

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

THE IMPACT OF PREACHING THE IMAGE OF GOD AS  
DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

by

Laurie Elmore Thompson

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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## ABSTRACT

According to Howard (2010), the North American Mission Board (NAMB) considers the disabled community in America to be unreached by the church. Hardwick (2021) also writes, “The disability community is the most unique community, the largest minority group in the world” (p. 12). This quantitative descriptive research study explored the frequency of preaching the biblical principle *imago Dei*, found in Genesis 1:27, in a way that includes the disabled, and how this preaching may impact disability-inclusivity in the church. The Word of God states, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them” (*New International Version*, 2011, Genesis 1:27). The biblical principle of *imago Dei* is inclusive of the disabled. Disability-inclusivity is also necessary for the church to be true to its original design and purpose to fulfill the Great Commission and the Greatest Commandments. The role of the pastor is significant in the initiating of a disability-inclusivity mindset by setting an example through his own attitudes and preaching. Solid foundational preaching on how *imago Dei* is disability-inclusive is necessary for the church to value the disabled from a biblical worldview and be motivated to reach them with the Gospel. This study included the collection of quantitative data from a random sample population of 131 Southern Baptist senior pastors in the state of South Carolina. Data was collected via a survey to determine the frequency Genesis 1:27 is preached and whether the preaching is intentionally disability-inclusive. The majority of survey participants indicated that they preach on Genesis 1:27 once a year (29.37%) or more than once a year (38.89%). However, when surveyed on preaching this passage as intentionally disability-inclusive, 69.87% of survey participants answered “yes”, while 30.16% answered “no”. There is much to be done in the church to change the current trajectory.

*Keywords:* disability, image of God, minority, inclusivity

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## Dedication

I first and foremost dedicate this project, as an offering of love and humility in gratitude to Jesus Christ and His unceasing and unconditional love for me. I am genuinely humbled that He would allow me the privilege of having such a unique platform to proclaim His goodness and faithfulness. He chose to use me, though He knew I would fail and disappoint Him at times. I also dedicate this project to all persons with disabilities who have ever thought they simply were not enough or could never achieve certain goals and ambitions due to limitations. None of us are worthy-that is why Jesus's sacrifice was necessary. All of us are valuable and loved, created with a purpose by God and for God, to bring glory to Him. I also dedicate this project to the biblical truth found in the *imago Dei* principle, that every individual is created in the image of God and has the ability to reflect Him through our lives, no matter the limitations, baggage, or previous experiences. I also dedicate this project to the One true God, Who supersedes any and all restrictions or impossibilities imposed on humanity by humanity. Lastly, I dedicate this project to the advocacy of all those with disabilities, as my hope is that this project will be used by God in a mighty way to change the current landscape and trajectory of the church. May this project become a segue for eliminating barriers and the marginalization of the disabled, so they too are effectively reached by the church and allowed opportunities to use their gifts and talents within the church, thus embracing the *imago Dei* principle personally and corporately.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Genesis 1:27 Survey Questionnaire Instrument (GSQ)

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

North American Mission Board (NAMB)

Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)

Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

New International Version (NIV)

Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB)

## CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

### Introduction

Ventura (2016) writes that according to the CDC, 1 in 4 adults in the United States has some sort of disability. Based upon the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) the legal definition of disability is:

“a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. This includes people who have a record of such an impairment, even if they do not currently have a disability. It also includes individuals who do not have a disability but are regarded as having a disability.” (p. 4)

Hardwick (2021) declares, “the disability community is the most unique community, the largest minority group in the world” (p. 12). Those with disabilities include all ages, genders, and ethnicities. Disabilities may include physical, mental, and developmental impairments. Some disabilities result from illness, accidents, acts of violence or wars, and others are from birth. This researcher will reference the all-encompassing term *disability* based upon the definition herein. For this study, the specificity of disability is not the focus.

Howard (2010) points out that the North American Mission Board has stated that 95% of those with disabilities remain outside of the church. Howard (2010) goes on to say that this population is considered to be an unreached people group by the church, due to a lack of intentional inclusivity. In reviewing the literature on the topics of the church and the disabled, several issues have been studied. These studies include topics such as the theology of disability, pastoral reactions to those with disabilities, the importance of inclusivity in the church, analysis of Jesus’s ministry to the disabled, and Jesus’s approach to inclusivity (Hulshof, 2022). There is also literature focusing on children with disabilities, those with developmental disabilities, veterans with disabilities, and ministries to serve the disabled within the church (Hack, 2017). The literature gap identified and addressed by this researcher involves the pastor’s role in

impacting how the disabled are viewed and how a clearer understanding and preaching of Genesis 1:27 can promote a biblical perspective of the disabled so that ultimately they may be reached with the Gospel and be a part of the church body. A subtopic for this study was the impact this may also have on the church fulfilling the Great Commission more successfully. For this study, Southern Baptist senior pastors in South Carolina served as the sample population. This researcher hopes the data collected will be instrumental in helping other churches to recognize the importance of reaching the disabled and be willing to implement changes to do it.

Chapter One of this study explored the frequency of preaching the biblical principle, *imago Dei*, from Genesis 1:27 whilst also exploring the frequency of disability-inclusivity in the preaching of the passage. The Word of God states, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them” (*New International Version*, 2011, Genesis 1:27). The subsections in this chapter will include identifying and addressing various barriers which impact ministry to the disabled whilst also interfering with the church’s ability to successfully fulfill the Great Commission and the Greatest Commandments. As Broussard (2018) highlights, reaching those with disabilities is a fulfillment of these biblical mandates and must be a church priority. This chapter concludes with a summary of the study design.

### **Background to the Problem**

Those with disabilities make up a significant percentage of the world’s population. Howard (2010) points out the assertion of the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in which they have identified those with disabilities as an unreached people group in the United States. Various barriers, a lack of education, and a lack of awareness keep the church from disability outreach and inclusivity (Eiesland, 1994; Howard, 2010). Authors who write on the topic of disability and the church agree with Broussard (2018) who notes that

the fulfillment of the Great Commission and the Greatest Commandments are not possible if the church is not intentional with disability-inclusivity. Barriers can be overcome, the church can be educated and made aware of the specific needs of the disabled, if pastoral leadership effectively promotes disability-inclusivity through a clear and concise teaching of Genesis 1:27, specifically including those with disabilities. Most of the current literature on disability and the church acknowledges the problem of disability-inclusivity but fails to make a direct connection to the significance of preaching Genesis 1:27 as intentionally disability-inclusive (Hardwick, 2021; Hulshof, 2022). The current literature also does not focus on the significance of the pastor's leadership in preaching this biblical principle for disability-inclusivity to take place. The church cannot effectively and obediently fulfill the Great Commission and the Greatest Commandments if it is not ministering to those with disabilities (*New International Version*, 2011, Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 12:30-31).

### **Statement of the Problem**

As Eiesland (1994) and others demonstrate, barriers are present and separating those who are not disabled from those with disabilities. These barriers may result from fear, prejudice, or a lack of understanding. Hulshof (2017) and Eiesland (1994) are some writers to address the necessity for churches to provide accommodations for church members with disabilities, and to be intentional with disability outreach ministry. Hulshof (2022) provides current literature which offers an evaluation of the theology of disability and there is additional literature regarding the church's response to developmental disabilities and children with disabilities as well. Hack (2017) for example speaks to autism and the author's personal family example of experiencing exclusion and segregation. Matthews (2011) and Hardwick (2021) are two authors who provide literature and concur on the value and dignity of human life and justice for all. Matthews (2011)



writes on the topic of the disabled and their intrinsic dignity and need for respect by others simply by being human. This researcher has observed in several churches that those with disabilities continue to be marginalized in the preaching of the basic biblical principle, *imago Dei*. It is the goal of this study to draw attention to this inequity within the church to promote change to effectively fulfill the Great Commission and Greatest Commandments to all persons and reach the disabled population which is currently unreached.

The objective of this study was to address the research gap directed at an understanding of how South Carolina Southern Baptist senior pastors, regarding their role and responsibility in preaching the biblical principle, *imago Dei*, in Genesis 1:27 more inclusively to intentionally include those with disabilities. For this study, this researcher addressed the frequency with which South Carolina Southern Baptist senior pastors preach the biblical principle, *imago Dei*, in Genesis 1:27 and whether or not it is intentionally disability-inclusive. It is important for this researcher to grasp whether the South Carolina Southern Baptist senior pastor recognizes the importance of his preaching on disability-inclusivity and how his role, influence, and attitudes impact the church's view of others and how others are treated. It was important for this researcher to seek supporting consultants in the areas of those who have studied and written about the theology of disability as well.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this quantitative descriptive research study was to determine the frequency of the preaching on Genesis 1:27 and the *imago Dei* principle based upon surveying randomly sampled senior pastors of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina. Additionally, the frequency of the preaching on the *imago Dei* principle as intentionally disability-inclusive was determined.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this quantitative descriptive study:

**RQ1.** Is disability-inclusivity understood by members of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?

**RQ2.** Is disability-inclusivity practiced by members in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?

**RQ3.** How often is the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27 preached in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?

**RQ4.** How often is the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27 preached as intentionally disability-inclusive in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?

## **Assumptions and Delimitations**

### **Research Assumptions**

1. The researcher assumed that all Southern Baptist senior pastors in South Carolina preach the biblical principle, *imago Dei*, in Genesis 1:27.
2. The researcher assumed that the Southern Baptist senior pastors surveyed in South Carolina believe that those with physical disabilities are created in the image of God.
3. The researcher assumed that barriers are present in the church and that some form of marginalization of those with disabilities is occurring.

### **Delimitations of the Research Design**

This study was delimited to a sample population of Southern Baptist senior pastors of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina who have held their church position for at least three years and have an established relationship with their congregation. It was also delimited to the Southern Baptist denomination and included some churches which may not contain the title *Southern Baptist* in church name but are officially members of the Southern Baptist Convention and abide by the Southern Baptist Convention doctrines. Interim senior pastors in Southern Baptist churches in the state of South Carolina were not included in this study. This study was

delimited to male senior pastors as the Southern Baptist denomination does not ordain women for senior pastorate roles due to their theological perspective and doctrine.

### **Definition of Terms**

1. *disability*: A disability is a physical or mental impairment that makes it more difficult for individuals to achieve certain goals (Covey, 1998, p. 3).
2. *imago Dei*: Imago Dei is a Latin phrase referencing the biblical principle that all persons have been created in the image of God according to Genesis 1:27 (Eiesland, 1994).
3. *inclusion*: all individuals with disabilities have a right to be included in naturally occurring settings and activities with their neighborhood peers, siblings, and friends (Hulshof, 2022, p. 17).

### **Significance of Study**

This researcher is passionate about this study as she has been disabled since the age of fourteen after being hit head-on by a drunk driver in a car accident, leaving her a partial paraplegic. This researcher is both saddened and concerned at the current trajectory of the church concerning those with disabilities and the fact that they are not being reached by the Gospel or active participants in churches. This researcher feels that the *imago Dei* principle is key. The current research by this researcher may bring clarity to the frequency of the preaching on the principle, *imago Dei*, found in Genesis 1:27. This researcher also hopes to bring clarity to the frequency of the preaching of the *imago Dei* principle found in Genesis 1:27 and whether or not it is preached as intentionally disability-inclusive. The practical significance of this study is that it may improve conditions within the church so that it may more effectively fulfill the Great Commission and the Greatest Commandments. Both Hulshof (2022) and Hardwick (2021) outline this critical need. This study may also contribute to the improvement of the lives of those with disabilities as they may be reached more effectively with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and be welcomed into the church family. Raffety (2022) and Kilner (2015) reiterate the fact that those

with disabilities are valuable to God, being created in His image just as much so as those without disabilities. This study may assist in furthering the Kingdom of God and allow those with disabilities to use their gifts and serve in the life of the church. Raffety (2022) clearly states the lack of those with disabilities' presence and participation in the church today. This study can be used to affect change for all Christian churches around the world so they can be proactive in disability-inclusivity.

### **Summary of Design**

The design or methodology for this descriptive research study was quantitative in nature. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2015), the quantitative approach to data collection is quantitative research, which deals with amounts or quantities. The quantitative descriptive design is valuable for this researcher as the results of the study reflected a larger population and provided specific details regarding the description of certain behavior. The sample size was a random selection of 162 Southern Baptist senior pastors in South Carolina which served as the population for this study and this population was contacted via group pages on Facebook, specifically the *SC Baptist Pastor to Pastor* and *SC Baptist Pastors' Wives* private pages. The instrumentation used for this study was a questionnaire in the form of a survey which was sent via an electronic link that was made available to qualifying members of the private *SC Baptist Pastor to Pastor* Facebook group page containing 1,214 members and the private page *SC Baptist Pastors' Wives* Facebook group containing 451 members. Some survey participants did not complete the survey questionnaire, so the final sample size for this study was a random selection of 131, also referenced in this study as  $n=131$ .

The purpose of this quantitative descriptive research study was to examine the practices of the senior pastor regarding his frequency in preaching the biblical principle, *imago Dei*, in

Genesis 1:27 to the congregation and the frequency such preaching is done in a manner that is disability-inclusive. This study explored the frequency that the biblical principle, *imago Dei*, is preached in addition to the frequency at which the principle of *imago Dei* is preached as inclusive of those with physical disabilities.

This current research seeks to bring clarity to the frequency of the preaching on the principle of *imago Dei* and what populations are intentionally included or addressed. This current research also seeks to bring clarity on the frequency of this preaching as being intentionally disability-inclusive.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview

Howard (2010) writes that those with disabilities make up a significant percentage of the population, and they have also been identified as an unreached people group in the United States according to the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Hardwick (2021) goes even further by saying, “The disability community is the most unique community, the largest minority group in the world” (p. 12).

Various barriers, a lack of training, a lack of education, and an insufficient awareness keep the church from disability outreach and impact the church’s vision for disability ministry. It is noteworthy that the fulfillment of the Great Commission, Jesus Christ’s mandate to the church body, is not possible if the church is not intentionally pursuing disability inclusivity. Barriers can be overcome, the church can be educated and made aware of specific needs of the disabled if pastoral leadership effectively promotes disability-inclusivity through a clear and concise preaching of Genesis 1:27. Though Hardwick’s (2021) focus is on diversity, he presents a solid argument when the author states, “you can determine an organization’s commitment to diversity and disability inclusion by who it allows to lead” (p. 53).

There is a plethora of literature on various topics on disability and the church, including various theologies of disability, how to start a special needs or disability ministry in the church, the importance of inclusion, along with literature on the biblical principle, *imago Dei*, applying to all persons. Much of the literature available, is authored by authors who are disabled themselves, or are parents to children with disabilities, or have siblings with disabilities. Literature is also available on the topics of ministry to children with disabilities and biblical studies on how disability was treated in the Bible. Additional literature focuses on the impact

which ableism has upon disability ministry and this is an emphasis on those in leadership who don't have disabilities and this lack of perspective and understanding contributes to the issue of marginalization. Raffety (2022) is one writer whose focus is upon the mindset of ableism which Raffety feels is the largest hindrance to disability ministry in the church today. This researcher finds a literature gap in current sources on disability-inclusivity in the church and most specifically, its relationship to the preaching of Genesis 1:27 as being intentionally inclusive of those with disabilities. Hardwick (2021) who is a disabled pastor, believes in the power of preaching and its ability to promote a culture of learning within the church. After all, culture is not only related to race or nationality. There have been many works on cultural intelligence and cultural competence when it comes to interacting with various cultures. For the purpose of this researcher, the definition of *culture* is important for this study. Livermore (2015) defines culture as, "the beliefs, values, behaviors, customs, and attitudes that distinguish one group from another" (p. 69). In order for disability-inclusivity to become a reality, churches should understand that those with disabilities have a distinct culture of their own (Hardwick, 2021). This researcher focuses on the leadership of the pastor and the preaching of Genesis 1:27 for her study. Evidence supports the role of the pastor in general inclusive ministry, but a gap is present in specifically preaching the *imago Dei* principle to be disability-inclusive. Various literature is presented to support this author's literature gap identification including theological literature, theoretical literature, and related literature.

### **Theological Literature**

The theological literature supports the role of the pastor in general inclusive ministry, but a gap is present in specifically preaching the *imago Dei* principle to be disability-inclusive. The theological literature identifies the need for disability-inclusivity in the church as it relates to

societal norms and influences on the church. The theological literature provides historic attitudes and influences which impact this researcher's study. In addition to a historical perspective, the theological literature also evaluates barriers to disability ministry, the church's attitude and response to disability, and biblical examples which are relevant to this researcher's study. The theological literature also provides insight into the significance of *imago Dei*, the need current need for more training and education, and the importance of the pastor's role to implement change in the church in the promotion of disability-inclusivity.

### **Historical Perspective**

Many writers, including Lopez (2016), define the term 'disability' based on the ADA official definition. Lopez (2016) highlights the number of Americans with disabilities which is believed to be one out of every five persons. Hardwick (2021) points out, "The disability community is the most unique community, the largest minority group in the world" (p. 12). Lopez (2016) confirms the historical mistreatment of the disabled and how societal trends also impact the church. Lopez (2016) presents three models of disabilities which are prevalent in disability studies: the theological, the medical, the minority, the social, and the limits models. Lopez (2016) provides brief descriptions of each model and how they are relevant to his dissertation topic of study which centers around an Old Testament theology of disability. Lopez (2016) highlights that the disability rights movement in the United States resulted from the medical model and those with disabilities became characterized as a minority in need of justice. Lopez (2016) points out the identification of the disabled as a minority and recognizes general societal discrimination taking place.

Eiesland (1994) also confirms and validates the presence of marginalization and stigmatization of the disabled in writings as well. However, neither writer makes a comparison to



pastors and church leaders teaching specifically on disability-inclusivity as it relates to the biblical principle *imago Dei* in Genesis 1:27, in order to fulfill the Great Commission and Greatest Commandments effectively. Similar to Lopez (2016), Howard (2010) provides a historical perspective on disabilities in conjunction with the civil rights movement and the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. Howard (2010) points out that this law improved facilities, schools, and transportation in ways that directly benefited those with disabilities. As Howard (2010) makes a good point that, “laws are not sufficient in and of themselves to shape attitudes toward individuals with developmental disabilities” (p. 18). Raffety (2022) takes this a step farther reiterating the value of legislation and also identifying what the author considers to be a root problem that resides more so in the hearts of people, and laws cannot change hearts even when physical barriers are changed, and structural accommodations are made. There is a lot of truth in Raffety’s (2022) sentiment, and the author makes a valid point referencing John Swinton’s argument that “the solution is in Christ and not in legislation, society, or modernity” (p. 117).

The historical perspective of disability within the church seems to remain unchanged and unphased. It appears that in order for the current trajectory and landscape of the church to be changed, hearts need to be impacted. Yong (2011) highlights the belief that understandings of biblical references to those with disabilities such as the blind, the lame, etc. historically and currently contribute to a negative and incorrect image of disability. Raffety (2022) confirms this reality when writing about those with disabilities not being impacted by religious organizations.

### **Barriers**

Eiesland (1994) details the reality of barriers, both social and physical, which continue to impact those with disabilities and their interaction with the church. As an advocate for the

disabled and coming from the perspective of being disabled personally, Eiesland (1994) chastises the church for a lack of action and inclusivity. Eiesland (1994) states, “For many disabled persons the church has been a “city on a hill” – physically inaccessible and socially inhospitable” (p. 20). Eiesland (1994) calls the church to accountability and points out the biblical principles supporting inclusivity.

Lopez (2016) writes on the minority model of disability which was formed and holds to the belief that restrictions faced by those who are disabled hinge upon prejudice and discrimination in addition to limitations based upon functions. Somewhat similar to the minority model, Lopez (2016) expounds upon a social model of disability which emphasizes the minority status of the disabled, their marginalization, and the impact of society.

Though the author’s emphasis is on developmental disabilities, Howard (2010) highlights the reality of attitudinal barriers and discusses the direct impact these barriers have upon those with developmental disabilities and their interaction with society. Howard (2010) alludes to the societal impact of such barriers and their direct influence upon the Christian community and churches. Howard (2010) states the impacts which attitudes can have upon the general marginalization and discrimination of the disabled and how society interacts with those with developmental disabilities.

More recently Raffety (2022) states that nothing has changed culturally regarding how the disabled are treated in society and even in churches the disabled are treated as liabilities and deficiencies instead of being embraced as diversity in God’s kingdom. Raffety (2022) addresses the current church environment from an ethical, moral, and spiritual perspective and alludes to the impact it is having on the overall health and growth of the disabled and how it is basically being stifled. Barriers continue to impede disability-inclusivity.

## Christian Church

The Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 led to the government providing exemptions to religious entities and this contributed to disabled persons being further neglected by the church, even in the midst of societal progress (Howard, 2010). Howard (2010) communicates the research of the North American Mission Board in 2007 which identifies the disabled as one of the largest unreached people groups in America, saying that 95% of the population also identifies as being out of the church. Hardwick (2021) confirms the uniqueness of the largest minority group in the world when he writes about those with disabilities. Callaway (2018) points out that every community includes those with disabilities and therefore every church can have an impact on those with special needs just by being intentional and ministering to the disabled in their community. Nancy Eiesland (1994) is cited repeatedly throughout the related literature as Eiesland references disability and the church with a comparison of Jesus's broken body to those with disabilities, and how this realization should impact the church. Carter (2021) highlights that many churches struggle to reach out and meet the needs of the disabled in their communities and solid preparation is required for it to occur.

Hulshof (2022) addresses the mentality in the church towards those with disabilities as a persistent *country club mentality* and this is in stark contrast to the biblical kingdom of God which is inclusive in nature. As Hardwick (2021) states, there is a distinction between being *invited* versus being *included*. Disability-inclusivity involves a genuine belief in the value of every individual and intentional action. Hardwick (2021) reminds readers of the importance of valuing those whom God values and investing in them. Hulshof (2022) goes on to explain, "the church is not simply a social organization designed to only meet physical needs. She has a mission to evangelize, baptize, and disciple" (p. 118). Newman and Tada (1993) emphasize the

importance of the church coming to not only understand but also embrace the reality that disabled persons are just as worthy of restoration as anyone else. Hardwick (2021) calls for a disability inclusion that focuses on the importance of the image of God. Hardwick (2021) also highlights that all of creation reflects God's image and the church needs to recognize how this image is evident in those with disabilities. Cribb and Crisler (2019) also speak to the fact that the *imago Dei* principle is not assigned to one group, but rather that all persons are included in this imageness.

Raffety (2022) mentions the image of God but explains that the focus is more on the importance of the disabled being called into ministry and transformed by the Holy Spirit. Hulshof (2017) also writes authoritatively on disability-inclusivity in the church. Hulshof (2017) also identifies the presence of cultural barriers and the absence of effective disability inclusivity in the church. Hulshof (2017) references the inadequacy of material connecting what the Bible says about disability and how this relates to church leadership and ministry. Hulshof (2017) not only writes with a solid theological perspective but also from the perspective of being a parent of a disabled child. Like Eiesland (1994) and Hulshof (2017), Yong (2011) also writes to challenge the church in being more inclusive of the disabled community. Yong (2011) additionally writes from the perspective and experience of having a sibling with a disability.

White (2017) references both the call and mission of the church, which is more in line with the purpose of this researcher's presented problem. White (2017) is also forthcoming in the promotion and support of disability-inclusivity in the church in sharing that God's people historically provide an example of His parameters and expectations for unity and care for one another. White (2017) uses the Old Testament story of David and Mephibosheth to provide a beautiful depiction of the interaction between able-bodied and disabled people. Hulshof (2022)

writes on the lessons which can be learned from the New Testament, specifically from passages about Jesus and His ministry to those with disabilities in which mercy was key and openly extended with inclusion as the goal. For Hulshof (2022) this model is helpful for the church because it is a disability ministry approach that is intentional and purposeful. This engagement and extension of mercy referenced by Hulshof (2022) goes far beyond physical accessibility, it is a focus on the importance of social accessibility as well and that includes support, encouragement, involvement, and connection with others. Hardwick (2021) communicates a similar message for the church as the author believes the body of believers is called to set an example when it comes to those with disabilities in the community and how well they are treated with kindness and gentleness. Lopez (2016) also references the Bible and more specifically how the Old Testament provides examples of laws protecting the disabled and examples of people caring for them.

White (2017) presents an international focus in his article on disabilities and the church while also referring to the Old Testament, specifically Proverbs 31:8, and the church's designated mission to care for those who are marginalized. White (2017) proceeds to highlight the contributions disabled persons can make to the completeness and unity of the church body and how inclusive attitudes within the church towards those with disabilities are critical if the church is to live out its mission and Great Commission mandate. In addressing disability and the church Raffety (2022) spotlights a need for justice more than inclusion and focuses on the problem of ableism in writings. Raffety (2022) goes as far as to state the viewpoint that an emphasis on inclusion has been more of a deterrent to the problem of sin and ableism in the church. The presence of ableism in the church is addressed by other writers as well in disability ministry literature. Persons who are able-bodied see things from a different perspective than

those with disabilities. White (2017) argues that in evaluating the New Testament passage in Acts 3:1-10, the importance of identifying the spiritual longing of the disabled is evident. This passage is where Peter and John come into contact with a man who has been blind since birth and he is begging for *alms* at the temple entrance. The result of this interaction is the physical healing of the man, and his reaction is to praise and worship God.

Slightly similar to Hulshof (2022) with an emphasis on mercy, Annandale (2015) emphasizes the importance of care if all humanity is to survive, whilst also highlighting the vulnerability of the disabled. Annandale (2015) points out the additional challenges and stresses faced by families with disabled children and also acknowledges they are normally not treated well by others. Annandale (2015) admonishes the church to do a better job of responding to such families with care and providing them with opportunities to be a functional part of the church life with their gifts as well as those who are not disabled. Raffety (2022) agrees with this line of thinking and as a minister and mother of a disabled child, the author explains the perspective that Christian ministry in general is not passionate about those with disabilities and ultimately as the disabled feel they are treated as a problem to be managed, the result is their withdrawal from the church. Raffety (2022) makes the valid point that the church cannot be a place for the disabled if their hurts and frustrations are not heard. Annandale (2015) writes on the importance of a theological response to families with disabilities and believes that pastoral theology is a *practice of care*.

Callaway (2018) writes, “According to inclusion ministry leaders, a majority of churches have little to no ministry geared towards disabled people. The number of disabled people in our communities continues to rise yet few churches are making attempts to reach them” (p. 4). Callaway (2018) confronts the past and present actions of the church regarding disability

ministry and agrees that the church is failing in its original mission. Callaway (2018) presents an interesting perspective not addressed as much in related literature; the concept of reciprocity in which all church members benefit from the inclusion of the disabled. Callaway (2018) references Carter's belief in the value of gifts and contributions from all persons and when this value is missing from one part, the whole body is impacted. Raffety (2022) appeals to the Christian community by communicating the importance of advocacy for the disabled against the injustices they face within the church in the areas of theologies, worship, and ministry. Hardwick (2021) somewhat reflects this sentiment surrounding justice yet also coupled with grace and love writing, "The disability community needs the church to acknowledge, appreciate, and affirm their value and fight for their right to exist in this world as God's image bearers" (p. 169). According to the literature, the church is not responding to those with disabilities much differently than the world and culture.

### **Biblical Examples**

Lopez (2016) presents a theological model of disability as a construct based upon the belief that disease and disability come from God. This may be in the form of punishment (Exodus 15:26, Deuteronomy 28:28) or as a result of sin (1 Corinthians 11:29-30). Similar to Hulshof (2022), Lopez (2016) also draws from the New Testament highlighting Jesus's interaction with His disciples in John 9, when they assume a disability is automatically associated with sin, however, Jesus clarifies that this is not the cause. Hulshof (2022) references the inclusivity and totality of the gospel message when the author writes about Jesus's forgiveness of sins, which is not contingent upon one's ability or disability. Hulshof (2017) also references other New Testament examples of inclusivity, providing Jesus's example as the perfect model for pastors to incorporate in leadership. Hulshof (2017) writes, "A church that

takes seriously both the great commandment and the great commission will be one that is disability friendly” (p. 221). Similar to Hulshof (2017), Yong (2011) also refers to the New Testament but focuses on the synoptic Gospels and the examples set by Jesus and the early Christian church. Yong’s (2011) literature validates the reality of the problem and the lack of disability-inclusivity in the church, and he attributes this to attempts of redemptive reading of Scripture, a search for understanding of disability in such a way to project value onto the lives of all people.

Raffety (2022) focuses much attention on the New Testament passage in Mark as Raffety discusses Jesus’s interaction with Bartimaeus to support the position regarding disability ministry and justice. Hardwick (2021) leans on the New Testament as well, referring to the gospels to support his conversation on disability ministry and the church as the author references John 9:13 and highlights Jesus’s focus in conversation upon a person’s destiny instead of a person’s deficits. White (2017) focuses on biblical passages which support the church providing a voice for those who cannot speak for themselves. Similar to Hulshof (2017) and Yong (2011), White (2017) draws biblical principles from the Gospels and Jesus’s ministry to the disabled.

In contrast to today’s society in which the disabled comprise more of a majority of the population, Lopez (2016) writes about the context and historical component of biblical text where advocacy for the disabled was neither popular nor readily available. However, Lopez (2016) also argues that the Old Testament presentation of the disabled shows them as active and engaged members of their communities, and just as worthy of the plan of redemption in Scripture. Lopez (2016) does acknowledge that some Old Testament passages clearly communicate an inclusivity of the disabled. Biblically, Howard (2010) also takes the opportunity to point out examples of God’s view of love, compassion, and nondiscrimination throughout the



Old Testament when it comes to disabled persons. Howard (2010) also highlights Jesus's example and the experience in John 9:1-33 with Jesus and His disciples and how societal attitudes toward those with disabilities can shape behaviors. This passage highlights Jesus's experience with His disciples as they pass a man who has been blind since birth and the disciples inquire as to whose sin is responsible for the disability.

White (2017) illustrates that the disabled are a part of God's mission agenda through the Parable of the Great Banquet in Luke 14. White (2017) states, "The biblical idea on justice envisions such human relationships to be balanced, reciprocal and of quality" (p. 126). The biblical examples Callaway (2018) provides also demonstrate Old and New Testament passages which focus upon people mentioned in scripture with a disability while also providing examples of what is said about disabilities generally. Some of the individuals Callaway (2018) highlights specifically include Jacob, Paul, and Samson-who had disabilities later in life- Mephibosheth, Nebuchadnezzar, Bartimaeus, and the young man born blind in John 9.

Hulshof (2022) also points to the disciples following Jesus's example in their ministry to the disabled as Peter and John in Acts 3:1-10 interact with the lame man outside the temple and demonstrate inclusion. The biblical examples provided throughout all the literature reviewed proclaim a biblical worldview of the value and worth of all persons, including the disabled. As Hardwick (2021) eloquently states, "God's Spirit rests on *all* people without distinction" (p. 191). This biblical principle begins in Genesis 1:27 and is evident throughout the Old Testament and to the end of the New Testament. This principle is also evident in God's kingdom and its reflection for eternity as evidenced in John's writings from the Isle of Patmos:

"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands."  
(*New International Version*, 2011, Revelation 7:9)

## Image of God

In the literature, White (2017) presents a biblical view of humanity whilst also addressing the rights of those with disabilities. Howard (2010) discusses the importance of the image of God from a variety of perspectives: the substantive view, the functional view, and the relational view. Howard (2010) also shares Hoekema's sentiment, "the image of God describes not just something that man has, but something man is" (p. 42). Howard (2010) goes on to say that all who are made in the image of God are worthy of dignity and value and this is not based upon one's abilities. Howard's theological implications promote the Christian worldview which supports the sanctity of all human life. For Howard (2010) this is the foundational premise underpinning the dignity and sanctity of life for everyone. Howard (2010) also contrasts the differing beliefs of Martin Luther, Hitler, and President John F. Kennedy to demonstrate how their beliefs, based upon very different motivations, can impact others' beliefs.

Kilner (2018) also references the value of life and truth when he quotes Dietrich von Hildebrand referencing the belief that the words in Genesis 1:27 are crucial in determining the success and failure of civilizations. White (2017) clearly presents the biblical view of humanity along with the rights of the disabled from ecumenical and theological perspectives. White's (2017) international perspective references the General Assembly of the United Nations, Africa, Kenya, the World Council of Churches, and the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. White (2017) writes:

"the basis for human equality is the creation of humankind in the image of God...the equality and the sanctity of life of all human beings, derived from the belief that human beings are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*), have a strong implication for human rights." (p. 121)

White (2017) concludes this article with a challenge to treat every person equally, with respect and dignity based upon the biblical principle that humans are made in the image of God. Part of

the problem as Annandale (2015) writes is that those with disabilities are oftentimes denied their humanity and churches don't know how to respond to them, therefore there is a need to improve the situation. Callaway (2018) critically discusses the implications and importance of the biblical doctrine, *imago Dei*. A significant statement for this researcher and her study is when Callaway (2018) states, "There are few doctrines that are more important to mankind than the *imago Dei*. This can have a profound effect on the way humans are viewed" (p. 45). Similar to Howard (2010), Callaway (2018) highlights the application of this truth no matter what a person's abilities are and states that without this principle, people with disabilities lose both value and dignity.

Callaway (2018) clarifies that an application of the *imago Dei* brings with it a sense of equality and a church not demonstrating this is missing the point of the principle altogether. Callaway (2018) concentrates upon the significance of *imago Dei*, when the author says that it is the main driving force behind a special needs ministry because it is ingrained in humanity and serves as a motivation for serving and loving the disabled. Hulshof (2022) also speaks directly to the significance of the image of God and how this is reflected in different passages such as the story of Jesus and the man with the paralyzed hand whom Jesus identifies as valuable and containing the *imago Dei*. Hulshof (2022) highlights that those with disabilities are image-bearers just as much so as those without disabilities.

Hardwick (2021) also discusses those with disabilities as being created in God's image and goes on to speak to the importance of the church rallying this cry for the disabled because they reflect His image just as other creation. Raffety (2022) discusses the image of God, but the author's perspective is unique from other literature in that the author believes that it is insufficient to proclaim that the disabled are made in God's image because the emphasis is that

they are called to ministry and leadership. Raffety (2022) speaks to a deeper level and feels there has been too much emphasis on the inclusion of the disabled in the church and seeing the disabled simply as image bearers.

### **Training and Education**

Yong (2011) comes from the frame of mind as a theologian but also from a personal experience as a brother to someone with a disability. Yong (2011) addresses the theological perspective of disability and the church while also boldly identifying the marginalization of those with disabilities by the church. The cause, according to Yong (2011) is incorrect study and reading of Scripture. Similar to Hulshof (2022) and Hardwick (2021), Yong (2011) ultimately believes the objective of the church according to the Bible, is to successfully fulfill the Great Commission and communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all people. This is evidenced in Matthew 28:16-20 and throughout the activities of the Christian church in the book of Acts.

Howard (2010) believes that in regard to the disabled community if there are intentional efforts in the church to change attitudes via curriculum, ministry efforts, and direct pastoral challenges the disabled will be reached with the gospel message and changed by it. Howard (2010) is convinced that understanding leads to healthy empathy, acceptance, and effective ministry to the disabled. Howard (2010) also references Robert Perske's belief that a correct theological view of disabilities is the key for ministry to being impactful and effective. This adequate view comes directly from an accurate understanding of God's Word.

Howard (2010) also contrasts different special needs ministry models: one model of inclusivity and the other a model of segregation. Howard (2010) writes that the model of inclusivity has more value and benefit than the model of segregation. White (2017) also discusses the importance of higher educational training in the area of disability ministry for

pastors and church leaders to ensure effective ministry to the disabled. White (2017) references the Lausanne Committee in 2005 which called on the church to focus on removing barriers that limited those with disabilities and centering efforts more upon building up the church and using the gifts and talents of those with disabilities. White (2017) goes on to focus upon justice as the author believes it is an attribute of God, it is a part of the church's mission and therefore the church should be intentional about demonstrating it. Carter (2021) alludes to the fact that most theological schools are not providing the necessary preparation to support the vision and guidance for successful and effective disability ministries. Carter (2021) calls for the all-encompassing training of those in ministry so that they can include those with disabilities and their families, whilst also helping them to flourish. This emphasis upon adequate minister preparation serves this researcher and her study on the importance of disability-inclusivity being contingent upon the preaching of Genesis 1:27, on the *imago Dei* principle.

Similar to Carter (2021) Hulshof (2022) takes the importance of adequate training to a different level highlighting specifically the lack of literature resources on the topic of church leadership and disability. Hardwick (2021) also highlights the importance of the church learning about disability and feels the lack thereof contributes to the gap between both communities. Hardwick (2021) focuses on education in the church discussing different means for disability education and the author's belief that it comes specifically from preaching, and various educational studies and means. As a disabled pastor, Hardwick (2021) also sees value in the context which can be provided through disabled pastors, professors, and theologians and their involvement in the education process when it comes to disability and the church.

Raffety (2022) points out several areas that need improvement when it comes to training and education as the author specifically speaks to theological institutions and their lack of

disability curricula in conjunction with the fact that few disabled people are attending seminaries. Raffety (2022) also states that the students who are attending seminaries are graduating with no knowledge or training on how to reach the disabled. Raffety's (2022) argument is that this hinders disability ministry tremendously.

### **Pastoral Role**

Hulshof (2017) focuses upon the importance of the pastor's role for effective and successful disability-inclusivity. Similar to Hulshof (2017), White (2017) alludes to the significance of a holistic inclusivity if the church is to fulfill God's original mission and plan for the body of believers. According to White (2017), this includes the preparation and training of those who are working with the disabled so there is a better understanding of their specific issues.

Howard (2010) emphasizes the challenge of attitudinal barriers while also acknowledging the influence of the pastor. Howard (2010) specifically addresses the impact which pastor's attitudinal barriers may have on the church and the church's ability to effectively minister to those with disabilities and their families because the pastor's vision contributes to the direction the church follows. According to several related literature writers it is believed that pastoral attitudes are a significant factor impacting disability-inclusivity in the church. Howard (2010) stresses the importance of training, including formal and informal courses, and experiences for pastors to impact attitudes.

Annandale (2015) writes that pastoral theology is a form of public theology and it must address pain and injustice so that the church understands the greater good and the kingdom of God from a biblical perspective. Callaway (2018) also asserts that the pastor's role is significant in a church's inclusive ministry as well. Hardwick (2021) who is a disabled pastor himself, sees

the value and importance of the pastor when it comes to disability ministry. Hardwick (2021) poignantly writes, “you can determine an organization’s commitment to diversity and disability inclusion by who it allows to lead” (p. 53). Hardwick (2021) sees the pastor as being a primary communicator for the congregation and the one who will lead because what is important to the pastor will be important to the church. Hardwick (2021) highlights that preaching is tantamount for building a learning culture within the church and is a strong believer that a pastor’s sermons on disability will promote disability-inclusivity in the church.

Similar to Hardwick (2021), Hulshof (2022) also sees the value of the pastoral role which can ultimately impact whether or not the church is successful in meeting its original design since a pastor who is focused upon disability-inclusivity will focus upon the related biblical principles contained within the Great Commission and the Great Commandment and lead with them in mind. Hulshof (2022) points out that the pastoral role is important in conjunction with church leadership and the congregation if disability ministry is going to be successful. Hulshof (2022) considers it imperative for a pastor to preach and communicate a theology of brokenness to the congregation. Hulshof (2022) also address the importance of the church leader understanding how God gifts those with disabilities and how valuable those gifts are for the church body. Hulshof (2022) is a proponent of intentionality as the author writes about the importance of church leaders connecting with the disabled and being both purposeful and thoughtful in this endeavor.

Contrary to Hardwick (2021) and Hulshof (2022), Raffety (2022) provides a different position on the pastoral role as the author does not believe the pastor is someone who can solve the problem for the church when it comes to disability ministry but rather, the author believes such an approach is more transactional and hierarchical and not helpful. Raffety (2022) holds to

an approach that the author describes as being one based upon confessional and collaborative models instead of transactional ones. In addressing the view on the pastor's role in disability ministry Raffety (2022) writes a lot about those who are able-bodied confessing to the sin of viewing things from this perspective of ableism and believes it is more important for the pastor to be focused upon nurturing, witnessing, and receiving. Raffety (2022) feels that the current landscape of the church should not place the pastor in a role of arbiter with the purpose of equipping or visioning.

### **Summary**

As this researcher points out in the theological literature, there are a variety of topics in the related literature. This literature provides an historical context to how those with disabilities have been treated and the societal improvements that have been made. The literature confirms the presence of barriers which impact both society and the church and the declaration that these barriers need to be overcome. The literature reveals the current need in the church for disability-inclusivity while also referring to biblical examples of disability. According to the theological literature, the image of God is evidently a key component in any training or education that needs to be implemented and the pastoral role and leadership in promoting disability-inclusivity is evident as well.

### **Theoretical Literature**

In addition to theological literature, there is also ample theoretical literature to provide a foundational understanding of the topics of disability ministry and the significance of disability-inclusivity. The theoretical literature provides an additional perspective into the overarching theme of disability theology and how various topics intersect with it. These topics include disability theories, specific barriers, various belief systems, the biblical mandate of the church



and the pastor's role in disability awareness, the biblical application of the image of God, ableism, and the necessity of intentional training and education on disability-inclusivity.

### **Disability Theology**

Webb (2020) draws attention to a name well-known for disability theology, Nancy Eiesland, agreeing with several other writers that the author's book, *The Disabled God* (1994) is one of the most influential and most referenced of works on the topic. Webb (2020) references Eiesland's theory that "the idea of disability as sin, a mode of suffering, or an object of charity pose a great obstacle to full participation in the church. These beliefs separate people from community and from God" (p. 9). Eiesland (1994) identifies the importance of using the Bible critically to address the concerns of the disabled so that barriers can be overcome. It is important for this researcher to highlight that Eiesland's (1994) disability theology centers around Eiesland's belief that "Christ's resurrection offers hope that our nonconventional, and sometimes difficult, bodies participate fully in the imago Dei and that God whose nature is love and who is on the side of justice and solidarity is touched by our experience" (p. 107).

Having a disability personally, Eiesland (1994) speaks from a perspective of personal experience to validate statements on the need for disability-inclusivity in the church. Eiesland (1994) writes honestly about the difficulty of living an ordinary life with the difficulty and challenges of being disabled, in contrast to all the barriers in the culture preventing the disabled from living an ordinary life. Eiesland (1994) presents, in an approach to disability theology, a biblical perspective of justice for the disabled and a call for the church's theology and rituals to be better aligned with biblical principles on disability-inclusivity. Eiesland (1994) addresses the misconception of benevolence and goodwill being extended through the offering of mere accessibility to the disabled instead of a genuine and wholehearted approach to equality being the

focus which serves much more logically as a foundation and model for justice within the church.

Another significant writer in the area of disability theology is Broussard (2018) and Broussard reiterates these thoughts years later writing:

“A careful exegesis of the biblical account of creation affirms that all human beings are created in the image of God. Though that image is marred by sin, the fact that Christ took on flesh in the Incarnation provides evidence of the intrinsic worth of human beings as image-bearers. This worth applies to all human beings, regardless of ability.” (p. 4)

In conjunction with the mindset of disability theology, Stewart (2020) points to the importance of a ‘liberation theology’ as well as countering any assumptions or barriers in order to encourage those with disabilities to participate in the life of the church.

### **Disability Theories**

In a discussion of disability theories, Blair (2006) also highlights the work of Nancy Eiesland along with that of Deborah Creamer. Blair (2006) writes, “As disability theorists continue to refine sociocultural conceptions of disability in contrast to the dominant pathological discourse of conventional medical and social science, more attention is being afforded to the generative intersections of disability and religion” (p. 7). Blair (2006) presents four theoretical propositions related to both disability awareness and theological education: a pathological perspective of disability, an inherently discriminatory perspective of disability, a cultural model, and the integration of disability education. The first of Blair’s (2006) theories views disability as abnormal, a condition that is undesirable. The second of Blair’s (2006) presented theories identifies a sort of oppression by the domination of those who have no disabilities. The third theory Blair (2006) describes is liberatory in nature as it embraces a belief that everyone is disabled in one way or another. Lastly, Blair (2006) presents a final theory that is somewhat inclusive in nature and can potentially improve both the religious experiences and the social relations of those with disabilities. Other models specifically highlighted by Blair (2006) include

the *Individual Model* which identifies the specific problem of disability for a person in a fashion that the impairment equals disability and the solution is to fix the problem. Blair (2006) also points out the *Social Model* which, by definition, is the binary opposite of the previous model and focuses more on the disability's location within society.

Similar to Blair (2006), Creamer (2012) also identifies four models used by disability scholars and theologians when it comes to evaluating and considering disability and these include the moral, the medical, the social, and the limits. Webb (2020) narrows the relevant theories to three main models on disability and provides discussion on the following: the medical model also referred to as the individual model, the religious model which sees disability as an act of God, and the social model which is preferred by disability advocates because it points to a social perspective in need of change. Webb (2020) also points to disability theologian, Jennie Weiss Block, and how Jennie Weiss Block responds to the assumption that disability is punishment or sinful, "she states that Jesus' experience with disability on the cross and the continued presence of His scars after the resurrection indicate that disability is not sinful or a punishment for sin" (p. 52).

Dyer (2018) references different theories in the work in a section on conceptual framework including the socialization theory which underscores the value of social skills and social inclusion, the family stress theory which identifies the stressors experienced by families with disabilities, and the inclusion model of socialization. Dyer (2018) highlights the significance of community for the family stress theory. Similar to Yong (2011), but more from a theoretical perspective, Black (1996) addresses the importance of the church being inclusive of those with disabilities. Black (1996) provides biblical texts to assist in preaching about disabilities. This literature validates and demonstrates the reality of the problem in the church

while also demonstrating the benefits of pastoral leadership teaching clearly and concisely on the topic of inclusivity. Black (1996) is not afraid to address the current discomfort and silence when it comes to the disabled. Black (1996) calls out the consistent contradiction which oftentimes is seen in the church's message about the disabled being blessed and cursed by God. Lastly, Hoekema (1994) also spends some time explaining various theories with an emphasis on sin and how this impacts the image of God.

### **Barriers/Belief Systems**

As this researcher communicates in the previous theological section, various barriers to disability-inclusivity are present in the church. This researcher presents the models and theories of disability in the previous section of the theoretical section and notes that many of barriers to disability-inclusivity influence prevalent beliefs in the church. Cribb and Crisler (2019) point out God's intent for the beliefs and practices of His people, the church, and that is by using the foundational principles in the Old Testament and New Testament for correct theology and beliefs. Stewart (2020) writes from a theological perspective on disability including common incorrect associations or assumptions: due to the sins of a parent, associated shame, sympathy extended, or societal expectations. Stewart (2020) discusses a narrative of disability in the church and also references Mephibosheth in the Old Testament and the blind man in John 9 for biblical examples.

Blair (2006) references the ADA of 1990 and agrees with other authors in this literature review that changing attitudes is much more difficult than changing politics. Blair (2006) discusses the tendency of Christian communities to respond to those with disabilities by attributing *reasons* or *causes* to them. This is an unhealthy and incorrect theory on disability. Treloar (1999) discusses that one of the roles of the church includes providing care and this is

inclusive of the disabled, but attitudinal barriers are a reality that impacts this negatively. Treloar (1999) points out the tendency for people to offer pity and charity towards the disabled instead of a more productive response. Treloar (1999) also highlights the fact that the disabled are not being treated equally. Treloar (1999) discusses the importance of religious belief systems and how such beliefs impact how those with disabilities are treated. Treloar (1999) also believes that there is a relationship between one's spiritual beliefs and how one responds to disability. Treloar (1999) writes on the belief that the attitudes of people impact disability-inclusivity in the church.

In a quantitative study and content analysis, Webb (2020) points out the continued issue of barriers faced by those with disabilities, impacting participation in churches. Webb (2020) focuses on the disabled being unable to participate in the church or benefit from the church due to the present barriers. Webb (2020) lists a plethora of barriers that fall into a variety of categories: architectural, attitudinal, communication, programmatic, and liturgical. Similar to Raffety (2022), Webb (2020) writes that the disabled are unable to exercise their gifts in the body because even though churches mean well by creating *special* programs, they end up segregating those with disabilities from those without disabilities.

Dyer (2018) writes to specifically address those impacted by the disability *Autism Spectrum Disorder* (ASD) and their experiences with the church or lack thereof. Dyer's (2018) work is useful for this researcher's perspective and discussion. Similar to the goals of this researcher and her study, Dyer (2018) hopes to bring increased awareness to the need for disability-inclusivity in the church due to the lack of current research and progress. Dyer (2018) highlights parents of disabled children and the parents' perceptions of church participation. Dyer (2018) clearly demonstrates with results a general lack of support within the church for those with disabilities.

Similar to Hulshof (2021) and Hardwick (2022), Dyer (2018) points out that the concept of inclusion is more than physical placement in a space, and it needs to have a much broader application so that those with disabilities can become an integral and contributing part of a community or social system. From a disability-inclusive perspective, Dyer (2018) writes about churches playing an essential role in society and as they support families, support needs to be specific to each family's needs. Eiesland (1994) calls the church to make changes that will reflect full inclusion and the author feels this will require new symbols, practices, and beliefs. Barriers have a direct relationship to beliefs and in order to improve the latter so they are in line with proper theology and theory on disability, the barriers must be addressed and removed. Speaking on the topic of religious beliefs, Treloar (1999) relates this to the human spirit and writes that understanding this as a part of humanity's core helps to provide clarity for understanding disability and its greater meaning.

### **Church Mission**

Like other authors within this literature review, Stewart (2020) points to the mission of the church and its need to embrace diversity. Blair (2006) points out the example of Jesus's ministry to the disabled, the fact that He sought them out and they pursued His touch as well. Jesus's mandate to the church is to communicate the Gospel to all persons. To support the theory referenced previously, Webb (2020) writes, "there is a need to analyze the presence of disability in Christian doctrine and explore the "place" of disabled people in Christian faith communities in order to establish the context from which this study operates" (p. 39). Dyer (2018) references the positive strides for disability-inclusivity in the public education sector and calls for churches to do the same as she points out the mission of the church, as evidenced throughout the Bible, and modeled by Jesus Christ in His specific and frequent ministry to those with disabilities. Dyer

(2018) also highlights that God's intent for the church is to be inclusive of all types of people and to be a place that embraces differences. Dyer (2018) speaks directly about the *imago Dei* principle when the author writes of the importance of reminding the church that those with disabilities are also created in God's image and have a right to be a part of the church. Similar to Raffety (2022), Dyer (2018) also points out that oftentimes training is provided for volunteers who work with the disabled in churches, but the emphasis can focus more on the differences of the disabled versus their unique talents and gifts. Dyer (2018) speaks to how the Bible encourages spiritual growth for everyone and in focusing upon this mandate, the church can develop programs that are disability-inclusive while also ministering to and caring for the disabled and their families. Dyer (2018) reiterates that all persons should be able to understand the message of Bible.

Broussard (2018) also presents a strong argument for disability-inclusivity in the church, thus supporting and validating the problem posed by this researcher in her study. Broussard (2018) includes a historical perspective of those with disabilities, including their treatment and discrimination in the church. Broussard (2018) points out that those with disabilities are still marginalized by the church even when they are in the congregation. Broussard (2018) focuses on the church's need to extend hospitality to those with disabilities based upon the biblical doctrine of Genesis 1:27. Broussard (2018) highlights how there's a focus on general hospitality but no growth in the inclusion of those with disabilities and this is a trend that falls behind some cultural advances.

Similar to Broussard (2018), Treloar (2002) also addresses the importance of the integration of the disabled in the church. This literature is older, yet valuable, as it is theoretical in its approach. The term *integrate* is parallel to a more current term used by this researcher in

this study, *inclusivity*. Treloar (2002) presents a different perspective than other literature presented thus far, as she provides experiences and spiritual beliefs of those with disabilities to assist the church in a better understanding of the disabled. Though Muller-Fahernholz's (1981) literature is even more dated, it is both useful and valuable in his validation of the historical issue with which the church has struggled regarding disability-inclusivity historically. Muller-Fahernholz's (1981) questions the church's commitment to its fundamental character if the disabled are not included in the life of the church or are not being impacted by it. Muller-Fahernholz (1981) writes about the church and the contrast of faith which exists, that which is not constrained by limits and that which accepts limits. According to Muller-Fahernholz (1981), this is a fine balance but also a necessary one. Muller-Fahernholz (1981) confirms the presence of barriers and refers to the unjust treatment the disabled oftentimes encounter. The time period of the literature is evident in the terms *integration* and *incorporation* versus a more contemporary reference to *inclusivity* by this researcher. A powerful quote for the purpose of this researcher's study is when Muller-Fahernholz (1981) states:

“To be faithful to the Gospel, the Church must be the place both of the faith that rebels and of the faith that accepts; and it cannot be this unless the handicapped are, and are seen to be, an integral and indispensable part of its life.” (p. 23)

Similar to Eiesland (1994), Muller-Fahernholz (1981) references the brokenness of Christ and the relevance of this concept for the disabled and inclusivity in the church. Cribb and Crisler (2019) point to the distinct mission of the church which reflects the covenant of the Old Testament and that is to care for the *least of these*.

### **Pastoral Role**

Stewart (2020) reiterates the significance of the pastor's role in leading a congregation to a theology of disability which is disability-inclusive. Stewart (2020) challenges churches and



congregations to ask direct questions to address individual church stories and how the church responds to the disabled. Stewart (2020) emphasizes the importance of able-bodied church leadership being committed to a mentality of equality among all people in the church and allowing that mindset to transform them. Likewise, Webb (2020) also highlights the importance of supportive leadership in the church so that disability-inclusivity may become a reality. Webb (2020) also writes on the responsibility of church leaders to find ways to remove barriers, especially attitudinal barriers of hostility towards the disabled. Webb (2020) writes that church leaders not only teach and lead but also are an example to others in how they believe and what they do. Webb (2020) believes that this proves that information and training on disability-inclusivity are necessary if church leaders are going to facilitate community change. A key statement for this researcher and her study is when Webb (2020) references survey results which point to a majority of responders feeling that church leaders present a primary barrier between the disabled and the faith community.

### **Image of God**

Hoekema (1994) presents a historical survey. Hoekema (1994) references both philosophers and theologians while presenting their beliefs on the image of God: Thomas Aquinas found humanity's intellect or reason to be the deciding factor, John Calvin's emphasis upon the soul, Karl Barth taught that neither intellect nor reason was the reflection of being in God's image but rather the presence of confrontational relationships, and Emil Brunner's focus upon man's ability to reason. Hoekema (1994) emphasizes the concept of wholeness and how the author feels it is related to the image of God and including how mankind is physically and how mankind functions. Hoekema (1994) also expounds upon the various aspects of sin and an understanding of the whole person and individual freedom.

Similar to Hardwick (2021) and the author's statements on the minority status of the disabled, Dyer (2018) elaborates on the underrepresentation of the disabled around the world, indicating that they are one of the largest populations with this identification and the church is simply not equipped to meet the needs of the disabled. This researcher attributes this lack of preparation stemming from a lack of biblical teaching on the image of God being disability-inclusive. Stewart (2020), in reflecting on *imago Dei* states that despite lacking in the areas of sensory this is not indicative of blessings being withheld for those with disabilities. Stewart's (2020) narrative on disability demands intentionality and a willingness to see the disabled as masterpieces instead of mistakes. Treloar (1999) emphasizes the power of the human spirit and how it goes beyond the biological and psychosocial aspects of humanity. Treloar (1999) also speaks to the authority of scripture in providing a healthy perspective of the disabled and how the church should respond to them. Similar to Hulshof (2022), Treloar (1999) also draws from the biblical imperative given by Jesus in what He states as the greatest of commandments: loving God, and loving others (Matthew 22:37-39). In referencing churches becoming fully disability-inclusive, Webb (2020) calls for churches to value the disabled and regard them as created in God's image, to focus upon removing any barriers which interfere with their involvement, and to promote the use of spiritual gifts. Similar to Hulshof (2022), Webb (2020) also highlights that this mindset not only honors the disabled but also demonstrates a faithfulness to Jesus Christ as it follows His ministry example. Dyer (2018) references the belief that those with disabilities and the unique qualities of the disabled must be regarded as valuable if inclusivity is going to occur in the community. Also in addressing the importance of the image of God, Cribb and Crisler (2019) reference that the image of God is neither restricted nor limited to one person or one

group of people, but according to the Bible, every human benefits from and reflects the *imago Dei*. Significant for this researcher and her study, Cribb and Crisler (2019) state:

“the Bible presents humanity as the crown of creation, possessing a singular and special status as God’s image-bearers. Thus according to Genesis, all have equal dignity in the eyes of God- Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female (Gal. 3:28), born or unborn, regardless of mental or physical or social or economic capacity. And we should treat all with dignity and respect.” (p.145)

### **Ableism**

Yong (2011) and Raffety (2022) are two writers who discuss the theory of ableism and how the authors believe this mentality is significantly impacting the full inclusion of those with disabilities in the church. Yong (2011) writes from the perspective of growing up with a brother with a disability. Raffety (2022) also writes passionately and from the personal experience of having a child with a disability. Both writers contribute to the topic of disability ministry and are authoritative in their perspectives. Yong (2011) explains that those with disabilities are marginalized, stigmatized, and excluded in communities due to a predominant mentality which is ableist in nature. Similar to Yong, Raffety (2022) also references ableism and describes it as a mindset that disability is a problem which needs to be solved or that it is a troublesome obstacle that needs to be overcome and therefore those with disabilities need to be managed and dealt with as problems. This presents a significant problem and impacts how those with able bodies treat and perceive those with disabilities. For this researcher and her study, she feels that when there is a misunderstanding of man’s brokenness and there are categories seemingly created as to what is normal and what is not, that will interfere with community and fellowship, much less who is allowed to lead and contribute. Raffety (2022) points out the necessity of those who are able-bodied to consider how their experience has been prioritized over those with disabilities and this mentality must be challenged and transformed. Raffety’s (2022) argument is that those with

disabilities have so much to offer but since they are not seen as valuable resources, their gifts remain untapped, and the church is suffering. Raffety (2022) calls for the church to genuinely listen to the disabled and to be willing to offer confession and repentance for not lamenting alongside the disabled and failing to treat them correctly. Raffety (2022) emphasizes that the church must listen and intentionally engage those who are suffering, in pain, or feel isolated. Yong (2011) points out that nothing is wrong with the disabled and they don't need to be cured. Yong (2011) goes on to state that in reality, it is those who are non-disabled who are discriminating against those with disabilities, and they need to be rescued from this mindset and the disabled should be embraced as they are.

### **Training and Education**

Stewart (2020) points out that the disabled are often abused and assumed to be broken individuals. This has been seen in the various models and theories on disability presented earlier. As this researcher focuses on the importance of teaching *imago Dei* to be disability-inclusive, Treloar (1999) also supports the value of training and education with a solid biblical understanding when the author addresses what she feels originates from inaccurate interpretations of the Old and New Testaments and historical attitudes on topics such as disability, sin, faith, and healing. Treloar (1999) also alludes to church leaders' lack of understanding of disability and how this impacts the church. Webb (2020) theorizes that church leaders can help to bring about change to reduce these various barriers to disability-inclusivity and it needs to begin with theological education. Through research, Webb (2020) finds that any disability topic covered in theological study is within the realm of pastoral care and counseling with emphasis placed upon the medical or religious model perspective of disability instead of a social model. Webb (2020) focuses on the importance of theological programs being more

disability-inclusive. Webb (2020) points out that the practices of many Christians do not match up with their beliefs of love and acceptance of all when it comes to disability. Knowledge and training can assist in changing incorrect beliefs. Webb (2020) is convinced that a deeper study of the Bible and an evaluation of historical theologies can provide a healthier and more inclusive perspective of disabilities. Webb (2020) specifically emphasizes not only a pastor's need for theological training on disability-inclusivity but also highlights the Master of Divinity degree specifically, due to it being a preferred qualification for many Christian denominations. Webb (2020) points out that there is limited curriculum and few current opportunities for pedagogy or practical experiences for future Christian leaders when it comes to ministering to those with disabilities. Webb (2020) boldly goes on to claim that this lack of curriculum specifically within Master of Divinity programs demonstrates that disability ministry is not a priority within the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) which is responsible for accrediting graduate theological degrees at numerous institutions. There are no legal mandates surrounding disability-inclusivity in churches and Dyer (2018) points out that a majority of church leaders do not have specialized training in dealing with the disabled. Similar to Webb (2020), Dyer (2018) also reports that recent research indicates a very small portion of seminaries provide a curriculum to students on the topic of disability. Broussard (2018) offers a perspective that focuses on the importance of education and the need for behavioral change in the church toward those with disabilities as well. Similar to Webb (2020), Dyer (2018), and Broussard (2018), Carter (2021) reiterates the importance of those in ministry being prepared effectively for disability ministry through various means with the ultimate goal to promote participation and spiritual growth of the disabled along with their families. This researcher sees the value of education for those in

ministry and as history has displayed, so much more needs to be done to promote disability-inclusivity in churches.

### **Summary**

Theoretical literature provides a foundational understanding of disability theology and varieties of disability theories which are reflected in existing barriers and belief systems that impact disability-inclusivity in churches. The mandate of the Great Commission to the Christian church is clear in scripture, along with the responsibility of the church to care for those in need and to treat all persons with justice and love. The pastor's role in implementing successful disability-inclusivity in the church is undeniable, as is the pastor's example to the congregation. The principle, *imago Dei*, clearly applies to all persons and should be exercised liberally by the church to the disabled community. As studies prove, there is still much that needs to be done in order to successfully implement disability-inclusivity in the church. The theoretical literature supports the gap identified by this researcher, as training and education are imperative for successful disability inclusivity, but a poignant teaching of Genesis 1:27 to be inclusive of the disabled has not been specifically addressed.

### **Related Literature**

Related literature provides a comprehensive synthesis of topics and subtopics which are relevant to this researcher's study on the importance of Genesis 1:27 being communicated in a way that is intentionally disability-inclusive. For this researcher, the church's perspective of the disabled is significant seeing that it impacts the church's awareness of the disabled and their needs. This researcher's study, which is intent on promoting disability-inclusivity in the church, is ineffective if the church's perspective of the disabled is not biblically based and oriented. Related literature also includes a review of biblical passages on disability including the 'healing

narratives,' which is a thorough understanding of the body of Christ and its various members, and the Great Commission. A review of various approaches to the interpretation of Scripture is helpful as is the topic of how religion and spirituality impact the disabled in conjunction with a need for relationships and a sense of belonging. In the related literature, there is also a general consensus regarding respect, inclusion, dignity, and equality to provide a better understanding of the uniqueness of humanity in addition to how these topics are related to disability-inclusivity.

### **Perspectives of the Church**

Miller and Sammons (1999) provide information on the reality of differences among people. The strength of this dated literature is that it provides helpful information which allows for the understanding of the different needs of the disabled versus those without disabilities. In order for relationships to improve for the disabled, Miller and Sammons (1999) state that society as a whole needs to develop skills to assist in understanding each other better and not merely changing attitudes, but rather having an ultimate goal of improving communication and encouraging interactions with others.

According to Letšosa and Retief (2018) there are models of disability which shape perceptions of disabled persons and it is important to evaluate and understand each model in order for the church to become more disability-friendly or disability-inclusive. Letšosa and Retief (2018) write about the development of disability theology which is multidisciplinary in nature. Letšosa and Retief (2018) specifically reference the nine most common models of disability: the moral or religious model, the medical model, the social model, the identity model, the human rights model, the cultural model, the economic model, the charity model, and the limits model. Letšosa and Retief (2018) emphasize that these models impact the way people view the disabled and in order for disability-inclusivity to successfully take hold in the church,

these influences must be addressed. Though the literature by Newman and Eareckson (1993) is dated, it provides insightful information regarding the disabled and the plethora of issues they face. This literature is associated with an organization, Joni and Friends, which was created for the purpose of reaching the disabled community globally with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and improving their lives in various ways (Newman & Eareckson, 1993). Like Hardwick (2021) and Hulshof (2022) in their writings, Newman and Eareckson (1993) emphasize that those with disabilities are made in the image of God. This literature from Newman and Eareckson (1993) identifies the low percentage of churches with disability outreach programs, and it also addresses the lack of awareness the church has for this community. This resource from Newman and Eareckson (1993) serves as a handbook for the church, and it highlights the value of those with disabilities and provides resources for church leaders interested in disability-inclusivity. The cultural barriers and lack of education regarding disability-inclusivity are also confirmed. The role of the pastor is significant as Newman and Eareckson (1993) point out that if the pastor is not committed and demonstrating concern for those with disabilities, it is difficult for the congregation to see the importance of disability ministry.

*Autism* Hack (2017) opens a discussion on the church and disability, specifically autism, with a reference to the SBC Baptist Faith and Message which serves as a guideline for all Southern Baptist Churches affiliated with the denomination. Hack (2017) references personal experience with a child, who has autism, and their family's experiences with churches. Hack (2017) relays a general lack of support, sometimes even exclusion, though sympathy or pity has been extended, and he highlights how such a response is not consistent with a biblical view of disability. Hack (2017) writes that exclusion and segregation speak volumes and even the best of intentions doesn't guide results and ministry decisions. Hack (2017) contrasts the author's



family's negative experience with a positive one in which his son was embraced with a personal interest by the children's ministry director who valued the disabled and took a genuine interest in not only identifying needs but meeting them as well. Hack (2017) believes a general understanding of all people will transcend and develop the church's role naturally. Hack (2017) goes on to say that there is an absence of literature presenting a Southern Baptist perspective on disability and this impacts the edification of the church.

***Disability-Inclusivity in Ministry*** Pinsky (2011) alludes to the influence of Nancy Eiesland as the author writes that there is no literature on the topic of faith and disability which doesn't include Eiesland's works. Pinsky (2011) goes on to reference Eiesland's emphasis in the book *The Disabled God* when Pinsky states:

“The lesson is that Jesus is not cured in the sense that he is made whole. The nail holes are a part of him, and not a divine punishment or an opportunity for healing...God remains a God with whom people with disabilities can identify.” (p. 146)

In Pinsky's (2011) book within the chapter on church hospitality it highlights the experiences of Pastor Montgomery developing a disability-inclusive ministry in her church where the author acknowledges the difficulties and rewards of the program. As Pinsky (2011) highlights, there is a focus upon the victories achieved through intentional tolerance, understanding, and the acceptance of differences which the pastor feels fuels a spirit of inclusion among church members. Pinsky (2011) references the reality of a mindset in North American churches that contributes to excuses to helping or intervening for those in need; a mindset oftentimes based upon God helping those who help themselves and the power of faith when exercised properly. Fox (2019) writes about the significance of perspective when it comes to the experiences of the disabled, stating it can provide better understanding and practice in conjunction with discernment. For this researcher and her study, a significant statement comes from Fox (2019) as

that author points out, “Finding ways to bring the voices, perspectives, and experiences of people with a wide range of disabilities into conversation with the biblical text is part of what can lead to a theological landscape that is both faithful and accessible” (p. 76).

Similar to Raffety’s (2022) observations, Raffety (2020) argues that disability ministries oftentimes operate according to the hierarchies of what the church considers normal and based upon those who are able-bodied, and the claim is that it is done with justice and redemption in mind. Raffety (2020) concludes the article with the belief that there is the potential for churches to have more effective relationships with the disabled which can ultimately transform the church and strengthen inclusion. Dows (2012) references the medical model of disability which considers disability a problem and focuses on rehabilitation. Dows (2012) indicates the result is that such thinking creates obstacles to inclusion as it contributes to processes which not only disempower but also isolate. Dows (2012) writes that this medical model of disability influences the church. Dows (2012) states that as society accepts and values difference and diversity, this allows healing for the disabled. Dows (2012) writes that a church’s perspective on disability being the result of sin will be reflected in that church’s ministries and its focus on repentance and healing. Dows (2012) references Gaventa’s insight into Luke 18:9-14 as he encourages a proper perspective of identity and not judging others. Dows (2012) calls the church to progress past beliefs that disability is associated with punishment or some form of virtuous suffering as the author reminds readers that all persons are on a continuum that can change at any moment due to an injury or age. Dows (2012) emphasizes that a medical issue is not necessarily in need of a cure, but rather a social issue that must be recognized as being built upon incorrect beliefs.

*Gracism* Anderson (2007) uses the concept of *gracism* as a Christian approach to the cultural issues of prejudice and injustice so that the marginalized and excluded may experience a

radical inclusion based upon this principle which is a biblical perspective of differences. Though Anderson (2007) writes specifically to address racism and issues surrounding immigrants and differences across color, class, and culture his concept of *gracism* is applicable to disability-inclusivity for this researcher and her study as well. Hack (2017) believes that the church must learn to view humanity from a theological perspective. Hack (2017) highlights the influence that culture has had on the church with its values and standards along with what may be perceived as threats to the health and prosperity of others when certain people don't measure up and are perceived as liabilities. Howard (2010) highlights the pastoral role in moving past or facilitating barriers to disability-inclusivity. Howard (2010) also specifically evaluates senior pastors' awareness of the disabled and their related needs, experiences with disabled and special education ministries, and formal or informal training on disability completed. Howard (2010) believes that in conjunction with a solid exploration of the biblical doctrine on the image of God, more is necessary in the area of theology, and this begins with a foundational premise of disabilities and understanding biblical principles which apply to them.

*African American* McCoy (2011) writes from a qualitative and phenomenological approach as the author points out the lack of adequate ministry support and church hospitality to the disabled as the author focuses on the consciousness of church leaders and pastors and their preparation for such ministry due to their influence and role in the church. McCoy (2011) focuses on African American pastors and their seminary experience and training specifically. McCoy (2011) writes about the significance and sense of personal fulfillment which comes from church engagement in the lives of disabled African Americans as the author considers a commitment to religion to be one of their cultural strengths. McCoy (2011) is motivated by research which points to the growing number of disabled in the Black church and the lack of

related research available. McCoy (2011) highlights the influence of history when the author reiterates that theological education for African Americans has not been a priority due to previous separations which were present in society. McCoy (2011) writes that Black religious studies have developed along with Black Christian religious education. McCoy's (2011) information is relevant for this researcher as the author's study represents not only a significant and influential population in the National Baptist Convention of America (NBCA) but also highlights the need for disability-inclusivity from a perspective that is not identified in other literature. McCoy (2011) addresses the importance of seminarians' perceptions of disability-inclusivity for the Black church as they can assist in creating and implementing practices that will better serve all members of all churches.

*Caregivers* Similar to the parental perspectives of Hulshof (2021) and Raffety (2022), Bornman and McMahon-Panther (2021) focus on the experiences and perceptions of caregivers and families of disabled children. Bornman and McMahon-Panther (2021) focus more upon the paradigm shift away from the medical model of disability and gravitation to the social model of disability and how neither perspective truly defines disability. Bornman and McMahon-Panther (2021) argue that the more appropriate model of disability is a holistic one instead of an approach that links impairment and disability. Bornman and McMahon-Panther (2021) present several areas of participation in the church which are faced with barriers to disability-inclusivity: spiritual practice and formation (ex. weekly church services, small group Bible studies), church ministries (ex. community outreach), social and recreational activities (monthly social, sports activities), general ceremonies, rites and sacraments (ex. weddings, funerals), organizational meetings (ex. annual women's group meeting), education and training (ex. workshops, courses), and public and workplace activities (ex. community activities on church property). Bornman and

McMahon-Panther (2021) state that of all the participants involved in their study, all participants stated a need for reform in churches because their churches did not seem friendly to those with disabilities. Bornman and McMahon-Panther (2021) also write about the importance of reframing the church's identification of barriers and how to provide solutions for them. Bornman and McMahon-Panther (2021) focus on four specific principles to bring awareness and assist in forming such renewed understandings: to involve distinctions, systems, relationships, and perspectives. Even though Gould (2019) focuses on those with intellectual and developmental disabilities and those who care for them, the author presents a general call to action for the church in supporting these caregivers and meeting their needs. Gould (2019) argues that attention has been given to special needs ministry activities which take place weekly, but the rest of the week is filled with opportunities to serve the disabled and those who care for them. Gould (2019) references the *doulia principle* which comes from the Greek word, *servant*, and is built upon the concept of caregivers receiving care. Farrington (2000) points out misconceptions that are based upon a lack of awareness and education when it comes to the disabled, including the fallacy that the intellectually disabled cannot comprehend basic beliefs in the church regarding God and the Ten Commandments, or the holy sacrament of Communion. Farrington (2000) highlights the historical removal of physical barriers for the disabled as laws changed. Farrington (2000) goes on to point to the influence of the church on the culture and how the church has the ability to move past attitudes to promote disability-inclusivity and acceptance.

***United Methodist Church*** Pridmore (2010) writes from a Methodist perspective and evaluates the complex and significant relationship between religion and the disabled population which is extremely diverse. Pridmore (2010) writes that religion plays a significant role in the attitudes which surround all aspects of the body and one's physical and overall health. As other

writers referenced in this researcher's literature review, Pridmore (2010) also confirms the persistent presence of marginalization when it comes to the disabled. Pridmore (2010) reflects upon the history of disability rights while also looking at issues that impact the United Methodist Church and disability-inclusivity.

*Summary* Dows (2012) states:

“Looking carefully at issues of disability also requires those who are able-bodied to consider their own contingency and the exclusionary practices many faith communities have in place despite a professed belief that we are all children of God and are all made in the image of God.” (p. 25)

Carlson (2018) references those with disabilities as oftentimes being invisible to those in the church because they do not recognize them as full members. Carlson (2018) uses a disability liberation theology approach, and she believes that all persons, including the disabled, are made in the image of God and have a ‘birthright to full inclusion’ in the world and this perspective is reflective of what heaven will be. This is a healthy perspective that supports this researcher in her study and the belief that the perspective of the church regarding disability-inclusivity must have a foundation built upon Genesis 1:27, the *imago Dei* principle.

### **Healing Narratives**

Gould (2019) discusses the importance of the church demonstrating the same mind as Jesus Christ and His ministry to those in need and this perspective is necessary at the individual and corporate levels seeing that Jesus's humility and lifestyle are sacrificial, and this is how all believers are to live and serve. Fox (2019) presents Jesus's healing activities in Scripture as referred to as the *healing narratives*. Fox (2019) references Yong's concept of a *disability hermeneutic* which is an attempt to analyze the healing narratives in the Bible in such a way that does not contribute to further exclusion or marginalization of the disabled. Fox (2019) writes that when the perspectives and experiences of the disabled whom Jesus heals are acknowledged and

honored by interpreters, the healing narratives in the New Testament are seen in a different light that is otherwise ignored. Raffety (2020) also references the healing narrative of Jesus with an emphasis on Bartimaeus to create a new perspective of seeing the disabled through the lens of faithfulness and leadership instead of disruptions and differences.

### **Body of Christ & The Great Commission**

Anderson (2007) focuses upon 1 Corinthians 12 for his frame of reference as the author points out that the inclusion of people in the church from various backgrounds is a biblical concept and that God's original design for the church includes everyone working together because we need each other. Anderson (2007) goes on to state that there should be a constant and intentional effort by the church to reach out and be inclusive to anyone on the fringes.

Anderson's (2007) concept of *gracism* embraces diversity, believes everyone is important and should be a part of the church body. Anderson (2007) outlines specific phrases to be used by an individual intent upon exercising *gracism* in life: Saying "I will lift you up," "I will cover you," "I will share with you," "I will honor you," "I will stand with you," "I will consider you," and "I will celebrate with you" (pp. 44-45).

McFarlane (2001) writes about the societal stigmatization and discrimination of the disabled and emphasizes the fact they are not treated equally. McFarlane (2001) makes an excellent point that even for those who are not disabled there is a fundamental experience of loss and change throughout life. McFarlane (2001) goes on to call on the church to offer acceptance and fulfillment for the disabled based upon God's intent for the church and it's representing the body of Christ. McFarlane (2001) challenges the church to pursue disability-inclusivity from the biblical perspective which includes an acceptance of those who may be different, recognizing that they are His creation and unique.

Howard (2010) critically discusses historical examples and influences upon developmental disabilities and how they impact and shape attitudes in the modern era. Howard (2010) has as a primary area of interest the application of Jesus's Great Commission to every area of ministry and to be inclusive of all people, including those with disabilities. As other authors included in this researcher's literature review and previously mentioned, Howard (2010) identifies the reality of barriers that hinder the fulfillment of the Great Commission by the church and impact disability-inclusivity. These barriers must be eliminated in the church if the church is to obediently fulfill the mandate from Jesus Christ to the church:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (*New International Version*, 2011, Matthew 28:19-20)

### **Approaches to Scripture**

Hack (2017) discusses the essence of human worth, while also evaluating Old Testament and New Testament references to disability. Hack (2017) writes that the author's conclusion of Scripture is that it does not support exclusion or segregation from the church and more importantly that the church is called to a view of general equality based upon the premise that all persons are afflicted with fallenness and are in need of Jesus Christ's restoration. Fox (2019) references three different approaches for evaluating Scripture and disability: the *rejectionist* position which sees disability negatively, the *redemptionist* position is concerned with negative portrayals of disability, and the *historicist* position involves an examination of the ancient life and times of those with disabilities. Fox (2019) writes that outdated understandings of disability are not productive and believes that they actually propel more of a sense of oppression when such narratives are promoted. As Gould (2019) and Raffety (2020), Fox (2019) also references attitudes and beliefs toward the disabled and how one's perspective of the healing narratives



must be honoring to the experiences and interpretations of the disabled otherwise those with disabilities will be excluded or oppressed by the church. Dows (2012) highlights three common interpretations of Scripture: a *historicist* approach, a *redemptionist* approach, and a *rejectionist* approach. Dows (2012) also points out two negative perspectives of disability in the Bible: theological denigration which alludes to flaw or deficiency, and theological trivialization which alludes to a benefit or something positive.

### **Role of Spirituality**

Kim (2002) writes on the role of spirituality in the lives of the disabled as there is a strong connection between spirituality and one's quality of life. Kim (2002) provides further evidence to support the belief that spirituality assists people in realizing life's meaning and purpose. Kim (2002) references evidence that concludes consistency among those with disabilities and the value they place upon spirituality. Kim (2002) suggests that research provides evidence that spirituality holds more significance for those with disabilities than those without and this is also true for persons with chronic health issues. Kim (2002) highlights the benefits of those with disabilities' spiritual journey as it impacts social aspects such as integration, acceptance, reflection, and expression. Kim (2002) confirms a connection for those with disabilities and their views of spirituality impacting their quality of life. Farrington (2000) writes about the meaning of faith in general in the lives of the disabled, while also pointing out the strengths and needs that are present. Farrington (2000) does not take a solely Christian or biblical perspective but rather includes highlights of other faiths as well including Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism as well. Cantin (2018) focuses on older adults with disabilities with an emphasis in the study on the effects of *religion/spirituality (R/S)* as the author believes that less depression and less stress are present among those who are religious or spiritual. Cantin (2018)

presents evidence that religion or spirituality protects the disabled from negative mental health issues. Cantin (2018) highlights that less independence is common for those with disabilities, whether they are age-related, new disabilities, or a worsening of existing ones. Referencing both qualitative and quantitative research results, Cantin (2018) also points out that religion or spirituality helps people deal with adversity more productively and successfully.

### **Respect & Inclusion**

Bilimoria (2012) though referencing business management, highlights important aspects of inclusive leadership where people feel authentically valued and respected for who they are and what they have to contribute. For the purposes of this researcher, though the church may not be referred to as a business, it is understood to be an organization and therefore requires healthy management of people and resources. As this researcher regards the models portrayed in Acts and several New Testament epistles, church members need to feel valued and respected for who they are and what they have to contribute. Paul oftentimes references various body parts referencing church members and different contributions. Paul writes, “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body” (*New International Version*, 2011, 1 Corinthians 12:12). Bilimoria (2012) states when people belong to groups and are accepted and treated as insiders versus outsiders, they have a sense of inclusion. Bilimoria (2012) focuses on two keys for inclusive leadership: authenticity in valuing and respecting others’ skill sets and contributions and creating a culture of encouragement. These concepts may be just as imperative for the pastor to consider in his role as the leader of the church. Farrington (2000) specifically speaks to the church and the importance of respect and inclusion of the disabled by providing a thorough overview of the benefits of disability inclusivity: a sense of belonging, fellowship with

other people, friendships, an aspect of normalization, self-determination, and general quality of life.

### **Uniqueness of Humanity**

Carlson (2018) challenges readers to consider what makes humans unique. Carlson (2018) believes humanity's uniqueness is the need for relationships and the author refers to this as primary to life. This is relevant to this researcher as the Bible clearly teaches that humanity has been created from the very beginning to be relational, "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone'" (*New International Version*, 2011, Genesis 2:18). Carlson (2018) references the example in Scripture to various members of the church being necessary to make up the body of Christ. Matthews (2011) also highlights the fact that Christianity identifies the uniqueness of each individual and that this premise is the foundation for equality and dignity among humanity. Matthews (2011) references the importance of the image of God and states that dignity begins at the point of creation as God indicated His pleasure in the very beginning. Matthews (2011) writes that the design of all people includes both biological and theological components.

An important statement for this researcher and her study is when Matthews (2011) points to St. Augustine's belief that "the intellectually disabled, are in fact Christian witnesses who show that God's grace and the Spirit do not pass over any kind of incapacity" (p. 199). Howard (2010) highlights the negative influence of bioethics leader Singer when the author refers to the devaluing and mistreatment of those with disabilities which is encouraged by Singer's assumption that personhood is based upon one's ability to reason and do certain things. Howard (2010) also highlights the positive impact of the leadership, attitude, and example of President John F. Kennedy towards those with disabilities in the 1960s due to his sister who was disabled.

## Dignity & Equality

Covey (1998) writes from a secular perspective and focuses on the social injustices which have impacted those with disabilities. This historical perspective of Covey (1998) provides insight into patterns that have influenced current society and it is evidence that the same issues are prevalent in the culture, thus impacting the church currently. This literature by Covey (1998) is helpful for this researcher and her study as it validates the theme of cultural barriers and historical fears which impede the church's ability to be inclusive of the disabled. Covey (1998) writes that oftentimes people just simply do not know how to interact with the disabled. Covey (1998) focuses on the importance of a *disability narrative* for inclusivity. Carlson (2018) writes about the importance of a clearer representation of Jesus's call to Christians for respect and inclusion because the call laid out in the gospels is not being followed and may not be clearly understood. Carlson (2018) believes the church should focus on meeting the personal and social needs of the disabled while also focusing on justice for them. Carlson (2018) also clarifies a belief that justice can be achieved for the disabled in the church via teaching and education. Carlson (2018) focuses on disability liberation theology and is sympathetic to the Catholic Christian tradition which has helped to bring awareness in the church to those who have not been included historically. Matthews (2011) writes on the topic of the disabled and their intrinsic dignity and need for respect by others simply by being human. Matthews (2011) highlights the reality that attitudes exist towards the disabled which deny human dignity and contribute to equality issues. As previous literature indicates as well, Matthews (2011) stresses the social model of disability specifically and how it sees environmental issues which create societal barriers to disability-inclusivity. Matthews (2011) reminds readers that Christian theology has been a foundational component to human dignity.

## **Relationships & Belonging**

Gould (2019) references another Greek term, *koinonia*, which alludes to the importance of relationships and community, participation in each other's lives. As Gould (2019) points out the importance of loving God and loving others wholeheartedly, the author also references Bonhoeffer's thoughts on serving others as it being active and intentionally focused upon helpfulness. Chandler (2014) explores the concept of *disability community* and compares it to aspects of diaspora studies and feminist theory. Chandler (2014) highlights the reality that the disabled are not only considered undesirable citizens but also experience a lack of true belonging in certain geographic spaces. Chandler (2014) argues that even when structures, common identities, or shared embodiments are created for a sense of belonging oftentimes belonging is based more upon feelings than anything else. Bornman and McMahon-Panther (2021) in discussing the importance of creating a sense of belonging for the disabled, write about obstacles, perceptions, barriers, and facilitators to participation that hinder instead of enabling. Bornman and McMahon-Panther (2021) also stress the importance of relationships and perspectives and how much these are interrelated. Bornman and McMahon-Panther (2021) identified a need to change the mentality of the disabled being *apart from* the church body and focus on the disabled being a *part of* the church. Bornman and McMahon-Panther (2021) believe key concepts to facilitate disability-inclusivity in the church are to promote belonging and participation. Emphasizing the value of the church and natural relationships, Farrington (2000) writes that faith communities serve as a significant source.

## **Rationale for Study and Gap in Literature**

According to the Bible, all humanity is created in the image of God, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he

created them” (*New International Version*, 2011, Genesis 1:27). Yet, the disabled are classified as an unreached people group of the church. This researcher identifies a gap in the current literature on disability-inclusivity. The gap is the direct relationship of Genesis 1:27 being preached intentionally to include the disabled so that the church can identify the disabled as not only being worthy of hearing the Gospel but also worthy of participating as active members in the church, so they too can contribute their gifts and talents to the body of Christ. Disability-inclusivity is a complex issue that has been lacking in the church for several years. The theological literature provides an explanation of various passages of scripture on the topic of disability along with a call to fulfill the biblical principles related to justice, dignity, and equality for all people in how they are treated, and the imperative of the Gospel being presented. The theoretical literature provides various theories on disability, highlighting the impact such theories have and how they are reflected in attitudes and actions not only societally but also in the church as well. The related literature provides a more thorough understanding of topics and subtopics which allude to the factors and barriers present in churches today.

### **Profile of the Current Study**

For the purpose of this researcher and this study, it is important to evaluate various perspectives of the church towards the disabled. It is important to identify whether senior pastors in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina feel that they have an understanding of disability-inclusivity and whether or not they recognize and address various barriers, including architectural and attitudinal, faced by those with disabilities. It is important to consider the frequency senior pastors preach on the biblical principle *imago Dei* in Genesis 1:27 and whether or not this preaching is intentionally disability-inclusive. It is also important to consider existing accommodations for the disabled in churches. Accommodations may be limited to architectural

such as ramps and handicapped parking or be more specific involving ministries and programs. It is critical for this researcher to identify the senior pastors' awareness of current statistics related to those with disabilities and the church. It is also critical for this researcher to be aware of various approaches to biblical concepts and teachings on disability. As Hardwick (2021) believes in the power of preaching and its ability to promote a culture of learning within the church, this researcher focuses on the leadership of the pastor and the preaching of Genesis 1:27 for her study. Through this study, this researcher hopes to create awareness in the church on the relevance of preaching the biblical principle, *imago Dei*, found in Genesis 1:27 with intentional inclusivity of the disabled. Awareness has the power to promote change and to transform the current trajectory.

### CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

According to God's Word, all persons are valuable and have a purpose within the church. The writer of Genesis states, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them" (*New International Version*, 2011, Genesis 1:27). Yet today as Howard (2010) states, those with disabilities remain unreached by the church.

#### Research Design Synopsis

This researcher was motivated in her study to answer questions regarding the lack of disability-inclusivity in the church and its relationship to the preaching of the *imago Dei* principle found in Genesis 1:27. The literature review for this researcher and her study provides evidence of the barriers present within the church which contributes to the problem of the disabled population in the United States currently being unreached by the church, according to statistics of the North American Mission Board (Howard, 2010). For this researcher and her study, data was collected to confirm the frequency of the preaching of the *imago Dei* principle and whether or not this principle is intentionally preached as disability-inclusive. What is the impact of an intentionally disability-inclusive approach? This researcher highlights the frequency of the preaching of Genesis 1:27 in her study with the hopes of identifying a key piece contributing to the church's current landscape which is lacking those with disabilities inside the church. To obtain data for the study, this researcher distributed a carefully designed survey to a randomly selected group of 131 senior pastors of Southern Baptist Churches in the state of South Carolina. There were 162 GSQ surveys started, but only 131 surveys were successfully and thoroughly completed.

This researcher used a quantitative descriptive research study approach for her dissertation research design. This is in line with the statement in which Leedy and Ormrod



(2019) point out that quantitative studies evaluate variables and answer questions that explain why something has happened. This choice of design was necessary since there was a study of designated variables present and current statistics. The topic of this researcher's dissertation focuses on disability-inclusivity in the church and the relationship between the senior pastor's intentional preaching of the *imago Dei* principle found in Genesis 1:27 as disability-inclusive.

Galvan and Galvan (2017) express the value of the quantitative approach for the social and behavioral sciences. As Leedy and Ormrod (2019) specify, quantitative studies demonstrate limited and predetermined focus upon an identified behavior. Another value of this design choice is that the quantitative approach uses a larger sample size to generalize results to a larger population. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2019), the external validity of a study refers to its value in conjunction with its generalizability. This researcher clearly demonstrated external validity in her study by being able to generalize findings from this selection of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina to the more general population of all Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina. Another factor contributing to the selection of the quantitative research method for this study was the survey instrumentation chosen by this researcher to collect data. By using a stratified approach from two private Facebook groups, *SC Baptist Pastors' Wives* with 451 group members and *SC Baptist Pastor to Pastor* with 1,214 group members, this researcher randomly selected 131 senior pastors of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina for her study. Data collected determined what senior pastors are doing to promote disability-inclusivity in their churches, specifically focusing on the preaching of the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27. Data collected provides information on the current frequency of the preaching practices on the *imago Dei* principle found in Genesis 1:27 and whether this preaching is intentionally disability-inclusive. The next section describes the research problem that was addressed by this study.

## The Problem

Leedy and Ormrod (2019) make the distinction that, “the purpose of research is to seek the answer to a problem or question in light of data that relate to the problem or question” (p. 186). The problem of concern for this researcher motivating her research study is the current landscape and trajectory of the church in reference to disability-inclusivity. Leedy and Ormrod (2019) highlight that when it comes to research design the researcher must make decisions based upon the designated research problem and research subproblems. For this researcher and her study, the problem of focus centers around the current void of disability-inclusivity in the church. The subproblems for this researcher and her study focus on the frequency of preaching the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27 in addition to whether or not this basic biblical principle is preached as intentionally disability-inclusive.

According to Hardwick (2021), recent statistics state that 20% of the population is considered disabled. This translates to one out of every five persons in the United States falling within the parameters of the definition of *disabled* as determined by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Hardwick (2021) alludes to the fact that the disabled community is not only the most unique but also the largest minority group in the world. Similar to Hardwick (2021), Howard (2010) reiterates the validity of these statistics as he writes that the North American Mission Board declares those with disabilities as unreached by the church, with 95% of disabled persons being outside the church. There are numerous barriers, both cultural and individual, that contribute to this problem.

Referencing such works as Hulshof (2022), Hardwick (2021), Yong (2011), and Raffety (2022), just to name a few, there are a plethora of studies that have been done on topics related to disability and the church including disability theology, pastoral reactions to the disabled, the

importance of disability-inclusivity in the church, Jesus's example of ministry to the disabled, and how to begin a disability ministry. There is also ample literature available on various types of disabilities and how to best serve the disabled population. Yet, the disability-inclusivity trajectory in the church has not moved for the past twenty years. In fact, when comparing the needs addressed by Eiesland (1994) to published statistics by Howard (2010) and Hardwick (2021), this status regarding the disabled has not changed, but rather remained stagnant. This researcher holds to the assumption that the root of the problem lies within the church's overall perspective of those with disabilities. Numerous barriers remain due to those in the church continuing to make assumptions and maintain incorrect perceptions when it comes to persons with disabilities. Education, along with a solid biblical worldview of the disabled, must be communicated and preached from the pulpit if the current landscape of the church is going to change (Hardwick, 2021). This researcher holds to the assumption that this begins with the intentional disability-inclusive preaching of the *imago Dei* principle found in Genesis 1:27. Therefore, the purpose of this researcher and her study is to identify the frequency of preaching on Genesis 1:27 and the frequency it is being preached intentionally as disability-inclusive. The role of senior pastor leadership is significant if the current barriers and strongholds are to be overcome and the church landscape is to experience change (Hulshof, 2022). The purpose of this researcher and her study was to identify this key component in hopes that the church can be more effective in fulfilling its two most significant mandates found in the Great Commission and the Greatest Commandments. These biblical mandates found in Matthew 28:19 and Mark 12:30-31 to love God, to love others, and to evangelize the world are not suggestions, but rather directives to the church from God as laid out in Scripture. Similar to Hardwick (2021) Hulshof (2022) also communicates the importance of a disability-inclusive pastor and his leadership as such

leadership results in the formation of disability ministry in the church which is biblically based and focused upon the Great Commission and the Greatest Commandments. Broussard (2018) also indicates that as long as the disabled community is considered unreached by the church as a population, these two foundational biblical mandates are not being fulfilled and the church is neither being obedient to God's directives nor fulfilling its ultimate purpose and design as dictated by Scripture. The next section describes the research purpose of this researcher and her study followed by specific research questions answered in this study, and the research design and methodology used by this researcher.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this quantitative descriptive study was to determine the frequency of the preaching on Genesis 1:27 and the *imago Dei* principle based upon a surveying of randomly sampled senior pastors of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina. Additionally, the frequency of the preaching on the *imago Dei* principle as intentionally disability-inclusive was determined.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this quantitative descriptive study:

**RQ1.** Is disability-inclusivity understood by members of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?

**RQ2.** Is disability-inclusivity practiced by members in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?

**RQ3.** How often is the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27 preached in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?

**RQ4.** How often is the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27 preached as intentionally disability-inclusive in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?

## Research Design and Methodology

For the design and methodology of this study, the researcher used a quantitative descriptive survey research study approach. The quantitative research approach focuses on numbers with the use of closed-ended questions and responses which provide a quantitative hypothesis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Leedy and Ormrod (2019) descriptive research is a rather general category which refers to methodologies aimed at better understanding a specific situation or event in the world. The sample population for this quantitative descriptive study was contacted via pastors who are currently members of a private group listing on Facebook, *SC Baptist Pastor to Pastor*, or via senior pastor's wives in a private group listing on Facebook, *SC Baptist Pastors' Wives*. Leedy and Ormrod (2019) highlight the necessary sequence for a solid research design and methodology when they write that the process begins with data collection and then data analysis will follow separately. This researcher focused on a quantitative methodology approach for the first step in her study. Specifically, this researcher used the quantitative descriptive survey research approach for her study. The quantitative design included the use of a sample size of 131 randomly selected Southern Baptist senior pastors representing churches in various counties of South Carolina. There were 162 GSQ surveys started, but only 131 surveys were successfully and thoroughly completed. The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore the frequency of the preaching of the biblical principle, *imago Dei*, found in Genesis 1:27, and whether this principle is preached as intentionally disability-inclusive. The goal of this research was to bring clarity to the frequency of the preaching of the *imago Dei* principle found in Genesis 1:27 and to identify if those with disabilities are included or addressed intentionally. A goal of this researcher was to provide statistics in her study that will measure the relationship between the unreached status of those with disabilities and the

frequency of the preaching of the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27 as intentionally disability-inclusive.

As Leedy and Ormrod (2019) highlight survey research may use face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, or written questionnaires to gather data. For this study, the researcher used a survey for her instrumentation. This researcher collected data for her quantitative descriptive research study via the instrumentation tool of a written questionnaire in the form of a survey. This researcher used closed-ended questions and responses in her instrumentation tool. This survey was administered and collected via electronic means using Qualtrics. Since Leedy and Ormrod (2019) allude to the success of questionnaires being contingent upon the perception of how quickly and easily they may be completed, this researcher designed her survey with this in mind. For researchers referencing larger sample sizes, costs can also be kept minimal using electronic means for distribution. As Leedy and Ormrod (2019) point out the cost-effectiveness of an online questionnaire is better than a mailed questionnaire when the desired sample size is large. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2019), the use of a survey for research is both basic and simple and they allow the researcher the ability to pose questions to participants, classify and code responses, summarize responses, and draw necessary inferences. This researcher used a survey questionnaire as her instrumentation tool for her quantitative descriptive research study in conjunction with numerous programs provided by Qualtrics to organize the results and responses to provide a thorough analysis of the data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). This researcher also used a survey template and data analysis resources available through Qualtrics for the purposes of her study. The next section describes the population selected by this researcher for the sample in her study.

## Population

As Leedy and Ormrod (2019) state that a researcher can learn a lot from studying a well-chosen sample for the population of a study and reasonable inferences and observations may also be drawn. In 2019, according to the website for the Southern Baptist Convention, there were more than 47,000 Southern Baptist churches in North America. For this study, the researcher focused upon senior pastors in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina for her target population. These pastors must have served in this position in their churches for a minimum of three years. All churches selected were members of the cooperative of the Southern Baptist Convention, specifically the South Carolina Southern Baptists, and all pastors selected for this study have served in their church position for a minimum of three years to ensure an established rapport with the congregation. This researcher randomly selected 131 pastors to participate in her study with the intention of being able to generalize study results to the larger population of all Southern Baptist senior pastors in the state of South Carolina. Since the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention considers the disabled population to be unreached by the church, Southern Baptist churches in the state of South Carolina provides an appropriate representation of racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic people groups (Howard, 2010). Due to the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) statistics on disabilities, every community has a percentage of disabled persons. Therefore, communities around every church have a percentage of disabled persons, an estimated 1 in 5 persons (Hardwick, 2021). Due to the affiliation of this study with the North American Mission Board and the Southern Baptist Convention, this researcher used a single-stage design since she has access to names in the designated population and can select a sample easily.

The Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina served as the population for this study since this researcher resides in South Carolina and is familiar with the denomination whilst also having been a member of a Southern Baptist church for over 45 years. This researcher is also a graduate of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, which is under the leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention. This researcher additionally works for a university also affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. According to the *Baptist Faith and Message* the focus of the Southern Baptist Convention is to effectively fulfill the biblical mandates found in the Great Commission and the Greatest Commandments, this study could be beneficial to all Southern Baptist Convention-affiliated churches in the state of South Carolina. According to the website for the Southern Baptist Convention, it is intent upon the justice and worthiness of all persons, this includes those with disabilities.

The selection process or type of sampling for this researcher and her study was random in nature. One such example of this process according to Creswell and Creswell (2018) is explained, “In this approach, you choose a random start on a list and select every  $X$  numbered person on the list” (p. 150). This researcher followed a similar selection process of random selection for her study. This study involved a stratification of the population due to the fact that specific characteristics of individuals were represented in the sample. Some of these characteristics included the individuals being male, senior pastors, having served a minimum of three years in the church position, and serving in a Southern Baptist-affiliated church located in the state of South Carolina. The sample size of 131 senior pastors for this study was selected because it has been estimated that there are approximately 2,000 Southern Baptist churches currently in the state of South Carolina. Using a randomly selected sample size of 131 senior pastors, this researcher generalized her research study results to all Southern Baptist churches in



the state of South Carolina. There were 162 GSQ surveys started, but only 131 surveys were successfully and thoroughly completed. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) larger sample sizes allow for better inference accuracy. The next section describes the sampling procedures used by this researcher for this study.

### **Sampling Procedures**

In order to achieve a medium sample size for this study, this researcher used random sampling in this quantitative descriptive research study, selecting 131 randomly selected senior pastors of Southern Baptist Churches in South Carolina who have served a minimum of three years in that role. The mathematical reasoning behind this sample number of 131 senior pastors supported the confidence level and interval desired for this study. This researcher also selected this sample size based upon a desired 95% confidence level and a desired 8%-9% margin of error (SurveyMonkey, n.d.). Leedy and Ormrod (2019) define the confidence interval for a study as a range that is reached using statistical formulas and lies within a population's given parameter. This is also referred to as an interval estimate (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). It is estimated that 2,000 Southern Baptist churches are in the state of South Carolina and the population mean for the Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina is being used by this researcher to generalize findings to all Southern Baptist churches in the state of South Carolina. This researcher finds confidence in her population selection as Leedy and Ormrod (2019) point out that designated population characteristics are apparent in random samples and larger sample sizes provide sample means that more accurately approximate the population mean. This is important for this researcher as studies will use a sample for research purposes instead of attempting to assess an entire population (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019).

Therefore, this random selection satisfied the desire of this researcher to use a sample of medium effect size and it also will be inclusive of various counties in South Carolina. Only churches with full-time senior pastors qualified for this study. This researcher selected senior pastors for her study and contacted pastors through a private group listing on Facebook, *SC Baptist Pastor to Pastor* with 1,214 group members or through their wives via a private group listing on Facebook, *SC Baptist Pastors' Wives* with 451 group members. This researcher was granted membership to both private groups on Facebook for the purpose of her study. The next section discusses the limitations of the generalizations for this researcher and her study.

### **Limitations of Generalization**

With the intent being to generalize from the selected sample to be applied to a more general population, this researcher selected from the population by using purposive sampling with the sampling additionally being stratified in nature. The purposive sampling of senior pastors served to increase the validity of the research design selected by this researcher. The research would have been ineffective if the pastor included in the study was not the primary preacher and teacher in the church. The frequency of intentional disability-inclusive preaching cannot be measured using any other means or by using any other sampling. The purposive sampling approach was critical for this study so that results may be generalized to other Southern Baptist churches across the state of South Carolina. Though churches vary in size regarding membership, based upon current CDC statistics every community includes a percentage of persons with disabilities. The demographics across South Carolina also presented a clear diversity of persons in different communities. Therefore, a random sampling of Southern Baptist senior pastors in South Carolina made generalizations viable. Ultimately, this researcher's goal was to provide research design validity. This researcher did not expect the difference in church

size or membership to yield contrasting data. This researcher also planned to use stratified sampling with the intention of providing clear diversity in her results. The stratified sampling included the intentional selection of senior pastors throughout the counties comprising the state of South Carolina. With there being approximately 2,000 Southern Baptist churches in the state of South Carolina across various counties, this researcher selected senior pastors from across the state.

This researcher desires that in the long run, the research of this quantitative descriptive research study may generalize to all churches in South Carolina that are within the Southern Baptist Convention cooperative and even beyond. It is possible that similarities will exist between Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina and other Southern Baptist churches across the United States. Similar studies involving other evangelical populations may render similar results due to a common commitment to the biblical preaching of the *imago Dei* principle and intentional disability-inclusivity.

This research involved a denomination that does not ordain women or allow women to hold senior pastorate positions within the church. Therefore, this researcher's study was generalized to men who serve as senior pastors. This researcher's study was not generalized to other denominations that exercise the ordination of women as senior pastors. Lastly, this researcher's study attempted to provide a solid representation of diversity by means of randomization, but all cultural groups may not be uniformly represented in this random sampling.

This researcher's study included 131 senior pastors from Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina. There were 162 GSQ surveys started, but only 131 surveys were successfully and thoroughly completed. There is a possibility that samples obtained from Southern Baptist

churches in other states in the United States may yield different results. A final limitation of this researcher's study was the ability of all surveyed pastors to answer truthfully and accurately.

This researcher's study assumed that each senior pastor's survey responses were truthful and an accurate representation of their preaching. The next section explains the ethical considerations for this researcher's study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2019) general ethical considerations for research include protection from harm, consent, and the participant's right to privacy and confidentiality. For this researcher and her study, applicable ethical considerations included voluntary informed consent from each senior pastor. All survey responders had the option of receiving a copy of all final research study results and analyses. Each senior pastor survey participant also reserved the right to withdraw from this researcher's study at any time without repercussions. Participants were informed of the anonymity of all survey responses. Another consideration for this researcher in light of her own physical disability and her life experiences associated with her disability was the importance of protecting her study from any bias or any pre-existing mental models. As a safeguard, this researcher used a panel review of her survey to ensure that no biases were present. A final ethical consideration was that this researcher obtained permission from the IRB at Liberty University since human participants were involved in this study.

### **Proposed Instrumentation**

The stated research questions as to whether disability-inclusivity is understood or present in churches was used in the instrumentation for this researcher's study and served as a guide for the development of the instrumentation for this study. Additionally, the stated research questions regarding the frequency of preaching on the *imago Dei* principle and whether this is inclusive of

those with disabilities also served as a guide for the development of the instrumentation for this study. The instrumentation that was used for this quantitative descriptive survey research was the Genesis 1:27 Survey Questionnaire (GSQ). This GSQ was developed in such a way that it would be directly linked to the research questions which drove this study. This instrument was developed by this researcher for the purpose of her study instead of using one already created because the literature gap addressed in this study revealed no current study with this specific focus. This was done so that the frequency of the preaching of the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27 could be determined. The GSQ also identified the frequency of the preaching of the *imago Dei* principle as intentionally disability-inclusive. Previous literature studies identify and address other issues associated with disability-inclusivity, but none deal directly with the current landscape of the church and the intentional preaching of the *imago Dei* principle as being disability-inclusive. To answer these research questions, the researcher surveyed 131 senior pastors on their current preaching practices on this biblical principle. There were 162 GSQ surveys started, but only 131 surveys were successfully and thoroughly completed.

In an effort to provide detailed information regarding this researcher's instrumentation, the GSQ used to collect data included an instrument specifically designed by this researcher for her quantitative descriptive study. An initial version of this GSQ was created and then approved by the IRB prior to the study. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) point out, many survey instruments are free resources oftentimes as long as they are cited but there is also a plethora of other online survey products available. This researcher used Qualtrics as she was familiar with this program and the templates and resources it provides. This researcher created her GSQ using free templates. This researcher submitted survey links to participants in an electronic format via two Facebook private group pages and used the Qualtrics program software to facilitate her data

collection and analysis. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) speak to such software programs, they emphasize that errors can be reduced, and hypotheses can be tested more readily when researchers use organized spreadsheets for the analysis of their data. This researcher selected the survey method for her study's instrumentation due to the advantage of quick results for data collection and analysis. Other research study approaches would not be as beneficial for this researcher and would take more time to collect data. With the time frame in mind, this researcher also used a survey questionnaire approach which was cross-sectional in nature versus a longitudinal approach. It was important for this researcher to collect data at one time within a short period of approximately five weeks versus an extended period of time. This researcher disseminated the GSQ through the two private Facebook group pages, *SC Baptist Pastor to Pastor* with 1,214 group members and *SC Baptist Pastors' Wives* with 451 group members. This researcher saw value in this form of data collection for her study because it was quick, inexpensive, individualized, and convenient.

A weakness of this approach was the difficulty of individual connection without a previous relationship or knowledge of the pastors selected for the study. This researcher secured assistance with her study's data collection from an employee at the South Carolina Baptist Convention. This employee recommended using an established private Facebook group, *SC Baptist Pastors' Wives*, to get the GSQ study survey link to senior pastors. This researcher also used another private Facebook group, *SC Baptist Pastor to Pastor*. This approach protected the privacy of the pastors. This researcher held to the belief that if the GSQ came directly to them or from their spouse, they would be more apt to complete the GSQ. Sample items and content of the study instrument are available in the Appendix section. This includes a cover letter sent to all survey participants prior to the survey link being made available.

## **Validity**

In order for this researcher's study to be considered credible and trustworthy, it must demonstrate validity. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2019), the validity of a study is dependent upon the accuracy of its assessments. All questions on this researcher's survey questionnaire were examined by a panel of 20 non-participants who were selected by this researcher and approved by this researcher's dissertation supervisor. This expert panel of 20 non-participants included senior pastors of churches in South Carolina and other states. As Roberts and Hyatt (2019) point out, these panel participants should not be involved in the study but match the criteria of the study participants. The panel of 20 judges was asked to review the GSQ and offer any suggestions that may improve the quality or strategy of the instrumentation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Each question on the GSQ was directly related to the study's guiding research questions. The expert panel of 20 judges reviewed this criterion.

This panel of 20 judges was used by this researcher for the purpose of pilot testing or field testing the GSQ to allow for an initial evaluation and to assist in improving question clarity. The pilot test was conducted using an expert panel of 20 judges. This pilot test is similar to the GSQ survey available in the Appendix section of this study. Researchers use pilot tests as a way to test an assessment strategy in advance, or prior to a study, on a small group of people to try it out (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). The pilot test included follow-up questions regarding the clarity of information, the time required for survey completion, and whether or not there were any identifiable bias or leading indicators. This pilot testing also provided this researcher with an estimated completion time of the GSQ which was helpful for the actual study. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) state, pilot testing provides, "an initial evaluation of the internal consistency" and allows for improvements to be made (p. 154). These steps ensured a review of the validity,

both internal and external, of the proposed study. All feedback provided by the expert panel was considered by this researcher for any GSQ updates or changes. The GSQ and all correspondence with the participants was reviewed by Liberty University's IRB and any suggested corrections were made by this researcher. These steps also ensured a review of the reliability of the proposed study.

### **Reliability**

For research, reliability is “the degree to which your instrument consistently measures something” (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019, p. 149). Reliability is synonymous with dependability when associated with research and it assures readers that the data analysis of a study is trustworthy (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). This researcher enhanced the reliability of her assessment strategy by using the GSQ in a consistent manner for all study participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019). Leedy and Ormrod (2019) refer to this as *standardization* and state that it involves the use of “similar content, format, administration procedures, and evaluation criteria during the assessment” (p. 108). The next section describes the research procedures for this researcher's study.

### **Research Procedures**

This researcher contacted the Southern Baptist Convention of South Carolina in Columbia, South Carolina to receive guidance on the best way to contact as many as possible of the Southern Baptist senior pastors in the state of South Carolina that are official members of the Southern Baptist Cooperative. Due to privacy issues, the Southern Baptist Convention of South Carolina could not provide any sort of listing or compilation for this researcher but did recommend using the social media platform Facebook to reach out to groups made up of South Carolina Southern Baptist pastors and South Carolina Southern Baptist pastors' wives. In order



to keep all information safe, data will be stored on a password-locked computer owned by this researcher. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted from this personal computer.

Permission was requested and approved to join two private social media groups on Facebook, *SC Baptist Pastor to Pastor* with 1,214 group members and *SC Baptist Pastors' Wives* with 451 group members, in order to contact senior pastors regarding participation in this study. This researcher distinguished the senior pastors of the Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina based upon their positions detailed in their member profiles. Using the process of random sampling by focusing upon those members listed as senior pastor or pastor, this researcher randomly selected 131 senior pastors for her study from both private Facebook groups, *SC Baptist Pastor to Pastor* with 1,214 group members and *SC Baptist Pastors' Wives* with 451 group members, for participation in this quantitative descriptive research study. As Leedy and Ormrod (2019) point out, random selection is a way that allows for equal chances being present for each population member. For her study, this researcher asked for anonymous participation from these two social media groups of senior pastors and senior pastors' wives in the state of South Carolina. This researcher communicated with and met with an employee of the South Carolina Baptist Convention and received guidance on the most effective way to distribute the GSQ to senior pastors so they would be more apt to reply to the GSQ. This researcher used Qualtrics to develop a website so that all participants could access the GSQ using an imbedded hyperlink for easy access and completion of the questionnaire. This made it easy for participants to submit data for the researcher's study. This researcher used the IRB templates for this process and the format of the GSQ included an agreement to participate and a statement ensuring the anonymity of all responses. This researcher was committed to the strict confidentiality of all survey respondents involved in her study. All participants were ensured that participation in this

study was voluntary and could be discontinued at any time. The inclusion criteria for the participants involved senior pastorate positions who have been in this position for a minimum of 3 years. This criterion helped to ensure a strong relationship between the congregation members and the current senior pastor. Participants acknowledged that these inclusion criteria were met prior to beginning the GSQ. Using the social media group listings on Facebook for *SC Baptist Pastor to Pastor* with 1,214 group members and *SC Baptist Pastors' Wives* with 451 group members, this researcher posted an initial post for the pastors to participate in the forthcoming survey and for the pastors' wives to provide the forthcoming survey to their husbands. This request was disseminated electronically via social media private groups on Facebook to all group members. This social media posting requested their participation and explained the purpose of the study. This social media posting also assured all pastors of the anonymity of the survey and provided information on how to access the survey via a Qualtrics hyperlink, also notating the time frame in which the survey had to be completed. The online GSQ was available for a designated period of five weeks.

For the administration of the GSQ and follow-up after the survey, this researcher used a variety of steps. This included a social media posting which provided a short notification to the pastors that the survey link was available. After a week of minimal responses, this researcher contacted the Liberty University IRB and confirmed that using Direct Messaging to the members of the private pages remained within the originally approved parameters for her study. The actual GSQ link was then provided on the private social media group pages on Facebook through Direct Messaging. This researcher sent out between 35-50 Direct Messages daily. Between 4-7 days after an initial Direct Message, the next communication included a follow-up Direct Messaging reminder to individuals. This was done by using the member listings for both private

groups, *SC Baptist Pastor to Pastor* with 1,214 group members and *SC Baptist Pastors' Wives* with 451 group members for the purpose of reminding them of the importance of completing the GSQ promptly. This researcher only selected members who had a profile description of *senior pastor* or *pastor*. This researcher sent between 35-50 Direct Messages daily to pastors for two weeks. Approximately, three weeks after the actual GSQ was sent out, this researcher sent another notification to both social media groups encouraging a survey response and thanking them if they had already completed and submitted the GSQ. This researcher also sent out individual Direct Messages with a similar notification. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), this process normally takes place within a 4-week period. Participation in the GSQ was monitored by this researcher every day and this process took a total of five weeks before this researcher was able to close the survey with the number of responses needed. The next section describes the data analysis and statistical procedures for this researcher's study.

### **Data Analysis and Statistical Procedures**

#### **Data Analysis**

As Creswell and Creswell (2018) point out that data analysis comes from various interpretations of statistical results and themes and patterns which come from the data. For this study, the data was collected from the survey instrument and organized by this researcher based on each questionnaire response once all surveys were completed. All of the survey questions were driven by the research questions for this study. All of the survey questions are included in the Appendix section of this researcher's study. This Appendix section also provides the information which the researcher accumulated and reviewed in the data analysis, in addition to the statistical procedures used. Every survey respondent had the same questions on the GSQ. In the data analysis, this researcher also identified response bias and how response bias was

determined. An analysis of all independent and dependent variables in this study was also provided and this included the following: means, standard deviations, and a range of scores for the variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Statistical Procedures**

This researcher oriented her study on a 95% confidence level and a desired 8%-9% margin of error (Survey Monkey, n.d.). This researcher used a computer program available as a resource through Qualtrics to analyze the data gathered from this study. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), there are different companies that offer a statistical package that is both comprehensive and interactive for research purposes. This researcher also provided a listing of all the steps followed in the data analysis process so that the process is easy not only to follow but also to replicate. This researcher in her study reported how many participants in the sample completed the GSQ and how many did not. All GSQ results have been reported in this section since all research has been conducted and these results are in the form of practical evidence via the medium effect sample size and any confidence intervals. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommend, this researcher finished this section with a discussion section in which the implications of the results of her study are highlighted. This valuable information may prove helpful for any future research on the topic of disability-inclusivity in the church. The next section concludes this chapter with a chapter summary.

### **Chapter Summary**

This researcher is driven to change the current landscape of the church which contributes to the disabled population of the United States being classified as an unreached people group by the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. This researcher believes that answering questions regarding disability-inclusivity in the church may contribute to this

change. This researcher believes that there is a relationship between the preaching of the *imago Dei* principle found in Genesis 1:27 and the current lack of disability-inclusivity in churches today. Aside from the barriers that are presented by this researcher in her literature review and other issues associated with the lack of disability-inclusivity in the church, this researcher focused on collecting data to confirm the frequency of the preaching of the *imago Dei* principle and whether this biblical principle is intentionally preached as disability-inclusive in Southern Baptist churches in the state of South Carolina. To obtain data for her study, this researcher distributed a carefully designed survey which was successfully completed in entirety by 131 senior pastors of Southern Baptist Churches encompassing several counties in South Carolina. There were 162 GSQ surveys started, but only 131 surveys were successfully and thoroughly completed.

The research design selected for this study was a quantitative descriptive survey approach since this researcher identified designated variables. Another reason the quantitative descriptive research study approach was selected by this researcher is due to the social and behavioral aspects of the senior pastors being sampled and her preference to use a larger sample size with the hopes of generalizing results to a larger population. This strengthened the external validity of this researcher's study. This researcher selected survey instrumentation to conduct her quantitative descriptive research study. The data collected by this researcher for her study determined what senior pastors are doing to promote disability-inclusivity in their churches. This included identifying the frequency of the preaching practices on the *imago Dei* principle found in Genesis 1:27 and whether it is intentionally disability-inclusive.

The research problem addressed by this researcher evolved around the lack of disability-inclusivity in the church currently, hence rendering the disabled population to remain unreached

by the church (Howard, 2010). According to statistics, one in every five persons is classified as disabled (Hardwick, 2021). This statistic indicates that every community surrounding every church in America has a part of their population that is not being reached with the gospel and love of Jesus Christ. The disabled population is considered to be the largest minority in the world (Hardwick, 2021). Disability-inclusivity in the church remains at a standstill and it has remained in this posture for more than twenty years despite various legal strides made in America. This is also despite the available literature and other resources that identify various barriers and provide guidance on how to overcome these barriers in ministry to the disabled. The current church landscape and trajectory needs to change if the church is going to successfully fulfill its original purpose and the biblical mandates found in the Greatest Commandments and the Great Commission. This researcher believes that the current trajectory can be changed with the preaching of the *imago Dei* principle found in Genesis 1:27 if it is intentionally disability-inclusive. This researcher has identified a gap in the understanding of disability within the church and the senior pastor plays a pivotal role in communicating and clarifying God's Word on this very topic. Therefore, the purpose of this quantitative descriptive research study approach was to survey a random sample of senior pastors of Southern Baptist churches in the state of South Carolina to determine the frequency of preaching on Genesis 1:27 and the *imago Dei* principle, in addition to the frequency of preaching the *imago Dei* principle as intentionally disability-inclusive.

This researcher hopes that the results of her study may be able to be generalized to a larger population, specifically all Southern Baptist churches associated with the Southern Baptist Convention across the state of South Carolina. There were limitations of generalization and ethical considerations for this researcher's study as previously mentioned. The proposed

instrumentation this researcher used for her study was the GSQ that was comprised of questions that reflected the basic research questions mentioned previously that drove this study. The GSQ was distributed via electronic means, specifically using a website and an imbedded hyperlink created in Qualtrics in a social media posting on Facebook for access and completion. This researcher chose to use Qualtrics as a program to assist with this website and hyperlink setup. Qualtrics not only provides helpful templates for creating surveys but also provides a plethora of tools to assist in data analysis and some statistical procedures as well. For the purpose of following steps for statistical procedures this researcher contacted the Southern Baptist Convention of South Carolina for guidance on the most effective way to communicate with senior pastors affiliated with this denomination and currently serving in the state of South Carolina. To protect the privacy of the South Carolina Southern Baptist pastors, the Southern Baptist Convention of South Carolina was unable to provide any listing or contact information of Southern Baptist senior pastors in South Carolina, but a representative did recommend using a private social media group on Facebook. This researcher requested membership and was approved in both private groups, *SC Baptist Pastor to Pastor* with 1,214 group members and *SC Baptist Pastors' Wives* with 451 group members, for the purpose of her study. Not all members of these private groups are senior pastors, but most members identify their church position in their personal profile. Initial contact was made via a general social media post on the group page which was accessible by all members. This initial post communicated information regarding the study and requested their participation. After a week passed with minimal responses, this researcher received permission from Liberty University's IRB to Direct Message qualifying members with the same information. For the next two weeks, this researcher sent Direct Messages daily to between 35-50 private page members. This personal interaction and effort

produced the necessary survey responses. This researcher allowed time for the GSQ to be completed and she worked on the data analysis and statistical procedures to compile overviews in addition to a summary of results for her study. The ultimate goal of this researcher's study was to bring additional awareness to the need for disability-inclusivity in the church and to hopefully assist in changing the trajectory and current church landscape when it comes to this important topic.

This researcher hopes that her quantitative descriptive research study will assist in bringing awareness to the connection between the preaching of the *imago Dei* principle found in Genesis 1:27 and disability-inclusivity in the church. This researcher believes that an emphasis on this specific preaching can improve the current landscape of the church exponentially. The current church landscape does not reflect effectiveness in reaching all populations seeing that the disabled are not being reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ. In order for the church to be obedient and fulfill God's directives found in the Greatest Commandment and the Great Commission, those with disabilities must be reached by the church in addition to being a visible and active part of the church.

This researcher believes that her ultimate goal was achieved in that it did seem to bring additional awareness to the need for disability-inclusivity in the church. The survey results indicated that though senior pastors are preaching on Genesis 1:27 and the *imago Dei* principle there is still a disconnect and lack of understanding when it comes to inclusivity in the church. The majority of those surveyed said that their church had architectural accommodation for those with disabilities but nothing more. Physical barriers must be removed for disability-inclusivity in the church but attitudinal barriers must be removed as well. Another interesting result of this researcher's survey was that the majority of those surveyed did not know those with disabilities



are unreached by the church or that this is the largest minority in the world. This researcher hopes to assist in changing the trajectory and current church landscape when it comes to this important topic.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Overview

The quantitative descriptive research for this study was designed to identify the frequency of the preaching of Genesis 1:27 and whether or not the frequency of the preaching of the *imago Dei* principle found in Genesis 1:27 is intentionally disability-inclusive. In the Genesis 1:27 Survey Questionnaire (GSQ) each RQ was represented in at least one of the GSQ survey questions. For example, RQ1 asks, “Is disability-inclusivity understood by members of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?” The GSQ specifically asked if disability-inclusivity is clearly understood by the pastor’s congregation. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data by identifying both the mean and standard deviation for each GSQ question. Percentage results are provided in both graph and table formats for visual insight. The GSQ results showed that senior pastors in South Carolina Southern Baptist Churches feel that they understand disability-inclusivity and that their congregations do as well. The GSQ results also show that pastors preach Genesis 1:27, but not all agree that this preaching is intentionally disability-inclusive.

### Research Questions

**RQ1.** Is disability-inclusivity understood by members of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?

**RQ2.** Is disability-inclusivity practiced by members in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?

**RQ3.** How often is the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27 preached in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?

**RQ4.** How often is the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27 preached as intentionally disability-inclusive in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?

### Null Hypothesizes

**H01:** Senior pastors of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina indicated that they have an understanding of disability-inclusivity.

**H02:** Senior pastors of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina indicated that they do not have an understanding of disability-inclusivity.

**H03:** Senior pastors of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina indicated that they preach the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27 annually as intentionally disability-inclusive as represented in the RQs.

**H04:** Senior pastors of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina indicated that they do not preach the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27 annually as intentionally disability-inclusive as represented in the RQs.

### Compilation Protocol and Measures

Descriptive statistics were chosen to analyze the study data. An analysis of all independent and dependent variables in this study are provided and this includes the following: means, standard deviations, and a range of scores for the variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As Creswell and Creswell (2018) state a 95% confidence level “indicates that 95 out of 100 times the observed score will fall in the range of values.” This researcher oriented her study on a 95% confidence level and a desired 8% - 9% margin of error (Survey Monkey, n.d.). This researcher used various programs provided by Qualtrics to analyze the data gathered from this study. For this study, this researcher wanted to describe the frequency of the preaching of Genesis 1:27 and the frequency of the preaching of Genesis 1:27 as intentionally disability-inclusive. This research revealed that senior pastors in South Carolina Southern Baptist churches preach Genesis 1:27 on an annual basis. This research also revealed that senior pastors in South Carolina Southern Baptist churches do not preach this passage as intentionally disability-inclusive.

### **Demographic and Sample Data**

As Leedy and Ormrod (2019) state, a researcher can learn a lot from studying a well-chosen sample for the population of a study and reasonable inferences and observations may also be drawn. In 2019, according to the website of the Southern Baptist Convention, there were approximately 2,000 Southern Baptist churches in the state of South Carolina. For this study, the researcher used only senior pastors in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina for her target population. These pastors must have served in this position in their churches for a minimum of three years. Descriptive research was chosen for this study in order to describe the frequency with which senior pastors in South Carolina Southern Baptist churches preach on Genesis 1:27 and whether or not it is intentionally disability-inclusive. Data was collected from a sample of that population. This researcher randomly selected 162 senior pastors but only 131 senior pastors participated in her study. This researcher's intention is to generalize study results to the larger population of all Southern Baptist senior pastors in the state of South Carolina. The sample size of 131 senior pastors for this study was selected because it has been estimated that there are 2,000 Southern Baptist churches currently in the state of South Carolina. Using a randomly selected sample size of 131 senior pastors, this researcher hopes to generalize her research study results to all Southern Baptist churches in the state of South Carolina. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) larger sample sizes allow for better inference accuracy. The research was delimited to senior pastors who had been in their position for at least three years. Using a sample size calculator, this researcher targeted a sample size of 131, which provided data with a 95% confidence level with a desired 8% - 9% margin of error (Survey Monkey, n.d.). This goal was met over the course of five weeks as this researcher posted a series of social media posts and direct messages on Facebook focusing upon the group pages *SC Baptist Pastors' Wives* and

*SCBaptist Pastor to Pastor*. There were 162 GSQ surveys started, but only 131 surveys were successfully and thoroughly completed. According to the sample size calculator, this sample size of 131 results in a sampling error of plus or minus 8% - 9% with a 95% confidence level (Survey Monkey, n.d.). Some survey participants did not answer some of the survey questions but according to the sample size calculator, a sample size of 112 still results in a sampling error of plus or minus 9% with a 95% confidence level (Survey Monkey, n.d.).

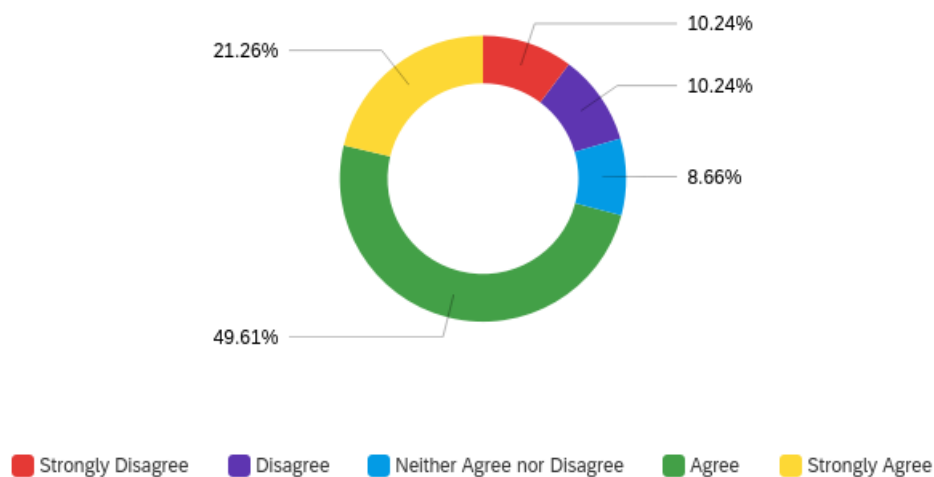
### **Data Analysis and Findings**

This research study evolves around the significance of God's Word which states, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them" (*New International Version*, 2011, Genesis 1:27). The descriptive survey research used statistics to describe the frequency of preaching Genesis 1:27 and the frequency of preaching the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27 as intentionally disability-inclusive. The data revealed that senior pastors in South Carolina Southern Baptist churches do preach Genesis 1:27 but the majority of those surveyed do not intentionally preach Genesis 1:27 as disability-inclusive. The majority of the senior pastors surveyed also indicate that they feel that they understand what the term disability-inclusive means, as do their congregations. The majority of pastors surveyed also indicate that their churches offer various means to assist and include those with disabilities in their congregation. The majority of pastors surveyed indicated that they were aware that those with disabilities are considered an unreached people group by the NAMB, but the majority of pastors surveyed also indicated that they were not aware of the statistics indicating that those with disabilities are the largest minority group in the world.

### Research Question One

The first research question asks, “Is disability-inclusivity understood by members of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?” The data analyzed for this question comes from GSQ survey questions four and five. These questions were designed to describe the answer to RQ1 by clarifying whether the senior pastor and congregation have a general understanding of disability-inclusivity. GSQ question four reads, “Please select the appropriate answer that best reflects your preaching practices at your current church. This research is seeking to understand current practices. Please use the following definition of disability-inclusivity while answering the associated questions in the survey: *Disability-inclusivity*: the intentional mention or inclusion of persons with disabilities. From my perspective as a Senior Pastor, I have a clear understanding of what disability-inclusivity refers to.” The possible responses for this question were “strongly agree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree.” The responses to this question are shown below in Figure 1 and Table 1. Table 1 reveals the mean was 3.61 with a standard deviation of 1.22. This lower standard deviation indicates that the majority of the responses rest near the central tendency, whereby most survey participants agree to have an understanding of the term *disability-inclusivity*. This is illustrated in Figure 1 and Table 1.

**Figure 1, Is Disability-Inclusivity Understood by the Pastor?**  
*RQ1, GSQ Question 4 Survey Responses*



With  $n=131$ , the data represented visually in Figure 1 shows that the majority of survey participants (70.87%) *strongly agree* or *agree* to have an understanding of disability-inclusivity. According to H01 this researcher's assumption that the senior pastors of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina will have an understanding of disability-inclusivity was supported even though the term may differ in definition based upon personal perspectives and experiences. The standard deviation of 1.22, as seen in Table 1, confirmed this assumption. The mean score of this question was 3.61 and the minimum and maximum were not significant outliers from the mean.

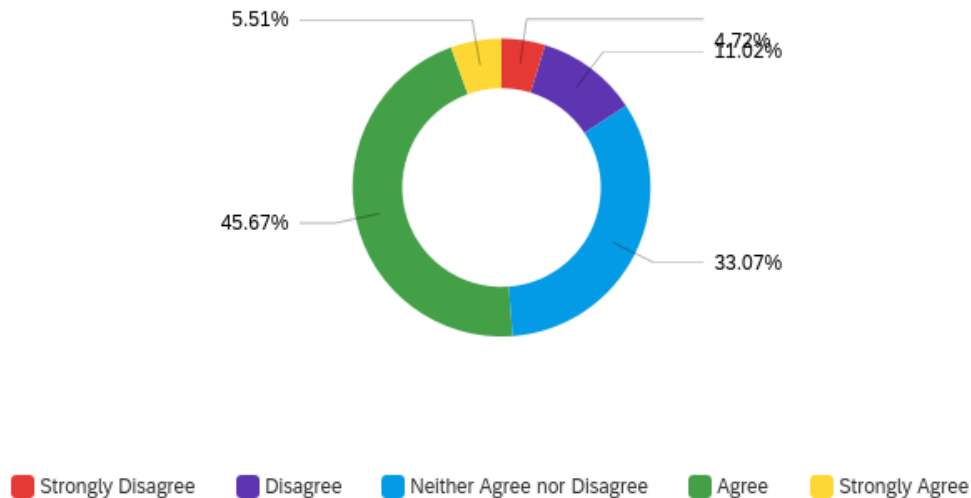
**Table 1**

*RQ1, GSQ Question 4 Survey Statistics*

Standard Deviation	1.22
Mean	3.61
Minimum	1.00
Maximum	5.00

GSQ question five reads, “From my perspective as a Senior Pastor, disability-inclusivity is clearly understood by my congregation.” The possible answers for this question were “strongly disagree; disagree; neither agree nor disagree; agree; strongly agree.” The responses to this question are shown below in Figure 2 and Table 2. Table 2 reveals the mean was 3.36 with a standard deviation of 0.92. This lower standard deviation indicates that the majority of the responses rest near the central tendency. This is illustrated in Figure 2 and Table 2.

**Figure 2, Is Disability-Inclusivity Understood by the Congregation?**  
*RQ1, GSQ Question 5 Survey Responses*



With n=131, the data represented visually in Figure 2 shows that the majority of survey participants (51.18%) *strongly agree* or *agree* that their congregations have an understanding of disability-inclusivity. The data represented visually also reveals a similar majority response to GSQ4. However, the percentage of those who strongly agree to this understanding is much smaller and infers a level of uncertainty that was not present in GSQ4 responses. This researcher expected the range of answers to this question to be uniform with what the senior pastors indicated for themselves in the previous question. The standard deviation of 0.92, as seen in



Table 2, confirmed this researcher's assumption. The mean score of this question was 3.36 and the minimum and maximum were not significant outliers from the mean.

**Table 2**

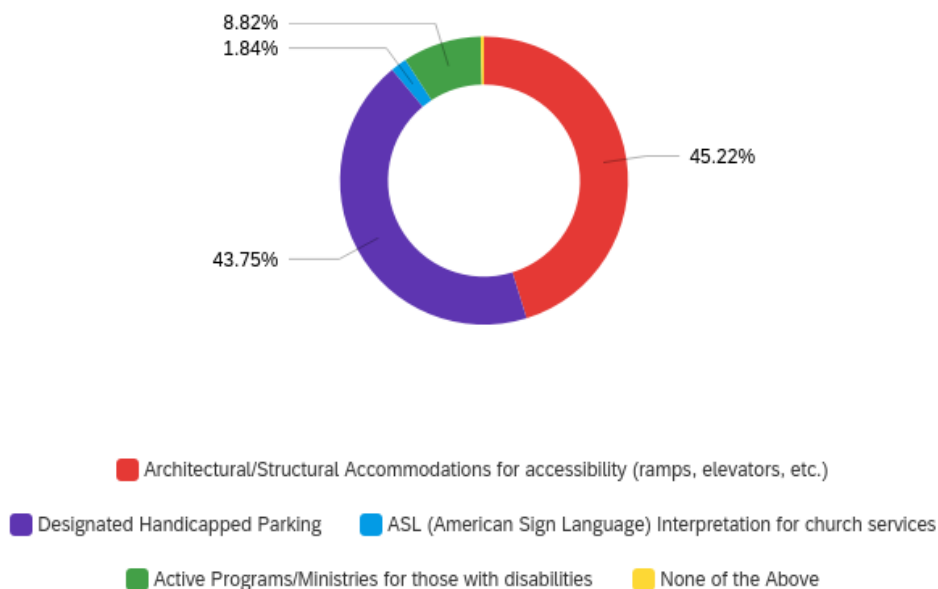
*RQ1, GSQ Question 5 Survey Statistics*

Standard Deviation	0.92
Mean	3.36
Minimum	1.00
Maximum	5.00

**Research Question Two**

The second research question asks, "Is disability-inclusivity practiced by members in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?" The data analyzed for this question comes from GSQ survey question seven. This question was designed to describe the answer to RQ2 by clarifying whether disability-inclusivity is being practiced in tangible and identifiable ways in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina. GSQ question seven reads, "Currently, my church has the following accommodations for people with disabilities (check all that apply)" The possible responses for this question were "architectural/structural accommodations for accessibility (ramps, elevators, etc.), designated handicapped parking, ASL (American Sign Language) interpretation for church services, active programs/ministries for those with disabilities, none of the above." The responses to this question are shown below in Figure 3.

**Figure 3, Existing Accommodations**  
*RQ2, GSQ Question 7 Survey Responses*



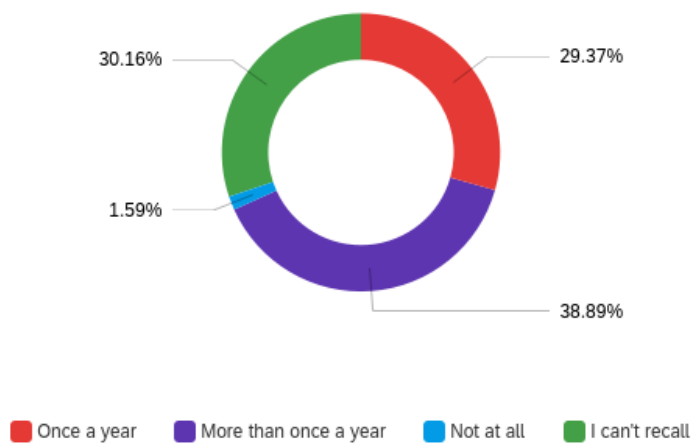
With n=131, the data represented visually in Figure 3 shows that the majority of survey participants provide architectural and structural accommodations for accessibility (45.22%) and designated handicapped parking (43.75%) totaling 88.97% of those surveyed. The data represented visually in Figure 3 also highlights a lack of active programs and ministries for those with disabilities (8.82%) and ASL interpretation for church services (1.84%). These results represent a lack of tangible evidence which would be expected as a result of the understanding of those with disabilities and the significance of disability-inclusivity in the church.

### **Research Question Three**

The third research question asks, “How often is the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27 preached in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?” The data analyzed for this question comes from GSQ survey questions eight and nine. These questions were designed to describe the answer to RQ3 by determining the frequency that Genesis 1:27 is preached annually in addition to whether or not the frequency of this preaching only occurs on the *Sanctity of Human Life*

Sunday with a focus on the unborn. GSQ question eight reads, “I preach on Genesis 1:27:” The possible responses for this question were “once a year; more than once a year; not at all; I can’t recall.” The responses to this question are shown below in Figure 4 and Table 3. Table 3 reveals the mean was 2.33 with a standard deviation of 1.19. This lower standard deviation indicates that the majority of the responses rest near the central tendency. This is illustrated in Figure 4 and Table 3.

**Figure 4, Annual Preaching on Genesis 1:27**  
*RQ3, GSQ Question 8 Survey Responses*



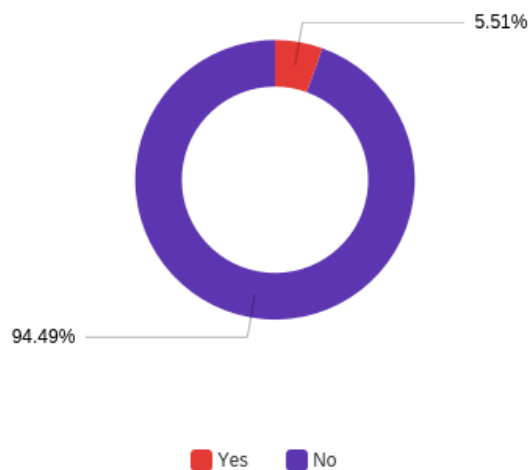
With n=131, the data represented visually in Figure 4 shows that the majority of survey participants preach annually on the passage of Genesis 1:27 with once a year at 29.37% and more than once a year at 38.89%, totaling 68.26%. This researcher expected the range of answers to this question to be uniform regarding the frequency with which they preach Genesis 1:27 annually. This researcher expected the participants to identify the frequency of once a year. The standard deviation of 1.19, as seen in Table 3, did not necessarily confirm this researcher’s assumption since 31.75% responded *not at all* or that they *cannot recall*. The minimum and maximum were not significant outliers from the mean of this question which was 2.33.

**Table 3*****RQ3, GSQ Question 8 Survey Statistics***

Standard Deviation	1.19
Mean	2.33
Minimum	1.00
Maximum	4.00

GSQ question nine reads, “I only preach Genesis 1:27 on the *Sanctity of Human Life* Sunday and the sermon is focused on the unborn.” The answers given for this question were “yes, no.” The responses to this question are shown below in Figure 5 and Table 4. Table 4 reveals the mean was 1.94 with a standard deviation of 0.23. This very low standard deviation indicates that the majority of the responses rest near the central tendency. This is illustrated in Figure 5 and Table 4.

**Figure 5, Preaching on Genesis 1:27 for *Sanctity of Human Life***  
*RQ3, GSQ Question 9 Survey Responses*



With n=131, the data represented visually in Figure 5 shows that the majority of survey participants (94.49%) do not only preach Genesis 1:27 for the *Sanctity of Human Life* Sunday with a focus on the unborn. This researcher expected participants to preach Genesis 1:27 primarily on the *Sanctity of Human Life* Sunday. The standard deviation of 0.23, as seen in Table

4, did not confirm this researcher's assumption. This researcher also noted that the minimum and maximum were not significant outliers from the mean of this question which was 1.94.

**Table 4**

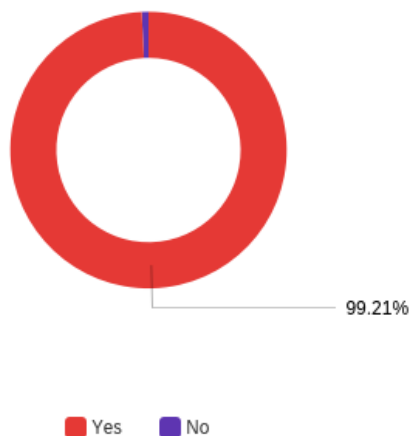
RQ3, GSQ Question 9 Survey Statistics

Standard Deviation	0.23
Mean	1.94
Minimum	1.00
Maximum	2.00

**Research Question Four**

The fourth research question asks, "How often is the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27 preached as intentionally disability-inclusive in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?" The data analyzed for this question comes from GSQ survey questions six, ten, eleven, twelve, and thirteen. These questions were designed to describe the answer to RQ4 by determining whether or not the participants believe that persons with disabilities are created in the image of God, the *imago Dei* principle. The questions were designed to identify if there is an intentional disability-inclusivity in the participants' preaching of Genesis 1:27 and if the preaching addresses marginalization issues and barriers facing those with disabilities. The questions were also designed to identify whether or not the participants were aware of current statistics regarding the disabled. GSQ survey questions six and ten could be answered "yes" or "no". GSQ question six reads, "I hold to the belief that all persons with disabilities are created in the image of God." The possible responses to this question were "yes; no." The responses to this question are shown below in Figure 6 and Table 5. Table 5 reveals the mean was 1.01 with a standard deviation of 0.09. This very low standard deviation indicates that the majority of the responses rest near the central tendency. This is illustrated in Figure 6 and Table 5.

**Figure 6, View of the Disabled**  
*RQ4, GSQ Question 6 Survey Responses*



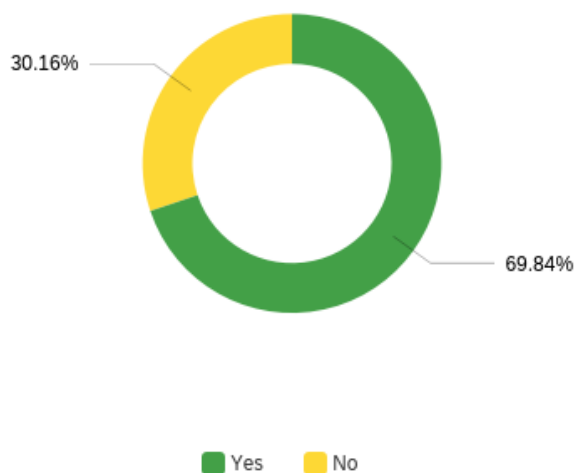
With  $n=131$ , the data represented visually in Figure 6 shows that the majority of survey participants (99.21%) believe that those with disabilities are created in the image of God. This researcher expected no variation of answers to this question as the basic biblical principle that all persons are in God's image is one that is consistent throughout the Old Testament and New Testament and is in line with the basic tenants of the Southern Baptist doctrines outlined in the *Baptist Faith & Message*. The standard deviation of 0.09, as seen in Table 5, confirmed this researcher's assumption. The mean score of this question was 1.01 and the minimum and maximum were not significant outliers from the mean.

**Table 5**  
*RQ4, GSQ Question 6 Survey Statistics*

Standard Deviation	0.09
Mean	1.01
Minimum	1.00
Maximum	2.00

GSQ question ten reads, “I preach Genesis 1:27 as being applicable to all persons and I intentionally include those with disabilities.” The possible answers for this question were “yes; no.” The responses to this question are shown below in Figure 7 and Table 6. Table 6 reveals the mean was 1.30 with a standard deviation of 0.46. This lower standard deviation indicates that the majority of the responses rest near the central tendency. This is illustrated in Figure 7 and Table 6.

**Figure 7, Preaching of Genesis 1:27 as Intentionally Disability-Inclusive**  
*RQ4, GSQ Question 10 Survey Responses*



With  $n=131$ , the data represented visually in Figure 7 shows that the majority of survey participants (69.84%) agree that they preach Genesis 1:27 as being applicable to all persons, including an intentional effort to include those with disabilities. According to H03, this researcher’s assumption that the senior pastors of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina would preach Genesis 1:27 as intentionally disability-inclusive was disproven with the survey results. Additionally, according to H04 this researcher’s assumption that the senior pastors of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina would not preach Genesis 1:27 as intentionally disability-inclusivity was disproven with the survey results. This researcher expected a less

balanced response between the answers to this question. This researcher did not expect the majority of participants to state that they made an intentional effort to preach Genesis 1:27 as inclusive of those with disabilities. The standard deviation of 0.46, as seen in Table 6, did not confirm this researcher's assumption. The mean score of this question was 1.30 and the minimum and maximum were not significant outliers from the mean.

**Table 6**

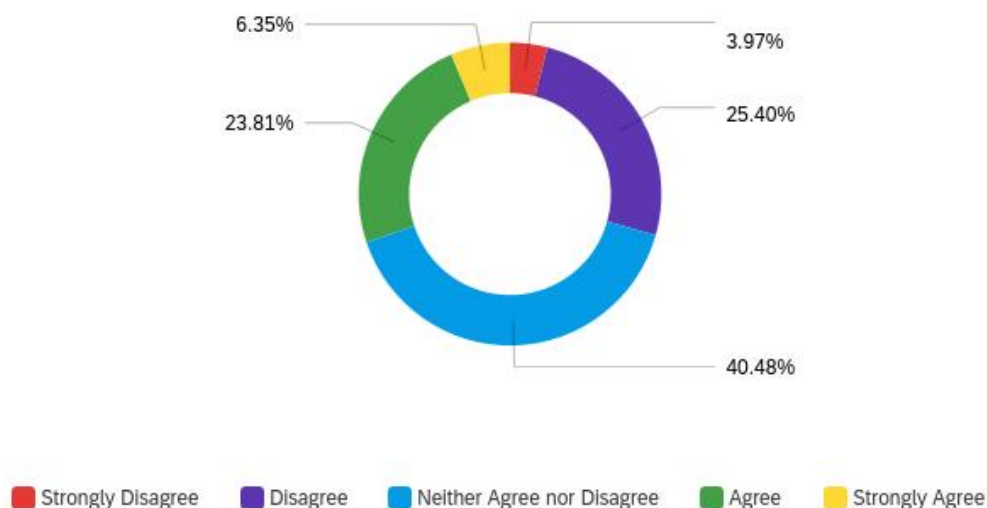
*RQ4, GSQ Question 10 Survey Statistics*

Standard Deviation	0.46
Mean	1.30
Minimum	1.00
Maximum	2.00

GSQ question eleven reads, "I preach on topics that address barriers and marginalization issues associated with those with disabilities." The possible answers for this question were "strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree." The responses to this question are shown below in Figure 8 and Table 7. Table 7 reveals the mean was 3.03 with a standard deviation of 0.95. This lower standard deviation indicates that the majority of the responses rest near the central tendency. This is illustrated in Figure 8 and Table 7.



**Figure 8, Addressing Barriers and Marginalization**  
*RQ4, GSQ Question 11 Survey Responses*

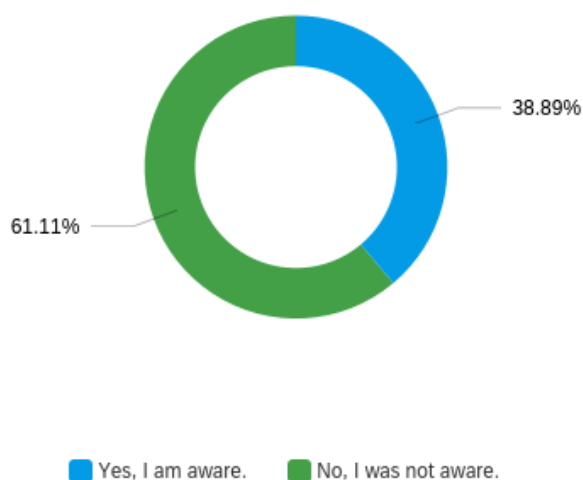


With  $n=131$ , the data represented visually in Figure 8 shows that the majority of survey participants (40.48%) *neither agree nor disagree* that they preach in a way to address barriers or marginalization issues associated with the disabled. The data represented visually in Figure 8 also shows close percentages between those who agree (23.81%) with this statement and those who disagree (25.40%). This researcher expected the range of answers to this question to be varied based upon the belief that barriers and marginalization issues differ from congregation to congregation and also due to the fact that these barriers and issues oftentimes are not recognized. The standard deviation of 0.95, as seen in Table 7, confirmed this researcher's assumption. The mean score of this question was 3.03 and the minimum and maximum were not significant outliers from the mean.

**Table 7***RQ4, GSQ Question 11 Survey Statistics*

Standard Deviation	0.95
Mean	3.03
Minimum	1.00
Maximum	5.00

GSQ question twelve reads, “I am aware that those with disabilities are considered an unreached people group in the United States.” The possible answers for this question were “yes, I am aware; no, I was not aware.” The responses to this question are shown below in Figure 9 and Table 8. Table 8 reveals the mean was 1.61 with a standard deviation of 0.49. This lower standard deviation indicates that the majority of the responses rest near the central tendency. This is illustrated in Figure 9 and Table 8.

**Figure 9, Awareness of Unreached Status***RQ4, GSQ Question 12 Survey Responses*

With n=131, the data represented visually in Figure 9 shows that the majority of survey participants (61.11%) are *not aware* that the disabled are considered an unreached people group by the church in the United States. This researcher expected the majority of participants to be

unaware that the disabled are unreached by the church simply based on the current statistics. The standard deviation of 0.49, as seen in Table 8, confirmed this researcher's assumption. The mean score of this question was 1.61 and the minimum and maximum were not significant outliers from the mean.

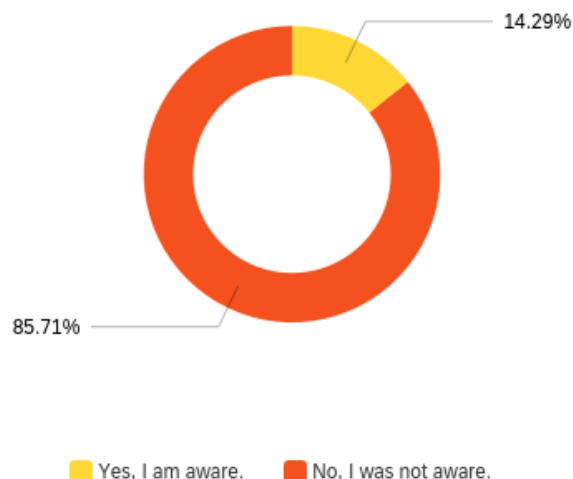
**Table 8**

*RQ4, GSQ Question 12 Survey Statistics*

Standard Deviation	0.49
Mean	1.61
Minimum	1.00
Maximum	2.00

GSQ question thirteen reads, "I am aware that current statistics indicate that those with disabilities make up the largest minority group in the world." The possible answers for this question were "yes, I am aware; no, I was not aware." The responses to this question are shown below in Figure 10 and Table 9. Table 9 reveals the mean was 1.86 with a standard deviation of 0.35. This lower standard deviation indicates that the majority of the responses rest near the central tendency. This is illustrated in Figure 10 and Table 9.

**Figure 10, Awareness of Minority Status**  
*RQ4, GSQ Question 13 Survey Responses*



With  $n=131$ , the data represented visually in Figure 10 shows that the majority of survey participants (85.71%) are not aware that those with disabilities are considered the largest minority in the world. This researcher expected the majority of participants to be unaware that the disabled are considered the largest minority in the world simply based on the current statistics. The standard deviation of 0.35, as seen in Table 9, confirmed this researcher's assumption. The mean score of this question was 1.86 and the minimum and maximum were not significant outliers from the mean.

**Table 9**

*RQ4, GSQ Question 13 Survey Statistics*

Standard Deviation	0.35
Mean	1.86
Minimum	1.00
Maximum	2.00

### Evaluation of the Research Design

The descriptive survey method used for this researcher's study had both strengths and weaknesses. A strength was that this researcher was able to collect sufficient data to identify the frequency of preaching on Genesis 1:27. This researcher was also able to determine if the biblical principle of *imago Dei* is being intentionally communicated as disability-inclusive. Another strength was that this researcher was able to collect sufficient data to identify an overall perspective of senior pastors in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina and their awareness that those with disabilities are considered unreached by the church and that they are the largest minority in the world. This researcher believes that the role of the pastor is significant as pastors must not only initiate disability-inclusivity but also set an example through their own attitudes and through their preaching. An additional strength was that this researcher was able to collect sufficient data to identify that senior pastors in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina have an understanding of what disability-inclusivity is as do their congregations. A final notable strength of this study was that this researcher had some participants respond in Direct Messages after completing the survey and to provide unsolicited feedback confirming the importance of this topic. Some of the senior pastors commented that the survey on the topic of disability-inclusivity in the church brought a new awareness for them to consider which was unknown previously. One senior pastor stated in a Direct Message after confirming his completion of the survey, "this is one area of application that we may be deficient in making, and I for one, am now cognizant of that...thank you" (anonymous, SC SBC Senior Pastor)! Another survey participant wrote, "As a pastor and a parent of a child with Down Syndrom [*sic*] I want to thank you for this survey" (anonymous, SC SBC Senior Pastor). A similar response came from another pastor who stated, "I enjoyed the questions, and it opened my eyes on several things."

There are also some weaknesses observed in the execution of this study. The first weakness observed was the lack of initial responses. This researcher came to realize that the group pages on Facebook were not as active with posts and traffic as she had hoped. This resulted in this researcher moving to Direct Messaging group members individually to request participation.

Another weakness observed was that some senior pastors may have taken offense at the reference to *inclusivity*. This was not in this researcher's tool nor was it being measured. As was reflected in the strengths of the study, this feedback was unsolicited and came from Direct Messaging. Some feedback received from one senior pastor stating that he initially misunderstood this research as being inappropriate for the church and more culturally oriented. After further conversation with this senior pastor, this researcher was able to clarify the biblical principle upon which this study operated in conjunction with current statistics of the disabled and this researcher's passion to change the present trajectory and assist the church in fulfilling its commission and purpose of reaching all persons with the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. This senior pastor changed his mind and indicated he had a better understanding and was just overprotective of the church with all that is currently going on in the culture.

Another weakness that was observed but was not in this researcher's tool nor being measured again was unsolicited feedback and came from Direct Messaging. This weakness observed in the execution of this study was that some of the senior pastors pointed out that this survey "tends to view preaching as a topical event...for those of us who are expository preaches [*sic*]...the imago dei is a consistent theme that resonates throughout all of our sermons" (anonymous, SC SBC Senior Pastor). Another observation from a participant was that the "passage alone isn't enough to build a theology of disability-inclusiveness" (anonymous, SC

SBC Senior Pastor). Other senior pastors responded in Direct Messaging and highlighted that the *imago Dei* principle is throughout Scripture, not just Genesis 1:27 solely. It was not the intention of this researcher to imply that Genesis was the only passage to support the *imago Dei* biblical principle.

The descriptive survey method used for this researcher's study had both strengths and weaknesses. The strengths of this study confirm the value of this specific approach for this topic. The weaknesses of this study will assist future research and guide future studies on the topic of disability-inclusivity and the church.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

### Overview

This research study sought to determine the frequency with which South Carolina Southern Baptist senior pastors preach the biblical principle, *imago Dei*, in Genesis 1:27 and whether or not it is intentionally disability-inclusive. The writer of Genesis states, “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them” (*New International Version*, 2011, Genesis 1:27). This study was important as it allowed this researcher to surmise whether South Carolina Southern Baptist senior pastors recognize the importance of this preaching and how their leadership role and actions influence the congregation and how those with disabilities are treated. This researcher holds to the belief that existing barriers can be overcome and the church can be educated and made aware of specific needs of the disabled if pastoral leadership effectively promotes disability-inclusivity through a clear and concise preaching of Genesis 1:27.

### Research Purpose

The purpose of this quantitative descriptive research study was to determine the frequency of the preaching on Genesis 1:27 and the *imago Dei* principle based upon a surveying of randomly sampled senior pastors of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina. Additionally, the frequency of the preaching on the *imago Dei* principle as intentionally disability-inclusive was determined.

### Research Questions

**RQ1.** Is disability-inclusivity understood by members of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?

**RQ2.** Is disability-inclusivity practiced by members in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?



**RQ3.** How often is the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27 preached in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?

**RQ4.** How often is the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27 preached as intentionally disability-inclusive in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?

### **Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications**

In Chapter Two, the review of current literature included an in-depth look at various literature providing both empirical and theoretical perspectives related to this researcher's study of disability-inclusivity. This current literature examined historical perspectives, barriers, biblical examples, the importance of the image of God, and the role of pastoral leadership. The literature also presented an analysis of disability theology and disability theories all of which are relevant for this researcher's study. This literature revealed the status of those with disabilities and the church in conjunction with how the trajectory has not changed for several years. The review of literature provided various perspectives of the church regarding disability while also identifying the original intent and purpose of the church is to reach all people groups with the gospel. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two highlights the worth and value of all people and that all persons are created in the image of God. Yet there are barriers and marginalization which continue to contribute to the status of persons with disabilities and this contributes to their being unreached by the church. This section highlights this study's results in relation to the current literature on the topic of disability-inclusivity while also discussing how it confirms and corroborates with the current literature. This section also offers recommendations for stakeholders on this topic as it relates to the church today. Lastly, this researcher will provide an overview of the RQs, the study's results, and how this information contributes to the literature reviewed.

## Empirical Literature

As Carter (2021) highlights, many churches struggle to reach out and meet the needs of the disabled in their communities and solid preparation is required for it to occur. This researcher's study confirms this research. Though the majority of senior pastors surveyed in this study stated that they have an understanding of disability-inclusivity, the survey results were demonstrative that there is still a deficiency of programs and ministries for those with disabilities. This inaction is evidence of a lack of understanding or recognition of the needs of the disabled.

This researcher highlighted the importance of intentionality in her study and this corroborates with what Howard (2010) states in regard to the belief that if there are intentional efforts in the church to change attitudes via curriculum, ministry efforts, and direct pastoral challenges, the disabled will be reached with the gospel message and changed by it. Hulshof (2022) is also another proponent of intentionality as the author writes about the importance of church leaders connecting with the disabled and being both purposeful and thoughtful in this endeavor. This researcher also focused on the significance of pastoral leadership for this study. As Treloar (1999) believes that there is a relationship between one's spiritual beliefs and how one responds to disability, the author also goes on to write on the belief that the attitudes of people impact disability-inclusivity in the church. This researcher in her study also demonstrated a disconnect due to the belief that disability-inclusivity was understood and Genesis 1:27 was being preached yet the majority of pastors surveyed stated that no actual programs or ministries were in place for those with disabilities. This researcher's study extends this previous research.

The novel contribution of this study is this researcher's emphasis upon the preaching of a specific passage and principle in the *imago Dei* found in Genesis 1:27. White (2017), Hulshof

(2022), and Raffety (2022) reference different passages to support their thoughts on disability and how it is addressed in Scripture. This research focused upon the first passage in Scripture referencing the *imago Dei* principle in conjunction with the role of pastoral leadership and the senior pastor leading by his example and preaching. The current literature also highlights both the importance of the pastor in promoting awareness which contributes to changing attitudes and leading the church to disability-inclusivity in addition to the importance of seeing those with disabilities as in the image of God. This researcher focused upon where the *imago Dei* principle begins in Scripture as she holds to the premise that this is foundational in nature. This was reflected in Matthews (2011) references to the importance of the image of God where the author states that dignity begins at the point of creation as God indicated His pleasure in the very beginning. This researcher extended on Matthews (2011) research.

### **Theoretical Literature**

As Hardwick (2021) highlights, preaching is tantamount to building a learning culture within the church and the author is a strong believer that a pastor's sermons on disability will promote disability-inclusivity in the church. This researcher also extends Hardwick's (2021) theory. For this researcher and this study, it was important to evaluate various perspectives of the church towards the disabled. This study sheds new light on theory, thus informing the topic of disability-inclusivity in churches in South Carolina.

An additional novel contribution that this researcher highlights in her research is the senior pastors' lack of awareness of the current condition and status of those with disabilities. The majority of senior pastors surveyed indicated that they were *not aware* of the minority status or the unreached status of those with disabilities. This is an inaccurate perspective of those with disabilities and this researcher sees it as contributing to the current trajectory in the church. Even

though a percentage of pastors feel that they preach Genesis 1:27 as intentionally disability-inclusive, this lack of awareness is significant and allows for further review. This researcher recommends that senior pastors continue preaching Genesis 1:27 but being more intentional in preaching it as disability-inclusive and to find ways to increase their awareness and understanding of those with disabilities so that they may more holistically address them and their needs whilst also providing a more inclusive setting. The implications in regard to the area of study surrounding disability-inclusivity in the church are clear by evaluating this researcher's results. More work needs to be done to ensure disability-inclusivity in the church. The theoretical, empirical, and practical implications for this researcher's study follow.

### **Research Question One**

The first research question asked, "Is disability-inclusivity understood by members of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?" The survey was designed to consider this question from a couple of different positions: does the senior pastor have an understanding of disability-inclusivity, and does the pastor feel that his congregation has an understanding of disability-inclusivity. The mean of 3.61 demonstrates a variety of responses as the standard deviation is 1.22 with the minimum being 1.00 and the maximum being 5.00. The importance of the data is revealed in the majority of senior pastors surveyed seeing that they feel that they have an understanding of what disability-inclusivity is. This result implies an awareness, but not necessarily a certain degree of awareness.

Interestingly, the results were not similar when senior pastors were asked if their congregations have an understanding of disability-inclusivity. The majority of senior pastors surveyed answered that they agree (45.67%) or strongly agree (5.51%) that their congregations have an understanding of disability-inclusivity. However, there is also a significant percentage

(33.07%) of senior pastors surveyed who could not answer this question definitively. The mean for this question was 3.36 with a very low standard deviation of 0.92.

The primary study which motivated this researcher, and her study is a study referenced by Howard (2010) which involves research collected by the North American Mission Board (NAMB) in 2007. Howard (2010) states that this study identifies those with disabilities as the largest unreached people group in America as 95% of the population states they are not in the church. Many sources are referenced in the literature for this study, but Howard (2010), Eiesland (1994), Hulshof (2022), and Hardwick (2021) have been the most influential in communicating both the current landscape concerning those with disabilities and the church and the work that remains. Howard (2010), Hardwick (2021), and Hulshof (2022) all reference the NAMB statistics in their writings as well. This researcher wanted to address the gap in which the senior pastor can play a role in developing a more biblical landscape in the church for those with disabilities if he understands disability-inclusivity and can be intentional about addressing it through the preaching of the *imago Dei* principle found in Genesis 1:27. The findings revealed that though senior pastors feel they have this understanding, there is uncertainty as to whether the congregation does. The implication is that more can be done to ensure the congregation's understanding of disability-inclusivity. Related literature communicates that the result of a thorough understanding should be evidence of an intentional practice of inclusion. This was the purpose of research question two.

### **Research Question Two**

The second research question asked, "Is disability-inclusivity practiced by members in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?" To understand how disability-inclusivity may be practiced in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina, the survey asked specific questions

that would indicate whether or not barriers were present. These barriers may be physical barriers or emotional ones. This researcher focused on physical or tangible barriers that are easier to identify. People may assume that disability-inclusivity in a church simply deals with architectural barriers, but other barriers also include a lack of programs, ministries, or services as well. Survey participants could select all applicable answers regarding their church. Due to the nature of this question and the fact that several options may or may not be selected, there is no mean or standard deviation or Table for this question. The survey results indicated that a solid majority of senior pastors acknowledge the presence of handicapped parking and architectural/structural accommodations at their church. Such accommodations pertain to physical barriers that may inhibit a disabled person from accessing a church building or property easily. The survey was also designed to include more involved and intentional aspects relating to disability-inclusivity which require an action that comes from awareness of needs such as offering American Sign Language (ASL) in services or having active programs and ministries for those with disabilities to be engaged in the church body. A single respondent answered that his church had nothing at all, but for this survey response a percentage did not result on the pie chart.

In the review of the literature, Eiesland (1994) details the reality of barriers, both social and physical, that impact those with disabilities and their ability to participate or interact with the church. Though Eiesland is somewhat dated, the author's work presents a perspective and truth that is referenced by most researchers who address the theology of disability or the topic of disability and the church. Howard (2010) also addresses the impact of barriers, both for those with disabilities and the church as well. Raffety (2022) addresses the church environment in her work, speaking to the presence of barriers that impact not only physical accessibility to the

church and activities but a lack of involvement as well. The reality of the barriers which inhibit full involvement in church activities is evident in the results of this researcher's study as only 10.66% are currently offering programs for those with disabilities. Though there have been physical improvements to church facilities and properties, there is still work that needs to be done so that those with disabilities may participate and be a part of church activities. Hulshof (2022) references the mindset which inhibits disability-inclusivity and is present in churches as a *country club mentality*. Hulshof (2022) references this mentality as being an attitude that alludes to certain church members being welcome whereas other church members are not. A study that contributed to this researcher's study is a quantitative study and content analysis by Webb (2020) which points out the continued issue of barriers faced by those with disabilities, impacting participation in churches. Webb (2020) is exhaustive in her listing of barriers that fall into a variety of categories: architectural, attitudinal, communication, programmatic, and liturgical. The implication of the results of this research question is that barriers are still present.

### **Research Question Three**

The third research question asked, "How often is the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27 preached in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?" The survey was designed to determine the frequency that this passage is preached whilst also determining whether this preaching is intentionally disability-inclusive. Though the majority of senior pastors in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina state that they preach on Genesis 1:27 more than once a year (38.89%), there is a close margin between those who preach on Genesis 1:27 once a year (29.37%) and those who cannot recall (30.16%) how often they preach on Genesis 1:27. For this survey question, the mean is 2.33 with a standard deviation of 1.19. This researcher felt that a definitive gap exists in the current literature and therefore the frequency of preaching on this

passage is important to her study. This researcher feels that these results are evidence that an intentional effort to preach on Genesis 1:27 contributes to an intentional effort to be disability-inclusive as well. The survey results of 30.16% who cannot recall are valuable for this researcher's study. The survey was also designed to determine whether Genesis 1:27 is only preached on *Sanctity of Human Life* Sundays which provides an intentional focus on the unborn. A solid majority of respondents (94.49%) said they do not only preach this passage for that Sunday. The mean for this survey response was 1.94 with a very low standard deviation of 0.23. The survey results of this question were not what this researcher expected.

In the review of the literature, Pastor Hardwick (2021) who is disabled, believes that preaching is powerful and capable of promoting a culture of learning within the church. The literature review also highlights Hulshof (2017) who provides a focus on the importance of the pastor's role for effective and successful disability-inclusivity within the church. Other literature includes work from Callaway (2018) who asserts that the pastor's role is significant in a church's inclusive ministry as well. Black (1996) addresses the importance of the church being inclusive of those with disabilities whilst also providing biblical texts to assist in preaching about disabilities. For this researcher, Genesis 1:27 is a pivotal passage for her study as it encapsulates the *imago Dei* principle. As Cribb and Crisler (2019) point out, God's intent for the beliefs and practices of His people, the church, is to use such foundational principles in the Old Testament and New Testament for correct theology and beliefs. This researcher specifically wanted to address Genesis 1:27 in her study based on this premise. The implications for this question are that the biblical principles found in Genesis 1:27 and throughout Scripture that communicate the *imago Dei* principle need to take precedence in the pulpit if disability-inclusivity is to become a reality.



#### Research Question Four

The fourth research question asked, “How often is the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27 preached as intentionally disability-inclusive in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina?” In an attempt to determine the frequency of this preaching and in order to understand the emphasis used in the preaching of Genesis 1:27, the survey was designed to focus on a few different angles. Survey participants were asked if they felt that those with disabilities are created in the image of God. Due to the presence of numerous identified barriers, this researcher wanted to know if her focus group of those with disabilities was intentionally included as a group who are made in the image of God as other populations. Survey results show that 99.21% of those surveyed agree that those with disabilities are created in the image of God. However, the data showing that 69.84% preach Genesis 1:27 as being applicable to all persons seems somewhat contradictory. Previous data indicates that pastors cannot answer definitively on their congregation’s understanding of disability-inclusivity and a large percentage of those surveyed cannot recall how often they preach on the passage. These results present a contradiction for this researcher. The survey was also designed to determine whether senior pastors believe that those with disabilities are created in the image of God. The survey results to this question were not surprising as 99.21% agree with this determination. The mean for this question was 1.01 and the lowest standard deviation of any other survey question. The survey was designed to identify whether or not pastors address issues surrounding barriers and marginalization issues experienced by the disabled. The results for this survey question were also not definitive, with a majority (40.48%) selecting *neither agree nor disagree* and only (23.81%) agreeing that this is included in preaching on disability-inclusivity. The mean for this question was 3.03 with a moderate standard deviation of 0.95. The survey was also designed to identify whether or not

senior pastors in Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina are aware of current statistics regarding those with disabilities, i.e., they are the largest unreached people group in the United States and the largest minority in the world. Survey results indicated that 61.11% of those surveyed are not aware that the disabled are classified as unreached and this question had a mean of 1.61 and a somewhat lower standard deviation of 0.49. Alternately, 85.71% of those surveyed are not aware that those with disabilities are the largest minority in the world. This latter response had a mean of 1.86 and a low standard deviation of 0.35.

In the review of literature, the image of God must be understood as being applicable to all persons. Howard (2010) writes that all who are made in the image of God are worthy of dignity and value and this is not based upon one's abilities. This is an important message to be heard from the pulpit. Additional literature from Callaway (2018) states, "There are few doctrines that are more important to mankind than the *imago Dei*. This can have a profound effect on the way humans are viewed" (p. 45). Callaway (2018) highlights the application of this truth no matter what a person's abilities are and states that without this principle, people with disabilities lose both value and dignity. Yong (2011) attributes the marginalization of the disabled by the church to an incorrect study and reading of Scripture. According to the theological literature, the image of God is evidently a key component in any training or education that needs to be implemented and the pastoral role and leadership in promoting disability-inclusivity is evident as well. This researcher finds this information to be significant for her study and the importance of Genesis 1:27 being preached as intentionally disability-inclusive. Related literature also identifies how beliefs impact behavior as Treloar (1999) believes that there is a relationship between one's spiritual beliefs and how one responds to disability. Treloar (1999) also writes on the belief that the attitudes of people impact disability-inclusivity in the church. The implications for this

question and its results are two-fold. First, an intentional effort to preach as disability-inclusive is tantamount if the current landscape of the church is going to change. This is true for the preaching of Genesis 1:27 or any passage on the *imago Dei* principle. A second implication is that there is not enough awareness of the disabled or their current status as being unreached and the largest minority in the world. A final implication is that the original design and purpose of the church that is given in the Great Commission and the Greatest Commandments will continue to go unfulfilled.

### **Research Limitations**

This research did have its limitations. This research only sampled senior pastors. These senior pastors had to have served in this capacity for a minimum of three years. This research was also limited to churches associated with the Southern Baptist Convention. There was also a limitation of only surveying pastors of churches in the state of South Carolina. This limitation increased the validity of the research design and was critical for this study. This research design involved a denomination that does not ordain women or allow women to hold senior pastorate positions within the church. Therefore, this researcher's study was generalized to men who serve as senior pastors. Another limitation came from the initial low survey response rate. Initially this researcher posted on two private group pages on Facebook, *SC Baptist Pastors' Wives* and *SCBaptist Pastor to Pastor*. These group pages were not as active as this researcher planned. Therefore, she accessed the list of private group members and used Direct Messaging to reach out individually and this approach worked to achieve the desired results. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) state a 95% confidence level "indicates that 95 out of 100 times the observed score will fall in the range of values." The study's initial goal was to have 140 survey participants, which would have resulted in a confidence level of 95% and a sampling error of

plus or minus 8%. With the actual response rate of 131, those numbers were slightly impacted still resulting in a 95% confidence level and a slightly lower sampling error than the original goal, a sampling error of plus or minus 8% - 9%. Another limitation was present due to the survey's anonymity. This study was designed to have disproportionate stratified sampling with approximately equal participants from all South Carolina counties. However, it was impossible to know how many participants participated from each South Carolina County. Another limitation of this researcher's study was the ability of all surveyed pastors to answer truthfully and accurately. This researcher's study assumed that each senior pastor's survey responses were truthful and an accurate representation of their preaching. Lastly, this research had a limitation based upon cultural issues and politically charged trends which are currently impacting the church in regard to the term *inclusivity*. Some senior pastors have taken offense at this term and consider all associations or references to it to be negative in nature.

The findings of this research may be applied to the further understanding of those with disabilities and how they may be reached by the church through the guidance and leadership of the senior pastor's preaching. This relevant topic and current need to reach the disabled must be one that reflects the power of the *imago Dei* principle clearly and how it should be communicated intentionally as disability-inclusive. The findings of this research confirm that more needs to be done in the church to remove barriers and minimize the marginalization of those with disabilities. The interpretation of the data not only demonstrates the need for disability-inclusivity to be a topic from the pulpit but it also demonstrates that senior pastors are not aware of the current statistics of those with disabilities. The application of that reality is that more needs to be done to create an awareness and knowledge of these statistics so that a sense of urgency is felt and the original purpose and design of the church can be accomplished.

### **Further Research**

In the process of conducting this study, several opportunities for further research became apparent. These are as follows:

1. The study could be replicated with senior pastors of Southern Baptist churches in other states.
2. The study could be replicated with senior pastors of other denominations in the state of South Carolina.
3. The study could be replicated with senior pastors of other denominations in other states.
4. The study could focus on senior pastors of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina who have served in their position for 1-2 years duration.
5. A similar study could be conducted using a qualitative methodology approach where a smaller sample size of senior pastors are interviewed and provide in-depth personal accounts of disability-inclusive barriers they identify in their churches and solutions for those barriers.
6. The study could be replicated with other leaders in the church, such as associate pastors, educational pastors, youth pastors, or other staff members.
7. The study could be replicated as a mixed methods study, using a survey questionnaire in conjunction with interviews with senior pastors.

### **Summary**

In the literature review, there is evidence that numerous barriers and marginalization are present in churches and these issues have contributed to a lack of disability-inclusivity in addition to those with disabilities being unreached by the church. The literature has revealed that this has been a problem plaguing the church for several years and the trajectory is stagnant. The primary goal of this research was to contribute to the perspective of disability-inclusivity by identifying a need for senior pastors to be intentional in their leadership and preaching of Genesis 1:27 with a focus upon those who oftentimes are misunderstood. This research study investigated the general understanding of disability-inclusivity while also looking specifically at

the frequency of preaching Genesis 1:27 and the frequency of doing so as intentionally disability-inclusive. Its purpose was to describe this frequency with the intent to use the data collected to bring attention to the role and leadership of the senior pastor in facilitating disability-inclusivity in his church and congregation.

This research study revealed senior pastors' understanding of disability-inclusivity and the frequency they preach Genesis 1:27 and whether it is intentionally disability-inclusive. This research study also revealed that the majority of survey participants are unaware of the current statistics regarding those with disabilities and the church.

The literature review, in its brief historical survey, revealed that barriers are present and the church is not fulfilling its purpose and design to reach all people groups with the Gospel. It also revealed that actions taken in the past several years have not changed the trajectory or status of the disabled. The role and leadership of the senior pastor is undeniable in communicating biblical truths and principles to a congregation. It is encouraging to this researcher that many senior pastors of Southern Baptist churches in South Carolina are preaching Genesis 1:27 and are doing so inclusive of the disabled. If senior pastors take the *imago Dei* principle found in Genesis 1:27 and go one step further by encouraging action and initiating programs for the disabled, the current trajectory would change and the disabled would go from unreached by the church to being reached.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Preliminary Genesis 1:27 Survey Questionnaire (GSQ)

#### Genesis 1:27 Survey Questionnaire (GSQ)

**GSQ1.** Participant Vetting Requirement Question:

Please continue this survey only if you are the Senior Pastor of a Southern Baptist Church in South Carolina who has held this leadership position at your current church for a minimum of three years. If you have been a Senior Pastor of a Southern Baptist Church in South Carolina for less than three years, please exit the survey now. Thank you for your time and have a blessed day!

Please acknowledge that you have been the Senior Pastor, **not** an interim senior pastor, at your current church in the state of South Carolina for three or more years.

- Yes
- No

**GSQ2.** Please acknowledge that you are the Senior Pastor of a church in the state of South Carolina that is a member of the Southern Baptist Convention, even if the church name does not include 'Baptist.'

- Yes
- No

**GSQ3.** Title of the Project: The Impact of Preaching the Image of God as Disability-Inclusive  
Principal Investigator: Laurie Elmore Thompson / Doctoral Candidate, School of Divinity,  
Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be the Senior Pastor of a church affiliated with and a member of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, having served in this position and location for a minimum of 3 years. Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done? The purpose of the study is to identify the frequency of the preaching of the imago Dei principle in Genesis 1:27 and if this preaching is intentionally inclusive of those with disabilities.

What will happen if you take part in this study? If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following: Complete the survey provided below within one week. This will take less than 10 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study? Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include more inclusion of those with disabilities in the church.

What risks might you experience from being in this study? The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected? The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Participant responses will be anonymous. Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Is study participation voluntary? Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or the Southern Baptist Convention of South Carolina. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study? If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study? The researcher conducting this study is Laurie Elmore Thompson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Andrea Tom, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant? If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent. Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

- I agree
- I disagree

**GSQ4.** Please select the appropriate answer that best reflects your preaching practices at your current church. This research is seeking to understand current practices.

Please use the following definition of disability-inclusivity while answering the associated questions in the survey:

*Disability-inclusivity*: the intentional mention or inclusion of persons with disabilities.

From my perspective as a Senior Pastor, I have a clear understanding of what disability-inclusivity refers to.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

**GSQ5.** From my perspective as a Senior Pastor, disability-inclusivity is clearly understood by my congregation.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

**GSQ6.** I hold to the belief that all persons with disabilities are created in the image of God.

- Yes
- No

**GSQ7.** Currently, my church has the following accommodations for people with disabilities (check all that apply):

- Architectural/Structural Accommodations for accessibility (ramps, elevators, etc.)
- Designated Handicapped Parking
- ASL (American Sign Language) Interpretation for church services
- Active Programs/Ministries for those with disabilities

- None of the Above

**GSQ8.** I preach on Genesis 1:27:

- Once a Year
- More than once a Year
- Not at all
- Can't recall

**GSQ9.** I only preach Genesis 1:27 on the *Sanctity of Human Life* Sunday and the sermon is focused on the unborn.

- Yes
- No

**GSQ10.** I preach Genesis 1:27 as being applicable to all persons and I intentionally include those with disabilities.

- Yes
- No

**GSQ11.** I preach on topics that address barriers and marginalization issues associated with those with disabilities.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

**GSQ12.** I am aware that those with disabilities are considered an unreached people group in the United States.

- Yes, I am aware.
- No, I was not aware.

**GSQ13.** I am aware that current statistics indicate that those with disabilities make up the largest minority group in the world.

- Yes, I am aware.
- No, I was not aware.



## Appendix B: Social Media Recruitment

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ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to identify the frequency of the preaching of Genesis 1:27 and if it specifically includes those with disabilities. To participate, you must be a Senior Pastor of a Southern Baptist Church in the state of South Carolina for a minimum of 3 years. Participants will be asked to complete an anonymous survey, which should take about 10 minutes. If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please click the link provided at the end of this post. A consent form will be provided as the first page participants see after clicking on the survey link.

To take the survey, click here: [https://anderson.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_0fwrzRIoEsxs114](https://anderson.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0fwrzRIoEsxs114)

### **Appendix C: Social Media Direct Messaging**

Hello \_\_\_\_\_. I am a doctoral candidate and I am in the research stage of my program and need pastors of SC SBC to take a 5-minute survey. Would you be willing to help me with my research? If so, I can send you the link here. Your help would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you again for your willingness to help me with my doctoral research. Blessings on you and your ministry!

## Appendix D: Thank You Message to Participants

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS:

Thank you for participating in my dissertation research regarding the preaching of Genesis 1:27 and how this can impact those with disabilities. This research is a major help in completing my dissertation. Outside of the dissertation process, I truly feel that this research will have a kingdom impact. Should you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to email me at [REDACTED]. I am excited to see what senior pastors in SC SBC churches have said regarding Genesis 1:27 and those with disabilities.

Again, thank you most kindly for your assistance with my research and study. Blessings on you and your ministry endeavors for Him.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Laurie Elmore Thompson  
Doctoral Candidate  
[REDACTED]

## Appendix E: Consent

**Title of the Project:** The Impact of Preaching the Image of God as Disability-Inclusive  
**Principal Investigator:** Laurie Elmore Thompson / Doctoral Candidate, School of Divinity,  
 Liberty University

### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be the Senior Pastor of a church affiliated with and a member of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, having served in this position and location for a minimum of 3 years. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to identify the frequency of the preaching of the *imago Dei* principle in Genesis 1:27 and if this preaching is intentionally inclusive of those with disabilities.

### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Complete the survey at the survey link provided within one week. 10 minutes.

### How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include more inclusion of those with disabilities in the church.

### What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

### How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or the Southern Baptist Convention of South Carolina. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Laurie Elmore Thompson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Andrea Tom, at [REDACTED].

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

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**Your Consent**

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.