

Liberty University School of Divinity

Saving the Sheep, Preserving the Fruit:
A Plan of Christian Education for the Millennials and Beyond
in the Midwest Wesleyan Church

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis involved a ministry plan for adequately preparing preteen youth in the Midwestern Wesleyan Church denomination. The goal was to ground those youth in their relationship with God until their relationship with Him and His Church will persist through their teenage years and beyond. The topic is crucial in view of the marked exodus of youth from the evangelical church by their late teenage years, often never to return. Data were collected to show what is actually being provided currently to preteen youth in Midwestern Wesleyan local churches through a mixed-methods survey of pastors or Christian education leaders in the denomination. In view of the research, a coherent, biblically based plan is offered to enhance local church ministry to preteen youth in Wesleyan churches by addressing the different avenues for their becoming and remaining active ministry participants in their local church.

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CHAPTER ONE

Saving the Sheep

Introduction

Among the last words of Jesus to His disciples was a description of the task that, upon His leaving this world, He was entrusting to them: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:19-20, NASB).¹ The only verb in this Greek verse is a command made to them all (μαθητεύω): “You all make disciples.” The other words of action are all participles, indicating how, instrumentally, they were to accomplish this mission. It is not misrepresenting this command, or the seriousness of the heart of Christ when finishing His ministry, to infer that the completing of the mission would be, in His eyes, a success, earning a “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt 25:23). It does not seem unfair to state the corollary: If the Church fails to make disciples, whatever else it seems to do well, it has missed its primary *raison d’être*.

The Statement of the Problem

The problem is that many adolescents are leaving the church, often never to return.² The millennial Generation (otherwise referred to as Millennials, Generation Y and *iY*, Mosaics, the Digital Generation, the Internet Generation, the Nexters, Echo Boomers, Sunshine Generation,

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

² Barna Group, “Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church,” Barna Group, 2011, accessed December 11, 2014, <https://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church>.

and Bridgers³) are those who were born, variously reported, from 1980 or 1984 to 2002.⁴ First referred to as “Millennials” by William Strauss in 1989 and popularized by marketing gurus Strauss, his partner, Neil Howe, and many others,⁵ unsurprisingly the field of marketing was the first to discover, describe, and focus on exploiting the unique aspects of this generation that are traceable to but so different in character from its parents and grandparents: “It is invariably ad agencies which try to fix labels to people, [but] ‘Generational labels don’t always reflect reality,’ says psychology professor and generational writer Jean Twenge. ‘Often, they reflect the hopes of what people want a generation to be.’”⁶

While data are available from several polling sources that are provided later in this paper, describing the lack of religiosity of this entire generation in comparison to previous ones, the problem at the heart of this study involves those young persons who have been raised in the church, participated in its worship and Christian education, and still decided to leave the church, very often never to return. David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins describe typical departing millennial experiences as sharing many common characteristics. Not only is there a “disengagement from church—and sometimes from Christianity altogether,”⁷ but even more importantly, a common cause for this rupture is commonly offered by these departing youth.

³ Tim Elmore, *Generation iY* (Atlanta, GA: Poet Gardener Publishing, 2010), 18, Kindle.

⁴ Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America’s Largest Generation* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2011), 1, Kindle; Elmore, *Generation*, 13.

⁵ Bruce Horovitz, “After Gen X, Millennials, What Should Next Generation Be?” *USA Today*, May 3, 2012, accessed December 11, 2014, <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/money/advertising/story/2012-05-03/naming-the-next-generation/54737518/1>. The phrase *Generation Y* was first used in a 1993 *Ad Age* article.

⁶ Harry Wallop, “Gen Z, Gen Y, Baby Boomers—A Guide to the Generations,” *The Telegraph*, July 31, 2014, accessed December 11, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/features/11002767/Gen-Z-Gen-Y-baby-boomers-a-guide-to-the-generations.html>.

⁷ David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 76, Kindle.

They claim, “Many young people who grew up in church and have since dropped out do not hesitate to place blame. They point the finger, fairly or not, at the establishment.”⁸ Perhaps the reason for this problem of exiting millennials is that while churches perceive some of the unique characteristics of these youth, they are simply, for whatever reasons, not understanding this generation, not effectively caring for, and not choosing to implement what is necessary to keep these from being lost. Despite the plethora of publications, conferences, blogging, and preaching on what is needed to connect to and truly disciple millennial youth, the lasting fruit of youth persevering in their faith walk is not as anticipated. Deitsch states that despite efforts to make “the message of the church more palatable to the Generation Y,”⁹ these efforts are largely ineffective in developing a settled faith in youth because they are insufficient. The sad truth is that the majority of churches are not committed to changing the way that they “do Church;” the problem is implementation.¹⁰ This practice seems to substantiate Kinnaman and Hawkins’s portrayal of the millennials’ charge to the church. Another reason for the problem may be that the church is unable to articulate why it believes and behaves as it does, other than simply following the traditions that have been handed down to it. As Barna reports,¹¹ the 18–29-year-old age group of the millennials shows a marked decrease in church involvement, despite very encouraging showings in the age category just previous to this one.

While some culturally contextual information will be offered as to the character of this generation, the limiting focus of this study is on those young people who have been involved in

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Christopher Mack Deitsch, “Creating a Millennial Generation Contextualized Church Culture,” (PhD diss., Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary and Graduate School, 2012), 1.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 229.

local churches. Moreover, of the three subgroups that include non-churched millennials, millennials with a background in the church who have fully or partially left the church and those millennial children and preteens currently in the church, who might even be called Generation Z, although not much is claimed to be known of their characteristics yet,¹² this study further limits itself primarily to addressing the challenges of preparing these younger ones who have not left home or the church as yet or, category three, to be responsible adults who persevere in their connection to God and His Kingdom, to the church, and to the family.

The Significance of the Problem

Deitsch reports, “At the 2012 Southern Baptist Conference Convention, it was reported that within the last year over 800 Southern Baptist churches closed and over 10,000 had no baptisms, which means they are not winning any converts.”¹³ In another evangelical denomination, the Wesleyan Church, a district conference conducted by one of the denomination’s General Superintendents just a few years ago contained a very stern word to the majority of churches who also had not reported a single convert in the past year. The books, articles, conferences, and research studies and graphs that address this problem indicate that it is not sectarian, even comparing evangelical and high church groups.¹⁴

Therefore, the significance of this problem is crucial, multi-faceted for its impact on the spirituality of individuals (their true relationship to God), parents (the integrity of the family),

¹² Wallop, “Gen Z, Gen Y.”

¹³ Deitsch, “Creating a Millennial Generation,” 1.

¹⁴ Diana Butler Bass, “The Future of Faith,” *The Huffington Post*, April 24, 2013, accessed December 11, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/diana-butler-bass/the-future-of-faith_b_3148175.html.

educators (the understanding of the ways to transfer and model wisdom), and church leaders (the means of connecting to those who need the Gospel and pastoral care, mentoring, and discipling).

Theoretical Basis

A number of constructs form the basis of this study. The first one is that of *generational cohorts*, a group of persons who have experienced the same event within the same period of time. The “cohort record” displays the “a distinctive composition and character reflecting the circumstances of its unique origination and history,”¹⁵ making it possible for the cohort to be “analyzed and compared with those for other cohorts by all the procedures developed for a population in temporal cross-section.”¹⁶ Any generational cohort, because of its *otherness* in respect to the societal status quo, causes disruption. “As the new cohort reaches each major juncture in the life cycle, society has the problem of assimilating it. Any extraordinary size deviation is likely to leave an imprint on the cohort as well as on the society.”¹⁷

Howe and Strauss speak of a “generational persona” where a generation’s conglomerate of characteristics are reminiscent of an individual’s personal profile. Describing a generational persona, they note that, “It is a distinctly human, and variable, creation embodying attitudes about family life, gender roles, institutions, politics, religion, culture, lifestyle, and the future. A generation can think, feel, or do anything a person might think, feel, or do.”¹⁸ A generation is not characterized with knife-sharp boundaries. Instead, individual exceptions are frequent and

¹⁵ Norman B. Ryder, “The Cohort as a Concept in the Study of Social Change,” *American Sociological Review* 30, no. 6 (Dec. 1965), 845–46, accessed December 11, 2014, <http://personal.psc.isr.umich.edu/yuxie-web/files/soc543/Ryder1965.pdf>.

¹⁶ Ryder, “The Cohort as a Concept in the Study of Social Change,” 845–46.

¹⁷ Ryder, “Cohort as a Concept.”

¹⁸ Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 921, Kindle.

boundaries can be fuzzy, but it can be described in its own biographical story with an articulated nostalgic past and an anxiety of its own limited future and an awareness of its own mortality.

Another construct is “Evangelicalism.” This transliteration of the Greek term εὐαγγέλιον (“good message or news”) describes an American movement originating after World War II that includes various Protestant churches, denominations, and organizations. Understanding evangelicals, according to historian Molly Worthen is be focusing on the responses to three core questions: “1.) How does one reconcile faith and reason? 2.) How does one become sure of salvation; and, 3.) How do Christians reconcile their personal faith with a society that is increasingly pluralistic and secular?”¹⁹

The theoretical basis of an understanding of the millennial generation is a sociological and marketing one. It is those whose work is centered in making products appealing to “Y” age youth that have led the way in understanding what they believe they need to be happy and complete (and even to convince them that their wares belong in that category). Every generation has been outlined for purposes of description and comparison, perhaps none better than Tim Elmore, a person who is aware of generational sociological distinctions as he speaks to over 50,000 of them and also to their parents each year. A helpful chart that details these unique aspects is:

¹⁹ Larry Eskridge, “Defining Evangelicalism,” Wheaton College, 1996, accessed December 11, 2014, <http://www.wheaton.edu/ISAE/Defining-Evangelicalism>.

Table 1.1. Five Generations.²⁰

	Seniors "Greatest Generation"	Builders "Silent Generation"	Boomers "Pig in the Python"	Busters "Generation X"	Generations Y & iY "Millennials"
Birth years	1900–1928	1929–1945	1946–1964	1965–1983	1984–2002
Life paradigm	Manifest destiny	"Be grateful you have a job"	"You owe me"	"Relate to me"	"Life is a cafeteria"
Attitude to authority	Respect them	Endure them	Replace them	Ignore them	Choose them
Role of relationships	Long term	Significant	Limited, useful	Central, caring	Global, 24/7
Value system	Traditional	Conservative	Self-based	Media	Shop around
Role of career	Loyalty	Means for living	Central focus	Irritant	Place to serve
Schedules	Responsible	Mellow	frantic	Aimless	Volatile
Technology	What's that?	Hope to outlive it	Master it	Enjoy it	Employ it
Market	Commodities	Goods	Services	Experiences	Transforma- tions
View of future	Uncertain	Seek to stabilize	Create it!	Hopeless	Optimistic

Interestingly, the concept of seeing adolescence or the teenage years as something unique that needs to delineate those who inhabit its ages is very recent:

The term adolescence had just been invented and published by psychologist G. Stanley Hall in 1904. It is taken from the Latin *adolescere* meaning "to grow up." Psychologist Erik Erikson characterized adolescence as a period of exploration and experimentation, a time when kids try on different roles, a period of coming to terms with one's personal identity. Obviously, there's a place for doing this—but there's a difference between doing it at sixteen and doing it at twenty-eight. And, there is a difference between experimenting and floundering.²¹

Newt Gingrich gives historical precedence to argue that adolescence did not exist prior to the nineteenth century. Rather, puberty was not seen as a beginning of the ill-defined floundering of spending time transitioning between childhood and adulthood. Instead, both in the *Bar Mitzvah* and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies of Jewish children and the confirmation to the faith in Christian

²⁰ Elmore, *Generation iY*, 24.

²¹ Elmore, *Generation iY*, 59.

churches, both around 12 years of age, or in “any hundreds of rites of passage in societies around the planet, it was understood you were either a child or a young adult.”²²

The theoretical basis of a response to the problem of young people being lost in early adulthood to the church must be the Gospel of Jesus Christ, informed by and sensitive to the generation Y perspective, discussed later in more detail. The entire biblical canon provides both concepts and methodology of child-raising, which include implicit promises, such as, “Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6, NASB, RSV, ESV, “turn from it” NET). While this proverb cannot be claimed as a totally seamless cause and effect statement, Scripture clearly points out that sowing and reaping give credence to the assurance that good preparation will bring good fruit.

What is effectual content of this sown seed is contained throughout Scripture, but a place where it seems summarized succinctly is in a Pentecostal passage in Acts 2:

And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation!” So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:40–47).

Immediately following a clear example of Holy Spirit conviction of sins and cry for assistance, Peter admonished them all to “repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Act 2:38). The

²² “Newt Gingrich: Let’s End Adolescence,” *Bloomberg Business Week*, October 29, 2008, accessed December 11, 2014, <http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2008-10-29/newt-gingrich-lets-end-adolescence>.

passage that follows cannot in any way be described as prescriptive but as historically descriptive. It was in the heart of God to have the Spirit inspire Luke to transcribe this description in some detail. A hermeneutic meta-question involves the advantage to any reader, then or now, of reading what a group of Spirit-filled believers intuitively did immediately following His being poured out upon them (Acts 2:17–18): Would this serve as any type of example?

Of interest to me would be a biblical concept or portrait of relational, experiential normalcy without any imposition of the subsequent infrastructures that have characterized the church. The elements of such a portrait, if contextually supported throughout the Canon as being the heart and will of God for all of His people might provide the theoretical basis for a plan or rubric to evaluate any Christian culture, regardless of time or location.

The aspects of this portrait represent the earliest expressions of the church in ways that, interestingly, reflect needs and desires published in multiple sources (some of which are reviewed later) articulated by millennials but also in other generations, as well, as is seen in Peter’s command: “Be saved from this perverse generation!” (Act 2:40).

The passive imperative of $\sigma\phi\zeta\omega$ indicates that they had a part to play in their rescue from the current crooked, perverse generation. The term “perverse” indicates a culture out of true, bent, other than it should have been, a deviation from normal.

Luke describes the infant church: “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42 NASB). These indicators of the corporate (plural) *status quo* show that they were continually, devotedly engaged in each of these activities (one participle applying to each of four nouns). Present are the connective conjunctions between numbers 1 and 2, as well as between 3 and 4:

1. The Disciples' teaching, and
2. The most intimate kind of fellowship,
3. The breaking of bread, and
4. Prayers.

Flowing out of this listing of activities, in the following verses observed is the most sacrificial service to others without regard for personal expense: “And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need” (Act 2:44–45). The unreserved sharing of themselves for each other resulted in the commonality of their material possessions, as well. With glad and generous hearts, they ate *together*. They enjoyed the same unity of mind and purpose that the disciples upon whom the Spirit fell enjoyed as they devoted themselves in prayer together (ὁμοθυμαδὸν Acts 1:14).

The expression of each of these elements corresponds directly to the strong desires of millennials in sources consulted in the literature review as well as in the empirical evidence in Chapter 2, such as connectedness and belonging, a deep desire to know the meaning of God's Word, true service (not by proxy) to others, and a strong desire for spiritual worship. It is likely that the youth of the church who have a relationship with God but are not finding that relationship nurtured within a group that actively experiences and follows the Spirit would have been disappointed and, possibly, disillusioned.

At the risk of a charge of being too simple, probably the spiritual satisfaction of a group of millennials might be fulfilled within a group of those who measure what church is currently as

compared to what it was in its earliest days, led, as it was then, by what Thom Rainer describes as a millennials ideal leader/mentor, one of “integrity, transparency, and humility.”²³

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to provide a plan, based on biblical examples and instructions, to prepare a child to enter responsible adulthood. A child would be defined as one who is being instructed and modeled as to the ideal way God has revealed humans are to live in relationship to Him, each other, and the cosmos in a protected environment. This training is primarily accomplished by God’s inspired Word, which is the basis “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16–17) as it is made available to be understood in a way that the child can receive.

Following a reiteration of the Law in Deuteronomy 5, and an admonition to keep the Law with its attendant blessings at the beginning of Deuteronomy 6, Yahweh provides instruction and methodology for transmitting a knowledge of the Law, keeping it fresh in the minds of the children:

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut. 6:4–9)

Adults who are responsible view themselves under He who rules the Kingdom of God, by faith in the grace of God that has saved them from their sins (Rom. 5:15–19), given them peace

²³ Thom S. Rainer, and Jess W. Rainer. *The Millennials: Connecting to America’s Largest Generation*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2011, Kindle.

with (Rom 5:1–2) and reconciliation to God (2Cor. 5:18–19), regenerating and transforming them into newness of life (Gal. 2:20, 2Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:1–11), and adopted them by God’s Spirit into the family of God (Rom. 8:14–17), the Body of Christ (1Cor. 12). Their lives are characterized by responding to the light of the Word of God by gladly conforming to its description of righteousness, rightness, and normalcy.

A plan is a course of action, based on the Bible, for equipping any person to live a life characterized by “every good work.” This plan’s implementation would be seen by others and become the grounds for them, in turn, to offer up praise and glory to God (Matt. 5:16; 1Pet. 2:12). This plan is a description, whose pattern is discerned throughout the Bible, of a life fulfilling what God made each person to accomplish. This plan would naturally be sensitive to address, even reshape, specifics of the postmodern culture that impact millennial thinking, offering a truth alternative to its presuppositions, premises, and accepted but unproven, futile assumptions. This plan would address the life situation of children in the home, church, and classroom. Educationally, whether in the church or, as much as possible, in the classroom, a form on constructivism could be employed that, beginning with what is known (or assumed to be known), is the foundation for the scaffolding of new learning, placing it into the structure of already accepted learning.

Without being simplistic, the crucial element in any plan that seeks to empower and enable a child to reach responsible adulthood is humble and transparent mentoring from an integrated plan, which will be shown in multiple sources to be welcomed by even the most confident generation Y youth. Kinnaman again speaks of three unavoidable realities to be kept in mind. First, despite teen church participation showing high numbers, many enthusiastic churched teens are not maturing to become faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Second, necessary caution

needs to be applied about simplistically collating the dropouts of this entire generation because the reasons teens leave the Church and their faith are so varied. Third, “The dropout problem is, at its core, a faith-development problem; to use religious language, it’s a disciple-making problem. The church is not adequately preparing the next generation to follow Christ faithfully in a rapidly changing culture.”²⁴ As will be viewed numerous times throughout this paper, both in analysis and programming goals, inadequate preparation is recognized throughout the evangelical church as an endemic, worsening condition of this newer generational cohort.

Crucial to reaching a persevering, Spirit-centered environment (“For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst” [Matt. 18:20]) in whatever arena of human life is the guidance for millennials of a godly mentor, much like Paul was for Timothy (and even prior; see 2 Tim 1:5). Happily, millennials, despite their vast self-confidence, are open to this type of trusted leadership.

Statement of Methodology

The research questions include the following:

1. What are the factors and values (parental, ecclesial, educational, and cultural) that have created and might have nurtured the unique components of millennial makeup?
2. What are the characteristics of millennials that contribute to their leaving the church?
3. What are the possible ecclesial responses that might be made to offset the cultural influence on those who are coming into adulthood?
4. How do these factors/values compare to what God’s Word describes as normative?

²⁴ Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 213.

Kinnaman writes of the charge of the typical millennial—“They point the finger, fairly or not, at the establishment: you lost me,”²⁵ the problem comes down to identifying what in the environment created by the establishment (e.g., home, church, academy) has produced the effect of alienating young people to so many relationships.

As mentioned, the methodology for meeting the purpose of this study must begin with an understanding of this group and a grasping of the felt needs of the Y generation as they perceive and describe it. The literature review, including a collection of Scriptures related to a formulation of a ministry plan to establish millennials in the faith and the church, indicates some prevalent commonalities, beginning with the assertion that the way church is conducted currently is not meeting the needs of this present generation.

Out of this review, practical exercises that intentionally speak to each of the elements of Acts 2:42-47 in view of the expressed needs of these groups could be formulated and field-tested for effectiveness in bringing about fellowship (κοινωνία) with God and each other.

Finally, a survey of willing Christian education leaders eliciting a report of that in which they currently engage with their preteens and its perceived effectiveness could be garnered. Presentation of the proposed plan with a request for any feedback on its usefulness in their locale could also be offered.

Review of Literature

Characteristics of the Millennial Generation that Impact this Study’s Problem

A significant review of literature on millennials leads one to a list of characteristics shared by many, if not most, commentators, be they in marketing/economics, sociology,

²⁵ Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 213.

psychology, or ecclesiastical circles. Probably the most quoted, and in some cases, most utilized observations come from the work of Howe and Strauss in their pivotal market-driven writings, including their 2000 *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*. Based on a study of the history of Western civilization viewed since 1433 and Anglo-American history since 1584 in terms of generations, in roughly twenty-year spans of time, the turning of the millennial generation receives its due attention in the *Rising*.

Howe and Strauss, in a very readable style, employing vignettes and quotations of millennial youth, ask and answer a series of questions that characterize this generation, often comparing them to previous ones. Some of these include

1. Are Millennials another “lost generation?” *No. The better word is “found.”* Born in an era when Americans began expressing more positive attitudes about children, the Millennials are products of a dramatic birth-rate reversal.
2. Are they pessimists? *No. They’re optimists....* Nine in ten describe themselves as “happy,” “confident,” and “positive.”
3. Are they self-absorbed? *No. They’re cooperative team players....* They believe in their own collective power.
4. Are they distrustful? *No. They accept authority....* The proportion who report conflict with their parents is declining. Half believe that lack of parental discipline is a major social problem, and large majorities favor tougher rules against misbehavior in the classroom and society at large.
5. Are they rule breakers? *No. They’re rule followers.*
6. Are they neglected? *No. They’re the most watched over generation in memory.*
7. Are they stupid? *No. They’re smarter than people think.* During the 1990’s, aptitude test scores have risen within every racial and ethnic group, especially in elementary schools. Eight in ten teenagers say it’s cool to be smart....”
8. Have they given up on progress? *No. Today’s Kids believe in the future and see themselves as it cutting edge.*²⁶

The authors conclude that the image of the millennials is off because they do not adhere to or fit into the dominant Gen-X paradigms. They are simply not an extension of that group.

²⁶ Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, 129–258.

Describing the *persona* of this generational cohort, Howe and Strauss claim seven unique distinguishing traits. Millennials have had instilled within that they are *special*, especially vital to their parents' sense of purpose, and indispensable to the nation. They have been sheltered as perhaps no other generation by their parents, referred to as *helicopter parents* because of parental hovering, who are committed to the most intense youth safety focus in American history. Boasting by themselves and others who have instilled a belief in their generation's power and potential, millennials are characteristically optimistic and *confident* with a tendency to trust. In the midst of the radical individualism of existentialism and now postmodernism, this generation is still very *team oriented*, sharing tasks, maintaining tight peer bonds, and conforming to group mores. Two related characteristics are an obsession with achieving and, not surprisingly, a burden resulting from being pushed to study, avoiding risk and exploiting offered collective opportunities to gain *trophy kid* achievement. Surprisingly, perhaps because of the type of interaction with hovering adults, a large segment of millennials are "more comfortable with their parents' values than any other generation in living memory, millennials support convention—the idea that social rules can help."²⁷ Being aware of the qualities that connect and separate this generation from previous ones is crucial to understanding how to minister to it.

If even a part of these observations are accurate, in reviewing Howe and Strauss's questions and responses, all of these characteristics would indicate that the young people of Generation Y and iY (early and late millennials born from the 1980's to about 1996) have some radical differences in their worldviews from those who lived as members of Generation X. Parenting styles for this generation are and have been much different than in previous generations with results that cannot be described as anything else than *other* when contrasted to

²⁷ Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, 129–258.

other generations. Christian education and youth ministry based on connecting to older generations of youth can also be assumed to be dated and needing modification to have successful communication and have the truth of God made available to young hearts. The truth of God is eternal, but perhaps its recipients need to be exegeted, as on foreign mission fields, in order that, with Paul, parents and educators might become all things to all persons in order that some be saved: “I have become all things to all people, so that by all means I may save some” (1Cor. 9:22, NET).

Tim Elmore gives further insight into these generational differences that require those who parent, mentor, and serve to be sensitive to the unquestioned assumptions, premises, biases, and presuppositions that the Y generation holds. Since those who are in charge of these young people are necessarily older than the “Y” generation, they are products of their generations with worldviews that may diverge sharply in how reality is perceived and valued. Table 1.2 could be helpful in at least making one aware of the presumption that all persons think alike. He states, “Ready or not, Generation Y is entering adulthood. A new breed has entered our campuses and workplaces, and they are already influencing their worlds. Although they have evolved from previous generations, Generations Y and iY have their own distinct identity.”²⁸ It is not to be assumed that older pastors, Christian education directors, and youth directors would be cognizant of the generational differences that exist between them and those they minister, but such differences could impact communication and contribute to the problem highlighted in this project and its remedy.

Despite the many positives that have described this generation, Elmore makes a crucial distinction from Howe and Strauss when he differentiates the “first wave” millennials from those

²⁸ Elmore, *Generation iY*. 24.

younger siblings who were born up to a decade later than the first. He terms these the *iY* and insists that their characteristics are vastly different from the former. He points to the problems of the *iY* created by the same environmental factors that work to the advantage of this age group but have become out of balance. He attempts to show in materials that this generation lives in tension, almost paradoxically, between healthy and unhealthy applications of these environmental factors.

He uses modifiers that contain the word “over” to describe the unhealthy lack of balance.

This generation is *overwhelmed* by pressures from some contrasting sources:

The stress comes from both internal and external sources. Many of these kids grew up with parents who put the pressure on them to perform; [however,] stress can also stem from a lack of healthy pressure growing up. Children who lived with undue comfort through high school may face a shock when they enter college and face demands that are a little closer to adult life.”²⁹

The transition from a pampered adolescence to the rigor of adulthood may induce pressure never before experienced. Another internal source of stress is anticipated from Howe and Strauss’s list of generational characteristics. Elmore explains that the inculcation of a belief in their specialness and unlimited potential creates a fierce competitiveness and obsession to live up to all that has been portrayed as clearly expected.³⁰

Millennials are an *overconnected* generation, referred to by some as the “connecteds.”³¹ Again, despite the radical individualism touted by philosophers, perhaps in reaction to it, one recalls Nietzsche’s disparaging reference to the majority of persons as belonging to a “herd.”³²

²⁹ Elmore, *Generation iY*. 19.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 20–21.

³² "Nietzsche and Morality: The Higher Man and The Herd," Academy of Ideas, March 13, 2018, accessed March 13, 2018, <https://academyofideas.com/2017/01/nietzsche-and-morality/>.

The herd mentality is exactly the opposite of individualism. More like George Orwell's "groupthink," where "Those affected do not think for themselves, but take on the belief-system of others,"³³ modern communication technology and the various social media software, with its irresponsible anonymity, inhibit personal meditation leading to a personal value system while crippling vulnerable personal communicational skills: "When will they ever unplug and discover their own identity? Will they ever experience the solitude that enables them to think or reflect on their lives? Will they become a generation so connected that they just parrot what peers are saying in their social network?"³⁴ All of this dependency on digital communication leads to a dearth of durable relationships because the elements upon which relationships are built, upon which they thrive, are missing. Love and reconciliation cannot be reduced to a truncated text on a phone screen. Elmore concludes, "Our focus groups have shown that young people are short on patience, listening skills, and conflict resolution. Call me the Master of the Obvious, but it appears their generation is better at interacting via technology than face to face. We've let them become socially isolated and lethargic."³⁵ The responsibility of the church is to restore millennials to a corporate web of relationships.

Their generation is *overprotected*: "This generation has been so sheltered by their parents, teachers, counselors, and an overregulated government that many have trouble developing strong, independent coping skills. Authors Neil Howe and William Strauss write,

³³ Christopher Booker, "Sinister Groupthink Powers the Modern World," The Telegraph, May 24, 2014, accessed March 12, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/environment/10853279/Sinister-groupthink-powers-the-modern-world.html>.

³⁴ Elmore, *Generation iY*. 20–21.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 20–21.

‘Overly involved parents have become a real hassle for many educators.’³⁶ Parenting of generation Y, is an element that must be considered when implementing any ministry plan for millennial youth.

Despite the early elation with the observations of the millennials reflected in works such as Howe and Strauss, other characteristics also became apparent. Without negating what has already been reported, a shift occurred among younger Y children (*iY*) born as their older siblings were approaching adulthood: “The younger members of Generation Y (born in 1990 and beyond) look different from the older ones. Earlier, the kids were submissive, but today’s kids are more likely to be mavericks. They tend to be lethargic rather than active, self-absorbed rather than engaged. Check out some of these changes within just one decade’s time.”³⁷ Failing to understand and to be prepared for this predominant shift in temperament, will not allow the communication so necessary for ministry to *iY* youth.

The difference between the perceptions of “Y” and “iY” youth in just a span of ten years is significant.

Table 1.2. Perceptual Shifts of Teenagers

Teenagers in 1999	Teenagers in 2009
Teens believed the US was broken, but they planned to fix it.	About 60 percent of them return home to Mom after college with no plan.
About 90 percent of teens planned to go to college.	About 30 percent of teens didn’t even graduate from high school.
Many had dreams of transforming the world.	Many face a “quarterlife crisis” at age twenty-five.

³⁶ Ibid., 22.

³⁷ Ibid., 31.

Elmore explains the reasons for the shift from generation Y to iY as consisting of six main factors. These factors that experienced some change between the subsets of generation Y are the effects of years of prosperity's easy living and societal licentiousness in America during the 1990s; dysfunctional (i.e., helicopter) parenting styles that prevent kids from becoming equipped for encountering and flourishing in the real world; the faulty portrayal by media and technology of the responsibilities of adulthood; education that does not train students for life but only for more education; the growing preponderance of postmodern thought that engenders skepticism, cynicism, and despair; and, a culture that denies commitment in favor of convenience.³⁸

Regardless of the first blush of optimism about the millennials, this change in the character of the second wave, what he calls the iYs, the younger siblings of the pioneers of this generation, present both an indictment on styles of parenting, education, and ministry and a new set of challenges that must be remedied to prevent those in a preteen age group from growing into a generation that considers irrelevant so much of what God has placed in their lives for their development. Succinctly, the Table 1.2 shows the tensions of degree of the same attributes. The author details these iY tensions in what he calls "paradoxes." These seem to correlate closely with what has been discussed by Howe and Strauss with some helpful characteristics noted.

1. "'They are Sheltered ... Yet Pressured.' Coddled by their parents yet pressured to excel."³⁹

³⁸ Elmore. *Generation iY*. 31–32.

³⁹ Elmore, *Generation iY*, 36.

2. “‘They are Self-Absorbed ... Yet Generous.’ Narcissistic, yet giving of money and time.”⁴⁰
3. “‘They are Social ... Yet Isolated by Technology.’ Socially distracted.”⁴¹
4. “‘They are Ambitious ... Yet Anxious.’ Unrealistically confident, but anxious about to get it done.”⁴² The problem for many of this generation is, Elmore states, “too much structure with little or no practice in independent reflection.”⁴³ As discussed, intentional training that counters the prevailing world culture must be supplied if members of this young generation develop their genuine relationship with God and others by establishing their personal values and ethics based on the Word of God.
5. “‘They are Adventurousome ... Yet Protected.’ These have a wide range of experience, but little chance of risk, a necessary part of growth and development. Instead, there is covert sense of entitlement.”⁴⁴ As noted, “this attitude has been indoctrinated into them by the parenting and other leadership they have had in school and church.”⁴⁵
6. “‘They are Diverse ... Yet Harmonious.’ Although identifying with a huge variety of groups and subcultures, are not strangers to cyberbullying. They are mostly connected to each other.”⁴⁶ “Rather than being familiar with reading the greats of the past, they come to know by what they view on the Internet. Rather than knowing the wisdom of

⁴⁰ Ibid., 37.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 41.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Elmore, *Generation iY*, 43.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

God's Word, they seek out each other. The result is a corporate worldview with those who know no more of reality, truth, than they themselves know."⁴⁷

7. "They are Visionary ... Yet Vacillating."⁴⁸ While youth of this generation will take up a cause passionately, "they often have trouble settling on one for very long."⁴⁹
8. "'They are High Achievement ... Yet High Maintenance.' Too high self-expectations are linked to a desire for a great deal of feedback, the failure of receiving leads to giving up."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 47.

Table 1.3. A Jekyll-and-Hyde Generation?⁵¹

Pros	Cons
They feel special and needed.	They can act spoiled and conceited.
They own the world of technology.	They expect easy and instant results.
They love community.	They often won't act outside their clique.
They are the focus of their parents.	They may be unable to cope with reality.
They are high on tolerance.	They often lack absolute values.
They've had relatively easy lives.	They may lack stamina to finish a task—even high school.
They catch on to new ideas quickly.	They struggle with long commitments.
They're adept at multi-tasking.	They have difficulty focusing.
They have a bias for action and interaction.	They're too impatient to sit and listen long.
They want to be the best.	They can get depressed if they're not the best.
They plan to live a life of strategic purpose.	They often avoid tasks that seem trivial.
They are confident and assertive.	They can come across as careless and rude.
They hunger to change the world.	They anticipate doing it quickly and easily.

As different in motivating forces as are the motivators in the millennials' world are the perceptions that result from those desires and goals. In short, to those who live in an older generational cohort, the elements of millennial worldview are so *other* that unaware persons trying to bridge those in this generation cannot assume that what is true is evident to these youth. Especially this evidence is of greatest importance to those who would mentor youth into becoming genuine disciples of Christ, the only outcome that will, in the minds of many writers and programmers listed here, insure youth growing into Christian persons who remain faithful to the God they were raised to know, love, and obey. The listed tendency of these youth to trust is

⁵¹ Elmore, *Generation iY.*,35–36.

based on their openness to any who would understand and respect their goals. Again, Elmore, whose work is largely centered on this generation, says about the qualifications of a mentor helpful to making this generation disciples is having an ability to understand and to “capitalize on their pros and diminish the consequences of the cons.”⁵²

The results of these listed tensions and paradoxes shape the millennials’ perception of the world in which they live and must succeed. Elmore describes the observed paradigms of such a world:

- Artificial. They spend much of their time in an online world... While such virtual living enhances some skills (such as multitasking), it can also hinder development of people skills, self-awareness, and ability to resolve conflict.
- Homogeneous. *iYers* spend most of their days with other *iYers*—over 50 percent of their day with peers and only 15 percent with adults. Instead of learning from other generations, they get much of their guidance from the unprepared.
- Guaranteed. Much of their time is spent in a failure-proof, risk-free environment. Being constantly protected and provided for tends to hinder maturity and nurture a sense of entitlement. Always winning, they may never have failed at anything. They believe they deserve it.
- Superficial. For the most part, this generation is a flood, not a river—seeping out in every direction but not going far in any one direction. They’re flooding not flowing, skimming the surface.
- Programmed. They’ve grown up in a world so structured and planned out by adults that some call them “Organization Kids.” They’re rarely required to interpret life on their own and may be unable to act without consensus or approval.
- Narcissistic. The society-wide effort to increase their self-esteem has backfired, creating a generation consumed with self. They’ve been allowed to be consumers, not contributors, and to be egocentric without consequence.⁵³

Largely in agreement with Elmore’s observations and analysis, in an conclusions of Thom and Jess Rainer’s *The Millennials*, Michelle Wu points to their comments about the spiritual condition of millennials generally speaking, that members of this generation are likely to care less about spiritual matters than those from previous generations, the Rainers write, completing a

⁵² Elmore, *Generation iY*, 35–36.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 48.

downward spiral that began in the parents of this generation, the Boomers: “Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of this generation rarely or never attend religious services.”⁵⁴

Possibly the most helpful insight from the Rainers highlighted by Wu is that the ineffectiveness of the modern church in reaching this generation has much to do with its own lukewarmness, a lack of commitment to the mission of God. This attitude is because “members of this group tend to be a high commitment generation and they see most of what takes place in churches as low commitment so they are not interested.”⁵⁵ Added to this fact is the reality that much of this generation comes from unchurched homes. Millennials are not against the Christian faith or religion in general; rather, in keeping with what has been discussed, they are ambivalent. The greatest problem is not so much hostility as apathy. Despite describing themselves largely as Christians (65 percent), as I will discuss, biblical illiteracy is shared with their elders, and nominalism seen in ethical praxis indicates, as Paul warned Timothy, of a “form of godliness without any power” (2 Tim 3:5) of real spiritual relationship with God. According to Lifeway Polls, Wu quotes the Rainers as concluding, “An astounding 70 percent of Millennials agree that American churches are irrelevant today.”⁵⁶

The polls from which the Rainers have mined their information have been substantiated and even replicated by others. Gallup’s polls give small comfort as the rise in religious “nones” slowed in 2012. “Religious ‘nones’ are those who respond ‘no religion’ as well as those who say

⁵⁴ Michelle A. Wu, “Few Millennials Interested in Religion, Study Finds,” *Christian Post*, January 12, 2011, accessed December 11, 2014, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/few-millennials-interested-in-religion-study-finds-48471/>, original emphasis.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

they don't know or refuse to answer the question: What is your religious preference?"⁵⁷ This lack of commitment suggests that at least part of these respondents are blank slates who are an opportunity for the planting of the Gospel seed.

A study by the Pew Research Center concurs with Gallup; in addition to tracking the increase of no religious preference from 1990 to 2010 (8 percent rising to 18 percent), claims, "Millennials are significantly more unaffiliated than members of Generation X were at a comparable point in their life cycle (20% in the late 1990s) and twice as unaffiliated as Baby Boomers were as young adults (13% in the late 1970s)."⁵⁸ The conclusions of this study may first elude those from other generations. The millennials are not a flat continuation of previous generational cohorts; they are on a downward spiral away from the personal knowledge of God.

Still another poll, the Institute for the Study of Societal Issues at Berkeley, gave similar results, having tracked adult scores for forty years. Agreeing with Pew that the increase in "nones" speeded up as the acceleration began to increase in 1990, this study concluded, "Preferring no religion is not atheism which is still very rare; in 2012, just 3 percent of Americans said they did not believe in God. Comparing religious origins with current religion we find that while 20 percent of adults currently have no religious preference, only 8 percent were raised without one."⁵⁹ Yasmin Anwar summarizes this lengthy survey by saying, "Religious affiliation in the United States is at its lowest point since it began to be tracked in the

⁵⁷ Lydia Saad, "In U.S., Rise in Religious 'Nones' Slows in 2012," *Gallup*, 2012, accessed December 11, 2014, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/159785/rise-religious-nones-slows-2012.aspx%231>.

⁵⁸ Allison Pond, Gregory Smith, and Scott Clement, "Religion among the Millennials," Pew Research Centers Religion Public Life Project RSS, February 17, 2010, accessed December 11, 2014, <http://www.pewforum.org/2010/02/17/religion-among-the-millennials/>.

⁵⁹ Michael Hout, Claude S. Fischer, and Mark A. Chaves, "More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Key Finding from the 2012 General Social Survey," ISSI Project Reports, March 7, 2013, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://issi.berkeley.edu/publications>.

1930s, according to analysis of newly released survey data by researchers from the University of California, Berkeley, and Duke University. Last year, one in five Americans claimed they had no religious preference, more than double the number reported in 1990.”⁶⁰ The statistics substantiate what has already been stated: the millennials, as a group, are further away from the knowledge of God that saves them (Joh 17:3) than their parents and grandparents.

An unavoidable general reflection of the wider culture is being seen in the church. Only a few of the many conclusions of the Institute for the Study of Societal Issues study could be highlighted that directly impact the discussion on millennials in evangelical churches (even in the South and Midwest), namely, political liberals are four times more likely than conservatives to report themselves as a “none.” Men are 1½ times more likely to refer to themselves as a “none” than women (24 percent of men versus 16 percent of women), and education does not seem to affect the results significantly. For purposes of this study, perhaps most correlative is the finding that “more than one-third of 18-to-24-year-olds claimed ‘no religion’ compared to just 7 percent of those 75 and older.”⁶¹ Indifference rather than hostility describes the current culture.

Despite the marketing optimism expressed by Howe and Strauss, even though their studies are so oft quoted by anyone writing in this field, the writing of Elmore and the Rainers and published surveys indicate that the latest wave of millennials is markedly divergent characterologically from their older siblings and previous generational cohorts. One is forced to make some inferences about the ontology of such a subgroup, considering primarily how a shift

⁶⁰ Yasmin Anwar, “Americans and Religion Increasingly Parting Ways, New Survey Shows,” UC Berkeley NewsCenter, March 12, 2013, accessed December 11, 2014, <http://newscenter.berkeley.edu/2013/03/12/non-believers/>.

⁶¹ Ibid.

in parenting styles, ministry understanding and response, and culture conditioning led to such an outcome.

Falling to leaders like parents (who lead the primary human institution first designed by God—the family), ministry leaders, and Christian educators is the task of reaching out to and contacting this generation. These mentors must flex to connect with what has fairly quickly become unfamiliar to them, to understand how to adapt in presuppositions and methodology to reach iY with the unchanging gospel that results in restoration of human relationships with an unchanging God of love and truth. This connection must be accomplished amidst a postmodern ambience of radical relativism. Fortunately, the unique characteristics of the iY, their weaknesses, provide entry points for the crucial bridge-building for keeping safe the sheep and preserving the fruit of God’s grace.

The Millennial Puzzle

The review of literature did not locate a comprehensive multipronged plan of connecting to and communicating with *iYs*. This interfacing with millennials begins at home and is supported by the church and Christian education in establishing what the Bible declares as normative for this generation by those responsible for God’s young sheep.

Of limited assistance is a preponderance to point out how the attitude and methodology of the church is increasingly useless in incorporating *iYs* into a relationship with God and His kingdom, either by clinging to tradition, an ignorance of the assumptions and needs of this people group, or showing an indifference or even hostility to the characteristics of these youth already observed. Perhaps some of this criticism is helpful in identifying issues and providing some basis of developing a plan that is not yet easily available to parents and churches. The puzzle that resounds in the heart of any sincere believer concerns the failure to equip adequately

those who have spent years within the home and church to persevere in their relationship with God and His church.

The question of why young adults and teenagers are in their unique spot of uncertainty begins with where in history, including the Bible, one sees any discussion about adolescence. One wonders if unique problems that need to be answered exist only because of an arbitrary social construct. Perhaps the whole idea of adolescence is an error. It certainly does not find its expression in any but the most recent American history. In addition to Gingrich's comparison of modern adolescence to human society as it largely existed, even in the West, until fairly recently, he adds insight into understanding the puzzle of millennial teenagers, which is a logical outcome as a result of what their parents experienced. Claiming that adolescence was developed historically to keep their children out of sweatshops, he says that it has "degenerated into a process of enforced boredom and age segregation that has produced one of the most destructive social arrangements in human history: consigning 13-year-old males to learning from 15-year-old males."⁶² His counsel, unlikely as it will be is to abolish the whole concept of adolescence as a failed social experiment, presents his remedy, which seems not all that different from what is called for by others as the goal of a trusted mentor for millennials:

It's time to change this—to shift to serious work, learning, and responsibility at age 13 instead of age 30. In other words, replace adolescence with young adulthood. But hastening that transition requires integrating learning into life and work. Fortunately, innovations in technology and in financial incentives to learn offer hope.⁶³

As stated in the purpose of this paper, the point of all of this consideration is that meeting millennials where they live does not accommodate or otherwise water down the Gospel message

⁶² "Newt Gingrich: Let's End Adolescence." Bloomberg Business Week, October 29, 2008. Accessed December 11, 2014. <http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2008-10-29/newt-gingrich-lets-end-adolescence>.

⁶³ Ibid.

but enables transformation of children into responsible adults who are able to respond to and live out committed lives to their Lord and His Kingdom.

Social momentum will not be globally changed, but transformation within a crooked culture can be accomplished in individuals and their relationship groups. In the face of what one sees in the lives of millennials, current parenting and nurturing methods in the church are not accomplishing goals as much as they once did.

David Kinnaman, president of Barna group, cites six reasons that young adults leave church. As these are examined, how young adults interact with Elmore's millennial paradoxes is clearly seen. These include the research that lists the six significant themes as to why nearly three out of five young Christians (59 percent) disconnect permanently, or for an extended period of time, from church life after age 15.⁶⁴ These reasons include, first, that churches seem overprotective expressed with the feeling of being stifled by the church as it operates from a fear-based and risk-aversion instruction in how to remain free of the predominant surrounding culture. This *cloistering* concern can lead to a predominance of prescribing moralism and ignoring the problems of the world outside of the church. Second, significant statistics indicate that "teens' and twentysomethings' experience of Christianity is shallow."⁶⁵ Research responses show that many youth believe the church boring, irrelevant to life plans, that the Bible is not often enough taught, and that God is missing in their experience of church. Third, the response of the church to an educational culture dominated by scientism is believed by these youth as being arrogant, yet ill-informed and out of touch. A significant number of people believe that the church is actually hostile to science. The evidence is that sincere young believers find themselves

⁶⁴ Barna Group, "Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church," Barna Group, 2011, accessed December 11, 2014, <https://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

in a quandary about how to reconcile the church's view of God's world concerning truth with the paradigms of the scientific fields they are entering.

Fourth, "young Christians' church experiences related to sexuality are often simplistic, judgmental."⁶⁶ Immersed in a sex-crazed society with total access to every type of graphic sexual evil, young Christians are offered a plethora of temptations at a time in their physical development where they are most vulnerable. The responses indicate a concern with church ethical mores rather than a concern regarding the kind will of God for them and the power of grace available to them. The sad truth is that "research indicates that most young Christians are as sexually active as their non-Christian peers, even though they are more conservative in their attitudes about sexuality,"⁶⁷ leading many to conclude that the church is anomalous in teaching its old-fashioned standards on biblical purity. Their evaluation may be that the church is judgmental in teaching and insisting that the normal Christian life be based on biblical standards, rather than prevailing cultural mores (these lifestyle standards being the outcomes of their boomer parents from the 50s and beyond).

Fifth, in a day of philosophical and religious pluralism, "they wrestle with the exclusive nature of Christianity."⁶⁸ With the preoccupation, even obsession, with fitting into the community of their peers, the never-ending search for common ground coupled with an open eclecticism lead ill formed youth to a pluralistic refusal to agree with the New Testament that Jesus Christ is the one way and consider the following proverb: "There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death" (Prov. 14:12; 16:25). This desire to be included

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Barna Group, "Six Reasons."

⁶⁸ Ibid.

seems to demand, for some persons, as Jesus said it would, a choice as to whether to choose Him or another's love. Many believe that the church is afraid to confront the claims of other faiths, while some with church experience disparage the church with a charge of being an insiders-only exclusive club.

Last, a significant number of young adults with Christian experience claim that the church is not a safe place where doubts can be openly expressed and considered, even if these center on very important questions about life, including personal faith and anxiety. The risk of presenting such questions results, in the minds of some, in these questions being relegated to the margin and not really being welcome any more in the church.

Kinnaman's closing remarks are telling, revealing the discomfort of church leaders in interacting with this generation. He claims that the church seems to meet the needs of what he calls normal, traditional, conventional young adults: "But most young adults no longer follow the typical path of leaving home, getting an education, finding a job, getting married and having kids—all before the age of 30. These life events are being delayed, reordered, and sometimes pushed completely off the radar among today's young adults."⁶⁹ In short, churches are not adapting to the new normal and remain unaware of the tensions, paradoxes, even internal contradictions within this generation. The autonomous skepticism of and cynicism towards any authority outside of themselves leave them suspicious of Christianity, based on the authority of Christ and that of God's Word. The point of this paper is to give suggestions to leaders who desperately want to establish these youth as disciples of Christ. Kinnaman warns of two contrasting, but equally dangerous, errant leadership responses: "either catering to or minimizing the concerns of the next generation. The study suggests some leaders ignore the concerns and

⁶⁹ Barna Group, "Six Reasons."

issues of teens and twentysomethings because they feel that the disconnection will end when young adults are older and have their own children.”⁷⁰ The research here and elsewhere denies the false hope that may have happened in previous generations but is not happening presently. The ongoing problem is that the church has not been keeping itself aware of the great cultural changes that have occurred in the last quarter century and applied the model of the Apostles when encountering cultures radically different from the ones in which they have grown up. As Paul summarizes, “Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some” (1Cor. 9:22, NLT).

Even churches that try primarily to shift the focus of teaching and programming to appeal to teens and young adults by catering to their preferences tend to ignore and exclude older believers and a pursuit of God, both of which youth growing to adulthood need to have modeled. Again, biblical ecclesiology seems to be largely unknown to leaders whose purpose is not a healthy, local expression of the body of Christ, but damage control. Even in this survival atmosphere and programming, ignorance of and understanding the universal needs of persons expressed in this generation’s nuance.

The accusation that the church, including parents, attempts to minister to youth is dated and requires revisiting is addressed in an article with a bit of confrontational title. The balance between methodology and content needs to be clear. Responding to the questions, “Should the Church change for Millennials? Aren’t you being a bit demanding?” Rachel Evans replies,

No, the Church shouldn’t change for millennials ...but I think the Church must (and will) change along with millennials. In other words, we need not compromise the historical tenets of the Christian faith to recognize that this generation has something valuable to contribute to the future of Christianity, as does Generation X, the Boomers, and the generations before them.... Obviously, the real work begins when we come together in

⁷⁰ Barna Group, “Six Reasons.”

community to do the hard, daily work of reconciliation, listening, serving, and worshipping in spirit and truth.⁷¹

How that work is planned and executed is the purpose of this thesis. Glimmers of a plan that follows biblical as well as sociological elements of establishing communication with a group unknown to those bridge builders is mostly hiding, waiting to be mined.

A University of Notre Dame dissertation on reaching millennials in Australia had its methodology based upon both the Bible (Paul in 2Cor. 4) and Whitehead's sociological concepts. Applying Whitehead's theological process of "attending," "asserting," and "deciding,"⁷² it seeks to bring Paul and Generation Y into conversation. Describing a set of "pastoral dispositions" that sound like Elmore's qualifications of an ideal mentor and seen in the empirical research of Chapter 2 as responsible for millennials remaining or returning to the church, these include "authenticity, proximity and intelligibility."⁷³ These qualities are necessary, allegedly, for the Australian church to connect to the Y generation. The proposed methods for reengagement with and transmission of Paul's message to the millennials are described as "kenosis, patience and apprenticeship in the Christian tradition."⁷⁴ Brain's emphasis on attending, asserting, and deciding focuses on the necessary approach of individuals and the corporate church to millennials in the hope of establishing communication with millennials who resist a top-down transference of knowledge and respond to experiential rather than logical foundations for trusting relationship.

⁷¹ Rachel H. Evans, "More on Millennials and the Future of Christianity ... (A List of Resources & Conversations)," Rachel Held Evans, July 21, 2013, accessed December 11, 2014, <http://rachelheldevans.com/blog/millennials-christianity-resources>.

⁷² Matthew Brain, "Treasure in Jars of Clay," University of Notre Dame Research Online, 2009, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theses/46/>.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

In further development of understanding the nature and means of connection with this group, Elmore describes the character of a communicational matrix involving an iY.⁷⁵ In answering the question of why millennials would listen to Christian proclaimers, teachers, or mentors, that hearing is dependent on the millennials trusting that the believer has something uniquely pertinent to their needs different from other options they already have. Elmore makes several observations of the unique character of this group of which an outsider needs to be aware.

First, they want to belong, before they believe. The aforementioned propensity for community plays out as a tendency to want to embrace and be embraced by a group before accepting what the group believes. Much like the ministry of Christ, receiving millennials must be previous to their receiving good news that they will believe.

Second, “they want an experience before an explanation. Futurist Leonard Sweet describes today’s culture and its young people as EPIC: Experiential, Participatory, Image-rich and Connected.”⁷⁶ Action and interaction, graphics that capture the imagination, and no initial lecture are the processes that begin communication.

Third, “they want a cause before they want a course.”⁷⁷ To gain a hearing, a provision must be made of an intersection of a concept with what will spark an emotional response with that issue. This intersection will motivate to some course of action.

⁷⁵ Elmore, *Generation iY*, 48.

⁷⁶ Tim Elmore, "Four Ideas to Lead This EPIC Generation of Students," *Psychology Today*, October 10, 2013, section goes here, accessed March 15, 2018, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/artificial-maturity/201310/four-ideas-lead-epic-generation-students-1>.

⁷⁷ Elmore, *Generation iY*, 48.

Fourth, they want a guide on the side before they want a sage on the stage. Not experts but the mentors described in Brain's article are the authentic type that millennials deign to regard as their heroes. Much like the trust in parents, mentors must be approachable and embraceable rather than rigid and untouchable. The hunger in this generation, as has been seen in many ways, is to trust someone before believing in the message he or she would bring to them.

Fifth, "they want to play before they pay."⁷⁸ Deferred satisfaction is a foreign concept. Like a microwave, results must follow quickly or interest is lost. Those who want to bridge to this group and communicate with them have to demonstrate quickly the relevancy of their message.

Sixth, "they want to use but not be used by others."⁷⁹ millennials, despite their attraction to the group, are not above using others as they do any technological means for achieving their own will. Conversely, they are wary of being used or exploited by others as someone else's project or marketing program. Control is tightly guarded: "They feel strongly about being able to weigh in, to have a voice. For us, this means creating environments where they can come up with their own ideas and implement them—all the while moving toward a common goal for the group."⁸⁰

Last, "they want a transformation, not merely a touch."⁸¹ A progression follows a course of edutainment, interesting content, good stories, then audiovisual, and finally the telling and sharing of experiences. Elmore concludes, "Now I believe students want experiences that

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Elmore, *Generation iY*, 48.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

literally transform them in the process.”⁸² Creating these experience opportunities that offer occasions for transformation would seem to be a primary goal for those who would minister to millennials.

Elmore lists several observed communicational goals, but experiencing belonging, certainly in a group but just as importantly in a relationship with a trusted mentor, is crucial to reaching this generation and must be part of any plan to do so. This corporate belonging is not new and is seen in the Spirit of God leading persons to be corporately associated, as in the book of Acts and also throughout the Pauline corpus and the other letters, as well as in the Old Testament nation of Israel. That mentoring between more mature and novice Christians is standard operating procedure throughout both testaments is also not arguable. Whether the parental modeling of Deuteronomy 5, the intergenerational transmission of wisdom in the Proverbs, or the inculcation of Timothy by his grandmother and mother of their sincere faith (2 Tim 1:5) doubtlessly, any plan that will successfully connect one(s) to millennials at any age will pivot around a mentor. The Rainers ⁸³describe that there is the need of a person, such as Timothy’s grandmother and mother, of integrity, transparency, and humility.

Dunn and Sundene, in their article “Spiritual Challenges of Emerging Adults: How to Minister to the Unique Spiritual Needs of 18- to 30-Year-Olds”, give a conceptual scheme with a bit of suggested methodology designed primarily for those in a mentoring or, as they refer to it, a disciple-making role. These methods are organized under the headings of discernment, intentionality, and reflection.⁸⁴ Regarding discernment, areas to be developed include discerning

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 268.

⁸⁴ Richard R. Dunn and Jana L. Sundene, “Spiritual Challenges of Emerging Adults,” *Small Groups*, 2012, accessed December 12, 2014, <http://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2013/spiritual-challenges-of-emerging->

growth frontiers, potential strongholds (i.e., obstacles to total obedience to God's will) by asking pacing questions, and exploration of the young person's plan or expectations of living the Christian life. Regarding intentionality, areas to be developed include a practices of confronting unwillingness in submission to the Father, being a truth teller so they can connect with God's wisdom, connecting them to other growing adults, empowering them with skills needed to pursue spiritual growth goals, and challenging emerging adults to explore and resolve spiritual doubts. In aiding them to develop reflection practices, those ministering to millennials must ask questions that allow assessment of movement, help millennials reflect on a vision for purposeful living in everyday circumstances, map growth in the Christ-life postures, and seek God through fasting.⁸⁵

The plan that is the proposed goal of this thesis attempts to provide a more complete and comprehensive conceptual and methodological scheme for parenting and church-based Christian education ministry in light of the Word of God and the research already reviewed.

Biblical Literature

Beginning with the assumption by some scholars, that the four habitual practices that the early Church devoted itself to intentionally and persistently accomplishing were dominated by the Apostles' Teaching and that the other three flowed from this foundation, it is worthwhile to view how the people of God were commanded, and practice the knowing and keeping of God's Word in any age under any covenant with Him.

adults.html?utm_source=buildingsmallgroups-html&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_term=3285144&utm_content=320624415&utm_campaign=2013&start=1.

⁸⁵ Dunn and Jana L. Sundene, "Spiritual Challenges."

Believing that the Word of God was first heard before it was written is clear in the life of humanity's parents, Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, and the other patriarchs. Whether regarding a command to Adam about ruling the earth (Gen. 1:15) or what tree not to eat (Gen. 1:17), the command to Noah to build an ark (Gen. 6:14), the command to Abram to go the land that God determined (Gen. 12:1), or for Abram to "I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless" (Gen. 17:1), God has communicated His Word with those whose hearts are open with intent and to save and bless them. Whether through some means of communication not easily understood or through a dream or vision, God, as Francis A. Schaeffer writes, "He is there and He is not silent."⁸⁶

Following a clear disclosure of His name of Yahweh (Exod. 3:6) to Moses in a burning bush (Exod. 3:2–5), Yahweh commissioned Moses to represent Him as He defeated the Gods of Egypt and led the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob out of Egypt (i.e., the Exodus), through the Red Sea, and into Sinai. When making a covenant with the children of Israel (Exod. 20), Yahweh details the stipulations whose keeping would cause Him to bless the nation and whose rejecting would bring His wrath. It was in His rehearsal through Moses of His Law that is seen a command to teach diligently ("repeat, say again and again" Deut. 6:7) the Law of the Lord to one's children for a specific purpose and with an intended outcome: "...that you might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it, so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged" (Deut. 6:1-2). This passage demonstrates a clear pattern of practice enjoined upon every father in the nation of Israel for his son(s) for the express purpose of passing on the covenant commands of Yahweh

⁸⁶ Francis A. Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001).

that the promises of blessings be fulfilled and the judgments be avoided as a covenant relationship with Yahweh is pursued with perseverance.

Of this Law (Word) of God, mediated by His servants Moses and Joshua, after the death of Moses, prepared, with a trembling heart, to lead God's people in the Land that was promised to Abraham. Yahweh encouraged Joshua:

Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. (Josh. 1:6–8)

God's encouragement for Joshua is to continue the legacy of what Yahweh gave every covenant participant through Moses: a preoccupation of every person under the covenant upon the entire Word of God and the living of a life in keeping with its commands.

Following Joshua, the nation descended into a lawless condition where "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 17:6; 21:25). Despite God being their King, the people demanded to Samuel's discomfiture, a human king. God anointed the first king of Israel, Saul, only to have his kingdom and dynasty taken from him because of his habitual rejection of God's

Word:

Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices
As in obeying the voice of the LORD?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
And to heed than the fat of rams.
"For rebellion is as the sin of divination,
And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,
He has also rejected you from *being* king." (1Sam. 15:22–23)

The priorities of Yahweh, even over the prescribed sacrificial system, is obedience to His Law. Indeed, the activity of sacrifice is meaningless when made from a heart of rebellion against God's sovereignty.

The second king of Israel, arguably the greatest, was characterized as being a "man after God's own heart" (1Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22), repeatedly inquiring of the Lord as to His Word and will in military matters (1Sam. 23:2, 4; 30:8; 2Sam. 5:19, 23) until he failed to do so. In the incident in which David did not inquire, he made the choice to stay home from war and was tempted and repeatedly sinned, perpetrating adultery and murder.

Committing what the Law called the "sin of the high hand" (i.e., deliberate rebellion against God, Num. 15:30–31), David was confronted by Nathan the prophet who after a clever parable, incited David to condemn himself and then revealed the predicted outcome:

Thus says the LORD God of Israel, "It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul. I also gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your care, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added to you many more things like these! Why have you despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon. Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife." Thus says the LORD, "Behold, I will raise up evil against you from your own household." (2Sam. 12:7-11)

A clear witness is given that David has *despised* God's Law and so he *despised* the character, the Person (i.e., name) of the One who gave it. The rest of 2 Samuel and the Kings' scroll record exactly what Nathan, for Yahweh, predicted: the division of David's kingdom and the spiritual, political, and military decline of his offspring with David himself experiencing humiliation and near death at the hands of his own sons.

Bracketed by Joshua's entry into the Land and Ezra and Nehemiah's return after the exile to the Land, one finds Ezra, as Joshua did, respecting not despising the Word of the Lord: "For on the first of the first month he began to go up from Babylon; and on the first of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, because the good hand of his God was upon him. For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel" (Ezra 7:9–10). Ezra, if not for all those returned from Exile, devoted his heart to study Yahweh's Law and to teach it in Israel. This devotion seems to parallel is described in Acts 2:42.

Following the Word of the Lord throughout the wisdom literature, more titles and synonyms for God's Law, as well as descriptions of blessings for those keeping the Law and threats of curses for despising it are too plenteous to document. The very first Psalm describes blessed persons whose life is characterized by a "delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night." "He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers" (Ps. 1:2–3). It contrasts this blessed person with the wicked person who has no certainty in the presence of God's judgment.

Psalm 19 provides titles that elucidate the effect of God's Word in anyone's life:

The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.

The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.

They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward. (Ps. 19:7–11)

Psalm 119, a massive Hebrew acrostic that speaks exclusively on the all-sufficient character of the Word of God and its gracious effects in the believer's life, is the longest chapter in the Bible.

Possibly one of the most pertinent proverbs (among many) that speaks about parenting and raising a godly child is provided by Solomon: “Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). This proverb refers to a *way* but actually speaks about the nature of a child that impacts the discussion of youth ministry in this postmodern era:

The phrase “in the way he should go,” actually verifies this fact. Literally, the phrase in Hebrew is: “according to the mouth of his way.” This enigmatic expression has been the subject of much scholarly discussion. Apparently, however, the phrase is an idiomatic way of referring to a child’s specific personality and peculiar traits. The “way,” therefore, does not refer to the “strait and narrow path” mapped out by God’s Word, but to the singular characteristics of each child. Parents are to inaugurate (from *hanak*, usually translated “train”) their children in the way paved by their unique dispositions. This is the behavioral and attitudinal course from which a child, as a general rule, will not deviate as indicated in the following phrase: “When he is old, he will not turn from it.”⁸⁷

Brantley, in his word study on the “mouth of his way” makes it plain that those who serve young people are not to begin to coerce youth into a pattern that the minister would create, but insists that the child’s individual propensities be understood and provided for any method designed for teaching them wisdom.

The Apostles’ Teaching

As will be seen in Chapter 3, the teachings of the Apostles (not yet written) were those received (passed down) by Jesus. These words of the Lord were often the Old Testament Law, history, and writings that He often explained and enhanced by His teaching. Just as in the older covenant where the Word of God with its careful teaching to all, including youth, and its proclamation as being the centrality of living in relationship to God was declared, so it was with

⁸⁷ Brantly, Garry K. ““Train Up a Child”—What Does It Mean?” ApologeticsPress.org, 1995, accessed November 11, 2017, <http://ap.lanexdev.com/APContent.aspx?category=7&article=348>.

the Spirit-filled infant church. The church's devotion was first to the word of Jesus Christ mediated by the Apostles.

The words of Jesus are far too many to cite here (see Appendix A), but of special interest to the central purpose of this plan is the place that "knowing and keeping" His Word (cf. the metaphor of the wise and foolish builders in Matt. 7:24–27) finds in Jesus' (and the Apostles') teaching. Completing the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7 is a series of metaphors that illustrate the reality of living in relationship with God (e.g., fruit = lifestyle, action), being characterized both by the knowing, keeping, obeying, and doing of His Word.

Of special interest is the relation to keeping the Word of God, the words of Jesus, is that He kept the Father's Word (John 8:55) and that for a believer truly to keep His Word has to be the result of love for God (John 14:15). Obeying the Word of God does not merit but facilitates relational intimacy with God: "Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me'" (John 14:23–24). Following an analogy describing the most intimate of human spiritual connection with God in the parable of the vine and branches, Jesus showed the place of obedience to His Word:

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. (John 15:7–10)

Clearly, obedience to the words of Jesus, later committed to the care of the Apostles, is a condition of abiding in Christ. Jesus says a chapter earlier: "Jesus answered and said to him, "If

anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him” (John 14:23 NASB).

The rest of the New Testament, written by the Apostles of Jesus for the benefit of His body, the church, is clear that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone, by His grace alone. However, the Scripture alone is very plain that having being justified by the merits of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 3–5), believers are regenerated, “born again,” having shared in the death of Christ to share in His newness of life. This new life, enjoyed by every believer, is characterized, as Paul wrote to the Romans, in a freedom not only from the penalty is sin but also from its dominating power: “For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin” (Rom. 6:5–7). In light of this new life, Paul can, in good conscience, issue the command, “Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts” (Rom. 6:11–12). The imperatives would be impossible to obey if not for the indicatives in verses 1–10.

According to Romans 8 and Galatians 5, believers are freed from sin and empowered to obey the Word of God. This teaching is clear throughout the New Testament. It was expressed from the very first in the early Church in its fulfilling of the Word of Christ in loving and caring for sisters and brothers nearby:

This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit would remain, so that

whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. This I command you, that you love one another. (John 15:12–17)

Fellowship

The noun for “fellowship” (κοινωνία) is used in the New Testament only (not the LXX or Apocrypha) and sparingly, at that.

In Romans 15:26, this word, often translated “contribution” carries nuances of generosity, of sharing with others, the less fortunate, in the community.

In 1 Corinthians 1:9, the fellowship spoken of is of believers with the Lord Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 10:16, the fellowship is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 6:14, the question is whether fellowship of righteousness and lawlessness, and light with darkness is possible.

In 2 Corinthians 8:4, another mention of fellowship of sharing in ministry to the needs of the saints is made.

In 2 Corinthians 9:13, offers another mention of sharing in needs by participating in contributions is given.

In 2 Corinthians 13:13, the final verse of the book, closes with: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all” (2 Cor. 13:14), portraying the promised blessing of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit to every believer.

In Galatians 2:9, the right hand of fellowship is discussed in respect to Paul and Barnabas by the pillars of the Church in Jerusalem.

In Philippians 1:5, Paul tells of his oft prayer for the Philippians in view of their fellowship in the gospel from the first day.

Philippians 2:1 Speaks of fellowship with the Spirit.

Philippians 3:10, Fellowship is related to the sufferings of Christ.

Philemon 6 seems to be the first mention of the fellowship of a faith shared with Paul

Hebrews 13:6 describes fellowship as sharing with those in need.

1 John 1:2 shows fellowship with other members of Christ's community is based on the fellowship of all believers with Him: "What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

In 1 John, fellowship with Him is portrayed as the basis for fellowship with each other: "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:6-7).

Fellowship begins between believers and the Holy Trinity and then moves to participating with other believers in sharing to meet their needs. This use of *κοινωνία* to meet the needs of others must see the unity of the believing community to expect this sharing generosity.

Other metaphors for the community of the saved are offered throughout the New Testament (e.g., the body of Christ in 1 Cor 12; Rom 12:4-5; Eph 4:4; 5:23; Col 1:18; 24; The temple of God in Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:5; God's household in Eph 2:19).

Breaking of Bread

This phrase is only seen only here in Acts 2:42 and in 1 Corinthians 11:24.

Prayer

"Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving" (Col 4:2).

CHAPTER TWO

Results of Survey Research

The purpose of this study was to provide a plan, based on biblical examples and instructions, to prepare a child to enter responsible adulthood. This study included both a review of the biblical narrative on the topic of characteristics of the newly formed Christian church on and following the Day of Pentecost and the results from a survey of respondents within the Wesleyan Church. This chapter reports the characteristics of respondents and the results of the study according to the research questions.

Characteristics of Respondents

Wesleyan district superintendents of nine districts covering seven Midwestern American states granted permission to survey their churches. The population included 588 pastors or their appropriate designees, including local Christian education directors, who were invited to respond to a five-page questionnaire electronically via an online survey collation site. Of these 588 invitations, 216 responded to the survey.

Research Instrument

The following survey instrument is an original creation, designed to help facilitate answering the research questions. It was deployed via Survey Monkey.

Midwest Wesleyan Christian Education Opportunities for Pre-Teens

Pastoral Survey

1. What percentage of your church is pre-teen?
2. At my local church, pre-teens are ministered to in groups including:
 - 5th–6th grades
 - 5th–8th grades
 - 6th–7th grades

- 6th–8th grades
- 7th–8th grades
- Multigenerational, non-age specific

3. What are the particular characteristics of pre-teens that stand out to you?
4. In your estimation, what characteristics predispose pre-teens towards remaining in or turning away from a personal faith?
5. In your estimation, to what activities, circumstances, and/or programs do pre-teens seem to respond well?
6. What historical events in the world are within the memory of *this group* of individuals? (e.g., For Gen-X, the Berlin Wall fell, the Challenger exploded, and MTV came into existence.)
7. Considering all young adults (post-high school) from your local church, in your experience, what percentage of these students who previously attended your church have left the faith they testified to possessing?

Less than 10% 10–30% 31–50% 51–70% 71–90% More than 90%

8. From what you may have heard or understand, what led to their departures?
9. Considering this same group of students, in your experience, how many have subsequently returned to their faith and/or the church?

Less than 10% 10–30% 31–50% 51–70% 71–90% More than 90%

From what you may have heard or understand, what factors contributed to the return of any of these?

10. Speculating generally, what factors in any local church might contribute to this turnaround in conjunction with the work of the Holy Spirit?
11. Speculating generally, what factors in any local church might contribute to this turnaround in conjunction with the work of the Holy Spirit?

For the following questions, select and rate the efficacy of the activities and programs in place to promote faith development of preteens at your local church with “1” being very low and “5” being very high.

Biblical Studies Modalities

12. In my local church, pre-teens are given opportunity to enjoy biblical teaching in the following:

- Sunday School which is age focused biblical instruction 1 2 3 4 5
 - In their specific age group 1 2 3 4 5
 - In a larger group of youth that would include their age group 1 2 3 4 5
- Youth worship which includes regular Bible teaching characterized by a wider age spectrum 1 2 3 4 5
- Small groups which include participatory Bible teaching and application Fellowship Opportunities

Fellowship Opportunities

13. In my local church, pre-teens are given opportunity to enjoy activities that intentionally foster *spiritual* fellowship (*koinonia*) in the following:

- Sunday School which is designed to be participatory for attendees 1 2 3 4 5
- Youth worship which encourages corporate participation with the Lord and each other 1 2 3 4 5
- Small groups which produce a “safe” place to share life joys and challenges with each other. 1 2 3 4 5

Worship Opportunities

14. In my local church, pre-teens are encouraged to participate (not just observe) and learn of the different means of drawing close to their Lord:

- Sunday School, which models and encourages student participation in prayer. 1 2 3 4 5
- Youth worship, which includes opportunities and modeling of public prayer. 1 2 3 4 5
- Public Worship where youth can observe lay modeling of prayer and are encouraged to participate, even lead the congregation, in prayer. 1 2 3 4 5

Service Opportunities

15. In my local church, pre-teens are encouraged to participate (not just observe) in service to the body of Christ:

- In the area of hospitality: 1 2 3 4 5
 - Car Parking 1 2 3 4 5
 - Umbrella Patrol 1 2 3 4 5
 - Senior Assistance 1 2 3 4 5
- In the area of greeting: 1 2 3 4 5
 - Other Pre-teens 1 2 3 4 5
 - Newcomers of any age, with or without adult assistance 1 2 3 4 5
 - Distributing Welcome Literature 1 2 3 4 5
- In the area of teaching: 1 2 3 4 5
 - Cradle Roll, with or without adult assistance 1 2 3 4 5

- Children Sunday School with or without adult assistance 1 2 3 4 5
- Children’s Worship with or without adult assistance 1 2 3 4 5
- Pre-teen Bible Study with or without adult assistance 1 2 3 4 5
- In the worship functions of the Church 1 2 3 4 5
 - Worship Team 1 2 3 4 5
 - IT Support 1 2 3 4 5
 - Children’s Sermon/teaching 1 2 3 4 5
 - Ushering 1 2 3 4 5

16. Aside from those mentioned above, are there other methods used in your local church to engage the faith development of preteens that have not been mentioned in the questions above? (Be sure to rate each of these items as well using the same scale as above).

Research Questions

The data described here are an empirically gathered perspective of what a segment of denominational churches is currently providing to this specific demographic. Another data set (detailed in Chapter 3) contains the biblical presentation of what God has inspired to be recorded as the characterizing of communal Christianity in His revealed teachings and commands. A portrayal in historical passages of how this pattern of His plan for believers was shown as being implemented in covenantal communities that were joined to Him.

This data responds to Survey Question #1, describing the average percentage of preteenagers for the participant congregations as 9.93 percent of the church population. Survey Question #2, which asked which age groups were included in the churches’ ministry, found fifth to eighth grades being 23.28 percent and sixth to eighth grades as being 29.33 percent.

Survey material is discussed in relation to how the survey questions inform each of the research questions used in the study. Acknowledging that the specific present demographic group of pre-teenage youth is a section of the generational group called the millennials (or later) justifies the repeated reference to millennials in the research questions. Under each research question are the corresponding survey questions used to provide some full or partial responses.

Research Question #1

Research Question #1 queried, “What are the factors and values (parental, ecclesial, educational, and cultural) that have created and might have nurtured these unique components of current preteenager makeup?” Survey question #6 asked, “What historical events in the world are within the memory of this group of individuals? (e.g., For Gen-X, the Berlin Wall fell, the Challenger exploded, and MTV came into existence.). This question simply collected the various responses to each part of this query and elucidated both the elements shaping the preteenagers’ worldview and the survey respondents’ awareness of these elements, hopefully from the interactions shared with this group. These responses contain actual wordings from submitted surveys. When reviewing the data, I formulated the following themes.

Cultural Innovations

Cultural innovations is a category that had an impactful effect on the culture of this cohort according to the survey responses. The title *cultural innovations* was a reference both to the changes in technology and in the culture as sweeping adjustments to norms seen during this period for the cohort and the world at large: the “new methods, ideas, products, etc.”⁸⁸

Social media and smart technology. Included in this subcategory is the proliferation of smart devices (e.g., iPhones, Android phones, and other devices able to access the Internet), access to and use of a variety of social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram), Netflix and other streaming services, and free Wi-Fi.

⁸⁸ Oxford Living Dictionaries Online, s.v. “innovation,” accessed March 11, 2017, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/innovation>.

The Barack Obama presidency. Respondents mentioned President Barack Obama's terms in office and the events included during that time most often. Responses included his last election, Obamacare (i.e., the Affordable Healthcare Act), the first ethnic President, "first black president," and "Michelle Obama's degradation of school lunches."

Music. While music has often been an influencer of youth culture, the growing popularity of Christian rap, "MTV and music for sure," and other forms of contemporary music have had an impact on this cohort as noted by respondents.

Sports results. A focus on sports and results has become mainstay in the culture of this cohort. Events such as the Soccer World Cup, Women's World Cup, and the proliferation of gaming (including videogames) are part of the daily conversation of this group.

Abrupt Disruptions

Within the lifetimes of this cohort, a number of disruptions have occurred in the social settings that have profoundly affected the group:

The study panel that produced the 1993 National Research Council (NRC) report *Losing Generations* concluded that communities and institutions that surround adolescents, which include families, neighborhoods, schools, health systems, and employment and training centers, are increasingly challenged by changing social and economic conditions within the larger society (National Research Council, 1993).⁸⁹

Although this study would have identified the very beginning of the demographic group, it is only reasonable, in light of the research, to see the observed responses that impacted the perspective of normalcy in 1993 similarly influencing the worldview a decade or more later.

Social disruptions. A number of socially related disruptions have occurred that have adjusted the outlook of these individuals. Race riots in Ferguson, Missouri Baltimore, Maryland,

⁸⁹ "Read 'Youth Development and Neighborhood Influences: Challenges and Opportunities' at NAP.edu," National Academies Press: OpenBook, 1996, 9, accessed July 22, 2017, <https://www.nap.edu/read/5511/chapter/6>.

and other locations, police officer controversies, Christian persecution, normalizing of homosexuality, gay rights, LGBT normalized and celebrated (e.g., Bruce/Caitlyn Jenner), “the deconstruction of traditional marriage,” Ebola, and the largest oil spill in history are some of the items mentioned by respondents.

Military disruptions. This group has known a world of war their entire lives, most recently with Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS i.e., the war in the Middle East). Additionally, terrorism news, the war on terror, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, Benghazi, the beheading of Christians, Osama Bin Laden, Ukraine, and the embassy in Benghazi, Libya, are all part of the military disruptions that have marked their lives.

Changes in the law. A number of laws have also affected this cohort, including the legalization of gay marriage across the nation and marijuana in many states. While also connected with the Obama presidency, the Affordable Care Act (i.e., Obamacare) was also a major change in law mentioned.

Financial disruptions. A number of financial disruptions have also affected this group, including a recession and the 2008 economic crisis.

Tragedies

A number of international and national tragedies have been a part of this group’s lives.

Physical tragedy. The Haitian earthquake was an event that had the focus of people worldwide.

Social tragedies. The Sandy Hook shooting tragedy, the Boston Marathon bombing, Katrina, local disasters, including domestic violence, September 11, 2001, “generalized violence,” and the shootings at Fort Hood, Texas and Virginia Tech were social tragedies that were impactful and mentioned by respondents.

Celebrity deaths. While there were many celebrity deaths during their lifetimes, those of Michael Jackson and Steve Jobs were two notable ones.

Several respondents stated their belief that “most preteens are unaware of world events” or only local events, including not remembering or understanding the significance of 9/11 or having the conviction that “history has little effect on pre-teens. Technology changes have a great effect.”

Research Question #2

Research Question #2 states, “What are the characteristics of millennials that contribute to their leaving the church?” Survey question #3 sought responses for this research question by asking, “Are there any particular characteristics of preteens that stand out to you?” This open-ended question was developed to provide an overview of observed psychological and sociological characteristics unique to this preteenager demographic in the surveyed church groups. In Table 2.1, the responses are counted and then shown as percentages of the overall total. The lowest count and percentage were 1 and .41 percent, respectively (compassionate). The highest count responses were 28 and 11.43 percent (Shy, uncertain).

Table 2.1. Preteen Characteristics

Characteristic	Count	%
Shy, uncertain	28	11.43
Energetic	26	10.61
Relational	25	10.2
Curious	23	9.39
Too old, too young	18	7.35
Craving attention, love affirmation	18	7.35
Easily distracted	18	7.35
Open to God	14	5.71
Transition	13	5.31
Self-conscious esteem	11	4.49
Bored, self-absorbed	10	4.08
Tech dependent	7	2.86

Happy or moody	7	2.86
Ignorant of God, church, confused	6	2.45
Honest	4	1.63
Helpful	4	1.63
Parental influences	4	1.63
Helpful	2	0.82
Respectful, loving	2	0.82
Model/mentor	2	0.82
Compassionate	1	0.41
Game	1	0.41
Respect authority	1	0.41

Survey question #4 also helped answer Research Question #2: “In your estimation, are there any characteristics that may predispose them towards or away from a personal faith?” Focusing on a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, this question was asked to identify contributing local circumstantial factors observed that positively or negatively impact a preteenager’s faith walk. This question was also an open-ended question and counts and percentages were calculated (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2. Influential Life Factors Affecting Faith in Preteenagers

Influence	Count	%
Family	69	29.87
Relationships with adults	31	13.42
Discipleship	29	12.55
Peer relationships and pressure	27	11.69
Friendships	21	9.09
Self-image, identity	15	6.49
Behavior in the church	9	3.9
Model of opportunity for servanthood	8	3.46
Busyness and distractions	7	3.03
Service involvement	6	2.6

School, cultural influences	5	2.16
Unanswered questions	4	1.73

Survey question #5 states, “In your estimation, to what activities, circumstances, and/or programs do pre-teens seem to respond well?” Table 2.3 provides the percentages that corresponded to the varying choices.

Table 2.3. Positive Response Activities for Preteenagers

Activity, Circumstance, Program	%
Meaningful interactions with adults	8.56
Sports	8.56
Social media participation	.45
Participative activities	19.82
Children’s Type Games, Fun	11.26
Fast Paced Worship	1.80
Discussions, including one-on-one	3.15
Compassionate Ministry	8.11
Discipleship	4.95
Teaching with fun activities	6.67
Short attention span teaching	1.80
Food	4.95
Entertainment, including music	7.21
Treated as important persons	4.50
Youth group, including camp	6.76
Programs designed and led	1.35

Survey question #7 asked, “Considering all young adults (post-high school) from your local church, in your experience, what percentage of these students who previously attended your church have left the faith they testified to possessing?” This set of data simply shows the

estimated percentages of young people who have been part of the church and its youth programming in their childhood and teen years but have made decisions after finishing high school as to their continuation in a faith relationship with Christ and His church (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.4. Departed Youth Statistics

Range Choices	Count	%
Less than 10%	46	27.06
10–30%	44	25.88
31–50%	40	23.53
51–70%	23	13.53
71–90%	12	7.06
More than 90%	5	2.94

Survey question #8 asked, “From what you may have heard or understand, what led to their departures?” This group of data, again in the words of the respondents, presents various factors, including some in the church and family, change of environment, influence of companions, and personal spiritual conditions that variously contribute to a young person’s falling away.

Table 2.5. Contributing Life Factors of Preteenagers Leaving the Church

Responses	Count	%
Friends	12	5.43
Life experiences	5	2.26
Life choices	9	4.07
Apathy	5	2.26
Selfishness	2	0.90
Worldliness rebellion	8	3.62
Locale change	9	4.07

Unanswered questions	6	2.71
Doctrinal problems, positions	11	.98
Body life problems, hypocrisy	9	4.07
Lack of personal faith	21	9.50
Lack of discipleship, mentoring	26	11.76
Parental, including non-Christian	30	13.57
Distractions, including college	23	10.41
Connected to youth group but not to church	3	1.36
Missing or irrelevant youth ministry	14	6.33
Sex temptations	3	1.36
Secular college	2	0.90
Peer relationships	2	0.90
No Christian friends	16	7.24
Unprepared to face culture	1	0.45
Disagree worship and music	4	1.81

Table 2.6. Contributing Life Factors of Preteenagers Remaining in the Church

Responses	Count	%
Meaningful adult interactions	19	8.56
Sports	19	8.56
Social media	1	0.45
Participative	44	19.82
Children's type games, fun	25	11.26
Fast-paced worship	4	1.80
Discussions, including one-on-one	7	3.15
Compassionate ministry	18	8.11
Discipleship	11	4.95
Teaching with fun	15	6.76

Short attention span teaching	4	1.80
Food	11	4.95
Entertainment, including camp	15	6.75
Programs designed and led	3	1.36

Research Question #3

Research Question #3 asks, “What are the possible ecclesial responses that might be made to offset the cultural influence on those who are coming into adulthood?” While Survey question #5 (Table 2.3, p. 59) helped answer this query: “In your estimation, to what activities, circumstances, and/or programs do preteens seem to respond well?” Survey question # 9 asked, “Considering the same group of students, in your experience, how many have subsequently returned to their faith and/or the church?” Table 2.6 provides the percentages of returned members of this group.

Table 2.7. Returned Youth Statistics

Range Choices	Count	%
Less than 10%	74	44.05
10–30%	56	33.33
31–50%	21	12.50
51–70%	12	7.14
71–90%	3	1.79
More than 90%	2	1.19

Survey Question #10 asked, “From what you may have heard or understand, what factors contributed to the return of any of these?” These are means, according to respondents, that God employed to facilitate the return of the youth back to the church (see Table 2.7).

Table 2.8. Reasons for Youth Returns

Reason	Count	%
Reconnecting with God	12	6.182
Christian friends	37	21.02
Families	52	29.55
Disappointment	33	18.75
Missing Jesus	3	1.70
Answers	21	11.93
None have returned	8	4.55
Childhood influences of truth	5	2.84
Curiosity about truth	1	0.57
Serving opportunity	2	1.14
Sports	1	0.57
Invitation to event	1	0.57

Survey Question #11 asked, “Speculating generally, what factors in any local church might contribute to this turnaround in conjunction with the work of the Holy Spirit?” This data details specific church-based activities, programs, and relationships that facilitated the return of youth to the church.

The following group of data responds to the survey section that inquires, “For the following questions, select and rate the efficacy of the activities and programs in place to promote faith development of preteens at your local church with ‘1’ being very low and ‘5’ being very high.” Each of these sought to provide a response to Research Question #3 and substantiation for the ministry plan for preteenagers proposed by this paper presented in Chapter 5 (see Table 2.8).

Table 2.9. Turnaround Factors

Factor	Count	%
Prayer	20	11.90
Preaching/teaching	8	4.76
Outreach	32	19.04
Family	10	5.95
Christian friends	14	8.33
Modeling of authentic Christianity	15	8.93
Offering answers	8	4.76
Offering discipleship	17	10.12
Offering events	4	2.38
Multigenerational connection	8	4.76
Offering service opportunity	6	3.57
Support services	1	0.60
Age-specific community	25	14.88

Under the topic biblical studies modalities, survey question #12 asked, “In my local church, preteens are given opportunity to enjoy biblical teaching in the following.” Survey items under this category are in three parts: (1) “Sunday school which is age focused biblical instruction” either (a) “in their specific age group” or (b) “in a larger group of youth that would include their age group”; (2) “youth worship which includes regular Bible teaching characterized by a wider age spectrum”; and, (3) “small groups which includes participatory Bible teaching and application.” Table 2.9 provides the responses to these items.

Table 2.10. Bible Study Modalities

Statistic	Sunday School which is age focused Biblical instruction	Sunday School Biblical instruction specific to pre-teenager group	Sunday School Biblical instruction for a larger group that includes pre-teenager group	Youth Worship That Includes Regular Bible Teaching Characterized by a Wider Age Spectrum	Small Groups That Include Participatory Bible Teaching and Application
Average	4.09	3.60	3.60	3.79	3.38
Median	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Mode	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00

Under the topic fellowship opportunities, survey question #13 stated, “In my local church, preteens are given opportunity to enjoy activities that intentionally foster *spiritual* fellowship (*koinonia*) in the following”: (1) “Sunday school which is designed to be participatory to attenders,” (2) “youth worship which encourages corporate participation with the Lord and each other,” and (3) “small groups which produce a ‘safe’ place to share life joys and challenges with each other.”

Table 2.11. Fellowship Opportunities

Statistic	Sunday School Designed to Be Participatory for Attendees	Youth Worship That Encourages Corporate Participation with the Lord and Each Other	Small Groups That Produce a “Safe” Place to Share Life Joys and Challenges with Each Other
Average	3.93	3.71	3.46
Median	4.00	4.00	4.00
Mode	5.00	5.00	5.00
Count of “N/A”	0.00	24.00	25.00

Under the topic worship opportunities, survey question #14 asked, “In my local church, pre-teens are encouraged to participate (not just observe) and learn of the different means of drawing close to their Lord”: (1) “Sunday school which models and encourages student participation in prayer,” (2) “youth worship, which includes opportunities and modeling of public prayer,” and (3) “public worship where youth can observe lay modeling of prayer and are encouraged to participate, even lead, the congregation in prayer.” Table 2.3 provides the responses for this question.

Table 2.12. Worship Opportunities

Statistic	Sunday School That Models and Encourages Student Participation in Prayer	Youth Worship That Includes Opportunities and Modeling of Public Prayer	Public Worship Where Youth Can Observe Lay Modeling of Prayer and Are Encouraged to Participate, Even Lead, the Congregation in Prayer
Average	3.87	3.48	3.63
Median	4.00	4.00	4.00
Mode	4.00	4.00	4.00
Count of “N/A”	25.00	25.00	5.00

Under the topic service opportunities, survey question #15 asked a multiple part question: “In my local church, preteens are encouraged to participate (not just observe) in service to the Body of Christ” (1) in the area of hospitality” (“car parking, umbrella patrol, senior assistance),” and (2) “in the area of greeting,” (3) “in the area of teaching,” and (4) “in the worship functions of the Church.” Figure 2.1 provides the response numbers.

Table 2.13. Service Opportunities

Item	Average	Median	Mode	Count of "N/A"
In the area of hospitality	3.22	4	4	16
In the area of hospitality: Car Parking	1.74	1	1	78
In the area of hospitality: Umbrella Patrol	1.96	1	1	73
In the area of hospitality: Senior Assistance	2.71	3	1	41
In the area of greeting	3.18	3	3	14
In the area of greeting: Other Pre-teens	3.14	3	3	16
In the area of greeting: Newcomers of any age, with or without adult assistance	2.93	3	3	20
In the area of greeting: Distributing Welcome Literature	2.80	3	1	27
In the area of teaching	2.51	2	1	22
In the area of teaching: Cradle Roll, with or without adult assistance	2.72	3	1	42
In the area of teaching: Children's Sunday School with or without adult assistance	2.67	3	1	31
In the area of teaching: Children's Worship with or without adult assistance	2.82	3	1	24
In the area of teaching: Pre-teen Bible Study with or without adult assistance	2.22	2	1	34
In the worship functions of the Church	3.30	3	5	14
In the worship functions of the Church: Worship Team	3.16	3	5	14
In the worship functions of the Church: IT Support	3.30	4	5	23
In the worship functions of the Church: Children's Sermon/Teaching	2.48	2	1	38
In the worship functions of the Church: Ushering	3.06	3	3	18

Finally, question #16 asked, “Aside from those mentioned above, are there other methods used in your local church to engage the faith development of preteens?” Table 2.13 shows the responses given.

Table 2.14. Additional Faith-Building Opportunities

Opportunity	Count	%	Average Rating
Assist in children’s ministries	8	7.48	4.8
Service to the church	21	19.63	3.62
Compassionate ministries in the community	30	28.04	4.32
Church outreach	10	9.35	4.4
Conferences and camps	10	9.35	3.67
Discipleship activities	28	26.17	4.00

The data from these survey questions are interpreted in Chapter 4 as to their significance in answering the first three research questions:

1. What are the factors and values (parental, ecclesial, educational, and cultural) that have created and might have nurtured these unique components of millennial makeup?
2. What are the characteristics of millennials that contribute to their leaving the church?
3. What are the possible ecclesial responses that might be made to offset the cultural influence on those who are coming into adulthood?

The last research question, “How do these factors/values compare to what God’s Word describes as normative?” will be addressed in the biblical research that comprises Chapter 3. Comparison of these two sets of data will be the goal of Chapter 4.

CHAPTER THREE

Biblical Research—Acts 2:42–47

The purpose of this study was to provide a plan, based on biblical examples and instructions, was to prepare a child to enter their teenage and adult years as maturing disciples of Jesus Christ who persevere in their faith and their involvement in the Body of Christ, the Church. This study included a survey of respondents within Midwest districts of the Wesleyan Church regarding ministry practice directed to preteenagers and a review of Luke's Acts 2 narrative practices of the newly formed Christian church on and following the Day of Pentecost. This chapter is the study of the biblical narrative concerning the latter section of Acts 2, especially 2:42, and seeks to answer the fourth research question: "How do these factors/values compare to what God's Word describes as normative?" In describing the normal activities of a Holy Spirit-motivated church, the discussion includes a rationale for valuing any biblical narrative as instructive, a review of the context of Acts 2:42–47, especially 2:42 from Acts 1:1–2:41, the practices of the Spirit-directed church, the intentional persistent commitment of the church to these practices, specified analyses of each of the four practices, and the spontaneous behaviors that were as recurrent as the practices themselves. The purpose of such a study serves as an affirmation or contrast with the experimental results gained in the survey of churches previously reported.

The research on Acts 2:42 in view of the immediate context of Acts 2, especially the section of Acts 2:42–47, describes a time shortly after the inauguration of the church at the phenomenal baptism of the gathered disciples with the Holy Spirit. The section also contains the miraculous proclamation events that ensued on the first Pentecost following the death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven of the Lord Jesus Christ. This passage is worthy of

examination because it presents one of the clearest, holistic pictures of the ongoing pattern of practices of the post-Pentecost New Testament Church. This narrative, Luke's described aspects of the infant church just following this pouring out of the Holy Spirit, is analyzed and compared in this study to other texts in the Canon. While acknowledging that this section of Acts (like most of Acts) is *descriptive* and not *prescriptive*; the voice of the verbs in this section is indicative, never imperative. The use of the indicative shows that these texts are historically descriptive of actual events rather than injunctions of what believers should be doing.

Nevertheless, the portrait of how a previously unchristian group interacted with each other after the coming of the promised Helper, Advocate, Comforter, and Companion promised by the Lord Jesus (John 14:26) is used as a guide for anticipating what elements would be operative in any community where He would be present and working. Parallels between what God has revealed about covenant community in any culture or time is revealed in the accumulated biblical data and is interpreted in the next chapter. At that time, these biblical findings are compared to what is significant about the survey findings of what churches are already doing to fulfill God's will for the preparation of this specific demographic subgroup.

The Purpose of a Biblical Historical Account

About the purpose of such a historical narrative account, Fee and Stuart declare their understanding: "We believe that much of Acts is intended by Luke to serve as a model."⁹⁰ The authors discuss two types of statements, the first involving specific commands or propositions; "the secondary level are those statements derived only incidentally, by implication or by

⁹⁰ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 114.

precedent.”⁹¹ This study belongs to this secondary level: The disciples and practices engaged in by the early church, as previously stated, are descriptive not prescriptive. Fee and Stuart acknowledge, “The problem with all of this, of course, is that it tends to leave us with little that is normative for those broad areas of concern—Christian experience and Christian practice.”⁹²

With this said, their earlier assertion about modeling proves to be correct.

The authors do provide several hermeneutic principles for interpreting biblical precedents, which include the value of seeing illustration and repeatable patterns in narrative passages:

Although it may not have been the author’s primary purpose, biblical narratives do have illustrative and (sometimes “pattern”) value. In fact, this is how the New Testament people occasionally used certain historical precedents from the Old Testament... In matters of Christian experience, and even more so of Christian practice, biblical precedents may sometimes be regarded as repeatable patterns—even if they are not understood as normative. That is, for many practices there seems to be full justification for the latter church’s repeating of biblical patterns.⁹³

This is helpful in validating the view that the intention of the Holy Spirit when inspiring the writing of a mostly narrative document such Acts and a large part of the Gospels was to provide behavior examples of what would please God and accomplish His purposes.

Helpful to understanding the value of biblical narrative is the broad discussion by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, which examines the contrast of nearly existential denials of any illocution value in narratives over the assertion of Mary Louise Pratt with narratives or stories “verbally displaying a state of affairs, inviting his addressee(s) to join him in contemplating it, evaluating it, and

⁹¹ Ibid, 119.

⁹² Fee and Stuart, *How to Read*, 122.

⁹³ Ibid., 124.

responding to it”⁹⁴ and Susan Lanser’s point: “the author’s perspective on the world displayed in the text: ‘In speech act theory I found a philosophical basis for understanding literature as communicative act and text as message-in-context’”⁹⁵ In his note on Lanser’s declaration that “literature is communicative both in usage and intent, and the distinction between ‘literacy’ and ‘ordinary’ language which poeicians have tended to assume is not supported by linguistic research (The Narrative Act, 65),” Vanhoozer emphasizes, “Again, this is far from being a merely academic dispute. Whether one reads Scripture with a general or a special hermeneutic will depend on whether one thinks that the Bible should be read as ordinary discourse or as literature.”⁹⁶ As can be inferred from the discussion to this point, I see Luke’s narration as revealing in his text a communication of God’s Spirit.

An interesting consideration from Richard S. Briggs, when speaking of a variety of biblical narratives, includes how these require the reader to participate in the action described:

In all these contexts words occur in action, and not idling, left inactive in prepositional statements. For too long biblical interpretation has been dominated by a model which has seen the biblical text as sentences carrying (static) meaning, meaning which then needs to be explained and applied in order to be understood. If my argument about self-involvement is correct, then we need to learn to see all these actions achieved by words as dynamic performances which require the reader of the Bible to be involved in what is going on.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 136, quoted in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 227.

⁹⁵ Susan Sniader Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 7, quoted in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 227.

⁹⁶ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 272.

⁹⁷ Richard S. Briggs, “Getting Involved: Speech Acts and Biblical Interpretation,” *ANVIL* 20, no. 1 (2003): 32, accessed June 26, 2017, https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/anvil/20-1_025.pdf.

A conclusion is that Luke's Acts narrative can be seen as the joint production of the divine will expressed by the Holy Spirit of God and Luke's intention as stated in the opening verses of this book to convey to the reader of that time the stories of the effects in Spirit-baptized persons as to how they lived in the new condition of being Spirit-filled believers. Necessarily in the interpretive journey a building and crossing of a "principlizing bridge" that spans the time and cultural differences of the ancient readers and modern ones, attempting to answer the question of any text written nearly 2,000 years ago, "What is the theological principle in this text?"⁹⁸ one may be confident that God preserved what Luke was inspired to write for the edification of any reader in any culture. To that end, Vanhoozer notes, "Textual knowledge is, I contend, rather a matter of believing testimony, and such belief is well within the interpreter's epistemic rights."⁹⁹

Therefore, parallels between what God has revealed about covenant community in any culture or time will be seen in the accumulated biblical data in this study. In the next chapter, these biblical findings will be compared to what is significant about the survey findings of what churches are already doing to fulfill God's will for the preparation of this specific demographic subgroup.

The book of Acts is the second part of Luke's detailed accounting of the story of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Following Luke's account of Jesus' biblical substantiation of His own death and resurrection, Luke's rendition of the Great Commission, the final blessing of the Lord at Bethany on those present, Jesus' ascension and the disciples' rejoicing return to Jerusalem conclude Luke's Gospel. Acts, clearly confirms Luke's Gospel content: "The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was

⁹⁸ J. Scott. Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-on Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 43.

⁹⁹ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 282.

taken up to heaven, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen” (Acts 1:1-2). Acts begins with a recounting and expansion of the conclusion of Luke’s Gospel with the repeated command to wait in Jerusalem for the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–5), which is fulfilled in Acts 2.

Context of Acts 2:42–47

The context of Acts 2:42–47 includes Luke’s account of how “He [Jesus] had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen” (Acts 1:2), which included a reiteration of Luke’s account of the Great Commission (Luke 24:46–49): “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Additionally, they were commanded to make themselves available to the Holy Spirit: “Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, ‘Which,’ He said, ‘you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’” (Acts 1:4–5).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit did occur, for this group, eight to ten days later in the place where they waited together on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1). The coming of the Holy Spirit was accompanied with various evidences, including something like tongues of fire resting on each, a house-filling sound from heaven like a violent rushing wind, and a Spirit-enabled ability to speak in other languages (Acts 2:2–4). Drawn by the wild-like sound (Acts 2:6), a crowd of devout Jews from throughout the empire (Acts 25:5–13) drew close to hear the “mighty deeds of God” (Acts 2:11) in his own language, even dialect (Acts 2:6). Despite charges of drunkenness of Peter and his comrades, which he quickly dispelled (Acts 2:12–15), Peter uses

excerpts from Joel's prophecy of the coming of the Spirit and David's prophecies of the Messiah (Acts 2:16–36) to help indict the listening crowd for their ignorance of the Person of Jesus, their treatment of Him, and God's response. His address might be summarized in the following:

Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. (Acts 2:22–24)

Exegeting and interpreting David's prophetic words as an apologetic of the resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ to the right hand of God (Acts 2:29–35), Peter concludes, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). In a bold contrast to the denial of the Messiah Peter made on the eve of the crucifixion, a plain proclamation insists that Jesus is the Christ of God.

The continuing presence of the Holy Spirit is demonstrated again this day following Peter's address with a powerful conviction produced in at least some sizeable portion of the hearers, if one judges by the outcome of new believers who are baptized (Acts 2:41). Peter's instruction to repent and be baptized is accompanied by the promise to them and their children of forgiveness of sin and their reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38–39), concluding with other words of testimony and an exhortation to “be saved from this perverse generation!” (Acts 2:40). The outcome of this account of personal, multilingual testimony and Peter's Spirit-anointed address to the crowd is seen in the response of the appropriately 3,000 persons who received Peter's words and were baptized, indicating their addition to the beginning church (Acts 2:41).

This baptism of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus had long promised (most lately in Acts 1), culminated in the formation of the church, including the shaping of the character of those believers gathering together in this new community and a sizeable addition of new members to the group of those who were putting their faith in Jesus Christ. This study was based on the continuity of Luke's account relating to the effect of the Holy Spirit on those who chose to receive the words of Peter concerning the Jesus whom they had, in part, crucified.

The remainder of Acts 2 (vv. 42–47) characterizes both the behavioral priorities and resulting practices of at least a portion of the group that responded to Peter's invitation. Denial that the Holy Spirit was not active on this Pentecost Day is not possible as Luke clearly describes in this chapter. Conviction (v. 37), belief in Jesus the Messiah, and baptism "in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38) coalesced this disparate group into a coherent company with shared priorities that resulted in a non-scripted life order that expressed itself in an others-centered concern and generosity that one would anticipate in some fashion among any group of Spirit-filled believers.

The Practices of the Spirit-Directed Church

Luke continues his account of the effects of the Holy Spirit on new believers on the same day of Pentecost and those days immediately following. This narrative is employed as a suggested basis of a Christian educational plan to prepare preteenagers, but would be well applied to any believing community of any age and culture, for nurturing a deepening relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and an intentional preparation for continued participation in the church through their adult years:

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayers. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their

property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

Again, no allegation are made in this study of what was accomplished in these days by the Holy Spirit and described by Luke as presenting a universal prescription of normative Christian community behavior. A guarantee cannot be given that the practicing of what this group did on Pentecost and the days that followed produced or would produce the effects described in a direct cause-and-effect manner or would necessarily do so in any future gathering of believers.

However, based on the discussion on the value of biblical historical narrative, one is given some assurance that evaluation of the meaning and significance of the human behavioral responses to the Holy Spirit's activity is worth contemplation and worthy of emulation, as cultural context permits. Luke simply describes what happened under the Spirit's influence. As the grammar of this text shows, however, this narrative not only describes the practices to which the church committed itself but also details the durative character of resultant patterns of behavior in themselves and those outside the church.

Luke describes the manifestation of the Spirit's activity both in miraculous acts and a continuing addition of believers to the young church: "Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles" and "And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved." Luke details this phenomena as a "continuing together" (v. 46 ~ προσκατεροῦντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν) followed by four more participles of "breaking bread," "sharing food," "praising God," and "enjoying favor with 'all the people,'" one may infer that this is the Holy Spirit's intention of normal operating characteristics of the Christian church, an ongoing condition rather than an isolated event on this day. The term

together (ὁμοθυμαδὸν) in 2:46 is a hoped-for description of unity and intimacy that any church or demographic subgroup within it would welcome.

This aspect of biblical research focuses on the practices described by Luke produced by the Holy Spirit's influence on these new believers. These behaviors are modeled and called for elsewhere in the Canon and compare favorably to methods employed throughout church history by other believers and leaders who had the same conviction that intentionally drawing near to God would elicit a responding relational intimacy promised by Him: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (Jas. 4:8) and a community that resembled that of Acts 2 cannot be denied.

The outline of the practices that might well be employed in this plan of nurturing pre teenagers begins with an analysis and usage of the terms in Acts 2:42 with a view of the resultant behaviors in which believers continually engaged, as well.

The enhanced activity of the Holy Spirit being poured out and distributed among the disciples was expressed in specially enabled communication gifts of spreading the good news in every language and dialect of the account of the crucified and risen Savior, Jesus the Messiah. Luke has recorded Peter's apologetic for this miraculous evangelizing based on the prophecy of Joel and also Peter's incisive indictment of the role of the listeners in crucifying the Christ. This anointed preaching has been discussed as well as its use by the Holy Spirit in convicting the listeners of their own sin with Peter's answer to their question being a promise to them and their children of forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The outcome of this proclamation was a response in faith by nearly 3,000 new believers. However, what follows in the description of this establishment of a new faith community and their spontaneous responses are Spirit-motivated behavioral practices that might be seen as a model for any faith community. Luke

detailed the immediate and durative practices and the outcomes of these practices of the infant church.

The Intentional Persistent Commitment to These Practices

Emphatically pointing to these new believers, in Acts 2:42, the periphrastic construction phrase is found: “They were continually devoting” (NASB); “continued steadfastly” (KJV); “devoted” (ESV, NET, RSV, et. al). Along with the imperfect active plural form of εἰμί is the present active nominative masculine plural participle προσκατεροῦντες from the verb προσκατερέω is referred to as a “periphrastic construction,” suggesting an “ongoing or continuous action.”¹⁰⁰ The intentional, persistent devotion to the following four nouns was the effects of the Holy Spirit’s baptism on these new believers.

προσκατερέω is used ten times in the Greek New Testament; six of these usages are in Acts and twice in this passage (vv. 42, 46). In addition to Luke’s indicative of describing the ongoing devotion of believers to these four practices (v. 42), he also describes believers’ regular commitment to attending temple together and the breaking of bread (2:46). He also “uses it elsewhere in Acts to characterize the devotion of the 120 in the upper room to prayer (1:14) and the apostles’ resolve in the matter of the Hellenistic widows to center their attention on prayer and the ministry of the word (6:4).”¹⁰¹ Interestingly, Paul uses the imperative form of this verb (Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2) to call believers to a constant, faithful, persistent devotion to prayer, perhaps a continuation of the practice of this verse.

¹⁰⁰ “Eimi: The Greek Linking Verb,” accessed June 28, 2016, <http://inthesaltshaker.com/drills/eimi.htm>.

¹⁰¹ Richard N. Longenecker, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, vol. 9, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 289.

The Elements of Committed Activity

The four activities in which they persistently engaged were not isolated practices but interconnected with each other. Each proved to be the result of, or at least influenced by, the others. Each also provided a motivation for the others to have ongoing participation. The inference is that the Holy Spirit's work, seen from the beginning of this chapter, is manifested strongly in the anointed preaching of Peter, leading to the conviction and conversion of many. A reasonable conclusion is that this gathering together with the intent to engage in these practices were also the Spirit's plan to develop the church into what God intended in order for it to accomplish His designs of reconciliation of all to Himself. Speaking of this practicing group, F. F. Bruce offers, "We are certainly intended to understand that they also received the Holy Spirit, although this is not said in so many words."¹⁰² The ongoing, persistent focus of the infant church immediately following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and a continuing pattern thereafter were four specific (but not fully explained) practices that form the basis of the corporate behavior of the early church as Luke describes it. G. Campbell Morgan stresses the importance of the section of Acts 2:37–47, including this described pattern: "Here are the lines, here are the standards, here are the measurements, here are the weights, the acid tests of the Church of God, all about her work and the conditions of membership both for entry and for all continuing conditions. Everything is here; if only we could bring our church life back to this test, what a great thing it would be for God and the World!"¹⁰³ The proposed plan of this paper, as has been noted, is not an innovation but rather a renewal of what God has already revealed as describing the nature of the Church of Christ.

¹⁰² F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1973), 79.

¹⁰³ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Birth of the Church* (Old Tappan, NJ: F.H. Revell, 1968), 151.

Grammatically, although some manuscripts and their translations separate these four elements with a conjunction “and” (καί), the NA28 Greek text inserts a comma after the second element (κοινωνία) probably because of a lack of a conjunction following “fellowship” in that manuscript. This rendering would leave the last two elements of “breaking of bread” and “prayers” as a noun phrase, detailing and perhaps highlighting some of the activities included in intentional pursuit of fellowship. The translation of several English versions (e.g., NET, NIV, NASB, ESV, RSV) would render this structure then as, “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42, NASB).

However, the continuing use of the dative case of these last two nouns validates their inclusion in those practices to which the infant church was devotedly committed. As previously noted, the verb root προσκαρτερέω whose participle προσκαρτεροῦντες contributes to the periphrastic phrase is found with dative case noun forms that indicate what is being committed to and intentionally, continually, and steadfastly practiced. In Acts 2:42 four such dative nouns detail how the newly formed faith community behaved as a matter of course. One can only reason that Luke was inspired to record this continued activity of the Holy Spirit in this infant church to serve as a valuable pattern for any faith community, including the subpopulation targeted by this ministry plan:

1. “Apostles’ teaching” (most modern English translations) is the dative feminine singular noun of “teaching” διδαχῆ (definite articular) from the noun διδαχή modified by the genitive masculine plural noun “disciples” ἀποστόλων (definite articular) from the noun ἀπόστολος.

2. “Fellowship” (most modern English translations) is the dative feminine singular noun *κοινωνία* (definite articular) from the noun *κοινωνία*.
3. “The breaking of bread” (most modern English translations) is the dative feminine singular noun *κλάσει* (definite articular) modified by *ἄρτου*, the genitive masculine singular of *ἄρτος* (definite articular).
4. “Prayers” (most modern English translations) is the dative feminine plural noun *προσευχῶν* (definite articular) from the noun *προσευχή*.

Research into the use of these terms in the Bible centers on the topics of the teaching (doctrine) of the Word of God to believers, the intimate fellowship of the community of believers, the practice of the Eucharist or Lord’s Supper (i.e., breaking of bread), and prayers. The last two although worthy of individual examination, contribute to the second but also are related to the first.

Persistent Attention to the Teaching of the Apostles

The “teaching of the Apostles” (*τῆ διδαχῆ τῶν ἀποστόλων*) is a noun (modified by a genitive noun perhaps acting as a “genitive of source,”¹⁰⁴ referred to otherwise as an “ablative of source”¹⁰⁵), naming that body of content held by and advanced by the Apostles. However, some view this genitive differently:

The phrase “teaching of the apostles” (*διδαχῆ τῶν ἀποστόλων*) is a subjective genitive: it is the apostles who were teaching the new converts. Luke makes three points. (1) The apostles regarded teaching as one of their main responsibilities (cf. 6:1–6). (2) The believers continuously listened to the apostles. (3) The believers practiced what they

¹⁰⁴ Greg Supina, “Genitives of Source, Genitives of Origin,” *The Genitive Case*, accessed July 4, 2017, <http://inthesaltshaker.com/drills/gencase.htm#SOURCE>.

¹⁰⁵ H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, “The Ablative of Source,” in *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto, Canada: MacMillian Company, 1955), 82.

heard the apostles teach (otherwise they would not “persistently devote” [the meaning of the periphrastic here] themselves to that teaching).¹⁰⁶

Whether speaking of the instrumentality of the Apostles engaging in the action of teaching or the content they propagated, the outcome is the same. The teaching of the Apostles is what was recorded and committed unto faithful men for the teaching of God’s people (2 Tim 2:1) as the Apostles passed out of the church’s leadership. The Apostles’ teaching transmitted the Words of Jesus Christ.

The immediate effect of the Apostles’ teaching is described: “The three thousand converts were then formed into a distinct community, the apostolic fellowship, constituted on the basis of the apostolic teaching. The apostolic teaching was authoritative because it was the teaching of the Lord communicated through the apostles. In due course, this apostolic teaching took written share in the NT Scriptures.”¹⁰⁷

What Luke does not in this passage describe explicitly is what the early church committed in regards to the Apostles’ teaching. However, Jesus did explicitly detail what the apostles were to do with His teaching until it became theirs to disseminate faithfully: “Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age’” (Matt. 28:18–20). The Apostles’ teaching consisting of what they had received of the words of Christ makes it likely that it was these teachings that comprised the message that began the church.

¹⁰⁶ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

¹⁰⁷ Bruce, *Commentary*, 79.

“The teaching of the Apostles” in Acts 2 and following in the New Testament consisted of the entire content of “all that [Jesus] commanded them” in His instruction and example in the time that He walked with them prior to His ascension to heaven. Christ’s command to the Apostles was not only to teach, informing new disciples of all that Jesus had commanded the Apostles, but, additionally, to insist that disciples observe, keep, obey, and hold to (τηρέω) all of Christ’s teaching. Differing views of the occurrences of this Day of Pentecost could obscure what was the focus of this day.

We note that those new converts were not enjoying a mystical experience which led them to despise their mind or disdain theology. Anti-intellectualism and the fullness of the Spirit are mutually incompatible, because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Nor did those early disciples imagine that, because they had received the Spirit, he was the only teacher they needed and they could dispense with human teachers. On the contrary, they sat at the apostles’ feet, hungry to receive instruction, and they persevered in it.¹⁰⁸

The confidence of the listeners then and readers now is the assurance that what the Apostles were teaching was the same Word of God that the Holy Spirit inspired in the Old Testament writers. Prophets, poets, and singers recorded and all that the New Testament writers were to write to the various persons and churches included what God has always intended: a revelation of Himself, His love for His creatures, and His radical response in Jesus Christ to the problem of human rebellion.

The Word of God Revealed in the Older Testament

From the time that God shared His Creation with man and walked with the first couple in the Garden (Gen 2:19–20; 3:8), God has always communicated His regard for His children and elicited righteous relationship with them. God’s communication with Cain and Abel (Gen. 4;

¹⁰⁸ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 82.

Heb. 11:4), Noah and the people of his time (Gen. 6:13; Heb. 11:7; 2Pet. 2:5), Abraham (Gen. 12; Heb. 11:8–10; Rom. 4:3) and the Patriarchs (Gen. 25–50) evidence that God’s intent has always been to reveal Himself to humanity, offering to enter into covenant with any who were willing.

Following Yahweh’s self-disclosure to and commissioning of Moses (Exod. 3:4ff), Moses led Yahweh’s power-revealing deliverance of His people from Egypt (Exod. 13:17ff). Before long until He began disclosing again His plan to covenant with His people and the covenantal stipulations that ensured the righteous type of covenant community in which this Holy God wanted to participate (Exod. 19:20ff). In the Law given to Moses, the teaching of the Law, God’s Word, was a foundational part, not only of public life but in the life of the family, showing God’s intent that His Word be deliberately taught and applied to each member of the family to the extent that children would grow up knowing and keeping Yahweh’s Word (Deut. 6:1-9). This Law given by Yahweh to Moses and reiterated and entrusted to Joshua and the nation of Israel (Deut. 34:9) prior to their entering the Promised Land was referred to and taught throughout the Old Testament historical books and the Prophets. The Psalms, typified by the massive acrostic Psalm 119, taught the sacred origin, nature, and benefits of living out the teachings of God’s revelation.

Undeniably, the teachings of Jesus and what His apostles obediently passed on to those they evangelized and taught contained much of the Old Testament revelation of God and His covenant plans for His people. According to Roger Nicole, in the broadest view, the clear use of Old Testament materials, either in direct quotations (224 times) or clear allusion, range from “at least 295 separate references to the Old Testament” to as much as “4195 passages reminiscent of Old Testament Scripture” that appear in the New Testament. “It can therefore be asserted,

without exaggeration that more than 10 percent of the New Testament text is made up of citations or direct allusions to the Old Testament.”¹⁰⁹

The Word of God Revealed in the Teachings and Life of Jesus Christ

The teachings of Jesus, which were passed onto the Apostles with instructions to propagate these to future disciples, were authoritative as they originated in the Word of God Himself, Jesus Christ. They often used, as just seen, the revelation of the Old Testament without hesitation by Jesus Himself (as demonstrated later in all the New Testament writers): “From beginning to end, the New Testament authors ascribe unqualified authority to Old Testament Scripture. Whenever advanced, a quotation is viewed as normative. Nowhere do we find a tendency to question, argue, or repudiate the truth of any Scripture utterance.”¹¹⁰ In a postmodern cultural ambience that decries any claim of objective truth, it is evident from Jesus’ respectful use of the Old Testament that He considered God’s revelation as truly true. His disciples and their teaching, consequently, also considered and disseminated the Old Testament as clearly God’s revealed Word.

¹⁰⁹ Carl Ferdinand Howard Henry, ed., *Revelation and the Bible: Contemporary Evangelical Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), <http://www.veritasseminary.com/wenix/Library/Carl%20Henry/CARL%20F%20H%20HENRY%20CONTEMPORARY%20EVANGELICAL%20THOUGHT%20VOL02%20REVELATION%20AND%20THE%20BIBLE.pdf> 137–38.

“The present writer has counted 224 direct citations introduced by a definite formula indicating the writer purposed to quote. To these must be added seven cases where a second quotation is introduced by the conjunction ‘and,’ and 19 cases where a paraphrase or summary rather than a direct quotation follows the introductory formula. We may further note at least 45 instances where the similarity with certain Old Testament passages is so pronounced that, although no explicit indication is given that the New Testament author was referring to Old Testament Scripture, his intention to do so can scarcely be doubted. Thus a very conservative count discloses unquestionably at least 295 separate references to the Old Testament. These occupy some 352 verses of the New Testament, or more than 4.4 per cent. Therefore one verse in 22.5 of the New Testament is a quotation.

If clear allusions are taken into consideration, the figures are much higher: C. H. Toy lists 613 such instances, Wilhelm Dittmar goes as high as 1640, while Eugen Huehn indicates 4195 passages reminiscent of Old Testament Scripture. It can therefore be asserted, without exaggeration that more than 10 per cent of the New Testament text is made up of citations or direct allusions to the Old Testament.”

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

“The apostles’ teaching” refers to a body of material considered authoritative because it was the message about Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed by accredited apostles. It undoubtedly included a compilation of the words of Jesus (cf. 20:35), some accounts of his earthly ministry, passion and resurrection (cf. 2:22–24), and a declaration of what all this meant for man’s redemption (cf. 1 Cor 15:3–5)—all of which was thought of in terms of a Christian “tradition” (*paradosis*) that could be passed on to others (cf. 1 Cor 11:2; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6).”¹¹¹

The taught word of the Apostles was authoritative because of the authority of the One who had originated this Word, because it was recognizable by those who heard it (Mat 7:29; Mar 1:21), and because He had passed it down to them.

The Apostles continued to teach what God had already provided in the past, albeit while including the fulfillment of so much of what had been anticipated in the Old Testament in the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus likewise insisted that His teaching was only what He had received:

When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him.... The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. (John 8:28–29; 14:10)

Interestingly, He taught the same of the coming Holy Spirit: “I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come” (John 16:12–13, cf. 14:26). What Jesus received, He taught publicly and privately in small groups that included His Apostles. What they taught, they too had received. The early Church unquestionably received and then passed on what they heard, as well.

¹¹¹ Longenecker, *Acts of the Apostles*, 289.

For those believers who have become part of Christ's body, the church, (1Cor. 12), the teaching entrusted to the Apostles of God's Word is necessary for growth and perseverance in a relationship with Christ. Examination of the Gospels shows the oral ministry of Jesus consisting of teaching, proclaiming, and preaching, often in their synagogues (Matt. 4:28; 9:35; 15:34; Mark 1:21; 6:1–2; Luke 4:15, 31; 6:6; 13:10; John 6:59) but also on open hillsides (Matt. 5–7; Mark 6:34; 10:1), on the lakeside (Mark 2:13), sometimes from a ship (Mark 4:1; Luke 5:3), in the temple in Jerusalem (Matt. 26:55; Mark 11:37; 12:35; 14:49; Luke 19:47; 20:1; 21:37; John 7:14, 28; 18:20), and in the cities of Judea (Matt. 11:1; Luke 23:5). Jesus taught His Apostles in a small group of prayer (Luke 11:1–4). Particularly in view of His Passion, Jesus taught the small group of Apostles (Mark 8:31; 9:31) of His impending death and resurrection, making them aware of what would after Pentecost become the kernel of their gospel message.

The Apostles were with Jesus on the occasions listed, hearing Him recurrently teaching comprehensively the good news. This Word of the Father (“Word of Yahweh,” seen 241 times in the Old Testament), passed on to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (John 16:13–15), would become the *kerygma* of the Apostles and what the early church devoted itself to knowing and living out.

Jesus was clear about the crucial nature of what he taught, and his disciples took Him seriously: “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:19). Consequently, the group most harshly criticized by Jesus were characterized by teaching their own passed-down interpretations and applications of God's Word, displacing (Matt. 15:9; Mark 7:6–13) and nullifying and invalidating the actual Word of God.

Other than His supernatural setting aside of natural laws to provide an authenticating sign that validated Himself, an indication of His true personhood as God's Son, one of Jesus' most frequent teaching methods (variously counted but at least 33 unique ones) was that of a special type of storytelling. The parable is a story easily recognized by the listener that was "thrown alongside" (παραβολή) of a desired spiritual truth that the parable both hid and revealed, depending on the hearer's inclination to understand spiritually (Mark 4:11-12): "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mark 4:23).

Parables are extended figures of comparison that often use short stories to teach a truth or answer a question. While the story in a parable is not historical, it is true to life, not a fairy tale. As a form of oral literature, the parable exploits realistic situations but makes effective use of the imagination. . . . Some of the parables [of Christ] were designed to reveal mysteries to those on the inside and to conceal the truth to those on the outside who would not hear.¹¹²

This method of teaching seems to reveal the heart of a Savior who wanted for those whose hearts were open and receptive to understand His message of Himself, His kingdom, and the nature of true discipleship. It also seems to reveal His merciful hiding of truth from those yet undecided or resistant to internalizing it, saving them the burden of responsibility of knowing what Jesus was teaching.

Prior to the Day of Pentecost, while Jesus was still with His Apostles, He sent them on at least one mission tour that involved teaching others what He had been teaching them, especially about repentance (Mark 6:7–13; 30). This mission seems to be a foretaste of the "Apostles' teaching" and was reflected upon by the early church. Although the Holy Spirit was not yet given, this mission was conducted with that which Jesus gifted each of them: "authority over the unclean spirits" (Mark 6:7).

¹¹² Ken Boa, "IV. Literary Forms in the Bible," Bible.org, May 5, 2010, accessed March 26, 2017, <https://bible.org/seriespage/iv-literary-forms-bible>.

The Word of God Preserved and Transmitted through the Apostles' Teaching

Paul expresses, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the divine origin of the apostolic writings (2 Tim 3:16–17), which were the recording and explanation of the apostolic *kerygma* applied to the unique circumstances of first-century leaders, local churches, specific groups of believers, and the church universal. Peter confirms the supernatural origin of the Holy Scriptures (2 Pet 1:19–21) while including Paul's writings in that inspired category as well (2Pet. 3:14–16).

The reason that the Apostles' teachings (later contained in their written Gospels and letters) were so crucial to the infant church and the church of Christ since then is the way God's Holy Spirit uses these inspired words to bring about transformation in those who hear them, both initially, as seen in Acts 2:42ff, when believers are first adopted into God's family, and continually, as these grow in their knowledge of their Lord and His kingdom plans.

The Apostles' teachings, when energized by the Holy Spirit as seen in the Acts 2 passage, brings about saving faith. The promise of salvation is that "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation" (Rom 10:9–10), so "whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13). First, persons need to be the objects of the proclamation and teaching of God's Word: "How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14). The teaching of the Word of God, which is the ascribed content of the Apostles' teaching, is indispensable to saving faith. The disciples made this teaching primary in their ministry, resulting in conviction even in those who opposed their Gospel ministry (Acts 5:28–33) but producing amazement at the power of this teaching when encountered by the open minded (Acts

13:8–13). Paul presented this teaching at the Aeropagus with the result that some, at least, responded, “We shall hear you again concerning this.... But some men joined him and believed,” (Acts 17:32–34). Paul wrote of the power of this Gospel (Rom. 1:16–17) in the transformations of the new birth in the Romans: “Thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Rom. 6:17–18). More than the necessity of justification, the transformation of regeneration frees believers from the domination of sin.

The Primacy of the Apostles’ Teaching

This teaching of listeners, especially believing ones who had submitted to baptism, was a task from which the Apostles were loath to be distracted from even when threatened by the authority of the Sanhedrin: The council “commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard’” (Acts 4:18–20). When Peter was jailed, his miraculous release by the angel of the Lord was immediately followed by his resumption of teaching the people in the Temple (Acts 5:25).

Called again before the council who reminded them of the previous edict to cease teaching Jesus, the Apostles would not stop teaching even when threatened with death and suffering persecution:

After calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (Acts 5:40–42)

When the administrative tasks of the fledgling church threatened to distract them from teaching, they delegated these necessary tasks to others on order to be free to accomplish their primary calling: “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:2–4). This last is the continued devotion of the Apostles themselves to the practices of prayer and the teaching of the Word.

The teachings of the Apostles were used of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of persons. Besides the account of 3,000 new believers on Pentecost, Paul’s teaching of the word of God and his treatment of Elymas so impressed the proconsul, Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7), that “then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord” (Acts 13:12). This kernel (*kerygma*) of the Apostles’ teaching about Jesus, used evangelistically by Paul to the philosophers at the Areopagus (Acts 17:18–34), had a marked impact upon the hearers as a “new, strange teaching” (Acts 17:18–19) with several results. While some labeled Paul as a babbler and proclaimer of strange deities (17:18) worthy of only sneering mockery, others believed: “Some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them” (Acts 17:34). Despite the resistance, these few new believers formed the core of the growing church.

One finds the continuation of Christian believers teaching and proclaiming the Word of God: Paul and Barnabas at Antioch (Acts 15:35), Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:11), Apollos in Ephesus (Acts 18:24–25), and Paul in Rome. Concluding the book of Acts, Luke describes the account of the teaching mission of the Apostle: “And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching

concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered” (Acts 28:30–1:1). The church dedicated itself to know and obey this kerygma of the gospel just as Jesus had commanded. Paul clarifies, solemnly charging in the pastoral letters that the continued task of the Christian leader is to proclaim God’s Word and to counter any practice that militates against it. He commands Timothy,

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths (2Tim. 4:1–4; see also 1Tim. 1:3, 6–10)

Paul continues his description of the faithful messenger in his letter to Titus: “holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain” (Tit. 1:9–11). An assigned task to the Christian leader is not only to teach but to entrust the Word to others who may teach, as well: “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2Tim. 2:2). Not surprisingly, one of the certain qualifications of a Christian leader/overseer is the ability to pass on to the church this handed-down body of tradition about Jesus (1Tim. 3:2; 4:11–16; 2Tim. 2:24; Tit. 1:9; 2:3).

John warns of those who do not abide in the teaching of Christ that the Apostles have delivered to the church as being disqualified from the fellowship of the church: “Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides

in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds” (2 John 1:9–11). John also discusses the importance of holding fast to true doctrine (Rev. 2:24) and the danger to those who embrace false teaching (Rev. 2:14–15) in the message of Jesus to the pastors and churches in Asia.

The Content of the Apostles’ Teaching

The devotion of the infant church to the Apostles’ teaching must be inferred to include a careful familiarization with its content and a practical application that sought to apply it to every aspect of personal and corporate life. This devotion is confirmed in the remaining verses of this chapter and throughout the rest of the book of Acts.

Clearly, the contents of the Apostles’ teaching is comprised of all of what they had received from the words and actions of Jesus Christ as He personally disciplined each of them in the few years they spent together:

As the phrase “the teaching of the apostles” describes the entire preaching of the apostles, both the instruction of the followers of Jesus as well as the missionary proclamation before unbelievers may be in view here. Note that Luke uses the expression “the word” (ὁ λόγος) to describe the apostolic preaching of the message of Jesus Christ, and that this expression belongs to the missionary language of the early Christians.¹¹³

Maclaren helpfully points out,

An earnest desire after fuller knowledge is the basis of all healthy Christian life. We cannot realize, without a great effort, the ignorance of these new converts. “Parthians and Medes and Elamites,” and Jews gathered from every corner of the Roman world, they had come up to Jerusalem, and the bulk of them knew no more about Christ and Christianity than what they picked up out of Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost. But that was enough to change their hearts and their wills and to lead them to a real faith.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Schnabel, *Acts*.

¹¹⁴ Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Accordance electronic ed. (Altamonte Springs, FL: OakTree Software, 2006).

Careful not to suppose that the content of the Apostles' teaching at this early point in the church was the totality of what is developed and recorded in the remainder of the New Testament,

Maclaren declares,

The Apostles' teaching—for "doctrine" does not convey to modern ears what Luke meant by the word—must have been very largely, if not exclusively, of the same kind as is preserved to us in the four Gospels, and especially in the first three of them. The recital to these listeners, to whom it was all so fresh and strange and transcendent, of the story that has become worn and commonplace to us by its familiarity, of Christ in His birth, Christ in His gentleness, Christ in His deeds, Christ in the deep words that the Apostles were only beginning to understand; Christ in His Death, Resurrection, and Ascension—these were the themes on the narration of which this company of three thousand waited with such eagerness.¹¹⁵

The Apostles' teaching in the infant church was the remembrance of all that Jesus began to do and teach, the Words of Christ and accounts of the behaviors that Jesus manifested that exemplified these descriptions of Truth. Naturally, this teaching was frequently based upon and often included verbatim quotes or in exposition and application of the Old Testament Canon. An example of this basis can be seen earlier in Peter's address in Acts 2, the context of this passage.

As far as primary theological themes emphasized and their interpretations, beginning in Acts 2, the content of this teaching can be gleaned, at least in part, from the sermons in Acts, particularly those of Peter. The apostles' teaching focused on Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection and on his significance in God's plan. The following themes stand out:

- Jesus as Israel's Messiah and Lord,
- The Son of David and God's Servant,
- The holy and righteous Savior,
- The prophet like Moses and the judge of humankind,

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

- The necessity of repentance in view of God’s revelation in the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus and in the bestowal of the Spirit of prophecy, and
- God’s offer of salvation through Jesus, who is Israel’s Messiah and Lord, available only in personal allegiance to Jesus.¹¹⁶

The teaching of the Apostles

undoubtedly included a compilation of the words of Jesus (cf. 20:35), some account of his earthly ministry, passion and resurrection (cf. 2:22–24), and a declaration of what all this meant for man’s redemption (cf. 1 Cor 15:3–5)—all of which was thought of in terms of a Christian ‘tradition’ (*paradosis*) that could be passed on to others (cf. 1 Cor 11:2; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6).¹¹⁷

What was “handed over” to others of this doctrine was developed throughout the rest of the New Testament, being based on these themes, building upon them, and applying them to the unique situations that presented themselves in the lives of the different churches, groups, and individuals.

The content of the words of Jesus written to believers of that time has been preserved for believers since then in the four Gospels: “For believers of later generations the New Testament scriptures form the written deposit of the apostolic teaching.”¹¹⁸ Jesus promised that the knowledge of, obedience to, and reliance upon them would influence the character of the relational intimacy that believers can enjoy with God: “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him’” (John 14:23). By the Word of God, as proclaimed by and

¹¹⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*.

¹¹⁷ Longenecker, *Acts*, 289.

¹¹⁸ Bruce, *Commentary*, 73.

exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ, humanity came to know that the most intimate kind of fellowship with God is His intent, as well as His desire for this fellowship to be shared with others.

Persistent Participation in Fellowship with Other Believers

Fellowship (κοινωνία) describes a dynamic condition that is the result of the same intentional, persistent, committed effort as these other three practices of the Spirit-filled church. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones related fellowship, the unity of believers, to adherence to the truth of what the Apostles taught:

Unity is not a matter of “arriving” at something that did not exist before but rather “perfecting” something that already exists. “We must never start with it [unity],” he said, “but always remember the order stated so clearly in Acts 2:42, where fellowship follows doctrine.” The Doctor contended for a strong doctrinal basis for unity, a basis including the fall, the sinfulness and helplessness of man, and the person and work of Christ, especially His substitutionary atonement.¹¹⁹

This unity, more than being simply social, founded upon the sharing of a “like precious faith” (2Pet. 1:1 KJV).

In its broadest understanding, κοινωνία means “association, communion, fellowship, close relationship.”¹²⁰ In the New Testament, this type of intimacy is used primarily in two ways: a Christian believer’s close relationship with God and the deep human relationships that can exist between persons, whether these be righteous or not.

Clearly, κοινωνία with God (in His three Persons) is the spiritual oneness restored through the reconciliation of justification. Fellowship “expresses what we share in together. This is God himself, for ‘our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ’ [1John 1:3] and

¹¹⁹ “The Ecumenical Movement,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* Fall, 1998: 44–46.

¹²⁰ F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed., ed. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), BibleWorks. v.10.

there is ‘the fellowship of the Holy Spirit’ [2Cor. 13:14.] Thus true fellowship is a Trinitarian experience; it is our common share in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”¹²¹ Socialization is frequently portrayed as the sole definition of fellowship, but although included, biblical fellowship is a mutual sharing of the same union with the Triune God (John 17:20-23).

In many New Testament descriptions (actual and analogical), a change of status, position, movement from distance to intimate closeness, and peaceful reorientation from enemy to family member, the Christian life is detailed as a life of fellowship entered into and maintained as an abiding “in Christ” (John 15) and a keeping “in step with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25, NIV, ESV). These spatial descriptions of relational closeness with an omnipresent God are sprinkled through the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament letters, portraying the possibility of the Holy Spirit’s enablement in conjunction with cooperative human response, resulting in abiding in, walking in, or living in accordance with God’s Spirit. This dynamic fellowship is linked to various positive outcomes, such as spiritual stability, fruitfulness, answers to prayer, power over temptation and spiritual victory in trial, as well as life characterized by the habitual expression of the manifestation of the character of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:23–24).

Jesus prayed to His Father for His Apostles and “for those also who believe in Me through their word” (John 17:20) to be granted access into the *oneness* that He shared with the Father and Spirit within the Trinity (John 17:21–23). Peter describes God’s gift of fellowship as His enabling believers that they “may become partakers of the divine nature” (2Pet. 1:4).

Paul declared that by the faithful invitation of the Father, believers are “called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1Cor. 1:9). He finally blessed the Corinthians: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,

¹²¹ Stott, *Message of Acts*, 82–83.

be with you all” (2Cor. 13:14). The confidence of this apostle was that, having abandoned any hope of achieving righteousness acceptable to God through personal endeavor, his assurance was fixed on the grace-providing fellowship with Jesus Christ. He expressed his sole desire “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:10–11). Despite the frequent Western evangelical perspective of the primacy of an individual relationship with God, in this Acts 2 passage that individual relationship with God is an important aspect but not the final goal of the Father. Jesus reflected this shared union with God in His prayer on the eve of His death:

I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (John 17:20–23).

Based upon a Christian believer’s personal fellowship with God is the resultant corporate fellowship, a community (*common unity*) of those who are so related to the same Father. As John writes,

What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of Life—and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us—what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:1–3).

John writes elsewhere of the Christian life being comprised on continual fellowship, so that “if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1John 1:6–7). By trust in the atonement of God in Jesus Christ, these sisters and brothers, commonly united to God become part of the intimate

fellowship with each other. Life becomes *life together*, a sharing of interdependence upon each other.

Paul described this fellowship as individual believers being part of the body of Christ (1Cor. 12) of which Jesus Christ Himself is the head. This intricate metaphor describes unity in diversity, compelling concern for and sacrificial service rendered to the entire group for its good rather than just to individuals, especially oneself. No sparing of compassion and allocating of resources to the meeting of each member's needs are made.

Peter describes this intimate community of worship with another metaphor. Individual believers are seen as “living stones” that make up a temple, a dwelling place for the Spirit of God. Again, Jesus Christ occupies the strategic place of supplying cohesion to the whole: that of a “cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20–22; 1Cor. 3:11), and Jesus quoted Psalm 118: 22 in each of the Synoptics (Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17), portraying Himself as the foundation or support of the building that illustrates this fellowship:

You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For *this* is contained in Scripture: “BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.... But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY. (1 Pet. 2:5-6, 9-10)

Both of these metaphors, while portraying the crucial centrality of Christ in a structure (biological or architectural), stress the necessity and interdependency of each member upon each other as well as on Jesus Christ Himself. Contrary to the perspective of Western radical individualism that has crept into evangelical soteriology, the fellowship, the shared life of those

who call God their Father and Christ their brother, do refer to each other as brother and sister being members of one another (1Cor. 12:27).

Jesus made specific promises concerning the activities of the group acting in concert. The presence of Christ's Spirit was promised in some enhanced measure when believers assembled: "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst" (Matt. 18:20). Christ stresses that important tasks are accomplished best in a plurality, including discernment of God's will (Matt. 18:16), corporate intercession (Matt. 18:19), and church discipline (Matt. 18:16). The rest of the New Testament confirms each of these, offering several examples for each in the book of Acts. The reality of the fellowship of the church is within the Spirit of Christ. Ogilvie offers, "There is no true fellowship without Christ's Spirit in us and between us. He is what we have in common. And that is greater than anything or anyone else. He draws us into oneness and loves each of us through each other. Sharing what we have is a natural result of this communion."¹²² This confidence of those who gather in Jesus' name is that His Spirit also participates in all of their life together. This type of Spirit-based intimacy would not only provide the motivation for the two listed practices but any other activities that are motivated by and flow out of this fellowship. Additionally, it would also foster the best discerning atmosphere for Spirit-assisted insight into the meaning and application of the Apostles' teaching.

Although Luke does not provide in 2:42 more than the term for *fellowship*, the results of that intimate oneness are seen throughout the rest of the chapter. The attitude that needed constant commitment was enabled both by the Holy Spirit and the Apostles' teaching about the "mind of Christ":

¹²² Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Acts*, vol. 28, *The Preacher's Commentary Series* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 73.

If there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 2:1–5)

The mind of Christ is described in the motivation for Christ’s incarnation and passion in the following three verses, and was to be shared by the Philippians to remedy that dissension that infected their local church, at least in part (Phil 4:2).

Although much later than Luke’s composition, the writer to the Hebrews gave the oft-quoted passage that seems to specifically summarize two clear outcomes that characterize a close faith community: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (Heb. 10:23–25). The power of the group both to encourage and motivate others of the body to fulfill the purposes of Christ indicates the Spirit’s persistent energy.

As already noted, the article precedes “fellowship.” Undeniably, the use of the article in Acts 2:42 with *κοινωνία* is emphatic. Dana writes, “The Greek noun has an intrinsic definiteness, an ‘implicit article.’ Therefore, the explicit article does more than merely ascribe definiteness. Green is touching the genius when he says that it used ‘mark a specific object of thought.’”¹²³ When viewing the context of the use of this term here with this article, one infers that *this* fellowship, based on each member’s personal fellowship with God, produced a unique intimate

¹²³ Dana and Mantey, “Participle,” 137.

community, characterized by sharing all that was possessed by everyone: spiritually, physically, emotionally, and in every way.

The result in this passage, and throughout the book of Acts, was that “all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need” (Acts 2:44–45). This pattern (e.g., all believers Acts 4:32, including Barnabas Acts 4:36–37) of physical sharing is freely expressed and never legislated by any (preventing a charge of economic imposition such as communism or even socialism). The sharing of and participation in spiritual riches is also viewed later in this verse in the breaking of bread and in prayers.

As can be seen in the various church crises and epistles directed at local churches and wider groups, the primary enemy of the church’s integrity is disunity, a breaking of fellowship, with the resultant quenching (1 Thess. 5:19) and grieving of the Spirit of God (Eph. 4:30) that hinders the church’s power of faith. The intentional pursuit and maintaining of the fellowship was an early expression of God’s Spirit upon the infant church and the jealous focus of the New Testament writers thereafter, as seen in the example of Paul’s entreaty to his Philippian sisters and brothers: “Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose” (Phil. 2:1–2). Unity is not describing total agreement on all issues, but the same commitment to maintaining the spiritual union with the Triune God.

The Breaking of Bread and Prayer

The Anglican scholar, John Stott, argues that the breaking of bread and prayers detail specific practices of fellowship.

Their fellowship was expressed not only in caring for each other, but in corporate worship too. Moreover, the definite article in both expressions (literally, “the breaking of the bread and the prayers”) suggests a reference to the Lord’s Supper on the one hand (although almost certainly at that early stage as part of a larger meal) and prayer services or meetings (rather than Private prayer) on the other. There are two aspects of the early church’s worship which exemplify its balance.¹²⁴

From the use of this phrase, the “breaking of bread,” in the New Testament, clearly, “the breaking of bread refers either to an ordinary meal or to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.”¹²⁵

The presence of this phrase here in a context of intentional practices of the church. Coyle maintains, “If this were a reference to the Eucharist alone, it is strange that no reference is made to the cup. Nowhere in Scripture can it be demonstrated that ‘breaking bread refers to both the bread and the cup.’”¹²⁶ The breaking of bread while definitely being comprised of shared meals, with all being served, still could have involved both activities.

Even allowing that the “breaking of bread” described regular communal meals (certainly an opportunity to develop interaction leading to fellowship), “at the close of each meal, they probably paused to remember the Lord by observing what we call ‘the Lord’s Supper.’”¹²⁷ Schnabel seems to agree: “There is the distinct possibility that it refers to both. The ‘breaking of bread’ is best understood as a reference to the ordinary meals that the believers regularly shared, during which they remembered Jesus’ death on the cross for the forgiveness of sins and for the establishment of the new covenant, linked with the command to remember Jesus and his sacrifice

¹²⁴ Stott, *Message of Acts*, 84–85.

¹²⁵ Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, 9th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publ. House, 1995), 267.

¹²⁶ Allen Edgington, “Issue 2: Fall 1985,” *Grace Journal* 6, no. 2 (Fall 85): 160–480.

¹²⁷ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary—Be Dynamic (Acts 1-12)*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2003), 411.

during meals.”¹²⁸ This last seems feasible in light of Luke’s report: “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight” (Acts 20:7). Paul’s talking to those assembled, was a special type of communication. The Greek term for *spoke* or *talked* is *διαλέγομαι*, meaning (1) of a reasoned discussion *discuss, discourse with, conduct a discussion* (Acts 18:4); (2) of disputations *contend, argue, dispute* (Mark 9:34); or, (3) of speaking to someone in order to convince *address, speak, reason with,*) upon which the NET Notes comment, “The verb *διαλέγομαι* is frequently used of Paul addressing Jews in the synagogue. As G. Schrenk (TDNT 2:94–95) points out, ‘What is at issue is the address which any qualified member of a synagogue might give.’”¹²⁹ At some breaking of bread occasions, the Eucharist and spiritual discourses were conducted.

More than the noting of the first day of the week, which could indicate a shift in worship practice from the seventh for the early church, this discussion, although in the context of a meal together, had the character of a teaching/preaching event. In the discussion of 1 Corinthians 11:20–34, Paul instructs as to the proper behavior in regards to a Eucharistic breaking of bread making a clear distinction between a meal to satisfy hunger and one to remember Christ’s finished atonement.

In agreement with Stott, regarding the use of this phrase in Acts 2:42, with the article preceding the phrase, noting Machen’s comments about the character of the Greek noun and the special use of the article, this phrase could point to a practice more unique than simply an

¹²⁸Schnabel, *Acts*.

¹²⁹ *The NET Bible, New English Translation Bible (NET)* (Richardson, TX: Biblical Studies Press, 1996), BibleWorks, v.10.

expression of hospitality and generosity described elsewhere, to more intentional times of worship and celebration. Bruce opines,

The “breaking of bread” probably denotes more than the regular taking of food together: the regular observance of what came to be called the Lord’s Supper seems to be in view. While this observance appears to have formed part of an ordinary meal, the emphasis on the inaugural action of breaking the bread, “a circumstance wholly trivial in itself,” says Rudolf Otto, suggests that this was “the significant element of the celebration.... But it could only be significant when it was a ‘signum,’ viz. of Christ’s being broken in death.”¹³⁰

In these two practices of *breaking bread* and *prayer*, one sees that the early church was devoted to worshipping together in the expression of their common unity with their God. Prayer is the other intentional worship activity noted in this verse. English translation is varied with some rendering this plural noun literally (e.g., ESV, KJV, RSV) while others rendering it singularly (e.g., NASB, NIV, NLT), probably considering with the NET that “this word was translated as a collective singular in keeping with English style.”¹³¹

In contrast, Schnabel suggests, “The plural implies regular prayer practices of the Christian believers, perhaps also referring to the traditional prayers that Jews regularly recited. Luke does not clarify whether private or communal prayers are in view.”¹³² While the former may be tenable, although unstated by Luke, in view of the context, one would infer that the pattern of offering prayers is noted in a context of fellowship and, therefore, corporate in execution.

Many terms for prayer are used in the New Testament, several focused on entreaty to receive, for oneself or another, what is needed or wanted. Petition is not the type of prayer used

¹³⁰ Bruce, *Commentary*, 73.

¹³¹ *The NET Bible*.

¹³² Schnabel, *Acts*.

here. The term for prayer (προσευχή) is one of two nouns Luke prefers in his writings (the other being δέησις), but he provides the reader with no modifiers or further context:

Luke's silence in reference to these particulars may have arisen from the fact that there was no invariable order of exercises; or may have been intended to prevent the order in the Jerusalem Church from being regarded as an authoritative precedent. It shows clearly the intention of the Holy Spirit that the assemblies of the saints should be left to the exercise of their own discretion in matters of this kind, and furnishes a most singular rebuke to the hundreds of party leaders who have since attempted to impose authoritative rituals upon the congregations.¹³³

Luke's use of that noun and the verb form προσεύχομαι in his Gospel and Acts totals thirty-five out of a total of eighty-six New Testament uses, indicating the importance of Luke's valuation of this type of prayer to the Christian life.¹³⁴ In view of the preoccupation with the Apostles' teaching, however, any prayer taught and modeled would probably be in the likeness of Jesus' frequent prayers. Brown agrees that the Apostles' teaching reveals how to pray.

As to an understanding of this type of prayer, Brown insists that Luke's predominant use of this noun and verb in his Gospel and Acts area is "very striking."¹³⁵ Brown continues: "For Luke prayer is a basic expression of the Christian faith and life, and Jesus the very model of how to pray aright (Luke 11:1). This prayer was experienced as genuine conversation with God is clear from the fact that those concerned often receive quite definite instructions from God (e.g., Acts 10:9ff., 30 ff., 13:2)."¹³⁶ Some have thought that a formal type of liturgical quotation of the Lord's Prayer was repeated, but this is only supposition.

¹³³ John W. McGarvey, *A Commentary on Acts of Apostles*, 7th Accordance electronic ed. (Altamonte Springs, FL: OakTree Software, 1999).

¹³⁴ Timothy Green, "A Study of Prayer in the Gospel of Luke" (Master's thesis, Lubbock Christian University), accessed 2017, <http://www.biblicaltheology.com/Research/GreenTM01.pdf>.

¹³⁵ Colin Brown and H. Schönweiss, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 5th ed., vol. 2, s.v. "προσεύχομαι" (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1976), 873.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

The use of the article preceding the noun (as earlier in other dative objects of intentional devotional commitment) and the plural noun emphasizes what Brown has noted: Prayer is a unique indispensable (basic) aspect of the fellowship of the new community. Of its importance in the mind of Luke and its recurrent intentional practice, there can be little doubt.

As to the effects of prayer on the establishment and development of *κοινωνία*, Ogilvie is helpful: “In order for people to be galvanized into oneness in Christ, it takes time to be together to listen to each other, care, and be *for* each other. Prayer together becomes the time of communication with the Lord in which we are replenished by His Spirit in order to continue unselfish and non-manipulative concern and caring for each other.”¹³⁷ John MacArthur concludes,

This was really a church, nothing more and nothing less. Its life was completely defined by the devotion to those spiritual duties which make up the unique identity of the church. Nothing outside the living Lord, the Spirit, and the Word define life for the church. This church, though not having any cultural elements of success, no worldly strategies, was still endowed with every necessary component for accomplishing the purposes of its Lord. The church will still be effective in bringing sinners to Christ when it manifests the same key elements of spiritual duty that marked this first fellowship.¹³⁸

Intentional return to the systematic practice of these “spiritual duties” is the foundation for the ministry plan that is presented for the “rooting and grounding in love” (Eph 3:17) of millennial youth.

Characteristics of Unified Believers

Undoubtedly, Luke’s account of the Day of Pentecost was throughout the results of the activity of the poured out Holy Spirit, not only as promised by Jesus throughout His ministry

¹³⁷ Ogilvie, *Acts*, 73.

¹³⁸ John MacArthur, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary—Acts 1-12* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994),

(lastly on the day of His ascension), but throughout the Old Testament cannot be denied. The history of the human race indicates that in addition to creating humanity in the image of Himself (Gen. 1:26–27), God shared His work with humankind (Gen. 1:28) and sovereignly allowed human choice (Gen. 2:26–17; 3:6b) and response (Acts 2:37–41) to His offered grace. God dignified human decision and activity. A consideration of human response is not to point to any type of human merit but only to the importance of human cooperation or rejection of God’s universally offered grace in determining outcomes.

The description of the intentional recurrent practices of the newly born church in Acts 2:42 is followed by Luke’s description of the behavioral characteristics of the church. While admitting that this situation was unique, never to be repeated again just in this passage, a survey of church history (beyond the scope of this study) indicates that when the people of God awakened from the lethargy of nominalism, made aware of their need and God’s sufficiency, by His power do “draw near to God,” they find that He Who promised remains faithful: “He will draw near to you” (Jas. 4:8). Whether termed a “great or spiritual awakening,” “a reformation,” or a “revival,” Cooperating with God’s sovereign activity has shown to accomplish in a relatively short time extraordinary results in human lives and societies.

Luke records,

Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:43-47)

While the Apostles described as being the instruments of “many wonders and signs” in the book of Acts are gone, God’s Spirit has often chosen to invade human history miraculously to do His

will throughout the church age in similar miraculous ways. Luke is not specific here. Elsewhere in Acts, miracles of healing (e.g., Acts 3:1–10; 9:17–18, 33–34; 14:8–10), anointed preaching and discourse (e.g., Acts 4:4:8; 7:1–55; 12:9–12), instant judgment (e.g., Acts 5:1–11; 12:21–23), deliverance (e.g., Acts 5:17–20; 9:22–25; 12:1–11), conviction of heart (e.g., Acts 5:35; 2:37; 7:57–58), angelic messaging (e.g., Acts 10:3–6, 30–32), resurrection of the dead (e.g., Acts 9:36–41), supernatural vision (e.g., Acts 9:11–12; 10:9–16; 16:9–10), direct instructions of the Holy Spirit (e.g., Acts 10:19–20; 13:1–4), direct conversation with Jesus Christ (e.g., Acts 9:3–6), prophecy (e.g., Acts 11:27–28), and exorcism of demons (e.g., Acts 16:16–18) are only some of the supernatural miracles and wonders accomplished by the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. These frequently produce fear of different types (e.g., “awe” in Acts 2:42 is *phobos*, fear) in those who are onlookers. Again, church history clearly records the various times when the Holy Spirit has sovereignly acted in different parts of the world, doing similar wonders resulting in the same unsettling results in onlookers. Often, He has used this discomfiture to point persons to Christ unto their salvation.

Luke’s account claims that “every soul” had this reverential fear, awe, come upon them. This last statement is and has been throughout church history whenever the people of God live in cooperation with God’s Spirit. This actual relational intimacy with the Spirit allows the fulfillment of what Jesus had promised, not just to the Apostles but to the entire people of God: “Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37–39). This fellowship with God was the basis of genuine fellowship with

other believers. Under the influence of God’s indwelling Spirit, the focus of individuals reoriented: “We thus can distinguish between attitude and action, between the attitude within the church toward other believers and the actions that result from this attitude. In the first months of the existence of the Jerusalem church, the attitude and the actions of ‘fellowship’ prompted believers to sell their possessions and to share their resources.”¹³⁹ From a naturalistic self-focus, a shift was made away from the self to others, from God, first, and then His other children. Personal possessions (even land, ὑπαρξίς) were sold and the proceeds divided and distributed based on the needs of all other persons. This attitude of “otherness” expressed itself in unbridled altruism.

“In expression of their Spirit-inspired togetherness, the believers pooled their resources. Individuals voluntarily sold property and goods, contributed the proceeds to a fund from which any Christian (and possibly non-Christians as well) could receive help, as he or she might have need. What a standard for today’s church! Indeed, ‘what we do or do not do with our material possessions is an indicator of the Spirit’s presence or absence’”¹⁴⁰

Schnabel precisely describes the attitude behind these acts of sacrificial giving: “Since the focus is on the sale of possessions, Luke does not describe an early Christian ‘community of goods’ but the renunciation of monetary assets for the sake of the poor. The Jerusalem believers did not share their goods—they sold their goods to support the needy.”¹⁴¹ The example of Barnabas (Acts 4:36–37) and the tragic example of Ananias, and Sapphira (Acts 5:1) point to this practice.

Again, in a continuing daily occurrence, with the same attitude of unity and fellowship described in the waiting disciples prior to Pentecost (Acts 1:14; ὁμοθυμαδόν), they worshipped

¹³⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*.

¹⁴⁰ Keener, *Matthew*, 62.

¹⁴¹ Schnabel, *Acts*.

together in the Temple. This fellowship of unity, a single mind, characterized other corporate worship sessions, as well (Acts 4:24; 5:12).

In this same pattern, daily in personal homes, they shared meals together. One would have to infer, with the same abandon and generosity, to the meeting of everyone's need. The sharing and partaking (μεταλαμβάνω) of food occurred within hearts characterized by exultation and exuberant joy (ἀγαλλίασις) and humility (ἀφελότης) “with gladness and humbleness of hearts.’ It is best to understand καρδίας as an attributed genitive, with the two nouns it modifies actually listing attributes of the genitive noun which is related to them.”¹⁴² Removed from any sense of duty, pervading all of this selfless activity was a joy and gladness and an awareness of being submitted to God's plan for each one.

“The communal meals of the believers in Jerusalem were marked by exuberant joy, surely prompted by God's presence through his Spirit, by the assurance of salvation, and by the experience of new friendships and the privilege of giving and receiving. In addition, they were modest (“simple hearts”) when they accepted contributions from others. They were not double-minded with envy or with calculation.”¹⁴³

The final description that Luke provides of the outcome of the church's devotion to keeping these practices are two participles that seem to describe the actions or conditions subsequent to their breaking of bread together. The first is their continuing praise of God. Praise (αἰνέω) is an action based on reflection, used only of persons directing at God: “give recognition for extraordinary performance,’ praise/extol in NT with God as recipient of praise and with implication of saving work.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² *The NET Bible.*

¹⁴³ Schnabel, *Acts.*

¹⁴⁴ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., ed. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), BibleWorks. v.10.

The second participle describes what this group of Spirit-filled believers were holding or possessing: the favor of all the people, which would be inferred to include the approval of those in Jerusalem who were observing the church's fellowship together being lived out. Luke chooses, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to record at this point, "And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47), probably linking what onlookers saw and approved in the church, resulting in them becoming attracted to the church and growing inclined to be a part. This attraction of persons to the church does not insist that mere human activity alone produced a human psychological response but that the "Lord was adding," the Holy Spirit was continuing to use the church to draw persons to the salvation of God in Jesus Christ.

Summation of this Biblical Research

This study was an examination of an actual historic account of the birth of the church that Luke recorded as inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is only a microcosmic portrayal of the possibilities of God's sovereign grace acting upon a group of persons to make them aware of their spiritual need of freedom from the guilt and power of sin, the sufficiency of God's salvation through Jesus, His Son, to liberate and transform humanity through the agency and power of the Holy Spirit, and the psychological and sociological reformulation that it occurred on this Day of Pentecost. Although this study was centered in Acts 2, similar practices and outcomes occur elsewhere in the book of Acts. As has been suggested, a review of church history indicates that similar incursions of the Holy Spirit have produced very similar results in the life of the church and the surrounding culture. The renewing results of the purification of the church's life together and the restored power for its mission has often resulted, as in this passage, in the Lord adding to the church such as are being saved.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings of the Data

This study was birthed in observation of the hemorrhagic departure of teenagers and college-age young persons from the church, in many cases the very ones in which they had been raised. Aware of this alarming trend, the purpose of this study was, in part, to understand the present American cultural context of preteenagers, the equipping they are being supplied to prepare them for life and the preparation of a plan to comprehensively assist and remedy the equipping millennial youth are receiving to insure their continuance in the faith and God's Church. A survey was used to discover how a small but representative section of the American evangelical church is engaged with preteenagers. From these results and with both biblical examples and instructions with the current field literature in view, the intended outcome was to provide a plan as to how to prepare the preteenager to enter young adulthood while maintaining a vital relationship to Christ and His church.

Suggestion was given of a comparison and contrast that needed to be made between these sets of data, empirical and biblical, that formed the basis for the development of a plan for the intentional and systematic spiritual preparation of pre-teenagers. As noted in Chapter 2, the first data set is a gathered perspective of how a segment of evangelical denominational churches would respond to the first three research questions, and possibly the fourth. With the permission of each of the nine district superintendents overseeing districts covering eight Midwestern states, 588 Liberty Institutional Review Board-approved survey invitations and questionnaires were sent to pastors or their Christian education proxies/directors in districts contained in eight states of the Midwestern United States of the Wesleyan Church. Two hundred sixteen responses were

received and collated into this study. The research instrument, described in its entirety in Chapter 2, was provided, responded to, and tabulated online.

The second data set contained the biblical presentation of what God considers a characterization of normative communal Christianity both in His revealed teachings and commands. While aspects of the entire biblical Canon are cited, the largest part of the study was based upon an evaluation of Luke's biblical narrative describing the characteristics of the newly formed Christian church on and immediately following the first Day of Pentecost after Christ's Ascension. Much of the results of this research were in Chapter 3 of this study and will be linked to the research questions of this study, but also referenced will be other Scriptural data found in Chapter 1's literature review.

Respondents' Survey Answers to Research Questions

The research instrument consisted of questions intended to discover current empirical responses to four research questions posed for this study:

1. What are the factors and values (parental, ecclesial, educational, and cultural) that have created and might have nurtured the unique components of millennial makeup?
2. What are the characteristics of millennials that contribute to their leaving the church?
3. What are the possible ecclesial responses that might be made to offset the cultural influence on those who are coming into adulthood?
4. How do these factors/values compare to what God's Word describes as normative?

When one reads the Bible, especially the Old Testament, one looks in vain for any mention of teenagers (or preteens) as a distinct demographic subgroup. The rite of passage from childhood directly to adulthood under the Law (*Bar Mitzvah* and *Bat Mitzvah*) at age twelve/thirteen and subsequently throughout the church age until relatively recently in a

progressive program of spiritual formation/catechism leading to confirmation and one's first celebration of communion at a similar age raised a child in preparation for adulthood and then facilitated a public affirmation of transition. Indeed, Gingrich has written about the very recent sociological genesis of the whole phenomena of *teenager* and the unique uncertainties of being in-between child and adult that this concept has engendered: "Prior to the 19th century, it's fair to say that adolescence did not exist."¹⁴⁵

Although there was no way to measure how this recent, novel social construction has influenced the effects that this project addresses or the empirical realities reported in the survey, but undoubtedly that this model of family and the process of the maturation of children and their insertion into adulthood is not what the covenant nation of Israel and the church in the West formerly practiced (and is still being practice in many other cultures across the planet that have not yet been Westernized). The *otherness* of the teenage years and those immediately leading up to it has sharpened into a distinct counter-cultural movement since World War II. Understanding these changes is crucial if the church meet this generation not where it would be expect it to be, but where it actually is, if this generation would experience the transformation from the kingdom of this world and its values to the kingdom of God and His righteous and holy values. Discovering the factors that differentiate the characteristics of this generation from previous ones is the purpose of the first research question.

Research Question #1

The purpose of this research question was to discover the worldview of modern preteenagers and the contributing influences that shaped that perspective. Understanding this

¹⁴⁵ "Newt Gingrich: Let's End Adolescence." Bloomberg Business Week, October 29, 2008. Accessed December 11, 2014. <http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2008-10-29/newt-gingrich-lets-end-adolescence>.

generational worldview is crucial if the church would connect with millennials (as seen in the research data to average 10 percent or less of the polled congregations), communicating the eternal truths about the Person of God and how He has described life to be lived in His Word. The data is clear that the cultural ambiance in which the millennial generation (and beyond) grew up was radically different from other previous generations in the events that occurred and their influence upon the perspectives and values of this younger generation.

This varied and extremely diverse set of responses was made to survey question #6: “What historical events in the world are within the memory of *this group* of individuals? (e.g., For Gen-X, the Berlin Wall fell, the Challenger exploded, and MTV came into existence.)” This qualitative question was answered with a plethora of responses whose frequency was not tabulated. The range of cultural innovations reported for this generation has little parallel with the events in this writer’s experience and those of other generational cohorts. Not until the social disruptions alone, such as the “deconstruction of traditional marriage” (and the ethos that accompanies this), the normalization of homosexuality, gender transition, the domestic and foreign persecutions of Christians, race riots beginning recently in Ferguson, Missouri, Baltimore, Maryland, and lately in Charlottesville, Virginia are noted that one perceives the truth of the conclusion that “adolescents ... are increasingly challenged by changing social and economic conditions within the larger society.”¹⁴⁶

Respondents frequently made reference to cultural innovations that are topics of discussion among the young such as the use of social media and smart technology, music, including MTV and Christian Rap, and a preoccupation with sports, domestically and internationally. Attributes of the Obama presidency, such as the Affordable Healthcare Act and

¹⁴⁶ “Read ‘Youth Development.’”

Michelle Obama's "degradation of school lunches" were sources of discussion and, might be inferred, some angst and annoyance.

Survey question #3 asked, "What are the particular characteristics of pre-teens that stand out to you?" When examining the highest percentage of responses, a profile of this demographic seems to emerge. Regarding self-image, shyness, and uncertainty (11.43 percent), craving attention, love, and affirmation (7.35 percent), and being self-conscious, lacking self-esteem (4.49 percent) point to a need for preteenagers to be aware of their identity in Christ. An inward focus (what Martin Luther called the "incurvature" [*Incurvatus in Se*]¹⁴⁷) seems to be the basis of this latter grouping of foci, rather than an outward one (e.g., an intentional setting one's mind on and seeking what is above [Col 3:1–3] and looking to the interests of other persons [Phil 2:4] more than one's own).

Reflecting on this latter need are hopeful responses, confirming current literature, that this generation is relational (25 or 10.2 percent) and craving attention, love, and affirmation (18 or 7.35 percent). Such specific needs of a millennials might be fulfilled by a group of those who live out currently in the church as it was in its earliest days, by leading, as it was then, by what the Rainers describe as a millennials ideal leader/mentor, one of "integrity, transparency, and humility."¹⁴⁸ Elmore agrees with the survey when indicating that a young person's openness to an adult known for her or his integrity may be allowed to fill this need and provide a Paul to Timothy type of mentoring. In a discussion of a communicational matrix presented by Elmore in the literature review involving an *iY* millennial, he makes clear the preference of a young member of this cohort wanting a nearby guide rather than an upfront expert. Apart from trusted

¹⁴⁷ "Incurvatus in Se," Mockingbird, October 12, 2015, accessed August 24, 2017, <http://www.mbird.com/glossary/incurvatus-in-se/>.

¹⁴⁸ Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 268.

parents, such a young person is typically open and desirous of another open, understanding adult who can be trusted to be transparent and honest with them: “They are accustomed to learning on a need-to-know basis—but *their need to know will increase if a person they trust and know well is the one sharing the information*. They’re looking for us—authentic mentors.”¹⁴⁹

Kinnaman confirms, as do others, that the answer to this paper’s query about understanding the epidemic of departing youth is centered in the lack of discipleship: “The dropout problem is, at its core, a faith-development problem; to use religious language, it’s a disciple-making problem. The church is not adequately preparing the next generation to follow Christ faithfully in a rapidly changing culture.”¹⁵⁰ Dunn and Sundene in their article “Spiritual Challenges of Emerging Adults”¹⁵¹ seem to typify other current literature that agrees with Kinnaman, Elmore, Stetzer, and others in an insistence that disciple-making is a crucial aspect of spiritual formation and results in the dissuading of future departure of youth from Christ’s church. This idea of discipleship by a trusted adult mentor must be an aspect of the fellowship (*κοινωνία*) to which the early church committed itself.

Research Question #2

The result of young persons leaving the church of which they were long a participant must be inferred to mean that, at least in part, the manner in which the church interacted with them was in some way insufficient to accomplish a type of spiritual formation that permanently shaped their lives. Kinnaman agrees in his book on this topic and says as much: “They point the

¹⁴⁹ Elmore, iY, 48.

¹⁵⁰ Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 213.

¹⁵¹ Dunn and Sundene, “Spiritual Challenges,” see Appendix 4.

finger, fairly or not, at the establishment: *you lost me.*”¹⁵² Deitsch agrees, saying, “The problem is that too few churches are implementing the necessary changes to actually reach the millennials.”¹⁵³ A goal of this plan for millennial youth is to look to God’s Word to identify practices that God has employed in the past for equipping believers to be healthy, productive members of the church.

The unique qualities that characterize different generations are often not recognized or understood by those in other generational groups. Just one example of this stark shift in millennials appeared in a very recent report (Nov. 2017) where, “according to the latest survey from the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation, a D.C.-based nonprofit, one in two U.S. millennials say they would rather live in a socialist or communist country than a capitalist democracy. What’s more, 22% of them have a favorable view of Karl Marx and a surprising number see Joseph Stalin and Kim Jong Un as ‘heroes.’”¹⁵⁴ In this sole observation, one can infer that the reason these findings were printed as a news item is that they so contradict the normal view of Americans in previous generations.

The point of answering this research question was to try to discover how equipped the modern church is in communicating the gospel to its youth. Admitting that the church is not the only influence in preteenagers’ lives, the church remains a significant influencer in the spiritual formation of young persons. The reviewed literature sufficiently describes the significant generational differences that often exist between the often older leadership in church and youth

¹⁵² Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 76.

¹⁵³ Deitsch, “Creating A Millennial Generation,” 1.

¹⁵⁴ Shawn Langlois, “Millennials: Communism Sounds Pretty Chill,” MarketWatch, November 2, 2017, accessed November 2, 2017, <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/millennials-communism-sounds-pretty-chill-2017-11-01>.

ministries and those to whom they minister. Norman Ryder defines generational cohorts “as the aggregate of individuals (within some population definition) who experienced the same event within the same time interval.... Each cohort has a distinctive composition and character reflecting the circumstances of its unique origination and history.”¹⁵⁵ What is crucial in the examination of the millennial cohort is its integration into the church: “As the new cohort reaches each major juncture in the life cycle, the society has the problem of assimilating it.”¹⁵⁶ The uniqueness of any generation necessitates that those of another generation familiarize with the generation that would be the ministry target, removing unnecessary hindrances to contextualizing the good news for members of that cohort.

Elmore states, “Ready or not, Generation Y is entering adulthood. A new breed has entered our campuses and workplaces, and they are already influencing their worlds. Although they have evolved from previous generations, Generations Y and iY have their own distinct identity.”¹⁵⁷ These observations compel one to review and assess a person and a church’s awareness and conformance to the words of Paul: “I have become all things to all people, so that by all means I may save some” (1Cor. 9:22, NET). The challenge is in meeting persons where they are.

A contributor to the problem of assimilation is in the failure to understand the values and expressional differences of a younger cohort by those older ones who have their own set of mores about so many aspects of personal worldviews. Failure to connect and engage in intimate communication, enabling life together, is enough, in itself, to prevent real community and,

¹⁵⁵ Ryder, “Cohort as a Concept,” 845.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Elmore, *Generation iY*, 24.

therefore, an effective transference of the “the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 1:3, NASB). Connection for this transference is crucial.

The literature review provided a lengthy set of questions and answers about the millennials from Howe and Strauss, noted as some of the earliest and most insightful observers and market writers on this cohort. These items include descriptions that other generational persons might overlook. These somewhat optimistic, largely positive attributes were seen to include terms such as happy, confident, protected, and intelligent. For purposes of this study, opportunistic aspects of their being cooperative team players, accepting of authority and rules that they believe in, and committed to progress need to be used to facilitate communication.¹⁵⁸

Radically different from what previous generations might perceive members of this cohort as being, much more exists to be optimistic about than anecdotal comments, humor, or disparagements that might be frequently portrayed. Part of the difficulty in other generational members’ understanding of the millennials and beyond could also be the *otherness* of both the way these youths were and are being raised and the resultant perspectives within which they operate. Howe and Strauss detail differences in this generation as believing in their special uniqueness; being sheltered to the extreme; being convinced of and confident in the future not only for them individually but, even more importantly, for the team or group to which they belong and are committed; being extremely committed; and, frequently internally and externally being pressured to achieve the highest of standards intellectually and ethically.¹⁵⁹

Keeping in mind the unique perspectives of this group, the survey discovered some of the reasons that young people leaving the church by using the following survey questions. Survey

¹⁵⁸ Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*, 129–258.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

question #7 quantitatively queried, “Considering all young adults (post-high school) from your local church, in your experience, what percentage of these students who previously attended your church have left the faith they testified to possessing?” The percentages of young people who previously attended the churches leaving included less than 10 percent—27.06 percent; 10 to 30 percent—25.88 percent; 31 to 50 percent—23.53 percent; 51 to 70 percent—13.53 percent; 71 to 91 percent—7.06 percent; and, more than 90 percent—2.94 percent. These statistics alone, empirically derived, substantiate the alarm made in the extant literature concerning the severity of this problem of departing youth. At least one-quarter of respondents reported the rate of departure of youth as being from 10 to 50 percent. Ken Ham, Britt Beemer, and Todd Hillard’s research seems to echo this survey finding.

Survey question #4 asked, “In your estimation, what characteristics predispose preteens towards remaining in or turning away from a personal faith?” In regards to the remaining in a faith relationship with Jesus Christ, respondents indicated that the three highest ranking factors in a stability of faith were the family—29.97 percent, relationships with adults—13.42 percent, discipleship activities—12.55 percent, and friendships—9.09 percent. Conversely, the highest factor contributing to youth leaving the church was peer relationships and pressure—11.69 percent. Notably, in view of responses that correlate with Research Question #1, interaction with relationships with peers are issues of self-image and personal identity—6.49 percent, and the school environment and other culture interaction—2.16 percent. Regarding the preservation of a vital faith in young people, while family faith stability approaching 30 percent was the most striking, three more important showings were seen in the biblical research that the church has opportunity to influence directly: relationships with adults, discipleship activities, and friendships. All of these were reported at less than 15 percent, indicating good results but few

responses. Factors listed that contributed to students drifting from Christ's church were led by peer relationships and the effects of peer pressure along with issues of self-image and identity, again areas the church has ample opportunity to shape directly.

Ed Stetzer offers the following: "LifeWay Research data shows that about 70% of young adults who indicated they attended church regularly for at least one year in high school do, in fact, drop out."¹⁶⁰ While the encouraging news, according to Stetzer, is that "almost two-thirds return and currently attend church (in the timeframe of our study)," he do not provide a timeframe as to when this occurs.

Ham and Beemer are not as optimistic as Stetzer, calling the problem of departing youth an *epidemic* and quoting statistics from George Barna: "A majority of twenty-somethings—61% of today's young adults—had been churched at one point during their teen years but they are now spiritually disengaged (i.e., not actively attending church, reading the Bible, or praying)."¹⁶¹ The dropping out, statistically, happens primarily from ages 16 through 19.

Survey question #8 asked, "From what you may have heard or understand, what led to their departures?" The chart in Chapter two lists the twenty-two areas of response to this crucial question. No responses referred specifically to any perceived failure or need for systematic biblical study being responsible for youth leaving the church. Arguably, a lack of discipleship, mentoring (26 responses or 11.76 percent), doctrinal problems and/or positions (11 responses or 4.98 percent), and unanswered questions (6 responses or 2.76 percent) point to an insufficiency

¹⁶⁰ Ed Stetzer and Tyson Lambertson, "Dropouts and Disciples: How Many Students Are Really Leaving the Church?" The Exchange: A Blog by Ed Stetzer, May 2014, accessed August 24, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/may/dropouts-and-disciples-how-many-students-are-really-leaving.html>.

¹⁶¹ Ken Ham and Britt Beemer, "Already Gone," Answers in Genesis, Part 1, October 20, 2011, accessed May 6, 2017, <https://answersingenesis.org/christianity/church/already-gone/>.

of adequate ecclesial equipping of youth discipleship and providing a biblical apologetic basis for the church's teachings. A key finding in view of writers already cited and others in the literature review has to do, directly or indirectly, with an interaction with questions asking about Church efforts to provide youth various biblical study modalities and intentional opportunities for fellowship, worship, and service (survey questions #11–14).

Stetzer's first point in his article refers to a methodological perspective in youth discipleship that is reflected in the biblical research of the early church and in Research Question #4: the primacy of systematic teaching of God's word that results in youth keeping and obeying the Word of God. He makes a crucial contrast of approaches to youth Christian education: "If your student ministry is a four-year holding tank with pizza, don't expect young adults to stick around. If, however, they see biblical teaching as relevant and see the church as essential to their decisions, they stay."¹⁶² The propensity of programing youth ministry as a social, entertainment program rather than methodical discipleship may well contribute to the problem that this project seeks to alleviate.

Ham, Beemer, and Hillard agree with Stetzer's focus on the neglect of systematic study of the Word of God being responsible for the problem addressed in this study. His research indicates that it is a doubt in the minds of preteenagers and teenagers as to the veracity of the biblical accounts and text that eventually leads to the epidemic of leaving the church in which they had grown up. Leaving home for college is not the beginning of these doubts or the primary place these first appear but the opportunity to make a break with the established pattern of church attendance.

¹⁶² Stezer and Lambertson, "Dropouts and Disciples."

What is helpful and confirmative of the survey research is Stetzer's four points of what was most predictive of why youth stay in church:

- I wanted the church to help guide my decisions in everyday life (prior to 18).
- My parents were still married to each other and both attended church (prior to 18).
- The pastor's sermons were relevant to my life (prior to 18).
- At least one adult from church made a significant investment in me personally and spiritually (between 15 and 18).¹⁶³

Most evident in these data is the cruciality of the teen years in determining of youth continuing to be involved in the church. The assumption of this paper is that preteen years are just as important in preparing a young person to make these teenage assessments.

Survey question #9 asked, "Considering this same group of students, in your experience, how many have subsequently returned to their faith and/or the church?" With both the statistics of Stetzer and Ham, Beemer, and Hillard in mind, the responses to this question as seen in Table 2.# were not as optimistic as Stetzer and more in keeping with the claims of Ham, Beemer, and Hillard, finding that the report of churches of the same youth who had left the church indicated that those who returned to the church, in descending order, was less than 10 percent (74 responses or 44.05 percent), 10 to 30 percent (56 responses or 33.33 percent), and 31 to 50 percent (21 responses or 12.5 percent). Higher returns of youth by percentage were fractional. The vast majority of those in the survey who left the church have not yet returned.

As for those who have returned, survey question #10 asked, "Speculating generally, what factors in any local church might contribute to this turnaround in conjunction with the work of the Holy Spirit?" The primary responses directly concerned influential relationships with those whose lives and testimonies pointed the errant one back to the Savior: families (52 responses or

¹⁶³ Stetzer and Lambertson, "Dropouts and Disciples."

29.55 percent) and Christian friends (37 responses or 21.02 percent). Inferentially, the aforementioned characteristics of integrity of character and lifestyle with profession demonstrated the genuineness of relationships with God and His people for those who had strayed. Pivotal persons persevering and remaining accessible when the departed one encountered life situations of disappointment with the world (33 responses or 18.75 percent) and lack of answers (21 responses or 11.93 percent) or simply missing Jesus, speaks much to the powerful presence of practicing fellowship.

Stetzer's data seems to correlate with this survey data that the presence of a stable home where (1) parents attended church, (2) teaching was seen as relevant to the young person's life, and (3) a significant relationship with another adult echo what respondents submitted as reasons youth either stay in connection with or return to the church after having left for a season.

Research Question #3

Jesus in His high priestly prayer entreats His Father concerning His disciples that though they are living in the world, they do not share the values and behavior of the world (John 17:14–17). Acknowledging, in agreement with Peter (Acts 2:40) and Paul (Phil 2:15), that in comparison to God's revealed description of normalcy the surrounding culture is a warped and perverse society from which believers must be rescued, the question sought to understand what the church, including the activities of parents, Christian education, and the rest of the church's activities, intentionally do to counteract the toxic influences of the surrounding culture.

Survey question #5 asked, "In your estimation, to what activities, circumstances, and/or programs do pre-teens seem to respond well?" to ascertain what points of connection between different types of activities and preteenagers have proven to work well. As previously noted in Chapter 2, not one direct mention of local church activity pointed directly to spiritual formation

to which youth responded well. The closest responses were participative (44 responses or 19.82 percent) and children's types of games, fun (25 responses or 11.26 percent) as the highest rated choices. They included youth camps and small studies mixed with fun (e.g., games, food, sports, and entertainment were recurrent themes). A small percentage indicated youth being attracted to conversations with adults (e.g., "Conversations with someone who will listen about their everyday life. The ability to ask 'deep questions'"; "small group study with older adults who will speak honestly with them"; and, other venues where all can safely participate, questioning and answering). In view of the reasons why youth left the church being, in some part, because of "doctrinal confusion" and "unanswered questions," seemingly, in a small portion, some churches are providing just the opportunities to remedy these issues and youth are eager to participate.

This group of responses is especially interesting in view of the reporting of what is actually offered to youth. The survey responses indicated that the following practices and activities are intentionally offered to youth. The purpose of survey questions #12–15 was to elicit a description of intentionally provided activities and practices that might be offered to preteenagers in the surveyed churches. As detailed in Chapter 2, responses included the following:

- Question #12 concerning biblical studies modalities indicated a median of 4 out of 5 (averages 3.6–4.09), with the mode being 5 out of 5.
- Question #13 concerning spiritual fellowship opportunities reported a median of 4 out of 5 (averages 3.46–3.93), with the mode being 5 out of 5. Of importance in responses to this question is the number of N/A answers, implying that these offerings are not made in the reported churches: 24 N/A to youth worship that encourages

corporate participation with the Lord and each other and 24 N/A to small groups that produce a safe place to share life joys and challenges with each other.

- Question #14 concerning worship opportunities indicated a median of 4 out of 5 (averages 3.48–3.87), with the mode being 5 out of 5 again with 25 N/A to each of the questions: youth worship that includes opportunities and modeling of public prayer and public worship where youth can observe lay modeling of prayer and are encouraged to participate, even lead, the congregation in prayer.
- Question #15 concerning service opportunities (local church) provided eighteen different categories to respond to ways in which preteenagers are encouraged to participate in service to the body of Christ. Reported was a median of 4 out of 5 (averages 1.74–3.22) across all categories, with the mode ranging from 1 to 5, with a predominance of 1s. Frequently noted, as seen in all the results presented in Chapter 2, was young persons serving as some facilitator in persons entering the church (hospitality), teaching, and otherwise assisting in the conducting of the main worship service of the church.

Unsurprisingly, these questions are directly related to the intentional, habitual practices that Luke outlined in Acts 2:42, as researched in Chapter 3, with question #15 reflecting the possible effects of the first three questions about opportunities regularly offered by the church to youth. All responses to this question, including the range of N/A (14–38) in these different categories naturally are reflective of what opportunities and practices churches employ in the utilization of youth in the churches' weekly operation.

Survey question #16 was a broad, catch-all inquiry that provided respondents with an opportunity to detail further practices and activities not suggested in survey questions #12–15:

Aside from those previously mentioned, are there other methods used in your local church to engage the faith development of preteens? As can be viewed from the survey results in Chapter 2, much of the limited responses in this area involved some other area of Christian service that included some listings contained in question #14, and only a very small portion indicated midweek children's meetings, targeted big events," camps, and youth conferences and spiritual retreats but did not indicate clearly the intended purpose of each.

Directing a full review of these five crucial questions of actual activities in the local church in Chapter 2, the high results of modes, medians, and averages in #11, 12, and 13 did not seem to correlate readily to responses to other questions offered in the survey already examined, particularly the high numbers of those leaving the church in their teen years and few returning or the type of activities that attract the church youth and, so, are offered. In addition, just examined, is the lack of mention in the views of Christian educators of interest in Bible study and the preoccupation (with the children or leadership?) with fun, sports, and entertainment. An inference that might be made that despite the opportunities provided in the local church for the study of God's Word, the practice of worship, and the planning of intentional development of spiritual fellowship, relatively few are availing themselves of these.

The resounding concern is the highly assessed numbers reported to each inquiry about programs designed to address spiritual formation in this generation and the incongruity with the numbers of those leaving. This discouraging contrast of survey results mirrored the national polls that abound. My supposition is that although some offerings are being made to preteens in the current church, the response to and effectiveness of these are not resulting in the retention and perseverance of faith in Christ and connection to His church that would be anticipated and desired.

If Ham, Beemer, and Hillard have some legitimate points when they claim that this biblical illiteracy and doubt of the Bible's truthfulness in Christian education participants might make a significant contribution to the problem of youth leaving the church:

In our survey of 1,000 20-somethings who regularly attended church as children and teens, we asked the question, "Did you often attend Sunday School?" In reply, 61 percent said yes; 39 percent said no. That's about what you would expect, isn't it? After all, not everyone is committed enough to make the effort to get to Sunday School, right? Only those who are more concerned about the spiritual and moral health of their kids, right? Because we all assume that Sunday School is good for them, right? Wrong. Our research uncovered something very disturbing: Sunday School is actually more likely to be detriment to the spiritual and moral health of our children.¹⁶⁴

The following reflects Ham, Beemer, and Hillard's research, which indicates the responses of the 61 percent of evangelical youth educated in Sunday school. These educated youth are

- More likely NOT to believe that all the accounts/stories in the Bible are true/accurate.
- More likely to doubt the Bible because it was written by men.
- More likely to doubt the Bible because it was not translated correctly.
- More likely to defend that abortion should continue to be legal.
- More likely to defend premarital sex.
- Much more likely to believe that God used evolution to change one kind of animal into another.
- More likely NOT to believe the earth is less than 10,000 years old.
- More likely to doubt the Bible because of the secular dates of billions of years for the age of the earth.
- More likely to have heard a pastor/Sunday School teach Christians could believe in millions/billions of years (*age of the earth*).
- More likely to question the earth is young and the days of creation are 24 hours each.
- More likely to believe that dinosaurs died out before people were on the planet.
- More likely to view the Church as hypocritical.
- More likely to have become anti-church through the years
- More likely to believe that good people don't need to go church.¹⁶⁵

The interesting point of the responses to these varied questions is that in these evangelical youth who attended Sunday school regularly, the answers are as discouraging as some of the

¹⁶⁴ Ham, Beemer, and Hillard, *Already Gone*, 38.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 39.

empirically gathered data in the survey about those youth leaving the church and why they do so. What is common is a lack of confidence in the entire biblical Canon along with a common theme that the church does not live out its professed beliefs. This uncertainty in the veracity of God's Word leads to ethical perspectives (and supposed practices) that most evangelical churches would hate to witness in their adherents. Like the early church, a preoccupation and primacy with the Apostles' teaching seem to be the fount from which other practices flowed.

Research Question #4

In Chapter 3, detailed substantiation was provided and research found that various reliable sources claimed that biblical narrative (despite being primarily in the indicative case, not the imperative), was provided by the Holy Spirit as a model, an illustration of righteousness or wickedness, for the child of God to be follow or avoid. Fee and Stuart declare their understanding: "We believe that much of Acts is intended by Luke to serve as a model."¹⁶⁶ The authors discuss two types of statements, the first involving specific commands or propositions; "the secondary level are those statements derived only incidentally, by implication or by precedent."¹⁶⁷ Very helpful to understanding the specific verse of Acts 2:42 and its surrounding narrative context was the claim of Mary Louise Pratt that narratives or stories are a tacit invitation to the reader to join the writer, in regards to the content in "contemplating it, evaluating it, and responding to it."¹⁶⁸ Susan Lanser's point was that the narrative was actually a "communicative act and text as message-in-context..."¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read*. 114.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 119.

¹⁶⁸ Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act*, 136, quoted in Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 227.

¹⁶⁹ Lanser, *The Narrative Act*, 7, quoted in Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 227.

Helpful was the establishing the view that Acts is not just an isolated narration but a portrait of what God can and wants to enable the church regularly to experience. This was an interesting consideration from another speech–act theorist, Richard S. Briggs. When speaking of a variety of biblical narratives, he includes how these require the reader to participate in the action described:

In all these contexts words occur in action, and not idling, left inactive in prepositional statements. For too long biblical interpretation has been dominated by a model which has seen the biblical text as sentences carrying (static) meaning, meaning which then needs to be explained and applied in order to be understood. If my argument about self-involvement is correct, then we need to learn to see all these actions achieved by words as dynamic performances which require the reader of the Bible to be involved in what is going on.¹⁷⁰

The clear findings from a study of Acts 2:42 and its immediate and chapter context is that the infant church “committed, devoted itself to” (a discussion of the Greek periphrastic construction is detailed in Chapter 3) the intentional, habitual engagement of four practices (in each case articular indicating specificity): the Apostles’ teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. Noted and explained are the actions of the young church that, one could infer, are the effects of this commitment to living according to this pattern, also provided by Luke. These actions are diametrically opposed to the narcissistic introspection of the world system, atypical apart from the grace of God made available by the Holy Spirit to the regenerate.

Discussions of each of these have been presented in the review of literature and Chapter 3, but the brevity of each here presented demands that the implementation of every one must be discovered throughout the book of Acts. Moreover, this pattern, if it be God’s plan to focus and sanctify His people in whatever age through a growing and enduring relationship with Him should be seen throughout the entire Canon among the people of God prior to and after the Old

¹⁷⁰ Briggs, “Getting Involved,” 32.

Covenant as well as the church and the age that followed. The Scripture indicates that this purpose of God is exactly the case.

The Apostles' Teaching

As to attention to the Apostles' teaching, clearly, what they taught is what they received at the feet of Jesus. An evaluation of the literature review indicates from the very genesis of the world, in all of the Patriarchs, to the giving of God's covenant through Moses, to the establishment of the Davidic dynasty, the knowing and keeping of God's Word always results in a supply of the promised benefits of God's grace and blessings. The neglect, the despising of God's Word always incurs the judgment of God and always results in ungodly ethics. Regarding, the words of Christ, knowing and keeping them is knowing and keeping the Word of God, as the Messiah declared that He always did.

As discussed in the literature review, the keeping of the Words of God and of His Son did not merit His grace but in some way indicated true love of God (John 14:15) and results in the deepest intimacy with Him (e.g., "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him," John 14:21). Shortly following is the portrayal of the deepest intimacy with Christ, a remaining, abiding in Him, indicating total dependence on Him, the Vine, by the branches, His followers, for His Life flowing into them. What follows relates this intimacy to His Word:

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. (John 15:7–12)

The primacy of devoting themselves to the Apostles' teaching shaped the early church, even as it had shaped the Apostles.

The Fellowship

As noted in the literature review, the Scriptures with *κοινωνία* in the New Testament use it in three ways. The first is the fellowship shared by all believers with the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

As far as fellowship with other believers, it is most often, by number of usages, translated as *participating* or *sharing* in the needs of other believers by financial generosity to the meeting of those needs. Only three texts seem specifically to use *κοινωνία* to express a spiritual union or oneness with other believers based in their mutual fellowship with God. What is unique in Acts 2:42 and seems to set it apart from any ordinary mention of sharing and relating it more to this last nuance is the use of the article, making it definitive, special in some way. Sharing resources and making sure that others in the community are cared for is clearly seen in the remainder of the chapter context, but this last example of fellowship is the spring from which this compassionate care giving originates.

The community of believers is seen in the literature review's citing of metaphors from elsewhere in the New Testament, describing the oneness of all believers for which Jesus prayed to His Father on the eve of His death:

I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (John 17:20–23)

The Christian community is described in a variety of metaphors (e.g., the body of Christ—1Cor. 12; Rom. 12:4–5; Eph. 4:4; 5:23; Col. 1:18, 24; The temple of God—Eph. 2:19–22, 1Pet. 2:5; God’s Household—Eph. 2:19). All these indicated both an interdependency and expectancy of mutual care for all (e.g., “If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ’s body, and individually members of it,” 1Cor. 12:26–27).

The Breaking of Bread

This phrase is only seen in the New Testament in Acts 2:42 and in 1 Corinthians 11:24. While there is the element of fellowship through the sharing of meals, not to see Acts 2:46 as a redundant mention of the previous practice seen in Acts 2:42 would seem to be held by several English translators. The only other use of this phrase in 1 Corinthians 11 is clearly Eucharistic, related to the practice of remembering the death of the Lord Jesus Christ in a shared worship event. Again, the use of the article seems to make this practice definitive and deliberate in contrast to simply taking meals together (NASB, NIV, NET).

The Prayers

While frequent prayer marked the incarnate life of the Master, even leading to the request that He teach His disciples to pray, the use of the article here, too, has been suggested that these are prescribed prayers, instituted in Judaism. This Jewish prayer practice is illustrated by the trip of Peter and John to the Beautiful Gate at the “ninth, the hour of prayer,” as though it were customary. The intentional devotion to practicing prayers, beyond a personal time of entreaty for a need, as was Luke’s frequent use of δέησις in asking for specific needs, προσευχή was likewise a requesting but also included speaking to God, including thanksgiving and worship.

Notably, what is compelling about these practices, as briefly as they are described, is that the early church was absolutely devoted to them. What is so encouraging about the outcome of these in the community is the care of all the believers by each other and the way that it is mentioned in the same context: “Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:46–3:1). Luke seems to have intended the reader to see the intentional practice patterns of the infant church and intended those who came after to emulate it.

Findings Summary

The departure of youth from both the Lord Jesus Christ and the local arm of His church in which these young ones were often raised gives reason for exploring the factors contributing to this vast departure. This departure necessitates a ministry plan that looks to God’s Word for necessary elements that must exist across church programming to prepare youth adequately to become adults who of necessity are immersed in the surrounding world culture but successfully maintaining a vibrant connection to the Savior and a biblical worldview that formulates their perspectives and values and shapes their behaviors.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Plan of Christian Education for the Millennials and Beyond in the Midwest Wesleyan Church

In view of the literature reviewed and the research findings in Chapter 4, both in the current survey results and many cited sources, Christian education programming across the evangelical spectrum is clearly indicated as not being sufficient to prepare preteenagers and teenagers spiritually to live in a world that is no friend to grace. Even the majority of youth who have attended traditional Christian education programs have been shown to have values (forming the basis of their lifestyles) that are very much in keeping with the prevailing culture and starkly in contradiction to and ignorant of God's revealed description of normalcy throughout the biblical Canon in nearly every category of life. This variance is particularly troubling when viewing Matthew 7's final section of the Sermon on the Mount and finding that the metaphorical *fruit of a tree* denotes its true character. Realistically, it is recorded that some persons who look like members of the flock who are really wolves. In conclusion, Jesus issues one the most sobering of warnings, namely, the possibility exists of those who even performed many works in Christ's name, including supernatural ones, who have no genuine relationship with the Lord.

Paul warns Pastor Timothy of the possibility in professed Christians of a "form" (NASB, NIV) or "outward appearance" (NET) of godliness while denying its power. As in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Paul describes the lifestyle of such as contrasting with the expected outcome of a godly heart: "For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than

lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these” (2Tim. 3:2–5, NASB).

Grieving over those who were once part of the church, Paul regretfully describes those Philippians whose lifestyle reflects other than “walking as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6): “For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things” (Phil. 3:18–19).

As with those who have left Christ and His church, a New Testament example of apostasy is seen in Demas, a fellow worker with Paul (Col. 4:14; Phlm. 1:24): “Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica” (2Tim. 4:10).

The effects, characteristics, and definition of those who have left the church have already been described. The religion that believes and practices these discussed values as seen in many evangelical adolescents was identified nearly forty years ago by Christian Smith and associated researchers. Dr. Albert Mohler writes about a forty-year-old construct whose effects have infiltrated the American Evangelical Church and largely supplanted the pure Gospel, perhaps being an example of what Paul wrote to the Galatians as “another Gospel” (Gal. 1:6). This heresy is termed “Christian Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.”¹⁷¹ He claims that research shows that it is this view of reality, rather than a biblical one, that most adolescents, including those in the church, have come to hold. This theological view contains the following components:

1. ‘A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.’
2. ‘God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.’
3. ‘The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about one’s self.’

¹⁷¹ Albert Mohler, “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism—The New American Religion,” AlbertMohler.com, April 11, 2005, accessed November 27, 2017, <https://albertmohler.com/2005/04/11/moralistic-therapeutic-deism-the-new-american-religion-2/>.

4. 'God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.'
5. 'Good people go to heaven when they die.'¹⁷²

Christian Moral Therapeutic Deism (CMTD) is concerned about providing benefits, including every type of healing, to their adherents. Scriptural principles and practices such as repentance from sin, recognition of God's sovereignty, faithful prayers, "basking in God's love and grace, of spending oneself in gratitude and love for the cause of social justice"¹⁷³ are not only not pursued but are often unknown. "Rather, what appears to be the actual dominant religion among U.S. teenagers is centrally feeling good, happy, secure, and at peace. The purpose of this perspective is about attaining subjective well-being, being able to resolve problems, and getting along amiably with other people."¹⁷⁴

In short, this religious belief system is not a reflection of biblical teaching about the nature of God, His Son, Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit, not of a theology of sin and salvation, nor a description of a Holy Spirit-enabled holy separation from the world, the flesh, and the devil (1 John 2:16), of a life lived pleasing to God. I conclude that the sad outcome of this religion is that "a significant part of Christianity in the United States is actually [only] tenuously Christian in any sense that is seriously connected to the actual historical Christian tradition, but is rather substantially morphed into Christianity's misbegotten step-cousin,"¹⁷⁵ as Mohler terms this surrogate religion, CMTD.

¹⁷² Albert Mohler, "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism—The New American Religion," AlbertMohler.com, April 11, 2005, accessed November 27, 2017, <https://albertmohler.com/2005/04/11/moralistic-therapeutic-deism-the-new-american-religion-2/>.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

The destiny for embracing “another Gospel” in the Church’s youth is reflected in the amazement of the Apostle Paul as he writes to the Galatian church:

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! (Gal. 1:6–8)

The reason for this shift to CMTD is easily inferred: a shift in the loss of the Gospel that is taught and modeled in Evangelical churches and families. In the midst of this grim news, reason for hope exists. As other studies have held, this generation is definitely listening and watching what is practiced in their environment. Carefully and with precision, studies have been observing, assessing, and interpreting the reality of what parents and churches actually believe, rather than profess to believe. They detect the accommodation with the surrounding culture that those important persons in their lives have made. They have witnessed the abandonment of truth by their leaders due to the commitment to individual autonomy and, as Ham, Beemer, and Hillard have claimed, a relativistic treatment of absolute truth. The theological perspective is handed down to these young people. “They have learned from their elders that self-improvement is the one great moral imperative to which all are accountable, and they have observed the fact that the highest aspiration of those who shape this culture is to find happiness, security, and meaning in life.”¹⁷⁶ Despite how all this belief system represents exactly the type of challenge that the church from Apostolic times until the present has always faced of the syncretistic or even wholesale replacement of the truth of the gospel with heresies, the hope mentioned is that this generation is still listening and conforming. The task that this plan seeks to suggest is a return to what the church has always known and is described in Acts 2:42ff. Mohler agrees and concludes,

¹⁷⁶ Mohler, “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.”

“We now face the challenge of evangelizing a nation that largely considers itself Christian, overwhelmingly believes in some deity, considers itself fervently religious, but has virtually no connection to historic Christianity.”¹⁷⁷ Grateful to Christian Smith and his colleagues for identifying and analyzing this other Gospel, the author identifies the task committed to the church in this generation: “This study should warn us all that our failure to teach this generation of teenagers the realities and convictions of biblical Christianity will mean that their children will know even less and will be even more readily seduced by this new form of paganism.”¹⁷⁸

Little doubt remains that the prevalent theology in Western evangelicalism, reflected in surveys as resulting in the epidemic loss of youth to their faith and the church, is *not* a personal knowledge of God that is the essence of eternal life (John 17:3) but is a search for happiness, security, and meaning in life somewhere else than in a relationship that every creature was created to enjoy with her or his Creator. Not surprisingly, rather than following the words of Jesus to “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you” (Matt. 6:33, NAS), such a life is characterized by a supplanting a devotion, a commitment to the genres of praxis that characterized the early church, as described in Chapter 3, which leads to spiritual maturity.

Any ministry plan that would seek to reverse this trend must begin early to connect or reconnect youth to God, to a knowledge and practice of His Word, in the company of other like-minded believers, in corporate worship and prayer. No better place to begin this plan exists than beginning with the Great Commission of Jesus, who near the end of His Incarnation, tasked His Apostles to the making and nurturing of disciples. Such a plan need not be a packaged checklist

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

or a list of formulaic steps but must seek to return deliberately to the genres outlined in the Bible, accomplishing the essential principles of these four examined elements creatively across any preteenager-directed activities.

The Great Commission: Make and Care for Disciples

Among the last words of the Lord Jesus Christ (all post-Resurrection) were instructions to the Apostles concerning their assigned task of proclaiming the message, the good news of the finished atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross, and of testifying of His bodily Resurrection from the dead, anticipating the response of faith among at least some who heard.

Matthew's rendering of these last instructions has often been termed the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19–20, NASB). The only verb in this Greek verse is a command made to them all (μαθητεύω): "You all make disciples." The other words of action are all participles, indicating how (instrumentally) that they were to accomplish this mission.

Luke's Gospel records among Jesus' last words an expansion and confirmation of this commission, containing both the content of the good news and the fact that they were firsthand witnesses of Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, qualified and tasked to proclaim this evangel, following their being "clothed with power from on high" shortly later as they waited:

Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:44–49)

What is termed *evangelism* (the proclamation of the evangel) is seen here in Luke to correspond with Matthew’s participle of *baptizing*, an initiation into God’s kingdom by faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus tells them that they are firsthand witnesses (Luke 24:42) of all that has occurred. He is recorded as describing the scope and enablement for their mission in Acts: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The “clothing with power from on high” promised at the closing of Luke’s Gospel is explained by Luke in Acts as being “baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). Again, the empowerment enables them to fulfill their commission.

John’s final chapter follows his helpful statement of the purpose of his Gospel:

“Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30–31). This last chapter is an account of the third (21:14) post-Resurrection appearance of Jesus to all of his apostles/disciples on the shores of the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee) where He makes breakfast for all but has a personal conversation with Peter, doubtless one that was overheard those nearby. Three times Jesus asks the same question of Peter (John 21:15, 16, 17): “Peter, do you love me?” (only the first question concludes with a comparative “more than these” [πλέον τούτων], which seems to indicate the rest of the group nearby). In verse 15, Peter is referred to as “Simon Peter”; in verses 16 and 17, he is referred to as “Simon, son of John.”

To each of Peter’s affirmations, Jesus responds with a command. In verse 15, it is “feed, tend, pasture [βόσκω] my lambs.” In verse 16, Jesus responds to command Peter to administrate,

lead (ποιμαίνω), the flock of Christ, this word including but carrying with it more than tending, feeding, but providing leadership like a shepherd does to his sheep. Paul uses this word in Acts 20:28 when committing the care of the church to the elders' oversight. In verse 17, the same verb (βόσκω) is used to command to provide food for Christ's sheep. In addition to the difference in the direct objects of the verbs, both verbs are a command to take care of Christ's sheep, His people, by providing nourishment, protection, and leadership.

Jesus' last words make clear that He leaves in the hands of the Apostles the task of proclaiming firsthand witness to what Jesus has taught and modeled of the Person of God and God's finished work on the cross of Christ to provide a means of reconciliation of lost humanity (lambs) to Himself. Not only the necessity of initial faith and baptism, symbolic of the propitiation that effects the only way into the kingdom of God but also an ongoing care for the well-being of the sheep (and young sheep?) are metaphorically enjoined upon Peter (and the other listening Apostles) as is the task of Christian shepherd-leaders.

Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, describes how the fulfilling of this commission is effected in the coming of the promised Paraclete and His work to birth, grow in numbers, and develop in character this flock of Christ. This process is described throughout the Acts of the Apostles, beginning with Peter's initial sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14–40) and Luke's description of the Spirit-baptized church in Acts 2:42ff. This ministry plan is not a checklist nor a formulaic set of programmatic steps but consists of a simple encouragement to commit intentionally in all activities regarding preteenagers (reinforced by the entirety of the local church) the inclusion of the four practices described in Chapter 3. This plan is definitely not innovative but is a recovery of what the Spirit has already revealed and demonstrated to accomplish continually in the lives of believers.

A Ministry Plan of the Care and Nurturing of Young Disciples

Biblical Assumptions

Before focusing on the four key practices listed in Acts 2:42 (see Chapter 3) that were instigated by the Holy Spirit (primarily through the Apostles) for the spiritual development of new Christian disciples, some presuppositions, even caveats, need to be made evident.

First, what the Bible contains about itself has been reflected in the teachings of Jesus and His disciples, namely, the entire biblical Canon is the divinely inspired revelation of God's unchanging nature and eternal kingdom. It is a history of humankind's rebellion against the Creator and the Father's relentless purpose to reconcile humanity back to Himself, most markedly in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was God's choice to use a "divine accommodation"¹⁷⁹ to reveal Himself to limited humanity in at least three languages in various times and contexts cannot be successfully denied. The Holy Spirit who inspired the original writings also chooses to illuminate its meaning to the minds and hearts of those who want to hear and obey it, whatever the hearers' time in history and cultural context, is testified to in both Testaments and throughout church history. While the one who has "ears to hear" can see the will and purposes of God in His commands and prohibitions, the argument was made in Chapter 3 that biblical narratives are also Spirit inspired and recorded often to instruct, even providing models of righteousness. The passage selected as the base of this study in Acts 2:42ff, but supported throughout the entire biblical Canon, is a valid guide to spiritual formation for any Christian believer, beginning with the youngest in the church. In view of the prevalence of the infiltration of CMTD, an indispensable aspect of any ministry plan for

¹⁷⁹ Michael Tinker, "John Calvin's Concept of Divine Accommodation: A Hermeneutical Corrective," *Churchman*: 327.

youth must include making youth aware of God's Word and facilitating them to build their lives upon its every detail.

Group Assumptions

Second, while special attention will be given to God's venue for Christian formation happening within a community of fellowship in the second of these four practices, from the very first, and also throughout the remainder of Acts and the rest of the New Testament, it is observed that the nurturing and development of disciples is a corporate activity. The pronoun in Acts 2:42 translates "they were," as including the entire company of new believers. Unknown to many modern English speakers, the use of the pronoun *you* in the New Testament, in absolute and emphatic uses but also in verbal constructions, is predominantly plural, not individual. Already noted, mentions of the body of Christ and the household of God, metaphors coming later in the New Testament, described the unity in diversity of Christian believers and their relationship to each other. The implication is that the elements of this plan will only attain optimal results when practiced within the true body of Christ.

The size of the groups of those who practice the four examined activities were, by modern measure, small. In Acts 2, Luke's narrative records, "Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart" (Acts 2:46). Shared meals and worship from "house to house" indicates that the meetings of these believers were in locales of very limited space. As Joel Comiskey writes, "Church historians agree that house churches could rarely have been more than 15 or 20 people—simply because they took place in small apartments. The vast majority of people, perhaps as many as 90 percent, lived in apartments of one or two rooms

crowded above or behind shops.”¹⁸⁰ When a house church outgrew its space, another daughter church was established with similar arrangements.

The normal practice was to meet in the largest room of a private residence, often a flat or apartment in a larger structure that shared a public courtyard with its neighbors, making all that occurred visible to the watching neighbors. “The dining room and courtyard provided space for teaching and preaching ministries, baptismal instruction, prayer meetings, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, and missional activities.”¹⁸¹ The first church of Jesus Christ was a multi-site group of home cells, house churches, intimate venues where disciple making occurred in the customary lives of believers.

The venue, while necessarily facilitating corporate assembly, must be very limited to guarantee that open communication leading eventually to an atmosphere of safety and growing accountability be ensured. The practice of each of these spiritual formation habits must be where the opportunity for participation be available to each member. John Wesley had names for the small groups, class meetings and various types of specialized bands, whose concepts were borrowed from the Lutheran Moravians who met in his program of spiritual formation: *Ecclesiolae in ecclesia*, which is Latin for “little churches within the church.”¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Joel Comiskey, “What Was the New Testament Church Like?” Small Groups, March 9, 2015, accessed November 29, 2017, <https://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2015/what-was-new-testament-church-like.html?paging=off>.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Ecclesiolae in Ecclesia,” accessed November 29, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ecclesiolae-in-ecclesia>.

Commitment Assumptions

Third, Chapter 3's analysis of the grammatical construction of Acts 2:42 clearly indicated that the four dative nouns supplied were the objects of the periphrastic construction: "they devoted, committed themselves *to*." This construction describes the heart motive and resultant behavioral habits or patterns in which they were intentionally and persistently engaged, even daily (Acts 2:46). Again, the four proposed habits of spiritual development presented by Luke produced lasting effects in disciples but *only as they were so enduringly practiced*. A good beginning to a life of discipleship is so important, but the frequent New Testament call to perseverance, endurance, "continuing in the faith, not moved from the hope of the Gospel" (Col. 1:23; Gal. 3:1–3), and running the race to the finish line, is just as important to the winning of life's race. Obviously, any ministry plan must contain some intentionally ordered regimens that involve careful organization, loving oversight (i.e., coaching) by those persons of integrity that young people trust, and mutual group accountability, all to ensure a faithful running of the race.

Mentoring Assumptions

Fourth, while the content of the Apostles' teaching has been seen to be Jesus' teaching, which they embraced and in which they continued (John 8:31), the genitive in Acts 2:42, in addition to meaning *the teaching that belonged to the Apostles* might also be seen as *the teaching whose source (ablative) was the Apostles*. As already noted, no written New Testament existed at this time; the devotion to the Apostles' teaching was in hearing and obeying what was proclaimed vocally at this point in the history of the church. The Apostles shortly declared that they must delegate certain aspects of serving to deacons in order that they might "devote [themselves] to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4), obviously an emerging primacy in their service to the church. The dissemination of this teaching goes beyond simply

transmitting the content of information but also by recalling Jesus' second command to Peter in John 2. In response to Peter's second declaration of love for Jesus was Christ's command, "Shepherd My sheep!" (John 21:16), focused around the key verb, which was seen not only to involve feeding, tending but also, defined by Freiberg "metaphorically, of [providing] administrative and protective activity in relation to a community of believers; guide, care for, look after; with emphasis on the governing aspects of administration rule."¹⁸³ Shepherding or pastoring is clearly described here as the responsibility of Peter, and by extension to those listening to this conversation, the other Apostles.

While the administration of the church by the Apostles is seen developing throughout the book of Acts, it can be anticipated in Acts 2:42. While definitely a community, the beginnings of leadership can be observed. In the study of God's Word, it is seen subsequent to this examined passage that God's Spirit gifts different body members for the express purpose of building stable maturity:

Some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ. (Eph. 4:11-15)

In the church, as in the Old Testament in the equipping of youth in preparation for adulthood, mentors conduct part of the ministry of teaching, including parents or other respected nonfamily adult believers. Mentoring is needed in the spiritual formation of any believer. Seen in the research survey results as both a factor in retaining young people and in some who left

¹⁸³ Timothy Freiberg, and Barbara Freiberg, *Analytical Greek New Testament (GNM)*, 2nd ed. (n.p.: Timothy and Barbara Friberg, 1994), BibleWorks, v.10.

returning, the role of a significant relationship with an adult outside of the parents, an adult whose genuineness of walk with the Lord, whose integrity was viewed and trusted was apparent. The mutual spiritual benefit of an older adult walking alongside of a younger one is not only described in the statement, “Every Timothy needs a Paul; every Paul needs a Timothy,” but is also seen in the instructions Paul gives to Titus about the roles elder adults play in the lives of younger ones (Tit. 2:3–5). In the literature review, one remembers Elmore’s word about the necessity but also preteenagers’ openness to be in relation to a qualified mentor. In the area of teaching God’s Word, often the objection is made about lack of qualification for teaching. This last can be remedied by a mutual engagement with millennials in the systematic reading, critical observation of the biblical text, and its application to life, but the key qualification is still authenticity leading to trustworthiness: “They hunger more for relationship than for information—even relevant information. They are accustomed to learning on a need-to-know basis—but *their need to know will increase if a person they trust and know well is the one sharing the information*. They’re looking for us—*authentic* mentors.”¹⁸⁴

As previously noted, Rainer and Rainer describe a millennials ideal leader/mentor as someone of “integrity, transparency, and humility.”¹⁸⁵ The selection of a mentor for any group must be a Spirit-led decision and could be based on the observation of church leadership of those mature believers who seem already to show an interest or otherwise show a propensity towards youth despite the differences between the background of the mentor candidate and the millennial group at hand. In the absence of such a person, the intentional recruitment of a person whom leadership believes has the forbearing spirit necessary to interact with those different from her or

¹⁸⁴ Elmore, *Generation iY*, 48.

¹⁸⁵ Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials*, 268.

him (much like a missionary candidate) might be taught and read some of the literature reviewed to acquaint that one with the cultural mores of this generational cohort. This person is as they are because of their own personal relationship with Jesus and their genuineness, openness, and Christ-like spirit will be as detectable and attractive to millennial youth as the lack of these.

The tendency to think only that Master-level seminary graduates in youth ministry make these kinds of mentors is a grave mistake. An academic degree does not guarantee spiritual integrity or the other characteristics youth appreciate, as some current headlines reveal. As Stetzer warned, skills in gamesmanship and connoisseurs of fine pizza in youth pastors, although emphasized in some training programs and expected in some local churches, does not ensure and may hinder the whole idea and development of young disciples who will endure by reinforcing the marginalization of God's Word in the disciples' lives. The role of laypersons serving as mentors is seen in the other three areas of disciple-making activities, but through the history of the church the benefits of lay mentors in the spirituality of small groups of persons are recurrent.

Motivation Assumptions

Fifth, lest a charge of a type of asceticism, legalism, or moralism be levied against what the early church committed itself to doing or what this ministry plan seeks to encourage, the context supplies the origin of and empowerment for this employed pattern in the infant church being the Holy Spirit. The Spirit anointed Peter's message (Acts 2:16–26), convicted sinners (Acts 2:37), and brought believers to Christ in repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38–41). Inferentially, the Holy Spirit also directed and maintained the life of the church with these four practices, until “everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles” (Acts 2:43), the results of sharing and care for everyone's needs (Acts 2:44–45), and daily “continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from

house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:46–47). The presence of the Holy Spirit prompting, energizing, and using such practices to His glory and the expansion of God’s kingdom is both necessary and anticipated because all of this activity contributes to a situation where God accomplishes His will of making disciples.

Not a single thing that God enjoins upon His people that can be accomplished in the flesh, the efforts of humanity apart from God. Only with the power of the indwelling Spirit of God and His Son, Jesus (Acts 16:7; Phil. 1:19), can young people can develop into disciples who will grow up in a settled relationship with a Holy God, being prepared to leave home and live in spiritual victory characterized by lives of righteousness and holiness in a culture referred to by Peter as a spiritually crooked, perverse, and corrupt generation (Acts 2:40). Having established the necessity of these precursors, a plan including the four objects of the early church’s commitment is suggested.

An Intentional, Commitment to Reading, Understanding, and Obeying the Apostles’ Teaching

In the biblical literature review in Chapter 1 and in other biblical findings in Chapter 4, the cruciality of knowing God’s revealed Word, the continuing meditation upon it, and the keeping of and obedience to it, was traced from the very genesis of the human race until the examined passage in Acts 2. Additionally was a clear call to inculcate intentionally and systematically the content of God’s Word upon young people until they would never forget it, training them to apply and implement it carefully throughout the totality of their lives. The purpose of this nearly constant training was to anticipate and alleviate the very problem this plan

addresses: “You might do them in the land where you are going over to possess it, *so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you*” (Deut. 6:1–2, emphasis added).

As noted, the Apostles’ teaching was essentially a recounting of all that they had received from the Master in the days of His Incarnation on earth. It consisted of citing, explaining, and enhancing the Old Testament with further revelation about His Father that had only been anticipated but not fully understood until His coming. As has been suggested, the crying need for American evangelicals is knowledge of God’s Word, both in the Old and New Testaments. The embracing of the just-discussed CMTD is largely possible because of the incredibly high percentage of biblical illiteracy in churches. Research by Lifeway indicates the paucity of Bible reading among Christians, despite a very positive view of God’s Word and admitting it contains a plethora of modern moral lessons; “however, more than half of Americans have read little or none of the Bible. Less than a quarter of those who have ever read a Bible have a systematic plan for reading the Christian Scriptures each day. And a third of Americans never pick it up on their own.”¹⁸⁶ The effects of not reading the Bible were traced not only to result in a high unfamiliarity with Bible content and stories but, just as importantly, a lack of familiarity with a knowledge and understanding of crucial biblical doctrines.

In keeping with the conclusions of Mohler’s article on CMTD, this research found that “while 67 percent of Americans believe heaven is a real place, 45 percent believe there are many ways to get there—including 1 in 5 evangelical Christians. More than half of evangelicals (59 percent) believe the Holy Spirit is a force and not a personal being—in contrast to the orthodox

¹⁸⁶ Bob Smietana, “LifeWay Research: Americans Are Fond of the Bible, Don’t Actually Read It,” LifeWay NewsRoom, April 25, 2017, accessed November 27, 2017, <http://blog.lifeway.com/newsroom/2017/04/25/lifeway-research-americans-are-fond-of-the-bible-dont-actually-read-it/>.

biblical teaching of the Trinity being three Persons in one God.”¹⁸⁷ In short, many professing Christians, even evangelicals, hold to other than a biblical view on crucial themes such as heaven, hell, salvation, the nature of the Holy Trinity, and the Bible itself.

As discouraging as these statistics are about the biblical illiteracy of many American evangelicals, these data do not affect the incongruous polling reports of the heart desires of many Christians to live maturing lives that characterize growing disciples of Jesus Christ and whose purpose is to please God in all of life. Despite this deep aspiration, “it’s striking that while most of us desire to please Jesus, few of us take the time to check the Bible to find out if we are actually doing it. Clearly, there’s a disconnect.”¹⁸⁸

While the illiteracy in adult evangelicals is undeniable from the research, the disconnection between those disheartening data and what those polled described as their desire to think and “please and honor Jesus in all that I do” is vast. In short, people who do not engage in an intentional, persistent commitment to read God’s Word, studying it until understanding comes and then keeping (i.e., acting upon) it, as Jesus taught (Matt. 7:24–27), have no possibility of fulfilling their stated desire.

In the genesis of the early church, no accessible copies of what the Apostles were teaching of Jesus’ *kerygma* yet existed. Instead, people devoted themselves to listening to the Apostles’ teaching, in a group, resulting in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and them having a time of discovery in discussion. Resisting any model of Sunday school or other Christian education that uses unilateral teaching/preaching, this small group involved participation. Remembering the insistence upon small groups, the corporate study of the Bible is intermeshed

¹⁸⁷ Smietana, “LifeWay Research.”

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

with all else that occurs in this group. It has already been suggested that some scholars see the primacy of the study of the Apostles' teaching as providing the basis for the other three elements; some see the word order as supporting this primacy. The claim that the content of the Apostles' (and Jesus') teaching was part of each of the other three cannot be denied.

Constructing a Group of Preteenage Disciples

In contrast to how some churches see youth ministry, Stetzer seems to substantiate and interact with previous survey findings and offer some elements of what he considers crucial to preventing dropouts by making disciples:

1. Disciple, disciple, disciple. If your student ministry is a four-year holding tank with pizza, don't expect young adults to stick around. If, however, they see biblical teaching as relevant and see the church as essential to their decisions, they stay.

2. Have a home with committed Christian parents. According to the USC study I referenced earlier, 74% of married couples who were both evangelicals also had kids who were evangelical.

3. Recognize that it takes a church to raise a committed young adult—involvement of other adults in the discipleship process. This is where student pastors, volunteers, and other adults being invested in the lives of teenagers can be so important.¹⁸⁹

Depending on the size of a church and its number of youth, many types of groups that can develop. Typically, these types include, perhaps even emphasize, points of affinity of the members (e.g., sports, music, nearly any of the interests included in survey question #3). It can often develop along lines of simple socialization. A discipleship group has a specific purpose and uses a regimen of specific elements to attain certain goals (beginning with the four examined in Chapter 3), namely, a definite and developing saving spiritual intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ. Before attempting discipleship, church leadership should entreat God, asking that the

¹⁸⁹ Stetzer and Lambertson, "Dropouts and Disciples."

Holy Spirit select and call a person whom He knows will be a good mentor in leading preteenagers to a spiritually formational maturity.

In forming a group dedicated to the purpose of discipleship, the easiest way may be to begin a new one where recruits/perspective members, made alert to the group's purposes, might already feel a heart hunger or the leadership of the Holy Spirit to pursue answers they have as to life's purposes, understanding the Person of God and the reason and nature of the gospel. However, even in a currently running band, a sensitive conversation about trying something new and reformulating the group to something more focused on growth could allow one to be started in this way. An initial meeting after prayer with church and lay leaders, recruitment could begin to model the format (if not already used) of finding some participative consensus on certain formulation questions, such as time of meeting, age ranges, life issues, and questions not yet answered that could be linked to the study of pertinent passages. In locating a passage, a beginning might be to select a New Testament passage first (not a single verse, but a thought within a context). A good start may be to begin with the historical narrative theology of a Gospel. Mark is often suggested as the first one. If raised questions can be linked to a Gospel passage, they will likely lead to other questions worthy of reflection and ensuing discussion.

Having set a time to meet and having secured a beginning study focus, a schedule may be set for the first meeting. In the survey research, the use of social media and the Internet is observed as being rampant among preteenagers and teenagers. They are experts. Wifi hotspots throughout the land and the purchase of cellular data in significant amounts allow continual online communication. A plethora of resident downloadable free Bible applications with every conceivable translation are available for the taking. Informing the group of a few of these apps (with an invitation for them to discover others), an advance notification or request that they read

the passage in question, at least three times, may be offered. Before the meeting or in the meeting, time may be provided to allow let them read the scriptural text preceding and following the passage.

A leader will be mindful that Bible study is but the first aspect contained in the group's life together; opportunities for the other three practices of fellowship, worship, and prayer may be presented concurrently. The method that nearly every group leader in current literature recommends is discussion engendered by the leader/mentor, using inductive questions (the so-called Socratic method). As much as possible, guided questions with a varying range of possible responses are directed at the group, involving as many as possible, even empowering quiet ones to give their input. Every response is sifted for some element of truth. Then another probing or clarifying question or application might be posed to the group. While occasionally question and answer may be a dialogue between two members or a member and the mentor, as soon as possible, a redirect of the topic to the center of the group may permit reengagement of all to the discussion. In short, the discussion belongs to the group, not the mentor. It is an experience of discovery where preteenagers discover that they already know the truth and are helped by the mentor to scaffold new revelations, integrating them into what they had already possessed. This results in being enabled to draw applicable applications. A helpful portrait of a discovery group format lists and illustrates the various kinds of questions that can empower members to participate in discussion on selected preread Bible passages:

The Discovery Meeting Group Format

Discovery groups work through the same questions each time they meet. These questions work regardless of what you're studying.

Opening Questions

What are you thankful for this week? (This question helps teach seekers or those new to Christ how to worship and pray.)

What is a challenge you're facing? Is there some way our group can help? (This guides people into caring community.)

Accountability Questions

These questions follow up from the previous week. See more about this under the Bible

Discovery Questions and Outreach Questions below.

With whom did you share what you learned last week?

How did it go with your "I will" statements?

Bible Discovery Questions

Read the passage several times together, perhaps in different translations. Then answer these questions.

What does it say?

How would I say that? (Each person tries to retell the passage or Bible story in their own words.)

What must I do to obey what I have learned? "I will..." (Each person crafts an "I will" statement or two to tell how they will obey the passage this week.)

Optional Questions if You Have Time

What does the passage say about humanity?

What does this passage say about God?

Outreach Questions

With whom will you share what you learned this week? (Each person considers who they will talk to about what they learned. Perhaps they'll encourage a coworker with this new knowledge or talk to their brother about the passage).¹⁹⁰

Readily apparent is that each of these inductive question genres encourages individuals to talk to the group about different developing areas in their Christian walk. The opening questions begin to develop an atmosphere of safety where one learns to trust others with needs in one's life, leading to corporate intercessory prayers of petition for wisdom (Jas. 1:5–6), help (Ps. 121:2), and deliverance (Ps. 74:12) from the throne of Grace (Heb. 4:14–16). The second opening question furthers this intentional offering of sharing (i.e., fellowship, *κοινωνία*) the life concerns of individuals with other members of the group. The mentor can provide reassurance

¹⁹⁰ Jim Engli, "Discovery Group Format 2.0," Jim Egli, June 04, 2016, accessed March 16, 2018, <http://jimegli.com/discovery-group-format-2-0/>.

and understanding, even offering other guiding questions of clarification that can facilitate sharing without the request taking too much time and attention by becoming the relating of too much or inappropriate information.

Accountability questions are a gentle follow-up accountability of the previous week's stated intentions of applying what was learned to one's personal life and then sharing those understandings of biblical lessons with another person. These questions are another means of opening dialogue within a caring community (i.e., fellowship) to evaluate how biblical study is being used in intentionally developed bridging relationships to those who as yet do not know Christ. This type of interaction is clearly seen as disciple making. It involves mutual encouragement and motivation to others. It is useful for countering the falling away described previously. It leads to mature stability in fellow believers, an opportunity seldom offered elsewhere in modern church programming because of a lack of knowledge of the lives of others, as the Hebrew writer details:

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Heb. 10:23–25)

Crucial to the edification of the disciple is the corporate participation of assembled believers, just as on the Day of Pentecost and following. The group formation described is the place where each of the four practices that characterized the early church can be enabled to occur.

The Bible discovery questions are simplified aspects of inductive Bible study methods guiding to observations (of word meanings, grammar, and syntax), beginning at making interpretational inferences about what something meant to the original reader and, in view of that information, what God would reveal to the preteen, and a statement of application coupled with a commitment to assimilate that revealed truth into one's belief system and lifestyle. Just like a

classical homiletic study based on thorough exegesis of the biblical text, multiple readings of the passage are followed by a journaling or jotting of observations of what the Spirit leads the reader to see (perhaps raising and answering further questions of what, who, where, when, how, why). Inferring the meaning(s) of a passage is initiated with critical reflection and personally paraphrasing what it seems to mean. The final Bible study questions clearly involve taking the discovered meaning and shaping one's beliefs and behaviors around it, knowing the group will check in next time.

Helpful in Bible study are not only the online electronic Bibles that are freely available but also the plethora of associated helps to which the student may be introduced in times of questions or a desire for deeper answers. These would include the home pages for the Blue Letter Bible, Bible Gateway, Biblica, and YouVersion, to name just a few. Without overwhelming students of all the benefits of each of these, an orientation and employment of these in study will soon produce competence and a far better use of ever-present smartphones.

The optional questions are theological and anthropological, leading to more questions and opportunities to learn of God's Person and humankind's dire dilemma, need of rescue, and momentary reliance on God. The selection of some catechism such as that found on the home page for the newly published New City Catechism or a visit to a section from one of the ancient could serve as a springboard to theological discussion. A game of sequentially citing the alphabet to identify the attributes of God is easily prepared using a virtual concordance.

The outreach question is intended to keep the connection clear between the truth of God and the disciple's task to bring it in contact with a person in need of God's grace. Discussing how and when to bridge to others relationally so that the bridge may be traveling to take the gospel to another may provide worthwhile discussion.

The scheme is not the last word in a small group format. It is something that definitely could be adapted, modified, and otherwise shaped to fit a variety of contexts in nearly any culture. It gives a comprehensive framework to respond to three of the four practices detailed in this study.

An Intentional, Commitment to Sharing All of Life Together

As seen in the review of the biblical literature, the base use of the word *κοινωνία* is *sharing*, holding all things in common. Whether sacrificially giving to the physical needs of other believers or sharing in a unified communion with each other because of believers' sharing in the life of the Son and the Spirit, all intentional, deliberate persistent giving comes from the Spirit regenerating the human heart that is "curved in upon itself" as Luther stated (*Incurvatus in Se*)¹⁹¹ The transformation from narcissism so rampant in the world culture, painfully present in youth, comes from the Spirit-enabled mind of Christ in a believer: "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:3–5). The participles in Philippians 2:3–4 only demonstrate the instrumentality of actions needed to accomplish the command of having the mind, the attitude, of the Son before He emptied Himself of His divine prerogatives and condescended to become a human. This command must mean that believers are to cooperate with God's grace that Jesus' high priestly prayer might be fulfilled:

For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them

¹⁹¹ "Incurvatus in Se."

and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (John 17:19–23)

What Jesus prayed the Father grant Him was made available on the cross for believers, namely their union with Christ (Rom. 6:3–5) making possible, at some level, what Peter describes as a sharing in God’s nature: “His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust” (2Pet. 1:3–4). The intimate union that Jesus prayed for all believers to have with Him and His Father in John 17 and the declaration of its reality in 2 Peter is seen as the basis for fellowship of believers with each other, a sure sign to a watching world of the authenticity of God’s children.

As Jesus prayed, however, oneness, unity, was enabled among believers (Eph. 4:1–6). Harmony and the forbearing towards others that leads to it was a frequent theme to which Paul returned because of its indispensability to maintaining a wholeness in the body of Christ (1Cor. 12) in which the Spirit arranged members with differing gifts (v. 18) for the good of all (v. 7). With cyberbullying leading to suicide, sexual impurity, disease, pregnancies, senseless violence, and the striving to prove one’s identity to others through physical enhancements and prowess of various kinds, and the striving for and possession of more impressive toys than others, believing preteenagers need to be helped to see their true identity in Christ. They also need to see other believers as part of His church. The cultivation of humanity and perspectives and habits of servanthood must be instilled early so that preteenagers can be confident of who they really are by the grace of God. Survey question #15, enquired about students working for God in the local church. Results in the survey were average, as can be seen in Chapter 2. Having the mind of

Christ, discipleship necessitates a replacement of conceit and selfishness with humility (Phil. 2:3), a denial (Matt. 16:24) of fulfilling self-interests (Phil. 2:4), a taking up of one's own cross, and following the Christ, the slave of God (Matt. 18–21).

Instead of youth being taught to anticipate that the church exists to help it fulfill doctrines of CMTD, ensuring entertainment and that a good time be had by all, they need to be helped early to see that God has saved believers to reconcile them to Himself and transform them to be able to be conformed to the image of God's dear son (Rom 8:29) instead of being destined to conform to this world (Rom. 12:2), "to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance" (1Pet. 1:14).

The anonymity of social media has cultivated an incivility, rudeness, and even brutality in America, and it shows up in middle and high schools and in the church. Observed already is the necessary of shifting one's perspective. Several examples were given in the group format that are good beginnings that an insightful mentor could biblically teach further, respectfully model, and gently call students to practice in the protected venue of the group. Acts 2 again gives description about two of the habits (fellowship and the breaking of bread) of the early church that would seem to help form and maintain a remedy to an incurred self-centeredness. Just how Paul taught, intentional encounter and sharing with those in need (Acts 2:44–45), including meals (Acts 2:47), provided opportunity for imitating Christ, the Servant of God, by serving themselves. Service is not offered for some reciprocal reward but, like the mind of Christ, like the illustration of the Good Samaritan, an example of loving those encountered and needy, good service is rendered, especially to the household of faith (Gal. 6:10), to meet the needs of the Body of Christ and beyond.

The early church in Acts was characterized by internal satisfaction and the external approval of an scrutinizing, unbelieving world (Acts 2:47). While granting the world's opinion is not unchanging, the church's joyful sorties into meeting the needs of others helped them be secure in their identities, just as young people need to know today. While several of the questions in the meeting template address preteenagers' identity becoming secure within the group of believers, in a like manner, God prompted Luke to demonstrate that the fellowship and sharing within the church needed to be expressed outside the church to fulfill Jesus' intention for His disciples.

A mentor with her or his own relationship with Christ is completely adequate, working with local church leadership, to find genuine needs within a short distance of the church. Serving with no thought of any remuneration or reciprocation, including making a name in the community for the church, people can be found whose needs would provide continuing opportunities to apply Bible teachings to real life, to the lifting of burdens to those in need and making firm the faith, identities, and Christian worldview of the students. A blessing of God is promised to those who help the helpless (Jas. 1:27) which causes watching persons to give the credit for kindness to God: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

An Intentional, Commitment to Worshipping Together

Already discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 was the third practice of the infant church: "the breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42). The question is raised by some as to whether the breaking of bread refers both to the believers sharing meals together (an aspect of fellowship, sharing the common good) as well as a celebration of communion, the Eucharist, a meal of Thanksgiving (1Cor. 10:16; 11:24). For the purposes of this plan, seeing that the broader conclusion and

application of devotion to fellowship and sharing on every level and in seeing the Acts 2:46 notation of the church “breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,” as at least allowing, if not suggesting, that these two are different, the church did practice corporate worship of God both within and without the temple.

While mostly outside of the thrust of this plan, it is commonly known that “...The Seeker-Sensitive, Consumer Church is Failing a Generation”¹⁹² Dorothy Greco is not alone when she observes a correlation between the accommodating efforts of this increasing popular type of church and the anti-disciple, self-centered narcissism just discussed. She writes,

Rather than helping congregants in this endeavor, churches that bend into their mercurial whims foster a me-first mentality. This actually plays into one of the potential root sins of this generation: self-absorption. While it’s all too easy for those of us over the age of 30 to poke fun at their selfie antics, I think young Christians actually want the church to help them reign in their narcissism. Writer Aleah Marsden told me, “We definitely want to see Jesus at the center because the rest of the world keeps shouting that we’re the center. We don’t need the church to echo the world.”¹⁹³

She continues, “Based on the dissonance between Sunday morning and the other six and a half days of the week, it would seem that many of us have passively acclimated to a faith that demands very little of us. Perhaps millennials’ dissatisfaction with and departure from the church will motivate all of us to opt for more integrity and authenticity.”¹⁹⁴ Possibly no other activity more simply enables obedience to biblical commands to fix “your eyes upon Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith,” determining to “keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at

¹⁹² Dorothy Greco, “How the Seeker-Sensitive, Consumer Church Is Failing a Generation,” CT Women, August 2014, accessed November 30, 2017, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2013/august/how-seeker-sensitive-consumer-church-is-failing-generation.html>.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Greco, “How the Seeker-Sensitive.”

the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth” (Col. 3:1–2) than the act of worship, especially corporate worship.

While music is a means of worship, not the attributing of praise and thankfulness to God itself, music can impact greatly the focus of a believer who wants to honor God with His due. Looking one last time at the article on seeker-sensitive churches, some of the largest in evangelicalism, the writer notes its impact on both worship and the teaching of the Word. Originally designed to woo millennials (i.e., postmoderns) back into church, in the seeker-sensitive model the physical environment of the church was refashioned, removing stained glass that often pointed back to biblical scenes and earlier times and persons, removing other Christian symbols (e.g., the cross), and replacing the time-honored Christian hymnody that reinforced the theology on which faith rested to a more rock-style contemporary music that often is lacking in theological depth as a real aid to worship. Typically, a replacement of a longer, expositional examination and application to life of the text of the biblical Canon with a “shorter, story-based talk to address the ‘felt needs’ of the congregants while reinforcing the premise that following Jesus would dramatically improve their quality of life.”¹⁹⁵ These changes were done in the mistaken belief that such innovations would attract and keep this generation engaged, which research numbers show it has failed to do.

Millennials, as noted, have been impacted, often very negatively, by this expression of the church-growth movement: “Perhaps millennials’ dissatisfaction with and departure from the church will motivate all of us to opt for more integrity and authenticity.”¹⁹⁶ As discussed in the section on mentors, millennials are extremely sensitive to genuineness, whether anyone who

¹⁹⁵ Greco, “How the Seeker-Sensitive.”

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

professes the truth of anything, including themselves, do “walk the talk.” In 1973 Peter Gillquist, a former evangelical youth leader in Campus Crusade for Christ, formed the Evangelical Orthodox Church. He wrote a book detailing the reasons for his leaving the mainline evangelical movement. In view of the article just quoted, a comparison can be drawn from a portion of the epilogue: “It is also the story of every believer who is searching for the Church. Where Christ is Lord. Where holiness, human responsibility, and the sovereignty of God are preached. Where fellowship is more than a covered-dish supper in the church basement. And where fads and fashions take a backseat to apostolic worship and doctrine.”¹⁹⁷ Outcomes such as Gillquist’s leaving the church are the result of the church not living as the early church modeled.

In 2017, Hank Hanegraaff moved to the Orthodox Church, angering many evangelicals and having his program cancelled on over one hundred broadcast signals, affecting 51 million people. A trip to China significant to Hanegraaff where the love of some believers, if not a knowledge that matched his, had him questioning his salvation. Having been stricken with cancer, he made the move to Orthodoxy. “We live in an age of ‘pastor-preneur,’ where the pastor is the entrepreneur,” Hanegraaff said, “And the church has become consumerist. Instead of Christ being the end, Christ becomes the means to an end. Instead of people coming to the master’s table because of the love of the master, they come to the master’s table because of what is on the master’s table.”¹⁹⁸ Like Peter Gillquist, a clear answer to Haegraaff’s question regarding what was missing in his experience with evangelicalism was seen in the joy of simple Christians.

¹⁹⁷ Peter E. Gillquist, *Becoming Orthodox: A Journey to the Ancient Christian Faith*, rev. ed. (Englewood, NJ: Conciliar Press, 1992), accessed November 30, 2017, <https://www.amazon.com/Becoming-Orthodox-Journey-Ancient-Christian/dp/1936270005>.

¹⁹⁸ Tim Funk, "The Photo That Lost Radio's 'Bible Answer Man' Thousands of Listeners," *Charlotteobserver*, June 17, 2017, accessed March 14, 2018, <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/living/religion/article154030349.html>.

Methodist graduates from a prominent evangelical seminary are joining and pastoring in the Anglican Communion. In only three anecdotal accounts, a deficit is stated in the area of worship. Worship has become so detached from the hymnody and liturgy and recitation of the creeds of the church this is cannot be satisfy godly, sincerely worshippers who want to see God high and lifted up rather that another session that focuses on self rather than God. From a distinctively different branch of theology than the converts to Orthodoxy, a blog from a Pietistic tradition links the music of the church with its theology:

Showing care for the words of our conversation with God in worship. The author quotes: Let me write the songs of a nation; I don't care who writes its laws.—Andrew Fletcher. This statement attributed to 17th-century Scottish politician Andrew Fletcher about countries also applies to the church. Christians have long recognized the power of music to shape what we believe about God and the life of faith. As New Testament scholar Gordon Fee once said, “Show me a church’s songs, and I’ll show you their theology.” If this is true—and I believe it is—why do we seem to pay so little attention to the texts of the songs we sing?¹⁹⁹

Charles Wesley wrote over 6,000 hymns, doing as much to disseminate the teachings of his brother, John Wesley, as did John himself, according to him. None of the foregoing has been an apologetic for Orthodoxy, the Anglican Communion, or Pietism. It consists of reminders from several diverse quarters of the church that a sufficient loss exists in a knowledge and practice of God-honoring and focused worship, involving music, an awareness of the ancient creeds, and catechismal teachings and beliefs of the church, and a failure not only to know the Word (as previously discussed) but a failure to read and thoroughly exposit it during public worship. The result, as regretfully discussed in relation to CMTD, is little reverent practice of the means of grace, as participating corporately or practiced privately. As was emphasized at the beginning of

¹⁹⁹ Christine Longhurst, “The Words We Sing,” *The Mennonite: A Publication of Mennonite Church USA Providing Anabaptist Content*, December 1, 2011, accessed November 30, 2017, <https://themennonite.org/feature/words-sing/>.

this plan, they all participated. Worship today, as noted, is much like a rock concert. It is largely an observation of a few performing without all looking heavenward. Christine Longhurst defines healthy worship:

Healthy worship includes scriptural texts, traditional texts and newly composed contemporary texts. It balances finely crafted poetic texts to which we can return again and again with colloquial texts written in the immediacy of the moment without regard to literary quality.

It values texts that speak to God, texts that speak to one another and texts through which God speaks to us. It seeks to include texts from both the global Christian community and our local Christian communities.

Just as in conversations with one another, our dialogue with God is enriched by a wide diversity of content and style, both textual and musical.

If our worship is to rise above mere entertainment or education—if we truly believe that worship is a conversation between God and God’s people—then the words of that conversation need to be chosen with great care.²⁰⁰

If not in the larger worship service, yet in keeping with what characterized the early church and contrasts with the failure of much of the worship forms of modern evangelicals, the small group meeting of preteenagers must be crafted to allow some dedication of time to exploring how to worship: to sing songs that may vary in musical style but whose lyrics are understandable, God oriented, and doctrinally sound. As noted and personally experienced, simply publically reading God’s Word is valuable, as seen in the account of the returned exiles listening to the Law of God read for an entire morning. For centuries the people of God memorized and then recited the creeds from the ancient councils that first clarified and then summarized the key beliefs of the Christian faith.

Frankly, I have never been a regular part of systematic, holistic worship, but the scriptural record demonstrates in both the Old and New Testaments that God inhabits the praise

²⁰⁰ Longhurst, “The Words We Sing.”

of His people (Ps 22:3). As Longhurst insists, much room exists for a variety of musical styles if a means of our conversation with God be facilitated.

An Intentional, Commitment to Prayers

As was previously examined, the most frequent term for prayers (plural) προσευχαῖς, perhaps overlapping in some ways with the previously discussed practice of worship, was noted that its usage in Acts 2:42 is unique in its being prefaced with the definite article, pointing perhaps to a specific collection of types or genres of prayer. Already repeatedly mentioned was the interweaving of these four practices in which the disciples were so dedicatedly and regularly engaged. Part of the uncertainty of knowing what this practicing of corporate praying involved is the fact that although Jesus went out alone, perhaps in the quiet hours of the day, to pray, only six times in the Gospels are records provided of his actual words. Once again, for the teaching and grounding of preteenagers in this disciplinary practice of spiritual formation, one turns to the mentor and looks to her or him and that individual's practice of prayer not only to instruct but also to model, just as Jesus did for his disciples as to how to communicate with His Father. Remembering that the teaching of the Apostles was their passing along what they had received from Jesus, one would expect this pattern of continuing rather than innovating would also apply to the regular corporate and private practice of praying.

While many examples of entreaty are available to study in both testaments of godly persons praying, assumption could be made in the making of preteenager disciples that a better place to start could not be found than the example of how the Master taught His disciples to pray, with what is commonly referred to as the Lord's Prayer:

It happened that while Jesus was praying in a certain place, after He had finished, one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray just as John also taught his disciples." And He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be Your name. Your

kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation.” (Luke 11:1–4)

Pray, then, in this way: “Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” (Matt 6:9–13)

This prayer is, first, a reflective guide to worship as much as an example of petition to God for the needs of the community. Much has been written on the description and analysis of the types of prayer elements illustrated in this prayer along with the significance of the order in which they are presented. As discussed earlier and in keeping with the four practices in Acts 2:42, the prayer uses exclusively plural pronouns (e.g., *our, us, we*). The entire prayer is offered from the family of all believers, being based upon a recognizance of His Sovereign Majesty but is begun with the trusting address to the Mighty God who is the Father of all believers. Never merely meaningless liturgy, this prayer could be used each week with just one aspect of it examined alone and then with the context that surrounds it. Having pointed to the necessity of preteenagers being certain of their identity as individual persons and also as important contributors to and recipients of the benefits of the Spirit in the body of Christ, it is of vital importance that this group not draw its self-image, identity, or worth from a peer group or other worldly institution but from the certainty of God being the Father.

Another assurance follows with the confession of His exalted position over all of Creation as its Creator and the sum total of His personal attributes, His name, description, is holy. Worship continues with a confession of certainly of His coming kingdom and an ongoing opportunity to make a choice to submit to and cooperate in the consummation of this kingdom in the work that is done in His name.

An example of another kind of prayer is made—that of a petition, a request that He supplies what He alone can and humanity cannot. Still another confession of His sufficiency, His being El Shaddai, is reflected in this prayer. Just like the manna in the wilderness, this supply is daily, ongoing. Just like yesterday’s bread could not be stored, human dependency is ongoing. His faithfulness is never in question because He never fails to supply.

The next aspect of the prayer is the only one that seems dependent on a human response: A plea for mercy seems contingent on a willingness to extend mercy in the same fashion. Matthew 18:21–35 and similar passages reinforce the promise that God’s mercy is certain and the human response must be to reflect that same mercy on other persons.

Apart from the contested gloss in Matthew’s account—“For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen” (Matt. 6:13), the final petition is based on an awareness of the ferocity of the spiritual battle and makes a plea for the Father’s protection of guidance of His children in a world that is no friend to grace. Understanding each element of this prayer is crucial if millennial youth be made aware of their identities being founded upon their relationship with the King who is their Father. Each of these prayer elements are worthy of analysis by the group and, like all Bible study, are great places to discuss the intentions of the Master and how this prayer reveals both who He considers the group members to be and how He is eager to have them communicate with Him and His Father.

The old adage that *prayer changes things* probably was directed at how God enters the human existence and intervenes in their behalf as in James 5:14–29. A good mentor, experienced in prayer, will also make sure the group understands that the most affected person in a prayer relationship with God will likely be the ones praying—themselves.

The Lord's Prayer has been offered as one example of how a prayer journey can begin with a group. However, many older books of prayers are available, arranged by topic or to meet specific needs that have been written as carefully and prayerfully and scripturally as any prepared sermon. These are good to read and reflect upon and even offer to God.

Conclusion

This paper has described the dire situation of young people, specifically those attending or even having been raised in evangelical churches. Despite the history and continued belief that this branch of Christianity best understands and proclaims the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to the saving of souls, the statistics as seen in this study have been repeatedly substantiated. In reality and practice, another gospel has insinuated itself into many quarters of this movement. As Jesus said, the true character of a tree is seen in its fruit. The regretful results of those young people who have left Christ and His church are undeniable.

Having attempted to analyze the origin of this very real problem, a plan has been offered to provide a solution. Admittedly, nothing novel or innovative has been discussed; the research only detailed a New Testament passage describing the effects of God's Spirit working among first generation Christian believers viewed against the backdrop of the redemptive history of God's reconciliation of the human race back to Himself. When considering the immutable loving character of God, His faithful dealings with humankind, and His proclivity to initiate and maintain communication with sinful persons with an aim to return them to Himself, and if those things that God's Spirit has used to make disciples of Jesus Christ repeatedly in the past were successful, the principled practice of those in any cultural context at any time would continue to be effective in making disciples of Christ.

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APPENDIX A

The Words of Jesus

The promise is to wise persons who know and obey Jesus' words and the warning to the foolish who knowing Jesus' words, refuse to obey and act upon them is made plain (Matt. 7:24-27; Luke 6:47-49).

Crowds were amazed at the authority of Jesus' Words (Mat 7:28-29), the disciples were amazed at Word (Mar 10:24); "*Some* of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, "This certainly is the Prophet. Others were saying, 'This is the Christ.'" (John 7:40-41)
Healing Word of centurion's servant (Matt. 8:8; Luke 7:2-10).

Healing, exorcising Word (Matt. 8:16).

Word-Seed, Parable of the Soils (Matt. 13:18-23, Mark 4:2-20; Luke 8:10-15); "With many such parables He was speaking the word to them, so far as they were able to hear it; and He did not speak to them without a parable; but He was explaining everything privately to His own disciples" (Mark 4:33-34).

Jesus' Word of God invalidated by the traditions (interpretations) of men (Matt. 15:3-9; Mar 7:8-13).

Jesus' Words will not pass away (Matt. 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33 Heaven and Earth will pass).

Shame of His Words, ashamed in the Father/angels presence (Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26).

Luke's Gospel the result of the Apostles Words: "...an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word" (Luke 1:1-2).

Jesus' Words were gracious Words (Luke 4:22).

Jesus' Words were the Word of God (Luke 5:1; John 12:49).

Jesus' "...mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it." (Luke 8:21).

Jesus wanted His words to "sink" into the hearers ears, but often was not understood (Luke 9:44).

"...blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it." (Luke 11:28).

The Women at tomb remembered His Words: ""He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." And they remembered His words, (Luke 24:6-8).

Great Commission of Luke: “He said to them, ‘These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’” (Luke 24:44).

Jesus speaks the words of God (John 3:34) “He whom God has sent speaks the words of God; for He gives the Spirit without measure.

The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand.

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” (John 3:34-36).

Samaritans believed because of His Word (John 4:41).

Royal official believed word Jesus spoke to him and son healed (John 4:46-53).

“...he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, *has eternal life*, and does not come into judgment, but has *passed out of death into life*” (Jn. 5:24) but to Pharisees, “You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent” (John 5:38).

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.

But there are some of you who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him” (John 6:63-64).

“Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life’” (John 6:68).

To believing Jews: “If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:31-32).

But to these same Jews: “I know that you are Abraham’s descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you” (Jn. 8:37) and ““Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word.

You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father” (John 8:43-44)

“Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me?

He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear *them*, because you are not of God.” (John 8:46-47)

“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he will never see death.” (John 8:51)

Jesus about His Father’s Word: “I do know Him and keep His word” (John. 8:55)

“He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.

For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment *as to* what to say and what to speak.

I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.” (John 12:48-50)

**APPENDIX B
Project Overview**

Slide 1

**Saving the Sheep,
Preserving the Fruit**

**A Plan of Christian Education for the
Millennials and Beyond
in the Midwest Wesleyan Church**

Slide 2

Thesis Abstract

This thesis involved a ministry plan for adequately preparing preteen youth in the Midwestern Wesleyan Church denomination. The goal was to ground those youth in their relationship with God until their relationship with Him and His Church will persist through their teenage years and beyond. The topic is crucial in view of the marked exodus of youth from the evangelical church by their late teenage years, often never to return. Data were collected to show what is actually being provided currently to preteen youth in Midwestern Wesleyan local churches through a mixed-methods survey of pastors or Christian education leaders in the denomination. In view of the research, a coherent, Biblically based plan is offered to enhance local church ministry to preteen youth in Wesleyan churches by addressing the different avenues for their becoming and remaining active ministry participants in their local church.

Slide 3

Introduction

Among the last words of Jesus to His disciples was a description of the task that, upon His leaving this world, He was entrusting to them: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:19-20, NAU). The only verb in this Greek verse is a command made to them all (**μαθητεύω**): “You all make disciples.” The other words of action are all participles, indicating how, instrumentally, they were to accomplish this mission. It is not misrepresenting this command, or the seriousness of the heart of Christ when finishing His ministry, to infer that the completing of the mission would be, in His eyes, a success, earning a “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt 25:23). It does not seem unfair to state the corollary: If the Church fails to make disciples, whatever else it seems to do well, it has missed its primary *raison d'être*. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations are from the New American Standard Bible (NAU).

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The Statement of the Problem

The problem is that many adolescents are leaving the church, often never to return. The number of departures, many of them permanent, has been described by a variety of graphic terms, but none more than: hemorrhage.

The Millennial Generation (otherwise referred to as Millennials, Generation Y and *iY*, Mosaics, the Digital Generation, the Internet Generation, the Nexters, Echo Boomers, Sunshine Generation, and Bridgers) have been identified as a generational cohort distinctly different from preceding generations with a perception of life not shared by others. These differences involve their connection to others persons, both in and out of their generation. Their relationship to their parents might be described as smothered and pressured. Their ability to relate directly to others is challenged by the domination of technology. They are generous but often extremely narcissistic. Although unrealistically confident, they are often very anxious.

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The problem at the heart of this study involves those young persons who have been raised in the church, participated in its worship and Christian education, and still decided to leave the church, very often never to return. David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, in *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Church* describe typical departing Millennial experiences as sharing many common characteristics. Not only is there a “disengagement from church—and sometimes from Christianity altogether,” but even more importantly, a common cause for this rupture is commonly offered by these departing youth. They claim, “Many young people who grew up in church and have since dropped out do not hesitate to place blame. They point the finger, fairly or not, at the establishment.”

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Perhaps the reason for this problem of exiting millennials is that while churches perceive some of the unique characteristics of these youth, they are simply, for whatever reasons, not understanding this generation, not effectively caring for, and not choosing to implement what is necessary to keep these from being lost. Despite the plethora of publications, conferences, blogging, and preaching on what is needed to connect to and truly disciple Millennial youth, the lasting fruit of youth persevering in their faith walk is not as anticipated.

Despite some efforts to make church more appealing to Millennials, these efforts are proving to be largely ineffective in developing a settled faith in youth because they are insufficient. The sad truth is that the majority of churches are not committed to changing the way that they “do church.”

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This vast exodus across the evangelical church has caused me, a parent of eight and one who has attempted to minister to youth, a great deal of alarm and grief as I have followed reports of research. The personal observation of this research documenting growing disconnectedness between the church and Millennials has caused me to consider whether there really is a growing disconnect, an irrelevance between the church's activity and its success of making disciples of the Millennial generation. What is actually being done in ministry to Millennials and what needs to be is the foundation of this study.

While some culturally contextual information is provided in this study for the entire generational cohort, the limiting focus is on those young people who have been involved in local churches. The plan addresses itself primarily to the challenges of preparing younger members of the generation who have not left home or the church, as yet.

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The Significance of the Problem

Deitsch reports, "At the 2012 Southern Baptist Conference Convention, it was reported that within the last year over 800 Southern Baptist churches closed and over 10,000 had no baptisms, which means they are not winning any converts." While my denomination is different, a district conference conducted by one of the denomination's General Superintendents just a few years ago contained a very stern word to the majority of churches who also had not reported a single convert in the past year. The books, articles, conferences, and research studies and graphs that address this problem indicate that it is not sectarian, even comparing evangelical and high church groups.

Therefore, the significance of this problem is crucial, multi-faceted for its impact on the spirituality of individuals (their true relationship to God), parents (the integrity of the family), educators (the understanding of the ways to transfer and model wisdom), and church leaders (the means of connecting to those who need the Gospel and pastoral care, mentoring, and discipling).

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Theoretical Basis

A number of constructs form the basis of this study. The first one is that of *generational cohorts*, a group of persons who have experienced the same event within the same period of time. Ryder claims that the “cohort record” displays the “a distinctive composition and character reflecting the circumstances of its unique origination and history” which allows the comparison and contrast of it precisely with others.

Another construct used is “Evangelicalism.” This transliteration of the Greek term **εὐαγγέλιον** (“good message or news”) describes a American movement originating after World War 2 that includes various Protestant churches, denominations, and organizations.

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The theoretical basis of a response to the problem of young people being lost in early adulthood to the church must be the Gospel of Jesus Christ, informed by and sensitive to the generation Y perspective. The entire Biblical canon provides throughout both concepts and methodology of child-raising, which include implicit promises, such as, “Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov 22:6, NAU, RSV, ESV, “turn from it” NET). Another clear scheme for inculcating a youth in God’s Word is presented early in the Canon in Deuteronomy 6.

Of interest to me, then, would be a Biblical concept or portrait of relational, experiential normalcy without any imposition of the subsequent infrastructures that have characterized the church.

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The elements of such a portrait of ecclesial, relational, experiential normalcy, if supported throughout the Canon as being the heart and will of God for all of His people might provide the theoretical basis for a plan or rubric to evaluate any Christian culture, regardless of time or location.

On the day of the Church's birth, Peter preached Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected. He concluded his first sermon in Acts 2, with the admonition: "Be saved from this perverse generation!" (Act 2:40).

The resultant commitment of the infant Church to four habitual practices are listed in Acts 2:42 and will be shown to be presented by Luke as a Spirit-guided pattern for the continuance of what Peter has been used to begin. These are a devotion to The Disciples' teaching, the most intimate kind of fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers.

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The expression of each of these elements corresponds directly to the strong desires of Millennial in sources consulted in the literature review as well as in the empirical evidence accumulated, such as connectedness and belonging, a deep desire to know the meaning of God's Word, true service (not by proxy) to others, and a strong desire for spiritual worship. It is likely that the youth of the church who have a relationship with God but are not finding that relationship nurtured within a group that actively experiences and follows the Spirit would have been disappointed and, possibly, disillusioned to a point of leaving.

At the risk of a charge of being too simple, probably the spiritual satisfaction of a group of Millennials might be fulfilled within a group of those who measure what church is currently as compared to what it was in its earliest days.

Slide 13

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to provide a plan, based on Biblical examples and instructions, to prepare a child to enter responsible adulthood. A child would be defined as one who is being instructed and modeled as to the ideal way God has revealed humans are to live in relationship to Him, each other, and the cosmos in a protected environment. This training is primarily accomplished by God's inspired Word, which is the basis "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16–17) as it is made available to be understood in a way that the child can receive.

Seen in every type of research, biblical, empirical, and literature is the crucial element in any plan that successfully empowers and enables a child to reach responsible adulthood: humble mentoring by an authentic, transparent, and accessible older believer.

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Statement of Methodology

The research questions were as follows:

- What are the factors and values (parental, ecclesial, educational, and cultural) that have created and might have nurtured the unique components of Millennial makeup?
- What are the characteristics of Millennials that contribute to their leaving the church?
- What are the possible ecclesial responses that might be made to offset the cultural influence on those who are coming into adulthood?
- How do these factors/values compare to what God's Word describes as normative?

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Results of Survey Research

This study included both a consideration of biblical narrative on the topic of characteristics of the newly formed Christian church on and following the Day of Pentecost and the results from a survey of respondents within the Wesleyan Church.

Wesleyan district superintendents of nine districts covering seven Midwestern American states granted permission to survey their churches. The population included 588 pastors or their appropriate designees, including local Christian education directors, who were invited to respond to a five-page questionnaire electronically via an online survey collation site. Of these 588 invitations, 216 responded to the survey which sought their observations of the Millennial youth in their congregations, regarding youth perceptions and behaviors.

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BIBLICAL RESEARCH—ACTS 2:42–47

Having conducted a survey of respondents within Midwest districts of the Wesleyan Church regarding ministry practice directed to preteenagers, a comparison was made between modern survey results and Luke's description of the customary Spirit-led practices that characterized the infant church. These were examined in detail.

Before a close exegesis of Acts 2:42, with attention to 43-47, an apologetic is offered as to the legitimacy of considering indicative narrative prose as anything more than history. In a section examining the purpose of a biblical historical account, Fee and Stuart, in their *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, are only the first to declare their understanding: "We believe that much of Acts is intended by Luke to serve as a model." They are joined by Kevin Vanhoozer quoting Mary Louise Pratt and speech act theorist Susan Lanser to confirm that narrative contains an invitation to participate with what is described.

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The Practices of the Spirit-Directed Church

Having examined the context of Acts 2:42-47, the intentional persistent commitment to the four practices listed in Acts 2:42 was exegeted. The observation of the unique syntactical construction was made: along with the imperfect active plural form of εἰμί is the present active nominative masculine plural participle προσκατεροῦντες from the verb προσκατερέω is referred to as a “periphrastic construction.”

The significance of this is its emphatic referral to an ongoing, continuous, durative action in the strongest possible manner. These practices were the hallmark and probably the basis of the character and behavior of the early Church. What flows out in the lives described in Acts 2:43-47, is the result of what one has termed the “Church’s duties.” These outcomes would be the fulfillment of the dreams of any modern discipleship director of youth or adults.

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Of interest in Luke’s description is the precise meaning of each of the terms in Acts 2:42 of these practices, the various interpretational nuances of each, and their application to any culture or demographic.

Unique in this listing of practices is the use with each of the article. These are not simply general or generic practices, but definitive ones consisting of certain necessary inclusions and expectations of practice.

The Apostles’ teaching was exclusively what Jesus had entrusted them with and commanded that they teach all His disciples (Matt 28:20). The fellowship was, more than just socialization, the intimate sharing of every possession with each other. The breaking of bread, while including shared meals, likely included the Eucharist, as well (1Cor 11:23-24). The prayers may also have been, more than extemporaneous, but prescribed.

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This biblical study was an examination of an actual historic account of the birth of the church that Luke recorded as inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is only a microcosmic portrayal of the possibilities of God's sovereign grace acting upon a group of persons to make them aware of their spiritual need of freedom from the guilt and power of sin, the sufficiency of God's salvation through Jesus, His Son, to liberate and transform humanity through the agency and power of the Holy Spirit, and the psychological and sociological reformulation that it occurred on this Day of Pentecost. Although this study was centered in Acts 2, similar practices and outcomes occur elsewhere in the book of Acts. As has been suggested, a review of church history indicates that similar incursions of the Holy Spirit have produced very similar results in the life of the church and the surrounding culture. The renewing results of the purification of the church's life together and the restored power for its mission has often resulted, as in this passage, in the Lord adding to the church such as are being saved.

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Findings Of The Data

This study was birthed in observation of the hemorrhagic departure of teenagers and college-age young persons from the church, in many cases the very ones in which they had been raised. Aware of this alarming trend, the purpose of this study was, in part, to understand the present American cultural context of preteenagers, the equipping they are being supplied to prepare them for life and the preparation of a plan to comprehensively assist and remedy the equipping Millennial youth are receiving to insure their continuance in the faith and God's Church.

A survey was used to discover how a small but representative section of the American evangelical church is engaged with preteenagers. From these results and with both Biblical examples and instructions with the current field literature in view, the intended outcome was to provide a plan as to how to prepare the preteenager to enter young adulthood while maintaining a vital relationship to Christ and His church.

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In response to the four empirical research questions, first, a comprehensive listing of unique factors present in the lives of Millennials that no previous generation share with them, and in some cases, in any remotely similar genre, were provided.

This all pointed to a basis for the claim that older generations don't understand and must become familiar and sympathetic to Millennials if successful bridging into their lives be made. Without such bridging, sharing of multigenerational communication and exchange of wisdom will not occur. When one remembers Paul's path to connecting to others different from him: "I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22 NAU).

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To the second research question "What are the characteristics of millennials that contribute to their leaving the church?" one finds Millennial characteristics that contributed their to leaving the faith . When examining the highest percentage of responses, reasons for youth leaving seems to emerge. Self-image concerns, shyness, and uncertainty (11.43 percent), a craving of attention, love, and affirmation (7.35 percent), and being self-conscious, lacking self-esteem (4.49 percent) point to a need for preteenagers to be aware of their identity in Christ. An inward focus seems to be the basis of this latter grouping of foci, rather than an outward one. Largely missing is an intentional setting one's mind on and seeking what is above [Col 3:1-3] and looking to the interests of other persons [Phil 2:4] more than one's own). This empirical data, in every way, completely agree with the portrayal of Millennials in the review of Literature.

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The survey data also agreed with findings in the review of literature regarding the percentages of youth who, though raised in the church, depart and how few return. Factors impacting both the leaving and remaining of youth were reported, needing to be considered in view of the plan suggested here. Factors about youth leaving were seen to be primarily influenced by the pervading world culture outside of the church. Common reasons for youth remaining in church included “participative” activities (19.82%), “compassionate ministry” (8.11 %), while “meaningful adult interactions” (8.56%) and “discipleship” (4.95%) were listed only in the minority of responses. This last was in keeping with what was observed often in the review of literature. e.g by Ham, Beemer, and Hillard in *Already Gone*.

Slide 24

The fourth research question, “How do these factors/values compare to what God’s Word describes as normative?” was answered, first, with a careful exegetical examination of Luke’s record of the practices and behavioral outcomes of the infant Church in Acts 2:42-47.

In light of the evaluation of the specific survey responses and the findings of the review of literature as to what larger research found to be characteristic and effective in ministry to Millennials with, a comparison was then made. This comparison differentiated between how research reveals ministry to Millennial youth is actually being done and its outcomes over against what the biblical narrative characterized as being practiced by the Spirit-led Church in its opening days.

Slide 25

Findings Summary

The departure of youth from both the Lord Jesus Christ and the local arm of His church in which these young ones were often raised gives reason for exploring the factors contributing to this vast departure. This departure necessitates a ministry plan that looks to God's Word for necessary elements that must exist across church programming to prepare youth adequately to become adults who of necessity are immersed in the surrounding world culture but successfully maintaining a vibrant connection to the Savior and a Biblical worldview that formulates their perspectives and values and shapes their behaviors.

Slide 26

A PLAN OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION FOR THE MILLENNIALS AND BEYOND IN THE MIDWEST WESLEYAN CHURCH

In view of both the current survey results and many cited sources reviewed, Christian education programming across the evangelical spectrum is clearly indicated as not being sufficient to prepare preteenagers and teenagers spiritually to live in a world that is no friend to grace, as Peter termed it, "A wicked and perverse generation."

Even the majority of youth who have attended traditional Christian education programs have been shown to have values (forming the basis of their lifestyles) that are very much in keeping with the prevailing culture and starkly in contradiction to and ignorant of God's revealed description of normalcy throughout the biblical Canon in nearly every category of life.

Slide 27

The effects, characteristics, and definition of those who have left the church have already been described. The religion that believes and practices many of the discussed values often seen in many evangelical adolescents was identified nearly forty years ago by Christian Smith and associated researchers. Dr. Albert Mohler writes about a forty-year-old construct whose effects have infiltrated the American Evangelical Church and largely supplanted the pure Gospel, perhaps being an example of what Paul wrote to the Galatians as “another Gospel” (Gal 1:6). This heresy is termed “Christian Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” (see Appendix 6). He claims that research shows that it is this view of reality, rather than a biblical one, that most modern adolescents, including those in the church, have come to hold. It is an intentional effort to replace this cultural distortion of the real gospel that necessitates a return to the what was first entrusted to the Apostles.

Slide 28

Any ministry plan that would seek to reverse this trend must begin early to connect or reconnect youth to God, to a knowledge and practice of His Word, in the company of other like-minded believers, in corporate worship and prayer. No better place to begin this plan exists than beginning with the Great Commission of Jesus, who near the end of His Incarnation, tasked His Apostles to the making and nurturing of disciples. Such a plan need not be a packaged checklist or a list of formulaic steps but must seek to return deliberately to the genres outlined in the Bible, accomplishing the essential principles of these four examined elements creatively across any preteenager-directed activities.

The commission to the Apostles to “make disciples” (Matt 28:19-20) is explained by Jesus to Peter as “feeding” and “tending,” as a shepherd to Christ’s flock so that they would thrive (John 21:12-16).

Slide 29

This commission to make disciples of all persons regardless of race, or social class, or gender, or age, or culture was begun in the pouring out of the Spirit on the first Day of Pentecost following the ascension of the Lord Jesus. Following the Holy Spirit's baptism of those in the upper room (Acts 2:1-4), and the proclamation of the crucifixion and resurrection of the Messiah Jesus by Peter to the Jerusalem crowd (Acts 2:15-40), it has been seen how, before church infrastructure was established, those who chose to believe were guided by the Holy Spirit to first repent of their sins, be baptized in Jesus Christ, and then to begin to intentionally, continue engage in those practices that God blessed to the personal and corporate spiritual and numerical growth of the infant Church.

Slide 30

A Ministry Plan of the Care and Nurturing of Young Disciples

Before focusing on the four key practices listed in Acts 2:42 that were instigated by the Holy Spirit (primarily through the Apostles) for the spiritual development of new Christian disciples, some presuppositions need to be made evident. These biblical assumptions include, first, a conviction that It was God's choice to use a "divine accommodation" to reveal Himself and the nature reality in language ("words") that humanity could understand. It was this revelation of what humanity would have never concluded (or even guessed) of His love and purpose to live in intimate fellowship with persons that Millennials, and all people, need to understand if life would have meaning and each one would perceive how their own identity is derived from their relationship with their Creator and Savior.

Slide 31

There are Group Assumptions that exist. From the very first, and also throughout the remainder of Acts and the rest of the New Testament, it is observed that the nurturing and development of disciples is a corporate activity. The pronoun in Acts 2:42 translates “they were,” as including the entire company of new believers. Unknown to many modern English speakers, the use of the pronoun *you* in the New Testament, in absolute and emphatic uses but also in verbal constructions, is predominantly plural, not individual.

The size of the groups of those who practice the four examined activities were, by modern measure, small, rarely more than 20 persons. The size of the groups of those who practice the four examined activities must include small gatherings if participation seen in Acts and positively noted in research be achieved.

Slide 32

There are Commitment Assumptions in the making of disciples. The periphrastic construction viewed in biblical research describes the heart motive and resultant behavioral habits or patterns in which they were intentionally and persistently engaged, even daily (Acts 2:46). The four proposed habits of spiritual development presented by Luke produced lasting effects in disciples but only as they were so enduringly practiced.

The frequent New Testament call is to perseverance and endurance, “continuing in the faith, not moved from the hope of the Gospel” (Col 1:23; Gal 3:1–3), and running the race to the finish line. Any ministry plan must contain some intentionally ordered regimens that involve careful organization, loving oversight (i.e., coaching) by those persons of integrity that young people trust, and mutual group accountability, all to ensure a faithful running of the race.

Slide 33

There are Mentoring Assumptions. While the content of the Apostles' teaching has been seen to be Jesus' teaching, the genitive in Acts 2:42, in addition to meaning *the teaching that belonged to the Apostles* might also be seen as *the teaching whose source (ablative) was the Apostles*. As already noted, no written New Testament existed at this time; the devotion to the Apostles' teaching was in hearing and obeying what was proclaimed vocally at this point in the history of the church. Jesus made it plain that the commission to the Apostles included shepherding or tending the flock which is defined by Freiberg "metaphorically, of [providing] administrative and protective activity in relation to a community of believers; guide, care for, look after; with emphasis on the governing aspects of administration rule." Throughout the Bible, the equipping of youth in preparation for adulthood, mentors conduct part of the ministry of teaching, including parents or other respected nonfamily adult believers. Mentoring is needed in the spiritual formation of any believer.

Slide 34

Already described has been the Millennials ideal of a leader/mentor as someone of "integrity, transparency, and humility." The selection of a mentor for any youth group must be a Spirit-led decision and be based on the observation of church leadership of those mature believers who seem already to show an interest or otherwise show a propensity towards youth despite the differences between the background of the mentor candidate and the millennial group at hand.

In the absence of such a person, the intentional recruitment of a person whom leadership believes has the forbearing spirit necessary to interact with those different from her or him (much like a missionary candidate) might be taught and read some of the literature reviewed to acquaint that one with the cultural mores of this generational cohort. This person is as they are because of their own personal relationship with Jesus and their genuineness, openness, and Christlike spirit will be as detectable and attractive to Millennial youth as the lack of these.

Slide 35

There are Assumptions of Motivation. Lest a charge of a type of asceticism, legalism, or moralism be levied against what the early church committed itself to doing or what this ministry plan seeks to encourage, the context supplies the origin of and empowerment for this employed pattern in the infant church as being the Holy Spirit. The Spirit anointed Peter's message (Acts 2:16–26), convicted sinners (Acts 2:37), and brought believers to Christ in repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38–41). Inferentially, the Holy Spirit also directed and maintained the life of the church with these four practices.

The presence of the Holy Spirit prompting, energizing, and using such practices to His glory and the expansion of God's kingdom is both necessary and anticipated because all of this activity contributes to a situation where God accomplishes His will of making disciples. Not a single thing that God enjoins upon His people that can be accomplished in the flesh, the efforts of humanity apart from God.

Slide 36

The plan offered in this project is based on the inclusion of intentional, habitual practices of the Spirit-led early church. It attempts to provide a direct solution to the problem of Millennial youth departing the Church. This scheme is aimed at discipling, shepherding those that still remain in the Church, even prior to entering the teenage years. Admittedly, nothing novel or innovative in this plan has been offered; the plan is primarily based on a New Testament passage describing the effects of God's Spirit working among first generation Christian believers, viewed against the backdrop of the redemptive history of God's reconciliation of the human race back to Himself. Assumed in view of the biblical Canon and the teaching of Christ, is the immutable loving character of God, His faithful dealings with humankind, and His proclivity to initiate and maintain communication with sinful persons with an aim to return them to Himself. If those practices that God's Spirit has used to make disciples of Jesus Christ repeatedly in the past were successful, it would seem that the principled practice of those in any cultural context at any time would continue to be effective in making disciples of Christ.

IRB APPROVAL

Consent Form

Saving the Sheep, Preserving the Fruit:
A Plan of Christian Education for the Pre-Teen Millennials and Beyond in the Midwest
Wesleyan Church

Keith J. Stuebaker

Liberty University Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary

You are invited to be part of a research study of Christian education provisions for pre-teens. You were selected as a possible participant because of your position of leadership in a Midwest Wesleyan local church. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Keith J. Stuebaker, a doctoral candidate in the Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to determine the variety of methods used to develop and establish faith in Christ in pre-teenagers.

Procedures:

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

1. Review the included cover letter, which assures you of the permission of your district's Superintendent to participate.
2. Go online to the indicated website survey to complete the brief survey.
3. Respond to the multiple choice questions by selecting a "radio button."
4. Respond to other questions with a short entry into the text box associated with the question.
5. Log out of the survey when completed.
6. The time to complete this survey should be 10-20 minutes.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The risks are minimal in participating in this study, no more than you would encounter in everyday life.

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit but this study may present an opportunity to observe what your local church is doing in observing how your pre-teens are interacting with the Word and people of God. While there is no effort to instruct in this survey, an unavoidable benefit will be the consideration and deepening understanding of how the Church is preparing them to mature in their faith in preparation for life ahead in relation to Him and His Church.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your continued service to the Wesleyan Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Keith J. Studebaker. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. Dr. Michael Whittington, my thesis mentor, can be contacted at [REDACTED].

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 Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [REDACTED].

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 20, 2015

Keith Studebaker

IRB Exemption 2114.042015: Saving the Sheep, Preserving the Fruit: A Plan of Christian Education for the Pre-Teen Millennials and Beyond in the Midwest Wesleyan Church

Dear Keith,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:

(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

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