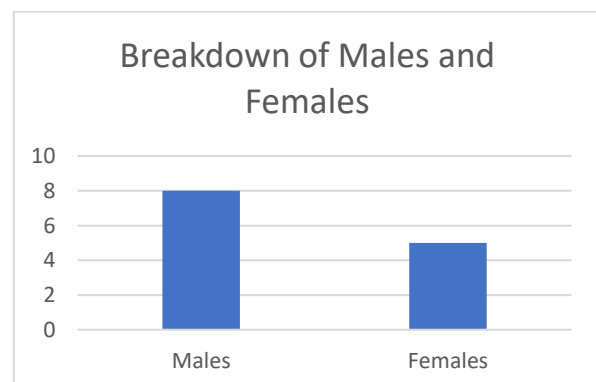


Figure 3 Male and Female

Validity and Reliability

To enable validity of results Lancaster et al. (2002:308) suggests “studies should have a well-defined set of aims and objectives to ensure methodological rigour and scientific validity”. They also warn about drawing conclusions from a small sample group, I am aware that this study is a small sample of young people, designed with participative and experiential methods which could question the validity of the research. However, this research is designed to offer findings and consideration representative of young people in this context and could be replicated on a wider scale in the future.

Ezzy (2002:62) argues about the importance of gathering and processing qualitative data straight away, this enabled me to reflect, validate, monitor, restructure and develop key themes during and between the sessions. I evaluated my own practice using Kolb’s reflective cycle (Thompson 2002:67). The danger of this approach could be a bias and subjective view point, to counteract this a number of activities were chosen to try and establish a pattern of results. Quantitative data from the questionnaires was collated and then tabulated into various forms offering visual comparisons and consideration of responses. The interviews and focus groups were recorded on a locked phone, transcribed and then stored on a password protected computer respecting confidentiality.

Three different ways of collecting quantitative data were used, the first was a paper questionnaire (PQ) which 10 young people returned. The second and third were discussion activities with both groups together (DA) and an activity where young people were given metal disks to place in a paper cup (CP), 13 young people took part in these focus groups. I have provided the activities and discussion questions for the focus group in the Appendix 1 for the empirical research activities.

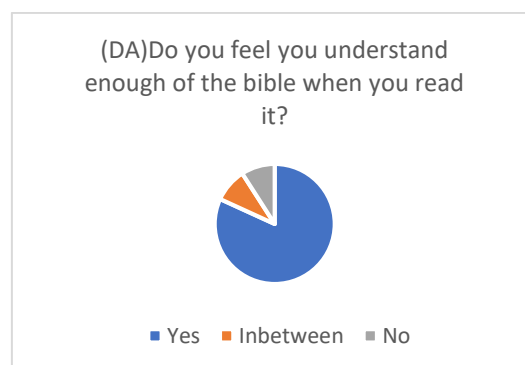


Figure 4 Understanding

Young people suggested that they had a basic knowledge about the bible, it's purpose and how to use it and understand it. Most young people have access to easy to read versions and see it as important.

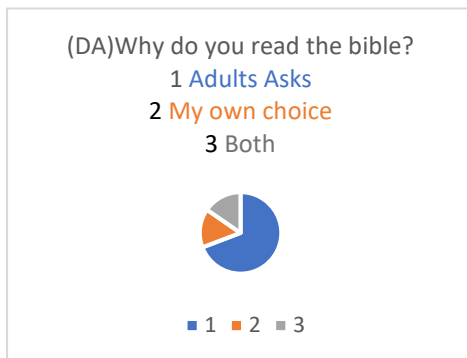


Figure 5 Why do you read the bible?

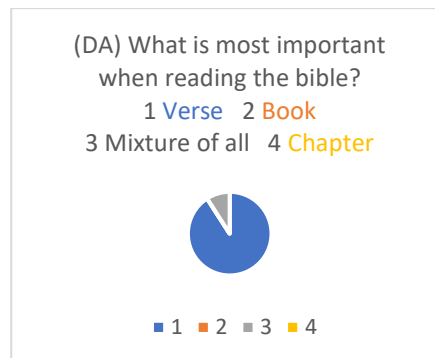


Figure 6 Importance

Motivation of young people was a challenge as many participants only read the bible in youth work settings or when initiated by an adult and highlighted limitations with church modelling and promoting the importance of bible reading. This study does not offer space to explore these but could be considered in the future about how youth work promotes bible reading and how adults can use influence well.

I wanted to avoid young people feeling pressured to take part in the survey and promote voluntary participation which meant only five young people read the whole of Luke. The short timescale and motivation were factors for participants in Group 2 not managing to read the small readings prior to the focus group sessions. It should be noted that none of the 11-13-year old's read Luke's gospel Briggs (2017) research offered insight into this age which could be considered giving validity to my research still. One female and four males read the whole of Luke's Gospel.

Focus groups explore and consider different viewpoints enabling participants to "collectively make sense of a phenomenon and construct meanings around it." (Bryman 2004:348). Richie and Lewis (2006:115) suggest focus groups and interviews need to have a structure in place that enables the discussion to be steered in a certain direction. With that in mind, I designed the focus groups with set activities, structured and semi structured questions, activities that demonstrated engagement. For some of the discussion it was necessary for Group 1 and 2

to meet separately to allow some control and reliability in the data collected but the young people were given the same set of questions.

Carr and Kemmis (Bradford and Cullen 2012:15) suggest “action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry” although not fully action research my study enabled the young people to think about the subject, formulate solutions and provided a platform for them to share ideas as Davies (Nash and Whitehead 2014:203) call ‘deep dialogue’. The dialogue was more comprehensive with Group 1 this could have been due to the size of the group or the maturity of the participants or group dynamics as identified by Tuckman (Bates 2019:174).



Figure 7 Tuckman's Groupwork Stages

The groups positioning in this model were notably different. Group 1 formed quicker, focussing on the task which may have been due to their investment outside the project or confidence of their own knowledge and experience. Group 1 had a far superior knowledge about the gospels, stories and biblical characters than the second group and demonstrated a deeper engagement with the reflective theological process and exploring meaning in a deeper way. The group described different aspects of theological themes and were able to demonstrate this theology with contextual and biblical stories. They had a willingness to explore the hidden meanings in all the narratives they read, often relating this to stories or characters in Luke. The young people were able to reflect on the character of Jesus and the difference he made with a passion and ownership of their faith.

Group 2 were able to spot metaphors in some of the stories but were often reluctant to engage in any deep dialogue but there was some theological reflection took place and evidence of engagement in the narrative. Group 1 shared stories or thinking quickly with a passion where Group 2 struggled to find meaning without the intervention of further questions from the facilitator. Within the 'creative' exercise Group 2 stayed within the boundaries of the stories

that they had learnt in childhood or read in the readings, the first groups pictures and explanations were more detailed with theological reflection included. Group 2's engagement was light as they couldn't relate Gospel stories to their own context although one young person could name the four gospel books and one young people listed a number of interesting facts about Jesus. One young person in the group had taken part in the original pilot study but hadn't developed any more theological knowledge or reflection since then.

Ward (2017:155) suggests that theological empirical research enables the practitioner to focus on the individuals he serves, this particular research should enable me to better understand how the young people theologically reflect, test their knowledge and establish if the methods used have developed their spirituality. The interviews presented an opportunity to talk with the young people about their journey of completing the full Luke gospel narrative, all the young people expressed that this the process was significant in their own faith journey. The interviews enabled the young people to process who they were, their role within the wider youth context and the next step of their own development.

The Lost Sheep Discussion

Using the model created by Briggs, I gave the young people the short narrative of the lost sheep story with questions to answer. Ten young people took part in the exercise, the young people had clear view points on the meaning of the story and the results suggested an understanding of the theological principle of grace. The young people engaged with the narrative and were able to spend a moment of theological reflection.

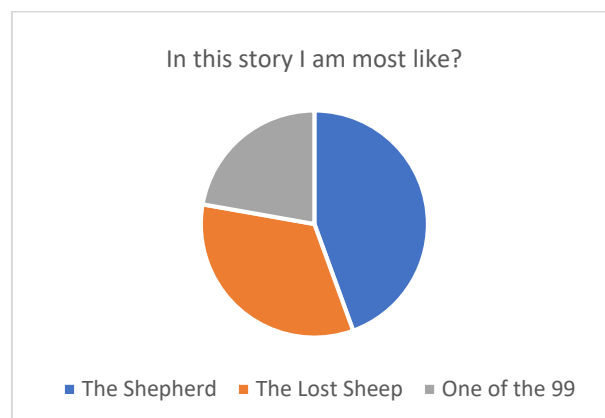


Figure 8 Lost Sheep

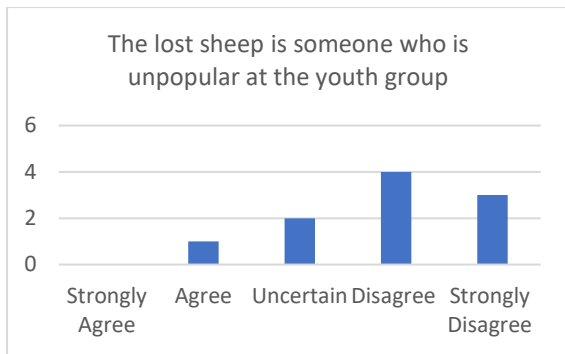


Figure 9 Unpopular

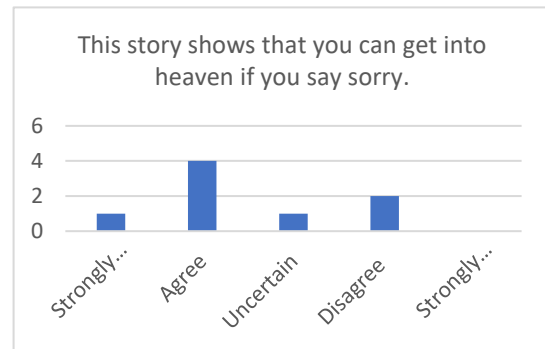


Figure 10 Heaven

Lectio Divina

Wilkinson (Silverman 2009:179) suggests the facilitator is key to success within a focus group as they can maintain a positive environment for participation, ensuring all voices are heard and discussion is not dominated. To enable greater participation and voice I used a number of activities that allow for a more creative and experiential approach. The final activity I chose to do was Lectio Divina based on 'the calming of the storm' and 'the boy in the temple'. This was a new activity to the group, the majority of young people engaged at different levels and all read the narrative at least once reflecting Briggs (2016:16) sense that to interpret the story a reader has to think with it. They were encouraged to treat this as a spiritual exercise and they respected each other, engaging in silence, with some young people requesting to go into an area that was quieter. Responses to this exercise were varied and interesting, one young person (Participant 5) suggested that this was "just reading" but engaged in dialogue about the story demonstrating he had formed opinions about the characters. It was difficult to judge engagement from some whose response was doodling which they took away, but some appeared to have had a spiritual encounter and dialogue with God. They responded with writing that explained their thoughts and prayers for other members of the group but in the discussion afterward young people were unsure if they had heard God's voice or their own thoughts.

Chapter 2 : Engaged in the Narrative.

Stories form part of our culture, it may be discussions round a table, bedtime stories, children and adults reading a book together, morals, lessons and parables. Our imagination enters and connects us to a world of discovery as the narrative sets the scene to a story, describing history, context, characters and gives the reader a plot to follow. The Luke 2:41-52 narrative describes how Jesus at an early age was allowed a voice to demonstrate the knowledge that he had gained at the temple. His whole ministry praxis reflected his deep understanding of the scriptures, his ability to contextualise theology into imaginative forms to the people around him, telling stories. Berryman (2008:8) describes times when children often 'astonish' adults with their deep theological thinking, he suggests that room should be made for young people to share their deep theological thoughts or as Bushnell described "gifts to the imagination" (Fowler 1987:83). This challenges me as a practitioner to provide an environment where knowledge is learnt but also demonstrated.

The biblical narrative has been written for us for hundreds of years, yet the stories become real and fresh and new to generations and individuals. Psalm 78 encourages "finding '*chidah*' a riddle, an enigmatic, perplexing saying or question" (Strong's 2420). Fowler (1987:83) suggests that we need to allow stories to intrigue our young people and avoid putting 'moral or moralistic meanings' that prevent exploration or encounter. Instead of giving young people the answers, we allow them to find the meaning and this study looked to see if young people could enter the ancient yet modern world and become part of the story. Zimmerman (2004:19) describes how the Old Testament stories were told experientially in the Israelite tradition of festivals, Sacks (2014) talks about how narrative in Jewish culture is used to remember but also pass on important lessons and traditions to the next generation.

Our culture uses traditions and significant dates to remember the narrative with storytelling and experiential methods, Maundy Thursday, Bonfire night and Christian festivals are celebrated widely. This was demonstrated in the nation's remembrance of 100 years since the First World War ended, the poppy provides a symbolic reminder to the nation combined with the recitation of John Mcrae's (1915) 'In Flanders Field' poem (British Legion). The digital age has meant that young people have started to follow other people's stories using social media, where young people have used books in the past, they opt to follow the storyline of their favourite bloggers, vloggers and youtubers engaging in the instant storyline. Youth for Christ (2019) suggests 'Generation Z' value authenticity, we need to encourage practitioners

to support young people in their quest of discovery, but more importantly help them explore God's narrative.

Knowledge

Green talks about how narratives shapes our knowledge base and belief in positive and negative ways citing Turner who says, "most of our experience, our knowledge and thinking is organised as stories" (Green 2011:27). Group 1 engaged the narrative of Luke's Gospel imaginatively deepening their knowledge of who Jesus was and the context he lived in and one young person described the Gospel as "basically the diary of Jesus" (FGD2:17). For many people keeping a diary is a personal account that helps them to process their thoughts, feelings and experiences. A connection between the bible and diary could suggest that by reading this account the young people felt a new connection to Jesus and an invitation to follow his story.

As the group engaged in broader Christological examination of the divinity and humanity of Christ, they responded with empathy to his struggles and constructed a theological view developed from His values, teaching, relationships and mission. They not only found answers in the narrative to who Jesus was, they started to apply their knowledge to the context they were in. One young person compared the boldness of Jesus and the other characters, discussing faith in the everyday part of life and how he struggles in this (FGD2:18). The group started to form 'practical theology', described as reflecting and studying 'those moments, context, situations and practices in which God's action intersects with our actions' (Root and Dean 2011:17)

"Everything he did it all has a purpose and was working to the end goal, the cross" –

Participant 8 (FGD2:19)

Hoggarth (2011:55) encourages an approach of reading the bible as a whole canonically, grasping the narratives but also seeing the wider meta-narrative the 'purpose and goal of God's plan'. Group 1 moved from an approach of scratching the surface with bible verses and analogical discussion, to digging deeper into experiencing the narrative of Luke's Gospel. Reading Luke both groups mentioned regularly that the parables were 'metaphors' that led to the wide story of Jesus on the cross. For Group 1 the foundations of reading Luke's gospel provided the knowledge and information to explore the narrative in a deeper way, relating the text to its place in God's wider story that offers "transformative interpretation" (Paul 2017:19).

Group 1 identified Jesus wrestled with who he was, faced challenges and wasn't universally popular. One young person mentioned that "*he was kind through it, if you knew you were going to die you wouldn't be as calm, I would think I'll leave that because it's not going to matter to me anyway*" -Participant 3 (FGD2:19). As young people talked about how they engaged in the plot, sub plot, learned characters and found deep meaning, Jesus became a 'living' role model and example. One young person talked about the conflict between Jesus and Pharisees as a '*cold war*' (FGD2:19), another talked about how Jesus was in a competitive environment where people were trying to come out on top (FGD2:19). It seems that young people were able to understand the context of the biblical narrative and apply it to some of the situations they find themselves in today. Bush (Yoder and Kaethler 2011:26) encourages us to remind young people that scriptures were written by humans and their experience of life, he suggests that this should give all people the confidence to feel that they can interpret scripture. The other characters came alive in the story also, one young person talked about how often they felt like Zacchaeus, "*he tried to see Jesus as best he could and then he just got picked out from the crowd*" Participant 4 (FGD2).

This immersion in the Luke narrative was a clear advantage over Group 2, who relied on past teaching and engagement to develop thoughts and opinions. The narratives they were given were not sufficient enough for them to use as a clear interpretive lens. In the interviews (AI:34-35) participants 1 and 2 (Group 1) talked about hearing some of the stories and described how reading in more detail brought a deeper level of understanding. It is evident that prior exposure to scripture has helped both groups in this process and it's difficult to measure how much exposure Group 1 have had previously to this study. Knowing these groups, I am aware that both have had similar life experiences and exposure to church but the transformation in knowledge of Group 1 since the pilot study suggests that in four weeks they have increased their knowledge significantly. The variables of prior knowledge and learning of scripture is one of the weaknesses of this study and utilising an existing group meant no measure was taken or administered to the findings. Future studies could develop the discussion of bible knowledge and apply this to findings to create stronger validity.

Interpretive lenses

Briggs (2017) talks about the hermeneutic circle, this is the process of finding meaning within a text and is affected by people's understanding of the context and own perspectives that can

be interchangeable which Taylor (2015:5) reflects can be affected through your own context. This circle reminded me of Thompsons (2001:21) PCS model and applying it into this situation. I can see young people's personal beliefs about the bible can be shaped by life experience and family upbringing values, the cultural experiences and customs and also the structural influences shape contextual theology.

Brueggeman (2011:11) talks about the rule of faith including creeds, doctrine and Trinitarian viewpoints having an effect on how the bible is interpreted in protestant church life. The study is focussed on young people who have been brought up in a 'new church' without traditional forms of Denominational liturgy and structures. When asked, young people identified that little time was spent reading the bible at home (FGD4), this supported my original evidence from my pilot study where only one participant in my original pilot study (PS8) stated that they read the bible at home with parents. They have recently joined the church from a traditional denominational church background that celebrates the use of liturgy and the lectionary as a yearly pattern. It would be interesting to explore what effect a more traditional model of church has on young people's engagement and interpretation of biblical narrative. Nash (2007:5) describes four theological influences that shape our theology 'biblical and applied' (above) 'denominational' (between), 'reflection' (among) and 'contextual' (below). The non-liturgical expression of church that the young people are a part of, their lack of deep meaningful biblical engagement would suggest that they are weak on the denominational and biblical influences of their theology. This has an effect on their ability to theologically reflect about the context they are in and could mean that their views are shaped by the opinions of others or their own reflection of societal values, morals and beliefs.

Group 2 when presented with a narrative text and dialogical approaches were unable to draw on a deep knowledge base to produce new reflective insight, developed with reason and critique. Their experience of church is of an entertainment approach to facilitation where a behaviourist style of learning is modelled. Briggs (2017:70) argues that young people often don't engage in biblical narrative because they expect adult intervention. Perhaps this is stronger when the whole church models a banking approach described by Freire (Smith 1994:155). In my original pilot study; a key outcome was the young people suggested a way of engaging in the bible was through an adult mentor. It seems a shame that one participant in Group 2 was able to quote some interesting facts about Jesus but not given the opportunity to turn this into knowledge and deeper engagement. Instead of forming his own views, he asked me what I thought (FGD5:31).

Fowler (1987:82) suggests that faith formation plays a big part in the interpretation of scripture and that people bring different levels of understanding to a group. We need to find ways of offering safe places for our young people to share thoughts, opinion and questions from their level without fear of ridicule but being able to support and teach one another.

Philosophical interpretation

The impact of social science has and will have a significant effect on the lenses that young people interpret scripture, sin and morality where the bible is no longer a guide for lifestyles in an increasing post modernistic pluralistic society. The structural influence of religious education can no longer be deemed of Christian nature where historically the story of creation and sin was told, young people are exposed to philosophical world views that present a greater degree of tolerance. Feminist theologian Elaine Graham (2011:3) says people should be totally immersed in the culture they belong, understand the challenges and from there practical theology can be developed, she suggests a model shaped by being 'among' and 'below', finding meaning through the context and reflection, moving away from a theology of rescue, to promoting salvation as achieving happiness and flourishing that rethinks traditions. Bush (Yoder and Kaethler 2011:24) suggests that just reflecting on postmodern culture can negate the concept that truth is timeless and is just relative to particular context. He suggests this can lead to the bible meaning whatever people want it to. It is evident that as Disbrey (2007:29) suggests the New Testament promotes to young people a sense of flourishing with virtues like fruitfulness and positive character rather than a list of rules. Asking young people to read seemed a formal approach however this process didn't have vast amounts of formal education, Jeff's and Smith (1996:61) state that informal educational benefits from 'being around' and taking part in the activities provided opportunities for a transactional learning environment between myself and the young people. I would have liked to explore the effect of young people sharing information in the context of the group and how this shaped the theological view of Group 2.

My findings are based on young people having the opportunity to explore meaning and develop their own viewpoint in discussion groups where they were able to develop deep theological understanding around the values promoted in the narrative. I recognise that Hart (1997) would consider this adult-led participation and it could have been developed so the young people set agendas and chose discussion themes. As it stood this study didn't dig deeply to debate some of the view's society has around sexuality, relationships and lifestyle and a weakness in using the narrative is young people might see the values represented as

not relevant for today or leave the interpretation of the story in the context that it is found. I believe youth workers need to make a professional judgement about their role of facilitating participation, this can only be determined through assessment of the group and the faith formation of the young people present. Empowering people to take more responsibility should be a step by step process that allows young people to have dialogue with the group, have their voice heard and respected but also good positive empowering direction from the facilitator.

Voice for the Marginalised

Hershberger (Yoder and Kaethler 2011:68) suggests that we need to see the biblical meta-narrative through a Christocentric hermeneutic, the young people described how Jesus' engagement was full of grace and virtue for sinners and the marginalised. Root and Dean (2011:63-75) suggest that young people who are immersed in the culture but are strong in their faith can be proclaimers of hope. I noticed this in one young person's theological reflection on poverty, and how he felt the church needed to act to address the needs of the local community and the world. It seems that he understood the theory of reaching out to the lost but his immersion in the scriptures meant that this led to a formational moment of wanting to intervene and activate his life. This would support Green's idea that for scripture to be transformative it must "transform the reader rather than the other way round" (2011:127).

Divine interpretation.

Brueggemann (2009:28) invites readers to read the scriptures as an art and let the Holy Spirit help bring transformational interpretation in a modernistic society. He encourages the interpreter to read the scripture, critically see the struggles of the context and leave knowing that God can bring about a change, restoration, righteousness, truth and life. Aristotle (Fowler 1987:15) described two types of knowledge, *Thoreia* - the understanding of the process and theories and *Poeisis* – a process that is 'shaped' and develop and nurtured into being. In the case of the young people they started to form and a deeper understanding of the theory and started to form their faith view.

Taylor (2015:5) suggests putting yourself in the character of the stories you are reading, Oatley (Briggs2017:47) argues that better reflections come if young people can draw on past knowledge and are immersed in the story line. In the Lost Son exercise (FGD1:11) one young

person from Group 2 saw God's heart of grace and forgiveness in the father and another felt the disappointment and injustice of the Son who had served his father faithfully. Briggs argues that young people read the narrative in two different forms, "language and association based" (2017:48). Group 1 expanded beyond these answers, one young person described the story as *"It kind of links in with Jesus, because Jesus always forgives our sins even if we make mistakes, he was saying what was going to happen"* (FGD1:12) another talked about being the 'lost son' *"often you go down different paths, but you will always be forgiven no matter what you do"* (ibid). This reflection was more than language based, it was formed from a theological lens that understand the wider meta-narrative Jesus used these micro-narratives, to remind people of the meta-narrative of God's salvation message. It seems interesting the young people have gathered information or bible stories that they have heard and begin to process them a little bit deeper. The symbolic nature of being fruitful and planted suggests that God has a bigger story for the young people to step into and understanding the history, the meta-narrative can help young people create a philosophy that moves from being rescued to living a life of abundance and a formed faith.

Chapter 3: Faith Formation

Jesus presented a theological perspective for faith formation in Luke 8:11-15, He talked about a farmer sowing seed and the environment that the seed fell. A challenge to youth work is making sure that we have a strategy, focus and environment for the spiritual seed we sow to grow faith in young people's lives. Failure to prepare, nurture and maintain the ground means young people can't grow deep roots and have shallow faith. Formation is explored through in the riverbank as a metaphor in Psalm 1 as a description of the philosophy our youthwork practice should aspire to. Youth workers practice, organisational culture, programmes and environment should be conducive for spiritual growth, nurture and faith formation. Jeremiah uses the metaphor of strong roots as demonstrating a generational effect which should inspire youth workers to look further than formative years to provide a foundation that supports a fruitful transition into adulthood and lifelong inheritance. Henry and Winter (1995:389) explains this metaphor is also related to the word of God (Luke 8:11) and it is this that I want to explore the effect that study of the bible has on faith formation.

Faith Formation

Fowler (1987:96) presents a process of faith formation that is allied with other development theories, it helps explain how the young people develop their thinking, not only about the Christian faith but also other faiths, values and their own beliefs. Erickson's Life Development Theory and Piaget's (Sudbury 2015:124-132) writings on early teenage years explain how beliefs and worldviews are shaped and how teenagers question personal values, morals, virtues and philosophical belief. Crawford and Walker (2003:25-28) cite (Erikson 1995 and Steinberg 1993) suggesting adolescents go through a stage of questioning roles, identity and values often moving away from views that are held by society and parents. This would support the sense of Folmsbee (2007:41) who argues youth work that just transfers information and doesn't nurture spiritual growth leads to static faith. This is a key time when youth work can intervene to impart knowledge and experience that can support young people to shape and explore their opinions.

Many studies have been done on adolescent development as well as models of faith formation, for example Fowler would refer to the mythical literal, imperial self, and the synthetic conventional faith, institutional stage (1987:96). Westerhoff (cited in Nash and Whitehead 2014:147) describes the adolescent stage as a time of searching and risky behaviour whilst these have truth and value Nouwen critiques models of faith formation suggesting they represent an impossible ideal of reaching a summit whereas he believed spiritual formation is often “horizontal movements that produce spiritual wholeness” (2011:132). This idea would be supported within this study by young people identifying their faith moving up and down scales and it being a spiritual journey rather than a process (Whitehead, *ibid*). I like this thought as it reminds me that sometimes journeys are not always straightforward and at times involve detours.

Parents and Growth

Barna’s (2019) research highlighted the importance of parents for the spiritual formation of Gen Z, followed by the church and schools and the report suggested more joined-up approaches between the three groups. Perhaps a reason for the young people in Group 1 engaging more is that their parents have a higher value of the bible and its importance to their life. When surveyed both groups expressed the view that parents were not involved in promoting bible reading regularly at home. It seems that parents are content for ‘church’ to be the major educator and influence with exploration and faith development and that young people need to discover their own faith. Many of our parents are part of generations who have seen the investment churches have made in youth work, to provide educational, social activities in church settings dating back to 1960’s where organisations like Youth for Christ gathered momentum. Ward (1996:183-84) argues that parents see the youth club as a place their child can be educated and a safe place they can experiment and take risks. Reflecting further about this, I believe that some parents feel unsure of how to approach educating and communicating with their teen and see the ‘church youth group’ as an opportunity to hand the responsibility to the youth worker.

Observations of the young people in my study suggests some young people are reaching a point where they will have to make a concrete decision about their faith, the Prodigal Son narrative was poignant as a participant (1:12) said “*often you go down different paths, but you will always be forgiven no matter what you do*” another compared the Prodigal Son directly to himself- “*I’m on the edge just mucking about*” participant (10:12). From an observation of the

two groups, Group 1 were really engaged and developed the themes and came across passionate about their faith, whereas members of Group 2 lacked passion, were disengaged and were reluctant to share their views. Participant 1 and 8, both were really serious about the importance of bible study and when asked at interview (AI:32) if they would recommend young people reading Luke's gospel cited motivation and commitment as being a key barrier that could prevent young people taking part.

Let me Entertain You

I believe that much of the work with this group is sowing seeds that are hitting hard ground or are not able to be rooted with any depth. For one participant who is capable of theological discussion, the current entertainment style of curriculum is not relevant for his age, intellect or learning style. Davis (Nash 2014:199) encourages youth work that is wisdom seeking, inhabitation and discovery of scripture that suggests the move away from Christian youth work as entertainment. Dean suggests attending and participation is not enough to develop deep faith and creates the idea within young people that Christianity is for "those with lesser intellects" (Dean 2004:166). The age of some of the disconnected young people would mean that the appeal of just attending may not be enough to keep them in the church long term.

Root (2017:30) also argues programmes are often more centred around attendance than transcendence, we put value on keeping the young people entertained and give little thought about how we develop a place where knowledge and meaning are found. Faith formation with in these settings can be measured on attendance and expression in worship on a Sunday morning which is based on observable assessment that does not offer a true reflection of the young person's engagement in a faith filled life enriched through prayer, bible and relationship. We need to be able to measure the effectiveness of our programmes firstly by the spiritual fruit and formation they produce but also young people's ability to form rational, knowledgeable and informed thoughts. Spiritual formation should encourage self-reflection and allowing the young people to reflect on who I am and who do I want to become.

Development theory identifies that adolescence is a time when struggles with identity, morality and beliefs are questioned. Our aim should enable young people to develop a greater meaning and understanding of transcendence, helping guide young people through the 'Moratorium' crisis to 'identity achievement' Marcia (Coleman and Hendry 1999:63). One young person was particularly challenged about his lifestyle and how he presented himself to his peers, reading the scripture had challenged him to think about how he identifies as a

Christian to his friends outside of a Sunday evening youth night, reading the Jesus narrative was a testimony to him.

Contemplation

Nouwen suggests time in contemplation and spiritual disciplines such as Lectio Divina are key for spiritual formation, they “remind us that we are beloved” (Nouwen 2011:81), Responding to Lectio Divina activity, young people reflected and identified fears, worries and hopes, describing a deeper sense and knowledge, through engagement in the narrative of Jesus calming the storm. They theologically reflected on him being around to calm their storms of life. This was an interesting development in the study as the young people hadn’t engaged in reading all of Luke’s gospel, claiming that they didn’t really like reading. This indicated that for some young people, engaging for a length of time with large chunks of narrative, enabled a deeper reflection but more importantly a direct dialogue with God. Some of the young people just didn’t engage, one participant claimed that lectio Divina was “just reading”, another young person was unsure how to distinguish between his own voice and God’s. This process allowed the young people to take part in spiritual reading in a moment of contemplation.

The whole group is part of a non-book culture who are a part of the digital age that uses technology, Carr (2010:261) argues that the internet “reroutes our vital paths and diminishes our capacity for contemplation”. YFC state “Gen Z are known for highly valuing the trait for authenticity” (2019:36) yet teens through technology invite a world that has so many voices, instant information, fake news, secular world views and philosophy that truth can become confusion.

Shepherd (2016:79) urges faith communities to allow young people to experience a God that is real, allow young people to question their faith and provide a context that helps transcendence make sense. One young person was able to see the beauty of the narrative, the cleverness of the hidden plots and treasures as he read through Luke, he described it as finding the ‘*Easter eggs in a film*’ (hidden message or inside joke placed within films). I believe by reading Luke’s gospel he was able to go deeper into the story, he discovered and realised the hidden plot and clues of God’s meta-narrative. Fowler (1987:43) talks about the importance of the ‘*Logos*’ and how it brings about the direction and formation of faith. The Logos that formed the world can have an influence in forming the young people in the now, bringing instruction and true freedom to those we serve in a youth work context.

The Encounter

Fowler (1981:153) highlights that adolescents go through three formation stages ending at 'synthetic conventional faith' he outlines that at this stage adolescents are searching for a God who knows, accepts and confirms the self deeply". This process starts to test and then shape a strong value and belief system. Dean (2004:245) encourages youth workers to immerse young people in the person of Jesus, the young people highlighted the incarnate nature of Jesus, discovered a new sense of encounter that seemed to be more transformational than just theological interpretation. Participant 1 (1:33) talked about a "*lifting feeling of grace and forgiveness*" and "*having an encounter with faith*" after reading the narrative Participant 4 (4:19) stated "*my faith has been boosted a little bit whilst reading some of it, there has been bits that are prophecies for people that are sort of linked to the story*" all the young people who read the Gospel implied that the process was a spiritual journey they had.

Root (2017:184) explores the concept of 'hypostasis' a union with Christ, suggesting that through kenosis (emptying), we go through a process called theosis (transformation) having encounters and becoming 'little Christs'. I like the concept that as the young people read they engaged with spirituality and the Godhead, beginning a process of transformation. The young people were committed to sacrificially reading the bible and I believe this commitment brought them deeper into the presence of Jesus, in the same way that prayer, worship and communion with other believers draws Jesus closer. The reading of the scriptures enabled them to encounter Jesus in a new way that led to a greater level of faith development and a life transforming encounter.

Conclusion

My personal faith development was influenced by an upbringing in a Christian home, a traditional Methodist church background and attending a Catholic school. This has helped me recognise what an important role belonging to a community of faith has in the spiritual, social, physical, moral and intellectual development of young people.

Part of the curriculum for secondary school was to read the whole of Mark's gospel, at the time this was a real challenge but as I look back on that experience I feel that it helped shape the way I view and understand the bible. Having personally read the bible a number of times I feel this has enabled me to draw closer to God, understand Him better but also establish firm foundations in my own spiritual journey. This has ignited a passion to read the bible not just to gain knowledge or out of duty but to be able to reflect theologically and apply it contextually.

A key influence and inspiration in my choice of dissertation was a lecture I attended by Melody Briggs, she presented her research and findings on young people engaging in biblical narrative. I wanted to investigate further her findings and see if this translated to the young people in my unique faith context. When I began this research, I wanted to explore and find opportunities to understand how young people engage with biblical narrative and how this affects their faith development. I wanted to discover ways young people can participate in the bible as part of their faith discipline enabling them to immerse and engage in the narrative and not just scripture. With all of the research and findings there are gaps that require further consideration to widen contextualisation of this study and improve validity, but I have managed to explore a situation and discover ideas, thoughts and possibilities for this group, church and youth provision. In the findings around faith formation and biblical narrative has come a greater appreciation of the ability of young people to engage with the bible but also the deep need for workers to offer and encourage this.

Pause

Through the research, I discovered by reading Luke's Gospel the young people's faith has been challenged, grown and transformed. Immersion in the Luke narrative was a significant factor and the young people had moments of transcendence where God had spoken to them through the journey. Through taking time to pause, reflect and contemplate the young people in both groups benefited from reading beyond a selection of verses and were able to start the

process of reflection. This was seen for example in both groups as they read the Calming of the Storm and spent time in contextual theological reflection. The comments and feedback from the young people around this signify a clear need for youth workers to consider how we approach the scriptures offering moments and silent opportunities for significant personal discoveries. To engage young people not only in practices that we may be comfortable in but allowing them space and fresh ways of taking moments and times to connect with God.

The process has enabled the young people to interpret scriptures and find meaning. I strongly believe that supporting young people to read the bible as a narrative at a younger age and revisiting this in early adulthood is really important in faith development. From the young people the idea around adults helping them in bible studies needs to be explored further and to consider ways as professionals we can create opportunities to support parents, guardians and wider family to engage in the bible including training, mentoring and developing family patterns. This should be done in this exploring manner that recognises the wisdom and understanding that young people do possess and allows intergenerational sharing and communion.

I'm Not Reading It

Throughout the study there has been an ongoing conversation of young people not reading and the increase in a non-book culture. This has been highlighted by recent publications by Youth for Christ (ibid) and the General Synod (ibid). We need to consider how we authentically engage the ancient yet timeless biblical treasures to the digital culture. Nash and Whitehead (2014:24) suggest that learning is achieved through formal and informal contexts. We need to create a variety of learning environments that cater for multiple learning styles and thus enable young people to gather knowledge, use their imagination and be fully engaged in learning. Fleming's VARK model (Bates 2019:120) suggests that people have four different learning styles visual, auditory, reading and kinaesthetic. Whilst reading focused on one style, the various approaches used in the focus group consultation show that moving away from traditional behaviourists approaches can aid engagement and learning. Gough (2018:80) encourages youth workers to become facilitators, create a culture of conversation and use models like Edgars 'Cone of Learning' (Lee and Reeves 2007:47-56) that promote participation and deeper learning outcomes. We see this modelled throughout the biblical narrative in the Old Testament where God engaged in dialogue with Moses or the visual acts of the Prophets and Jesus would often use a small group discussion in his discipleship model.

Smith (1994:58) outlines the importance of creating an environment where people feel they can share their views, conversation should be more about being around than having a fixed agenda.

This study has helped me reflect on how reading the bible as a narrative has helped in the spiritual growth of the young people who took part. I would like to conclude with how the reading and studying the bible in a youth ministry context can support growth.

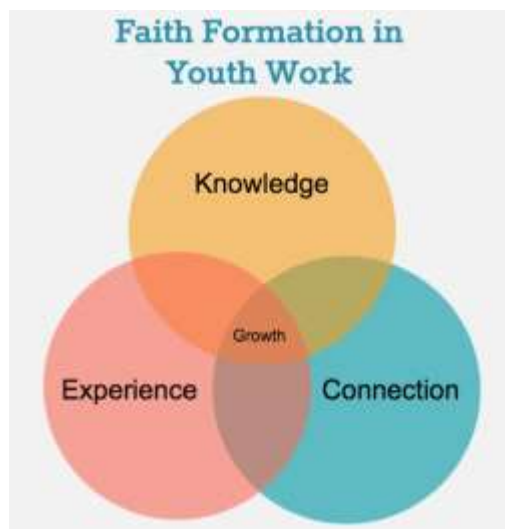


Figure 11 Hutson, N. (2019)

My findings have demonstrated that the young people gained knowledge throughout the process. Seeing the young people develop in their theological reflection has been possible because of the investment they made reading Luke's gospel. It is not the only way that they have gained knowledge, but it has built on some of the foundational work that has been done through their interaction with the faith community.

Connection

Shepherd (2016:120) argues that faith development cannot be achieved through knowledge alone and that Christians need to create supportive environments for young people where they can interact with their peers and also the wider community. I saw this in the study in the way that the young people interacted and shared a connection through the experience that they had, the young people created their own cultural rules for the group that promoted a good learning environment. Creating groups that stimulate a shared knowledge, can enable young

people who struggle to engage in the biblical narrative the opportunity to gain understanding through transaction with other group members and the wider faith community has a role to play in this sense of connectivity.

As young people theologically reflect they need to be able to test their knowledge and beliefs. Experience plays a big role in this process of testing, but this testing is done through the nurture and security of knowledge and supportive connections. If we want young people to become passionate followers of God, we need to give them the opportunity to experience spiritual disciplines of prayer, bible study and worship. Real spiritual growth can occur if we teach them the tools to develop a natural rhythm of life that offers encounters with the Divine whilst living in the now.

Seize the Moment

Spindle (2012:39) talks about *Kairos and Chronos*, youth workers only have a small window of time to help young people navigate their way through adolescence. We need to help them in the *Chronos* seasons to experience those *Kairos* moments when time stands still, and young people can experience a life enriching encounter with the author of the narrative.

We began with the idea from Bell (2012:58) that said

*“The bible tells a story.
A story that isn’t over.
A story that is still being told.
A story that we have a part to play in.*

This study has enabled me to think again about the story, to join in it once more and to see young people considering their character within this great narrative. The story is still being told and it is too good to be kept on a shelf.

Word Count 10919.

Appendix 1



Stories from Luke

Selected by Stories from Luke

The Boy Jesus in the Temple

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

Calming of the Storm

Parable of the Sower

Feeding of the five thousand

Trust in God

The Lost Coin

Lost Son

Jesus and Zaccheus

The Lost Sheep

Reading Day 1

The Boy Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2: 41-52)

⁴¹ Every year the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. ⁴² When Jesus was twelve years old, they went to the festival as usual. ⁴³ When the festival was over, they started back home, but the boy Jesus stayed in Jerusalem. His parents did not know this; ⁴⁴ they thought that he was with the group, so they travelled a whole day and then started looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ They did not find him, so they went back to Jerusalem looking for him. ⁴⁶ On the third day they found him in the Temple, sitting with the Jewish teachers, listening to them and asking questions. ⁴⁷ All who heard him were amazed at his intelligent answers. ⁴⁸ His parents were astonished when they saw him, and his mother said to him, “Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been terribly worried trying to find you.”

⁴⁹ He answered them, “Why did you have to look for me? Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?” ⁵⁰ But they did not understand his answer.

⁵¹ So Jesus went back with them to Nazareth, where he was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² Jesus grew both in body and in wisdom, gaining favor with God and people.

Jesus Calls the First Disciples (Luke 5: 1-11)

5 One day Jesus was standing on the shore of Lake Gennesaret while the people pushed their way up to him to listen to the word of God. ² He saw two boats pulled up on the beach; the fishermen had left them and were washing the nets. ³ Jesus got into one of the boats—it belonged to Simon—and asked him to push off a little from the shore. Jesus sat in the boat and taught the crowd.

⁴ When he finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Push the boat out further to the deep water, and you and your partners let down your nets for a catch.”

⁵ “Master,” Simon answered, “we worked hard all night long and caught nothing. But if you say so, I will let down the nets.” ⁶ They let them down and caught such a large number of fish that the nets were about to break. ⁷ So they motioned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats so full of fish that the boats were about to sink. ⁸ When Simon Peter saw what had happened, he fell on his knees before Jesus and said, “Go away from me, Lord! I am a sinful man!”

⁹ He and the others with him were all amazed at the large number of fish they had caught. ¹⁰ The same was true of Simon's partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Jesus said to Simon, “Don't be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”

¹¹ They pulled the boats up on the beach, left everything, and followed Jesus.

Reading Day 2

Jesus Calms a Storm (Luke 8: 22-25)

²²One day Jesus got into a boat with his disciples and said to them, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So they started out. ²³As they were sailing, Jesus fell asleep. Suddenly a strong wind blew down on the lake, and the boat began to fill with water, so that they were all in great danger. ²⁴The disciples went to Jesus and woke him up, saying, “Master, Master! We are about to die!”

Jesus got up and gave an order to the wind and to the stormy water; they quieted down, and there was a great calm. ²⁵Then he said to the disciples, “Where is your faith?”

But they were amazed and afraid, and said to one another, “Who is this man? He gives orders to the winds and waves, and they obey him!”

The Parable of the Sower (Luke 8: 4-15)

⁴People kept coming to Jesus from one town after another; and when a great crowd gathered, Jesus told this parable:

⁵“Once there was a man who went out to sow grain. As he scattered the seed in the field, some of it fell along the path, where it was stepped on, and the birds ate it up. ⁶Some of it fell on rocky ground, and when the plants sprouted, they dried up because the soil had no moisture. ⁷Some of the seed fell among thorn bushes, which grew up with the plants and choked them. ⁸And some seeds fell in good soil; the plants grew and bore grain, one hundred grains each.”

And Jesus concluded, “Listen, then, if you have ears!”

The Purpose of the Parables

⁹His disciples asked Jesus what this parable meant, ¹⁰and he answered, “The knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom of God has been given to you, but to the rest it comes by means of parables, so that they may look but not see, and listen but not understand.

Jesus Explains the Parable of the Sower

¹¹“This is what the parable means: the seed is the word of God. ¹²The seeds that fell along the path stand for those who hear; but the Devil comes and takes the message away from their hearts in order to keep them from believing and being saved. ¹³The seeds that fell on rocky ground stand for those who hear the message and receive it gladly. But it does not sink deep into them; they believe only for a while but when the time of testing comes, they fall away. ¹⁴The seeds that fell among thorn bushes stand for those who hear; but the worries and

riches and pleasures of this life crowd in and choke them, and their fruit never ripens. ¹⁵The seeds that fell in good soil stand for those who hear the message and retain it in a good and obedient heart, and they persist until they bear fruit.

Reading Day 3

Jesus Feeds Five Thousand (Luke 9: 10-17)

¹⁰The apostles came back and told Jesus everything they had done. He took them with him, and they went off by themselves to a town named Bethsaida. ¹¹When the crowds heard about it, they followed him. He welcomed them, spoke to them about the Kingdom of God, and healed those who needed it.

¹²When the sun was beginning to set, the twelve disciples came to him and said, “Send the people away so that they can go to the villages and farms around here and find food and lodging, because this is a lonely place.”

¹³But Jesus said to them, “You yourselves give them something to eat.”

They answered, “All we have are five loaves and two fish. Do you want us to go and buy food for this whole crowd?” ¹⁴(There were about five thousand men there.)

Jesus said to his disciples, “Make the people sit down in groups of about fifty each.”

¹⁵After the disciples had done so, ¹⁶Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up to heaven, thanked God for them, broke them, and gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people. ¹⁷They all ate and had enough, and the disciples took up twelve baskets of what was left over.

Trust in God (Luke 12: 22-31)

²²Then Jesus said to the disciples, “And so I tell you not to worry about the food you need to stay alive or about the clothes you need for your body. ²³Life is much more important than food, and the body much more important than clothes. ²⁴Look at the crows: they don't plant seeds or gather a harvest; they don't have storage rooms or barns; God feeds them! You are worth so much more than birds! ²⁵Can any of you live a bit longer^a by worrying about it? ²⁶If you can't manage even such a small thing, why worry about the other things? ²⁷Look how the wild flowers grow: they don't work or make clothes for themselves. But I tell you that not even King Solomon with all his wealth had clothes as beautiful as one of these flowers. ²⁸It is God who clothes the wild grass—grass that is here today and gone tomorrow, burned up in the oven. Won't he be all the more sure to clothe you? What little faith you have!

²⁹“So don't be all upset, always concerned about what you will eat and drink. ³⁰(For the pagans of this world are always concerned about all these things.) Your Father knows that you need these things. ³¹Instead, be concerned with his Kingdom, and he will provide you with these things.

Reading Day 4

The Lost Coin (Luke 15: 8-10)

⁸“Or suppose a woman who has ten silver coins loses one of them—what does she do? She lights a lamp, sweeps her house, and looks carefully everywhere until she finds it. ⁹When she finds it, she calls her friends and

neighbors together, and says to them, 'I am so happy I found the coin I lost. Let us celebrate!' ¹⁰In the same way, I tell you, the angels of God rejoice over one sinner who repents."

The Lost Son

¹¹Jesus went on to say, "There was once a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to him, 'Father, give me my share of the property now.' So, the man divided his property between his two sons. ¹³After a few days the younger son sold his part of the property and left home with the money. He went to a country far away, where he wasted his money in reckless living. ¹⁴He spent everything he had. Then a severe famine spread over that country, and he was left without a thing. ¹⁵So he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him out to his farm to take care of the pigs. ¹⁶He wished he could fill himself with the bean pods the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything to eat. ¹⁷At last he came to his senses and said, 'All my father's hired workers have more than they can eat, and here I am about to starve! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against God and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer fit to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired workers.'" ²⁰So he got up and started back to his father.

"He was still a long way from home when his father saw him; his heart was filled with pity, and he ran, threw his arms around his son, and kissed him. ²¹'Father,' the son said, 'I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.' ²²But the father called to his servants. 'Hurry!' he said. 'Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. ²³Then go and get the prize calf and kill it, and let us celebrate with a feast! ²⁴For this son of mine was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.' And so the feasting began.

²⁵"In the meantime the older son was out in the field. On his way back, when he came close to the house, he heard the music and dancing. ²⁶So he called one of the servants and asked him, 'What's going on?' ²⁷'Your brother has come back home,' the servant answered, 'and your father has killed the prize calf, because he got him back safe and sound.' ²⁸The older brother was so angry that he would not go into the house; so his father came out and begged him to come in. ²⁹But he spoke back to his father, 'Look, all these years I have worked for you like a slave, and I have never disobeyed your orders. What have you given me? Not even a goat for me to have a feast with my friends! ³⁰But this son of yours wasted all your property on prostitutes, and when he comes back home, you kill the prize calf for him!' ³¹'My son,' the father answered, 'you are always here with me, and everything I have is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and be happy, because your brother was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.'"

Reading Day 5

Jesus and Zacchaeus (Luke 19: 1-10)

Jesus went on into Jericho and was passing through. ²There was a chief tax collector there named Zacchaeus, who was rich. ³He was trying to see who Jesus was, but he was a little man and could not see Jesus because of the crowd. ⁴So he ran ahead of the crowd and climbed a sycamore tree to see Jesus, who was going to pass that way. ⁵When Jesus came to that place, he looked up and said to Zacchaeus, “Hurry down, Zacchaeus, because I must stay in your house today.”

⁶Zacchaeus hurried down and welcomed him with great joy. ⁷All the people who saw it started grumbling, “This man has gone as a guest to the home of a sinner!”

⁸Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Listen, sir! I will give half my belongings to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay back four times as much.”

⁹Jesus said to him, “Salvation has come to this house today, for this man, also, is a descendant of Abraham. ¹⁰The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

The Lost Sheep (Luke 15: 11-32)

One day when many tax collectors and other outcasts came to listen to Jesus, ²the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law started grumbling, “This man welcomes outcasts and even eats with them!” ³So Jesus told them this parable:

⁴“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them—what do you do? You leave the other ninety-nine sheep in the pasture and go looking for the one that got lost until you find it. ⁵When you find it, you are so happy that you put it on your shoulders ⁶and carry it back home. Then you call your friends and neighbors together and say to them, ‘I am so happy I found my lost sheep. Let us celebrate!’ ⁷In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to repent.

Lectio Divina

The Boy Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2: 41-52)

⁴¹ Every year the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. ⁴² When Jesus was twelve years old, they went to the festival as usual. ⁴³ When the festival was over, they started back home, but the boy Jesus stayed in Jerusalem. His parents did not know this; ⁴⁴ they thought that he was with the group, so they travelled a whole day and then started looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ They did not find him, so they went back to Jerusalem looking for him. ⁴⁶ On the third day they found him in the Temple, sitting with the Jewish teachers, listening to them and asking questions. ⁴⁷ All who heard him were amazed at his intelligent answers. ⁴⁸ His parents were astonished when they saw him, and his mother said to him, “Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been terribly worried trying to find you.”

⁴⁹ He answered them, “Why did you have to look for me? Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?” ⁵⁰ But they did not understand his answer.

⁵¹ So Jesus went back with them to Nazareth, where he was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² Jesus grew both in body and in wisdom, gaining favor with God and people.

Jesus Calms a Storm (Luke 8: 22-25)

²² One day Jesus got into a boat with his disciples and said to them, “Let us go across to the other side of the lake.” So, they started out. ²³ As they were sailing, Jesus fell asleep. Suddenly a strong wind blew down on the lake, and the boat began to fill with water, so that they were all in great danger. ²⁴ The disciples went to Jesus and woke him up, saying, “Master, Master! We are about to die!”

Jesus got up and gave an order to the wind and to the stormy water; they quieted down, and there was a great calm. ²⁵ Then he said to the disciples, “Where is your faith?”

But they were amazed and afraid, and said to one another, “Who is this man? He gives orders to the winds and waves, and they obey him!”

The Lost Sheep (Luke 15: 11-32)

15 One day when many tax collectors and other outcasts came to listen to Jesus, ² the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law started grumbling, “This man welcomes outcasts and even eats with them!” ³ So Jesus told them this parable:

⁴ “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them—what do you do? You leave the other ninety-nine sheep in the pasture and go looking for the one that got lost until you find it. ⁵ When you find it, you are so happy that you put it on your shoulders ⁶ and carry it back home. Then you call your friends and neighbors together and say to them, ‘I am so happy I found my lost sheep. Let us celebrate!’ ⁷ In the same way, I tell you,

there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to repent.

The Lost Sheep (Adapted from Briggs 2017)

In this story I am most like (Circle 1)

The Shepherd the Lost Sheep One of the ninety nine

Other Please state _____

This makes me think about my own life:

Strongly agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly disagree

The lost sheep is someone who is unpopular at the youth group:

Strongly agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly disagree

This story shows that you can get into heaven if you say sorry:

Strongly agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly disagree

If Jesus lived today he would tell this story differently:

Strongly agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly disagree

This story is about

A shepherd

A Lost person

How each person is special

How Jesus treats people who are not popular

Saying sorry

Other: -

What's This Story All About?

The Lost Son

¹¹ Jesus went on to say, “There was once a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to him, ‘Father, give me my share of the property now.’ So the man divided his property between his two sons. ¹³ After a few days the younger son sold his part of the property and left home with the money. He went to a country far away, where he wasted his money in reckless living. ¹⁴ He spent everything he had. Then a severe famine spread over that country, and he was left without a thing. ¹⁵ So he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him out to his farm to take care of the pigs. ¹⁶ He wished he could fill himself with the bean pods the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything to eat. ¹⁷ At last he came to his senses and said, ‘All my father’s hired workers have more than they can eat, and here I am about to starve! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father and say, “Father, I have sinned against God and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer fit to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired workers.”’ ²⁰ So he got up and started back to his father.

“He was still a long way from home when his father saw him; his heart was filled with pity, and he ran, threw his arms around his son, and kissed him. ²¹ ‘Father,’ the son said, ‘I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.’ ²² But the father called to his servants. ‘Hurry!’ he said. ‘Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. ²³ Then go and get the prize calf and kill it, and let us celebrate with a feast! ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.’ And so the feasting began.

²⁵ “In the meantime the older son was out in the field. On his way back, when he came close to the house, he heard the music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him, ‘What’s going on?’ ²⁷ ‘Your brother has come back home,’ the servant answered, ‘and your father has killed the prize calf, because he got him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ The older brother was so angry that he would not go into the house; so his father came out and begged him to come in. ²⁹ But he spoke back to his father, ‘Look, all these years I have worked for you like a slave, and I have never disobeyed your orders. What have you given me? Not even a goat for me to have a feast with my friends! ³⁰ But this son of yours wasted all your property on prostitutes, and when he comes back home, you kill the prize calf for him!’ ³¹ ‘My son,’ the father answered, ‘you are always here with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be happy, because your brother was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.’”

Group Work Discussion. (Adapted from Briggs 2017)

What is this story about?

Who do you most relate to

The Brother The Lost Son The Father

The Crowd of Friends The hired workers Other

What scene do you imagine the most?

What is the story about?

Discussion Questions.

What are the Gospels about?

Which Gospel Character do you most identify with?

What is the conflict in the story?

Has reading these scriptures changed your view of Jesus?

How have these readings related to me?

How has your faith been challenged by what you have read?

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this questionnaire for my research project.
Use the black pens provided and place in the envelope when completed.

- 1 **How old are you?**
11-13 Years 14-17 years
- 2 **Have you read the whole of a book of the bible before? Yes / No**
- 3 **On a scale of 1 to 10 how important is reading the bible?**
Not Very 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Very
- 4 **Do you spend enough time reading the bible? Yes / No**
- 5 **Do you feel you understand enough to read the bible Yes / No**

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Module Number YM6333	Module Name Dissertation	
Student Number S1613359	Student Name Neil Hutson	
Word Count	Assignment title ~ (include reference to which part is being submitted if there is more than one part to the assignment) <i>Dissertation Ethical Clearance</i>	
Name of CYM staff member receiving		Staff Signature
Date & Time when received by CYM		Notes

Plagiarism

Please read this note carefully. If you are still unclear whether or not some of your work has been plagiarised, please consult your Student Handbook or talk with your module tutor.

Plagiarism can take several forms:

- Using other people's ideas without acknowledging that the ideas are theirs
- Copying from other published or unpublished work without acknowledging the source
- Quoting from books, articles, law reports or any other writings without acknowledging that the words are being quoted.

Further, assessed work should be your own work and should not be produced jointly with any other students or individuals unless the instructions clearly specify this. Where collaboration is permitted, it should be made clear which part or parts of any jointly-produced work are shared.

Any course work submitted for assessment which is plagiarised, in whole or in part, may be subject to disciplinary action in accordance with the University's Student Disciplinary Procedure.

Candidates must ensure that course work submitted for assessment in fulfilment of course requirements is genuinely their own and is not plagiarised.

If you are clear, please sign the statement below.

I have read and understand the notes above and I confirm that the work submitted for assessment is my own work and has not been plagiarised in any way.

SignatureNeil
Hutson.....

Dissertation Ethical Clearance

You must submit your completed Ethical Clearance form for your intended Dissertation to the module coordinator at your Regional Centre at least 3 weeks before you plan to undertake any empirical research for your Dissertation.

Your Regional Centre will give the completed form to the CYM Ethics Officer at your Centre (usually Centre Director or Research Methods tutor). The CYM Ethics Officer will inform you of his/her decision and of any suggested amendments within two weeks of receipt of your form (during term time).

The CYM Ethics Officer has power to

- (a) require the student to re-submit the form with changes,**
- (b) reject the submission,**
- (c) clear the student to start data collection or**
- (d) refer the submission to Dr Sally Nash, Module Coordinator**

Approval must be received before students begin their empirical work.

This form, with signed approval, must be bound into your final Dissertation.

Section A

Student information

Name: Neil Hutson
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Regional Centre: Midland Centre for Youth and Mission.
Title of dissertation/PPE: "How young people engage with the bible through biblical narrative"

Section B

Initial declaration

This investigation will include formal study of children, young people or vulnerable adults?

Yes

This investigation will include formal study of adults?

No

If you have answered YES to either statements above, then it is presumed that you are completing an Empirical -based Dissertation. You must complete **Sections C, D E and F**.

You will also **MUST** include a copy of your **Consent Form and Information sheet for human subjects**.

If you have answered NO to BOTH statements above, then it is presumed that you are completing a Library-based Dissertation. You must go straight to **Section E** and obtained your tutor's signature only, then complete **Section F**.

Section C

Please answer the following questions, and give details if answering Yes (or if necessary to explain No):

<p>1 Does the study involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent?</p> <p>The study will be based on young people aged 11-16 years old who have regular contact with the Ashwood youth work and are able to communicate whether they want to participate.</p> <p>Time will be given to young people with additional learning needs such as Autistic Spectrum Disorders or dyslexia to process the information presented to them in verbal and non-verbal forms, enabling them to fully understand the expectations and purpose of the study and make a decision whether to participate.</p> <p>As good practice, we will require written consent from parents or legal guardians for all the young people to take part as well as from the young people themselves.</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>2 Will the study require access to groups or individuals because of their membership of a particular group, organisation, place of study or dwelling place? (e.g. particular youth group, school, community group)</p> <p>The study will be based on young people who regularly access the Thursday night open youth group and the Sunday night bible study group.</p> <p>The study will take part in the Ashwood Centre building which the young people regularly use or in other context that Ashwood Church young people meet.</p> <p>All young people will be given the option to volunteer to take part in the study or to opt out.</p> <p>If the consultation takes place on a youth club evening, we will offer activities as usual for young people who decide not to take part, turn up on the night, haven't gone through the consent process or parents have not given consent for them to participate.</p> <p>All consultation will be done by staff and volunteers who regularly take part in the youth work session.</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p>3 Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent at the time?</p> <p>Some observation of participants will take place during the study, this is something that we would typically do as youth workers</p>	<p>No</p>

	during a session and to highlight this would influence our findings or cause unnecessary concern for the young people.	
4	<p>Will the study involve discussion of sensitive topics not usually addressed in your placement work?</p> <p>The study will cover topics around reading and personal interests and will be presented in a format that is common for the young people to participate in. Careful support and help will be given to any young people who may struggle to read, write or express their views in group settings.</p>	No
5	<p>Could the study induce psychological stress, anxiety, or cause harm or negative consequences beyond the risks encounter in normal life?</p> <p>We will support anyone who finds any aspect of the session distressing, a member of the youth leadership team will be on hand and available to support and help young people experiencing difficulty.</p> <p>Support available will be explained at the start of the session and clear boundaries will be set around confidentiality in line with good safeguarding practice and policies.</p>	No
6	<p>Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses) be offered to participants?</p>	No

Section D

The investigation that you are about to begin is potentially harmful to participants. You are being judged on four issues:

Is your study valuable enough to ask other people to give up their time?

Have you considered that some people might not want to take part in your study, and how they will say no (the issue of informed consent)?

How can individuals leave the study if they wish to?

How are you going to store and use the information you have gained?

1. What do you hope to achieve through this study?

The study has the title of “**How young people engage with the bible through biblical narrative**”

Growing up in the Methodist church, I am grateful for the time my Sunday school teachers invested in my life and helped me interpret bible scriptures. I recognise that we need to develop practice that enables young people to move from being ‘spoon fed’ interpretations of the bible to a deeper understanding and engagement in theological application. I believe that the bible has a transformative message for young people and value the influence it has had on my life.

I am a married 43 year old youth worker with two teenage sons and have a passion for them and my other young people to grow in their knowledge of God. My context is a former mining town in Nottinghamshire and my church is evangelical in it’s approach and part of a network of churches that was formed through the house church movement in the late 70’s and early 80’s.

This study aims to explore how young people engage with the bible. Ian Paul (2017) suggests that good engagement is when people understand what is the writing, what does it mean and what does it say? I’m passionate about giving the young people who already read the bible, the skills to apply this into their context in a relevant way.

Authors like Gordon Fee and Douglas Stewart (2003) suggest that often bible study can become a dry, academic exercise for adults in a church. I want to try to understand how young people read the bible as a narrative, my pilot study identified that young people often read just bible verses and don’t always have the benefit of studying the full context of the verse. I want to see if young people can enjoy reading the bible for their own enjoyment, learning and spiritual development.

I have been a part of my placement church for over 20 years, my observations, pilot study and discussions suggest that the young people engage in the bible in different ways, some have limited knowledge of bible scriptures and how to use and interpret the bible. Other young people may have a grasp of some of the key bible stories and some relevant scriptures but are not sure about context or location of these scriptures or where books can be found in the bible. There are some of the young people in the group who have good bible knowledge but find it difficult to apply it to their context and theologically reflect. My pilot study suggested that young people understand the importance of the bible and engage with it through youth work, church, private study and occasionally through bible reading plans. Young people were able to identify key bible verses that were a comfort, inspiration and encouragement and suggested that this was important. The young people had a desire to have a deeper knowledge of the bible.

Our youth team goals are to see young people develop further their relationship with God and I have recently implemented Mike Breen's discipleship model of "Up, In and Out" (Breen 2012). I see encouraging the young people to engage in individually led personal and communal bible study as an important element of their spiritual formation.

My pilot study enabled me to understand how the young people in the local context engage with literature and the bible, how they source information, what they read and from this evidence, I wish to test the concept of young people engaging with the bible by reading the biblical narrative of Luke's Gospel.

My study will help me further identify key strategies for effective facilitation of bible studies and how to support young people to engage with the bible, what different approaches to informal learning could be beneficial and what things are barriers or opportunities to help young people grow in group and personal study. This will be discovered through the consultation with the young people as part of my study.

The young people in my pilot study research identified that adults, 1-1 mentoring, social media and the youth work environments help play a part in encouraging them to engage in bible reading. I want to explore if getting the young people to read a biblical narrative is beneficial, achievable and fruitful in the spiritual formation of young people in my context and whether through this they can develop an understanding of personal responsibility and desire for bible reading rather than feeling they need to have an adult to do this for them.

2. How will the study be carried out? (e.g. interviews, questionnaires, observation.

I will use a mixed methods approach in my research questionnaires interviews, focus groups and observation.

Questionnaire

The process will be to use a questionnaire to enable large amounts of quantitative data to be collected. Surveying a small group of young people will enable me to gather evidence of how young people engaged with the bible throughout the process. I will use structured questions to help me to collect quantitative data and help establish some qualitative data through scales such as from 1-10 did you feel you understood the bible. This consultation will be short, take no longer than 5 minutes at a time to complete and usually be part of the focus group process.

I want to create a questionnaire that helps the young people feel that they can express their view confidentially. This means that I will need to avoid any questions that could make the young people feel identifiable, for example I will only use age ranges such as 11-13 and 14-16 rather than specific ages. Young people will be given the same coloured pen and an envelope to put the questionnaires in. I will construct a post box for the surveys to be placed in.

Focus groups

I will run interactive focus groups over a number of weeks, these will include discussions using experiential methods this will be structured like a typical youth work session.

An example of an experiential method I may use is - young people could be encouraged to produce a picture, write a poem or other creative piece of work to describe a story or character from the narrative.

I have chosen focus groups as a method because sometimes being part of a group helps to spark off different ideas in young people. To maintain a supportive environment, they will be hosted by myself with other members of the Ashwood youth team. I will have clear expectations for the group and rules and ensure that all young people have the opportunity to speak.

To help gather the data I will record this session.

Interviews

I will interview up to 10 young people separately, the questions will be given to the young people one week prior to the meeting and the session will be recorded. I will use open ended questions that will explore their experiences of engaging with the bible, their behaviours of reading, perceptions of how young people engage with the bible, their own experiences and understanding.

A colleague will assist me in the interview to help observe the young people and enable best safeguarding practice is achieved. If a young person doesn't want to be recorded I will make notes on the session.

The interviews will include some introducing questions, probing questions, direct and indirect questioning and last up to 20 minutes.

Observation

The study will take place over six weeks, which will allow opportunity for myself to observe how some of the young people engage in the bible during our planned activities. Our regular Sunday night youth group engages in bible study discussion on a weekly basis and occasionally some of the young people may lead the session. I will use a participatory observation style to establish how it appears the young people are engaging and draw conclusions in a way that we would in a typical youth work session.

Anything noted in the observation will be recorded as 'a participant in a youth work session said'

3. How will you collect and store the data (e.g. recording, written notes)

I will make written notes, audio record and collect data on my computer. All data, questionnaires and forms will be stored on a password protected computer or device. All data collected on paper will be stored in a locked cupboard, where data can be kept confidential and secure.

When volunteers collect data this will need to be stored in the locked cupboard alongside my notes.

All information will be kept strictly confidential and the identity, privacy, anonymity of the participants and Ashwood Church will be ensured.

The data collection, storage and publication of research material will be retained in accordance with Gloucester University's policy on Academic Integrity and Ashwood Churches own data protection policy 2018 and staff handbook. This means, information will be stored in a locked cabinet that only I have access to or in password protected devices.

Young people will be assured that their confidentiality is maintained unless it puts them, myself or others at risk.

I will inform people that they can withdraw data collected up until the 1st of March 2019. I will inform participants that the data they give may be presented in my dissertation.

4. How many participants will be recruited, and by what criteria will they be selected?

All young people who attend Ashwood church youth activities in the 11-17 age range will have the opportunity to take part in the activities. The sampling method I will use is opportunity sampling.

I plan to recruit up to 12 young people in the age range of 11-17. Young people will be able to choose to voluntarily take part in survey, focus group and interview.

It is important to note that I have two sons who attend the youth group and may want to participate in the study. I am aware that this could present a conflict of interest but their contribution will be anonymous.

I will be make every effort to ensure that all young people can take part in the study and take into consideration how I can make my methods and environment as accessible as possible for participants.

5. Outline your plan for gaining informed consent

(a) initial approach

I will announce a week before about the study and briefly explain what is going to happen and ask if people may be interested in taking part.

If young people express an interest, they will be given an information sheet, parental and participant consent forms to take away and bring back (**see attachment 1**). I will also verbally explain what the study entails so they can make an informed choice about consent.

I will arrange a mutually convenient time to deliver the focus groups and interviews with the young people who are interested. I will make sure that I will put a poster up and remind the young people when the groups are taking place.

The young people will be able to choose which part of the process they would like to be involved with, for example the interview, questionnaire and the focus group. There will be no expectation that they have to take part in all the methods.

A selection of young people will read Luke's Gospel as a narrative and a selection will read extracts of the Luke's Gospel narrative.

(b) individual consent

I will make age appropriate consent forms and information sheets for the young people that are easy for young people to understand.

I will allow space and opportunity for young people to say no and explain that they have a right to choose to take part or not.

I will give opportunity for young people to say no to the research and explain that they will be still welcome to attend the normal youth work activities, so they don't feel excluded.

Young people will be informed that the group work will be recorded but will have the option for the interviews to be recorded or not.

(c) ability to withdraw

At the start of each session I will explain that young people are able to withdraw from the sessions at any time and also the process up until the 1st March 2019 I will inform them of people they can speak to if they find something upsetting during the sessions.

I will use age appropriate language in the consent forms for the young people that is easy for them to understand. I will also take time to answer questions and reaffirm the process verbally.

I will verbally explain to the young people about the project and what I would like to achieve.

Young people should not be expected to take part because they have been encouraged to do so by their youth worker, parents or peers.

Young people can withdraw data up until the 1st of March 2019.

(d) parental consent

Parents will be informed about the dissertation and their consent will be needed for the young person to take part. I will do this in the form of an information letter and consent form. I will also be available to answer any questions.

6. Do you foresee any potential adverse effects of the study?

I see this as a fairly low risk study, however careful planning and thought should be given to enable participants to feel that they have contributed.

Care should be taken for people with dyslexia, difficulty in reading or other learning barriers that if not supported correctly could lead to low self-esteem or a negative experience.

I need to support young people who make a contribution to feel safe and not fearful of critique or ridicule from other young people. I will do this of being aware of the group dynamics and challenging inappropriate behaviour.

I will not force any young people to read in a group session who doesn't want to and will make it clear that to take part in the process this isn't a necessary requirement. I will ask for volunteers to read but not choose people directly.

I will be sensitive in my approach and always ask if people understand the questions for example the interview questions.

We will make young people aware that pastoral support is available in the unlikely event that they have any adverse effects from this study.

7. Will confidentiality be maintained and if so how?

(a) Confidentiality of the individual?

Young people and parents will be given the option to suggest a name change or allow me to change their name or remain anonymous. I will not use the name of the church or the individuals in my writing of this study.

All names on the evidence such as questionnaires will be deleted after the evidence has been collected and analysed. This data will be stored in a locked cupboard when not in use.

(b) Confidentiality of the Agency?

The placement will not be named in the dissertation and the name of the church will be changed to safeguard confidentiality.

Section E

Supervisors

Supervisors are required to have personal experience of formally studying human subjects. The professional practice agency line-manager / gatekeeper (if appropriate) has a particular responsibility to ensure the well-being of the people involved in the study.

CYM Supervisor	Professional Practice Agency Line-manager /Gatekeeper (empirical-based dissertation only)
Name: Robin Smith	Name: Zoe Bell
Address: St John's School of Mission Chilwell Lane, Bramcote, Nottingham, NG9 3DS	Address: Ashwood Centre, Portland Street, Kirkby in Ashfield, Nottinghamshire, NG17 7AB
Tel: 0115 9683222	Tel: 07736317399
Email: robin.smith@stjohns-nottm.ac.uk	Email zoe@ashwoodchurch.org.uk
Signature: See Attachment 2	Signature: See Attachment 2

Section F

I agree to conduct this study in line with the ethical guidelines laid down in the National Youth Agency document 'Ethical Conduct in Youth Work', and the ethical expectations placed on me by the Practice Agency supervisor.

Signature of student



Date: 13/1/18

Student name:

DISSERTATION ETHICAL CLEARANCE HAS BEEN APPROVED / REJECTED
FOR AN EMPIRICAL / LIBRARY-BASED STUDY

COMMENTS:

Regional Centre Ethics Officer
Name:

Signed:

Date:

Attachments

Attachment 1 Participant Information Sheet and Consent Forms

Attachment 2 Section E Signed

Attachment 1



Dear Parent/Carer

I would like to offer the opportunity for your child to take part in a small research project looking at **“How young people engage with the bible through biblical narrative”**

The research is part of my BA (Hons) degree in Youth and Community Work with Practical Theology and my ongoing development work within Ashwood Church youth. It is hoped that in taking part the young people will be encouraged to actively participate in the group discussion, become more confident, learn negotiation skills in a variety of settings and learn about the Gospel of Luke. I believe this study is relevant for young people, parents and youth work providers. I’m hoping this will give invaluable insight into how we can best support young people to study, apply and learn from their bible now and into adulthood. Ideas raised will be shared anonymously with the youth team and leadership as well as part of the final research project. If you would like to see the results or discuss any of the research further please do not hesitate to contact me at nahutson@msn.com

I would be so grateful if you would give consent to your child taking part in this research, there will be no financial or other compensation for taking part, it is by choice. You or your child may withdraw your consent at any time up to 1st March 2019. Anyone will be able to opt out of the research up until this date.

I have purchased some copies of Luke’s gospel in narrative form from the Bible Society which will be used for this study. It is an easy to read format of 87 pages, including age appropriate images and I am asking that young people either read the whole of this or use a small information pack with selected extracts within it. If you would like a copy to read through with your young person or as a family please speak to me. We will then give your child the opportunity to take part in questionnaires, focus groups and an interview all of which are optional and not compulsory.

All information will be kept strictly confidential and the identity, privacy, anonymity of the participants and Ashwood Church will be ensured. The data collection, storage and publication of research material will be retained in accordance with Gloucester University’s policy on Academic Integrity and Ashwood Churches own data protection policy 2018. Copies of these policies are available on request. The electronic information I gather will be stored on a personal password protected device which will be stored in a locked cabinet.

Zoe Bell will be line managing this pilot study and can be contacted on zoe@ashwoodchurch.org.uk should you have any further questions or concerns.

Thank you for taking the time to consider your child being involved with this exciting research project on young people. To participate I need to receive the completed participant consent form (attached) signed by a parent or carer by 27th January 2019.

Kind Regards,

Neil Hutson.

Participant Information Sheet “How Young People Engage With The Bible Through Biblical Narrative”



I would like to offer you the opportunity to participate in a project I am doing for my BA Hons Youth and Community Work Course with Practical Theology at Gloucestershire University and as part of our ongoing work. We want to dedicate some time to thinking about how effectively we can support young people to read and understand the bible. We think young people are the best people to ask to help us find out.

The research will be based around reading the story of Jesus told in Luke’s Gospel. I have some specially produced copies of the Gospel of Luke which is an easy format and only 87 pages in total. You will be given the opportunity to either read this or just read part of the story in a pack. I will then ask you about what you have learned. I will give you the opportunity to take part in questionnaires, a youth work session called a ‘focus group’ and a short interview. These are all totally optional and you can read the book or stories and not take part in the study. I will need to record (audible only) the focus group and interview to consider the information you share and your ideas. This will be kept securely on a personal password protected device which is stored in a locked cabinet. All the results will be totally anonymous and data destroyed after one year.

Taking part in the study is completely voluntary, there will be no financial or other compensation for taking part it is by your choice. If you agree to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and you and your parent / carer will need to sign the attached consent. You can take part in one or all the research activities and the youth club will be running as normal during these weeks if you don’t want to participate. You can change your mind and withdraw from the research up until the 1st March 2019. If for any reason, you wanted to talk about any of the issues raised I will be available during and after the sessions as well as the normal members of team or you can contact Zoe Bell (zoe@ashwoodchurch.org.uk).

All information will be kept strictly confidential and your identity will not be used on any of the material. This means, we will not use your name or the name of the church when we write the project up. The data collection, storage and publication of research material will be retained in accordance with Gloucester University’s policy on Academic Integrity and Ashwood Churches own data protection policy 2018. Copies of these policies are available on request. This means that the information we collect will only be used for the right purpose.

Taking Part

If you want to take part, please do the following steps: -



Listen to the talk about what the project is all about.



Get your parent / carer to sign.



Bring back your participant consent for

If you require any further information or have any questions please speak to me or another member of the youth team.



Participant Consent for Research Project

Context of Research University of Gloucester Youth and Community Work with practical Theology BA Hons

“How Young People Engage With The Bible Through Biblical Narrative”

By signing the form you

- Agree to take part in questionnaire / focus group /and interview (delete if necessary)
- Agree to take part in the research described in the information sheet
- Agree to the session being audio recorded
- Agree that your contributions can be used anonymously
- Agree to the information obtained being used in Neil’s dissertation
- Agree to the information obtained in the research project being used by Ashwood Church to help develop our youth work project
- Have understood the information sheet.

Name of Participant	Date	Signature

Name of Parent/Carer (please state relationship)	Date	Signature of parent/carers

If you require more information before signing this consent form, then please contact Neil Hutson on 07821 111206 or at nahutson@msn.com


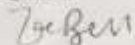
Thank You for agreeing to take part in this project

Attachment 2

Section E

Supervisors

Supervisors are required to have personal experience of formally studying human subjects. The professional practice agency line-manager / gatekeeper (if appropriate) has a particular responsibility to ensure the well-being of the people involved in the study.

CYMA Supervisor	Professional Practice Agency Line-manager / Gatekeeper (empirical-based dissertation only)
Name: Robin Smith	Name: Zoe Bell
Address: St John's School of Mission Chilwell Lane, Bramcote, Nottingham, NG9 3DX	Address: Ashwood Centre, Portland Street, Kirkby in Ashfield, Nottinghamshire, NG17 7AB
Tel: 0115 9683222	Tel: 07736317399
Email: robin.smith@stjohns-nottm.ac.uk	Email: zoe@ashwoodchurch.org.uk
Signature: 	Signature: 

Section F

I agree to conduct this study in line with the ethical guidelines laid down in the National Youth Agency document 'Ethical Conduct in Youth Work', and the ethical expectations placed on me by the Practice Agency supervisor.

Signature of student

Date: 13/1/18

