ABSTRACT

VISIBLE PRACTICES OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

IN ONLINE VIDEO SMALL GROUPS

by

Joel Peter Jupp

Online education and online video have both drastically increased in the 21st century, but previous research has not fully explored how video small groups might develop community in Christian education. For that reason, starting with relevant literature, then expanding through inductive coding of videos, this study determined which community practices were visible in video small groups in online Bible classes at Moody Bible Institute. Additional data was also gathered to determine the participants' experience of Christian community in the small groups. The dissertation concludes with suggestions for future research in Christian education and other ministry contexts.

The purpose of this project was to determine the effectiveness of asynchronous, interpersonal videos within small groups for cultivating Christian community in four online undergraduate classes — specifically, would Christian community be present in such groups, and if so, which community practices would be visible? Participants included students enrolled in online studies at Moody Bible Institute. In total, 57 students participated in the video small groups — with 48 analyzed videos, as well as pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, follow-up interviews, and participant observation used for data gathering.

This research confirmed that Christian community occurred in the asynchronous video small groups — with certain practices (e.g., self-expression, discipleship, and

gratitude) being more visible than others (e.g., humility and love). All respondents believed in the possibility of online Christian community; the final videos displayed 15 community practices of Christian community; nearly all (32 of 35) felt that the videos contributed towards online community; and most (33 of 35) expressed willingness to use video in future courses.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled:

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

they enabled and encouraged me to pursue a doctoral degree. In finishing this research, I share my success with them, as they were my motivation through every class, every chapter, and every deadline.

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CHAPTER 1

NATURE OF THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter introduces the implementation of video-based small groups in the context of Christian education. Beginning with a personal introduction, the chapter outlines why online small groups became a topic of conversation in my local context and why the effectiveness of such groups is worth researching. This chapter introduces the central question of this project: Can video-based small groups be used to improve Christian community in an online Bible course, and if so, in what ways?

Autobiographical Introduction

Several years ago, a church leader approached me to propose the start of video-based small groups. He recognized that distance and busyness prevented certain individuals in the congregation from meeting in the same physical space, and video sharing was his proposal. Because a number of people in the church were comfortable using video tools, his idea involved gathering online to study the Bible, using video as a tool to help in this process. In the years that have passed since that initial conversation, a number of additional tools (e.g., Periscope, Video Everywhere, Google Hangouts, Facebook Live, etc.) have made online video groups an increasingly feasible idea. In light of that initial conversation, I have often asked myself: Are video-based small groups a valid way of establishing a community to learn about the Bible? Is there a legitimate sense of community within those groups, or if not, what is missing from the groups that will need to be complemented with other ministry efforts?

Additionally, since 2013, I have taught courses for Moody Bible Institute, and one of the problems facing us involves the development of Christian community and the retention of students. With Christian men and women participating from around the world, the sense of community is sometimes lacking due to the lack of authentic, personal engagement. For example, "online prayer forums" remain empty, with little to no participation — whereas in any other context, a Bible teacher would likely want to include prayer and personal sharing when studying the Bible. To address this problem, I have often wondered if video-based small groups would help develop certain aspects of Christian community — and if so, how effective would those video groups be?

While teaching for Moody Bible Institute and Lancaster Bible College, I invited students to upload videos in a forum to introduce themselves to the class. To my surprise, however, I sensed awkwardness and hesitation. One student mentioned that he was comfortable "hiding behind words" and did not want to participate, but he said that he eventually realized that video would be a good idea. Occasions such as this illustrate that in any ministry context, it is important to study which approaches benefit and detract from building community. The same is true in an online setting. Hesitation and limited participation prevent the formation of community, so it is worth exploring how and why students develop community online.

This problem was accentuated by an email that a student named Chad sent to me:

I thought it was a fantastic idea and a great way for other students to interact with each via video. Since we do not have any real classroom time together, I thought the videos would be a good way to build more of a connection with our classmates. However, it seems people don't want to take the time to figure out

how to do a video. It's discouraging because we are in the 21st century and that is very simple technology that anyone should be able to figure out in this day. Being that this course is about Christianity in today's culture, it only makes logical sense that classmates should be able to participate in a 21st century way. If they don't learn now, when will they? I'm [sic] apologize if I seem irritated, but this was my first time making a video and I had no idea how to do it, but I took the time to learn how because I thought it was important and I was looking forward to meeting other classmates via video.

For me, this conversation raised important questions for me: What prevents Christian students who are studying online from wanting to connect with one another? For Christian colleges, how can instructors foster a greater sense of Christian community amongst distant education students? Could video-based small groups be used in a way to encourage fellowship and foster Christian development?

My interest in the topic also relates to the discipleship of underprivileged church leaders – particularly those in distant areas who are unable to attend Bible college or seminary. Online education provides a more affordable way for them to take Bible courses, but in my perspective, these leaders should not learn in an individualistic manner, but in Christian community with fellow brothers and sisters. My hope is that this research contributes towards the development of how online courses are structured so that further steps can be taken to foster Christian community in these educational settings. In addition, my conviction is that the results of this research will also shed light on related ministry questions — such as the effectiveness of satellite video preaching, the usefulness of video-based small group curriculum, and the biblical requirements of small group

community — questions that will not be fully answered here but could lead toward

further research.

Statement of the Problem

Should Christians embrace video-based small groups as a legitimate means of

learning together? As the statistics in the next paragraph demonstrate, an increasing

amount of education is taking place online — which explains why Christian colleges and

churches are using these means for instruction and discipleship (e.g., Liberty University,

Moody Bible Institute, Judson University, Lancaster Bible College, etc.). However, the

popularity of a method does not speak to whether or not it is effective; for example, we

might *assume* that video-based small groups would improve a sense of community, but

the hindrances of fear, uncertainty, awkwardness, technological limitations, asynchrony,

and so forth, require that any such method be proven as legitimate and effective.

Therefore, prior to implementing video-based small groups, it must be demonstrated

(rather than assumed) that online groups provide a true sense of Christian community for

growth and learning. Furthermore, for Christian educators, it must be proven that there is

not merely a general sense of social presence (as is found in any online environment), but

a uniquely *Christian* social presence. As Vanier notes, Jesus invites his followers to

practice community in a "special way" (Vanier "Community" 11).

Recent figures have shown that more than 5 million people and that more than

25% of current students participate in distance courses (D. Smith). Of this number, more

than 18% (727,371 individuals) at private colleges were in enrolled in distance courses

("Fast Facts"). Furthermore, reflecting the demand to learn online, more than 70% of

public degree-granting institutions offer online courses (Allen and Seaman 13). In fact,

only 14% of traditional students live on-campus and attend full-time, since a growing number of people are learning online ("Keeping Pace"). Further, in the past two decades, corporations using online learning have increased by more than 70% (Gutierrez). The movement towards online education means that 70.8% of universities see "online learning as critical to their long-term strategy," which is an increase from 48.8% in 2002 (Allen and Seaman 8). Collectively, the above statistics reflect the overall boom of online learning and suggests the importance of further research in this area.

As mentioned, the problem concerns whether or not Christian community can indeed be developed in such an atmosphere. In particular, can groups develop a sense of Christians community using online video? This study explores examine whether or not video-based small groups develop a sense of Christian community, and if so, how effectively so? Of particular concern is how these small groups develop the sense of Christian community (or a uniquely *Christian* social presence) in an online course — to see if such interactions might help further develop students in a holistic manner, so they grow not only individually, but communally during online courses.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to determine the effectiveness of interpersonal videos within small groups for cultivating Christian community in online Bible classes at Moody Bible Institute.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: Prior to the small groups, what do participants report as their expectations of the small group experience?

Research Question 2: In the small groups, which practices of Christian community are observable (i.e., present)?

Research Question 3: In the small groups, which practices of Christian community are *not* observable (i.e., absent)?

Research Question 4: Do participants report a sense of being in Christian community when describing their small group experience?

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Rationale for the Project

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Practical/Experiential

Online education has grown in popularity over the past decade. Each year, more than 5.5 million students in the United States took an online course, and the number of online students continues to grow year after year (Lowe, et al. 42; D. Smith). In 2016, more than a quarter of students (28%) were taking an online course (D. Smith). The Distance Education and Training Council reports that in this decade, distance education has been growing by 30% every year (Mount 32). Because online education provides an opportunity to reach more students (e.g., distant, non-traditional, and economically limited students), it is worth further study, particularly what makes online education useful and effective.

Previous research — such as Jackson's study of over 400 college students (Jackson ii) and Leahy's study of 100 faculty (Leahy 85) — has indicated the positive effect of video upon students in online courses. Jackson and Leahy demonstrate that videos contribute towards student engagement. Yet, in my personal experience at three evangelical schools (Moody Bible Institute, Judson University and Lancaster Bible College), videos were used for instructor lectures, but videos were rarely used amongst

students. Nowadays, it is common knowledge that instructor videos are beneficial, but in comparison, the benefit of interpersonal videos can sometimes be overlooked.

The rationale of this study, therefore, is to explore the effectiveness of interpersonal videos to develop Christian community within an online Bible course. Previous studies have examined the influence of video in education, but few studies have specifically examined visual technology in online Christian education. This lack of specifically Christian research should matter to Christian educators because pedagogy is not merely adoption in a pragmatic sense, but the practice of a particular worldview. Vanier notes that "certain conditions" are necessary for community life (Vanier "Community" 12), so it is worth investigating if interpersonal videos would be one of those conditions in an online setting. Thus, this study explores which aspects of video-based small groups are most effective for developing Christian community, so that Christian leaders, teachers, and instructional designers can better plan courses in a Christian educational context.

For the development of Christian community in an online Bible course, this study explores the benefits and deficits of visual technology, particularly interpersonal video in an online small group of students. As instructors become increasingly more comfortable with online education (Allen and Seaman 9), it is important to reevaluate how courses are designed. Unlike the early days, many courses now include video lectures by professors for the introduction or dissemination of information. However, few courses require interaction between students with video. This study explores how such peer-to-peer videos would influence students.

Biblical/Theological

Christian education is founded upon a Christian worldview, and for that reason, any study of Christian education must be grounded upon a solid theological foundation. In light of the Great Commandment (Mt. 22:37), this study is based upon the theological truth that human beings are not one-dimensional, but multifaceted in nature. God cares how individuals utilize their heart, mind, soul, and strength. Applying this biblical truth, then, Christian educators are thus compelled to not only address the mind, but the entire person.

This study works with the Christian understanding that intellect does not stand alone from the other aspects of the human person, but that our entire being influences the educational process. John Wesley, for example, viewed religion and education as inseparable (Maddix "Wesley" 82). Or as Schirrmacher states, "In the Bible, knowledge is always both holistic and relational" (Schirrmacher 102). Thus, from a Christian worldview, a person does not learn best as a silo (e.g., separated from the church), but within the context of relational community (e.g., within a church). Bonhoeffer, for instance, points out that the Christian "belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life" but in the midst of others (Bonhoeffer loc. 35). Keeping this in mind, this study explores if and how interpersonal videos develop a greater sense of community in an online classroom, so that students can experience a greater sense of Christian community.

Christians have researched online Christian community to some degree. In 2011, J.T. Mullins, for example, explored the nature of biblical community in the context of an online church. His research examined Christian aspects of community, such as attendance, giving, worship, evangelism, serving, congregational care, and the practice of

ordinances. While generally positive, Mullins observed a lack of participation from those using online church for the sake of convenience (Mullins 80). Mullins' study, however, limited the means of fellowship to live chat (which is text-based) and live video conferencing (Mullins 131-132). This study seeks to build upon Mullins' research to explore how asynchronous video in a small group context would encourage greater Christian community.

Marianne Evans Mount has written on the topic of learning, spiritual development, and Christian community in online settings. Mount's study primarily focuses on "the essence of text in online communication" and asks what it means "to be present without one's body in the online community" (Mount 35-36). Online education continues to develop, however, and is no longer limited in to text. Online education can include not only *more* than text, but can include a student's body, through the visual technology of interpersonal videos. As Mount states, the reality is that "very little research exists that explores the dimension of faith and presence in an online learning community," and this is especially the case with "non-text-based media" or visual technology (Mount 278). Therefore, this study explores how asynchronous, interpersonal videos in a small group context fosters Christian community (or in Mount's words, "faith and presence") in an online Bible course.

Definitions of Key Terms

Interpersonal videos. These videos are peer-to-peer videos in which students in the class engage with one another. The term "interpersonal" is used because these videos emphasize personal sharing and engagement. In other words, these videos were not

designed to be information-based student presentations, but for the purpose of community-focused student interactions.

Christian community. For the purpose of this research, Christian community is narrowly defined in terms of New Testament descriptions and teachings on Christian community. A healthy Christian community exhibits a wide range of qualities, including the following: unity, peace, worship, ethics, witness, obedience, order, prophesy, correction, Christ-centeredness, apostleship, diversity, experience, freedom, transformation, cultural integration, sharing, transcendence, hope, and pilgrimage (Wall 1099-1110).

Distance. Online distance education depends upon defining "distance" properly. As Casey points out, "The far is not the distant… Things remote in space and time can enter our near sphere, most notably through technological intermediaries" (Casey 60). So with online interactions, distance is not a matter of physical space, but of personal presence. Online, the degree of distance is best thought of in terms of relationship: to what degree can others interact with my thought and/or action? Is the relationship more active or more passive?

Distance should not be understood in terms of either-or, but more-or-less. As Moore explains: "Teaching-learning programs are not dichotomously either 'distance' or 'not distance', but they have 'more distance' or 'less distance.' One has more dialogue than another and less structure than another, allowing greater learner autonomy than another" (M. Moore 69). Thus, distance education needs to be conceptualized in ways other than the usual sense of nearness, which often means physical proximity, and should be thought of in terms of a spectrum of relational nearness.

Social presence. In an online setting, social presence refers to "the ability of learners to project their personal characteristics" into the community as holistic or "real" people (Maddix *Best Practices* 109). Without physical presence or non-verbal cues, instructors and students must find a way to present themselves, and social presence refers to this activity. Along with several other categorical definitions (Sung & Mayer 1739-1740), previous researchers have noted that social presence includes things such as the threefold constructs of "affective expression, open communication, and group cohesion" (Griffiths "Potential" 17) or the five components of "social respect…social sharing…open mind…social identity…and intimacy" (Sung & Mayer 1738). In other words, social presence is the degree of "projection of personality and emotion" in an educational setting (Griffiths *Improving* 26). Without social presence, there is a lack of engagement or the lack of ability to present one's self to the community. With a good/strong sense of social presence, students are able to feel authentic as themselves and perceive that they are accurately presenting themselves to others — since social presence involves the subjective feeling of being connected (Sung 1739), knowing and being known within the community.

Synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous educational tools allow for students to interact in real-time at the same geographical or virtual space. The learning occurs within a community that is "meeting," even if that does not involve face-to-face interaction. The defining feature of synchronous education is the timing — the real-time interaction between students. Asynchronous education, on the other hand, allows for interactions that are not in real-time, but impersonate in a sense real-time. Using a metaphor, asynchrony can be viewed as a community bulletin board, allowing for

individuals to interact with one another, but not necessarily hear or see one another in real-time.

Synchrony describes what happens in real-time, while asynchrony describes what does not take place in real-time. Traditional classrooms require synchrony (everyone attending at the same time), while online courses provide a way for students to interact without meeting at exactly the same moment in time. In particular, it should be noted that video can be used both ways — either synchronously or asynchronously. Examples of synchronous video would include Skype, Google Hangouts, Adobe Connect or other video conferencing platforms. Examples of asynchronous video would include recorded or hosted videos that can be viewed at any time.

Technology. Technology can be defined in both an instrumental and essential sense. There is both a task that is completed and an effect is enacted. A garden till works the ground, but it also works us. A car transports us, but also distances us. A computer expedites, but also frustrates. Any definition of technology should include both the "what" of instrumentation and the "what" of essence.

Technology, as Heidegger defines it, is "a contrivance, or, in Latin, an *instrumentum"* (Heidegger 5). Technology comes about when men and women create new tools (ranging from garden tills to computer processors) to accomplish a task. As implied by its Greek root (*technē)*, technology involves created tools for craft or work (Bauer 1001). The goal of technology is to aid users in accomplishing a desired end. Technologies serve as tools to make certain tasks easier or possible. Instructors are constantly making choices about what tools to use in order to make their task easier or possible.

Of course, the use of technology is not neutral — users are motivated towards certain ends — but "technology" is neutral, general, broad, and far-encompassing. For example, technology includes turbines, generators, airplanes, radar stations, hydroelectric plants, and so forth (Heidegger 5). In an educational context, technology can range from "chalk" to a "computer" (Hickey 18).

But "merely" having an instrumental definition is "unteneable" (Heidegger 21), which leads us to the second part of the definition — its essential sense. Technology is a way of "orderly revealing" what was previously hidden (Heidegger 19). When technology is employed, we gain a new sense of what was always possible, but not comprehendible. A microwave, for example, reveals that waves can heat food quickly, but it also reveals some truths about us as human beings. Technology reveals what was previously hidden or impossible. Thus, Heidegger states that "the essence of modern technology lies in Enframing" reality (Heidegger 23).

Visual technology. Visual technology can be defined as technological communication that utilizes the visual sense. These technologies include things like video recordings, streaming video and web conferencing, and PowerPoint and Keynote presentations. Newer expressions include things like Vine, which allow students to record, upload, and share video within a matter of seconds. Visual technology can be shared and responded to in a variety of ways, including embedded video posts and social media sharing. Whereas in the past, visual technology might be limited to a particular physical location (such as a VHS tape in a classroom), digital video can be viewed in all kinds of places and on all kinds of devices (for example, a Facebook app on a phone, a

Twitter feed on an iPad, or a website on a laptop). Nowadays, visual technology is much more flexible and fluid than in the past.

Delimitations

Many tributaries lead up to what is known as distance education, online education, and theological education, so when examining online Christian education, it is important to clarify what this study did and did not examine. To begin with, this study did not examine hybrid or partial residency courses. These courses utilize some online components and some in-person interaction. While hybrid courses are possible at some schools (for example, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary or Asbury Theological Seminary), it is not feasible for every school or every student. The ability to meet in-person adds a unique relational dimension that online-only students do not experience. For that reason, this study will focus on online-only distance education.

Second, this study will not examine all of online education. Broadly speaking, online education includes a wide variety of approaches, including for-profit (e.g., ITT Tech), non-institutional (e.g., Lynda, Udemy, MasterClass, MinistryCoach.tv), public universities, and so forth. Each of these approaches are driven by different motives and philosophies. For that reason, this study will focus only on online *Christian* education – particularly, online Bible classes at a Christian college.

Furthermore, "Christian" can be a broad term, so it is necessary to limit the focus. It would be impossible to study all of Christian education or all Christian theological traditions in one study. For that reason, this study will narrowly focus on Moody Bible Institute (MBI), an evangelical institution with a long tradition of teaching students who are unable to attend traditional classes.

Known in 1901 as the Moody Correspondence School, Moody's distance education program aimed to "benefit of those of both sexes who cannot, for financial or other reasons, attend the Institute personally. The purpose is to give them, as far as possible, all the advantages of the systematic methods of study pursued here" ("History of Moody Bible Institute"). Now that we are in the digital age, it is important for MBI to continue to reevaluate what is meant by "as far as possible" and "all the advantages." This project will explore whether video-based small groups might contribute to the ministry of Moody Bible Institute — particularly, whether these small groups develop a greater sense of Christian community in an online Bible class.

Review of Relevant Literature

Research for this study included resources in the following subject areas: (1) cultural analysis, (2) Christian philosophy of education, and (3) educational research. First, resources offering cultural analysis, such as Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death* and Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, provided a broad context for American education and visual technology. Now considered to be classics, Postman's and McLuhan's works are well known in educational studies, and in addition to providing the impetus for my study, their work summarizes some of the concerns that educators need to be aware of in the 21st century. Without a broad historical-cultural perspective, it would be difficult to understand how the narrow issue of peer-to-peer video fits within the overall framework of online Christian education.

Secondly, philosophy of education has a direct impact upon this study, so some of the literature included texts on the topic of Christian philosophy of education. Most helpful in this regard was *Best Practices of Online Education: A Guide for Christian*

Higher Education, which was edited by Mark Maddix, James R. Estep, and Mary E.
Lowe. This textbook collected articles from some of the best current thinkers in Christian
education and applied a Christian worldview to online education. The *Best Practices of
Online Education* book summarized what many leading Christian institutions are doing to
engage students, and it also provided an awareness of how asynchronous peer-to-peer
video has been under-utilized.

Thirdly, current educational research was reviewed — particularly as it relates to
asynchronous video, social presence in online classrooms, and peer-to-peer video. Many
journal articles were consulted for this aspect of the literature review, and a number of
current studies are discussed in depth in chapter two. At this point, it is worth noting that
Marianne Evans Mount's *Presence in Distance: The Lived Experience of Adult Faith
Formation in an Online Learning Community* was helpful at the beginning of this study.
Mount shares a concern for holistic Christian formation in an online context, and her
dissertation provided inspiration for this study — i.e., not merely an examination of
intellectual knowledge, but of social presence.

Research Methodology

The research methods included three tools to assess the effectiveness of
interpersonal videos within small groups for cultivating Christian community in four
online undergraduate classes (Reading the New Testament and The New Testament and
Theology) at Moody Bible Institute, with the same research methods were used in each of
the classes. To accomplish this, research data was gathered from the participants
(students) and the inside observer (researcher). Students received an online questionnaire
at the beginning of the small group experience, as well as an online questionnaire at the

conclusion of the small group experience. The researcher observed the content of all of the video conversations, and in the final videos, the same prompt was used in every class (Appendix F). The researcher analyzed each of these final videos and coded visible practices to determine in which ways those conversations did and did not demonstrate Christian community.

Type of Research

This mixed methods study, which used qualitative methods, explored if and how students experienced Christian community through interpersonal videos in a small group in an online Bible course.

To answer research question one (regarding student expectations), questionnaires were distributed to students at the start of each class, prior to the intervention. These were completed before week five, but not looked at by the instructor until final grades were submitted.

To answer research questions two and three (regarding observable and non-observable practices of Christian community), controlled observation of student participation, conducted by the part of the researcher, occurred in the online Bible class. Conversations in the final videos were coded to observe which practices were present – that is, according to visible practices of Christian community.

To answer research question four (regarding student experience of Christian community), at the conclusion of the eight-week course, post-intervention questionnaires were distributed to students to study their experience in the video small groups. Additionally, follow-up interviews with participants were conducted to gather additional details from questionnaire responses that needed additional clarity.

Participants

      The participants of this study included a collection of students of 68 students at Moody Bible Institute – 50 in Reading the New Testament (3 sections) and 18 in New Testament and Theology (1 section). Most of these students were freshman (43 of 68), with limited experience in online education. For the majority of students, it was their first or second semester taking online classes.

      Students at Moody Bible Institute were selected for several reasons. First, the researcher designed the courses back in 2015 for Moody Bible Institute as a subject matter expert, which allowed me to adjust the course and participate in course evaluation. (The video small groups were not part of the original course design but were added as a part of this research.) This allowed the researcher to integrate interpersonal videos without drastically altering an existing course. Second, participants were chosen from a Christian college because Christian colleges desire to develop both Christian character and Christian community; in light of this desire, this study examined if and how video-based small groups developed Christian community within the context of an online Bible course.

      A pre-intervention, researcher-designed, online questionnaire was distributed prior to the invention. This questionnaire was distributed using SurveyMonkey. These questions were designed to analyze previous experience and current expectations of participants. This pre-intervention questionnaire reflected student perspectives prior to participating in the small groups, in order to compare their responses to the post-intervention questionnaire.

During the intervention, the researcher conducted participant observation, where the research used controlled observation of student conversations. Observation coded the content of conversations, as students initiate and participate in conversation; this coding involved labelling the content of the conversation according to pre-determined marks of Christian community (which is defined in the "Definition of Key Terms" in Chapter 1). These online discussions were monitored and analyzed upon the conclusion of the course. This qualitative analysis will rate all posts according to a scale to see which aspects of distinctively Christian community are present and absent within the small groups.

At the conclusion of the research, a post-intervention online questionnaire was distributed to see how the intervention did or did not fulfill student expectations. This questionnaire was distributed using SurveyMonkey. This research method explored whether participants fulfilled or changed their expectations over the course of eight weeks. This research method was used in order to explore what small group participants reported about their experience of Christian community.

Data Analysis

To analyze the collected data, a number of steps were taken. First, the pre-intervention questionnaires were reviewed after the conclusion of the course; responses were tallied for each question, and the student responses were read to find any recurring themes and/or unique responses. Second, the instructor coded and analyzed visible observations of Christian community the final videos (in week 8) of the online course; these (instances) were inductively organized into categories so that each node (instance) could be tallied. Third, the post-intervention questionnaires were organized, tallied, and

analyzed, with the goal to find any themes that stood out in the responses. Fourth, follow-up interviews were used to clarify any vague or confusing student responses.

Generalizability

This study is most directly applicable to courses at Moody Bible Institute. The findings may also apply to similar Christian education contexts — especially if those were undergraduate Christian colleges that offered online Bible courses. It should be noted that online Moody students tend to be younger (including many who have the hope of transferring to the Chicago campus) compared to some other online schools that have more adult learners. Thus, this research would be most applicable to similar educational contexts, with young adult evangelical students who are enrolled in online courses at a Christian college.

<center>**Project Overview**</center>

The remaining chapters include a literature review (Chapter 2), an overview of the research methodology (Chapter 3), a summary of the data collected (Chapter 4), and a concluding discussion about the findings (Chapter 5).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of the Chapter

Reviewing current literature, this chapter offers a biblical and theological overview of community, as well as educational concerns related to community. Much of the chapter outlines what makes a Christian community, particularly in terms of real-life practices, so that Christian community can be analyzed in a practical, qualitative manner. The latter part of the chapter discusses issues related to online Christian community and how technology affects the development of such community. The purpose of the literature review is to establish the nature of Christian community (especially its distinctive practices) in order to determine which aspects of Christian community occur in an online ministry context, such as an online small group or an online Bible class.

Biblical Foundations

Both Christian community and Christian education finds their impetus and foundation within Scripture. This section provides an overview of how Christian community plays a role throughout biblical revelation; as will be shown, this theme of community (created and restored) recurs throughout Scripture. In addition, this section will discuss how Scripture provides several examples of Christian education taking place at a distance. Both of these topics matter, since together, they provide the biblical foundation for the focus of this study: Christian community in the context of distant Christian education.

Community

From a biblical perspective, the concept of community began at creation. Upon looking upon the world, God said that it was "not good for the man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18, ESV). Thus, with the creation of woman, a community developed. Man was no longer alone but was helped through the relationship with another. Thus, Genesis 2:18 initiates the discussion of community. In the Garden, prior to the Fall, Yahweh states that it was not good for man to be "alone" and that a "helper" would be provided to fit or correspond to him (ESV). As echoed in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, the Creator views aloneness as not good, or in other words, "The creator considers the-being-alone quite negatively: it is not good" (Westermann 227). Indeed, the lack of companionship is the first "not good" documented in Scripture (Hamilton 175). To resolve this, Yahweh provides "mutual assistance" (Delitzch qtd. in Westermann 227), which is one of the byproducts of creating community. This mutuality is the result of correspondence within the community – comprised of "neither a superior nor an inferior" (Hamilton 175). As Wenham puts it, the "fit for him" of Genesis 2:7 literally means "like the opposite," which expresses "complementarity rather than identity" (Wenham 68). The Hebrew grammar makes this point strongly by placing the "not good" at the beginning of the sentence, so a reader is left with the sense that "Isolation is not the divine norm for human beings; community is the creation of God" (Matthews 213).

In a lesser-known verse that is often overlooked, Genesis 33:10 also speaks of the significance of community. What is unique about this verse is the way in which presence, sight, and spirituality are woven together. As the estranged Jacob approaches and speaks to his brother, Esau, he makes this intriguing statement: "No, please, if I have found favor

in your sight, then accept my present from my hand. *For I have seen your face, which is like seeing, the face of God*" (Gen. 33:10, emphasis added). The statement includes a metaphor (i.e., the comparison of Esau's face to God's face) so as a poetic expression, Jacob is not equating identity or value; instead, Jacob makes the point that communal interaction with his brother has a powerful, even spiritual, effect upon him. Thus, what is especially significant for the purposes of this research is the fact that from a biblical perspective *seeing another person* can have a divine impact upon the "seer." In other words, a kind of spiritual blessing is imparted in the visual connection between persons in community, which means that the visual dynamic of community should not be diminished or overlooked. Jacob is communicating poetically not doctrinally, but a theological implication of his statement remains: dualistic views of humanity (such as Gnosticism, where the spiritual realm is good and the physical realm is bad) do not fit within the Judeo-Christian worldview.

On a larger scale, Exodus 6:7 describes the establishment of an entire community (a nation) in covenantal terms. Here again, as in Genesis, it is Yahweh – the God of creation and liberation – who takes the initial step by establishing a covenantal community: "I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God." In this sense, God's people experience community in a unique sense, with "special status…in a way that no other people were" (Stuart 172). Yahweh deserves credit for establishing the community, and furthermore, the future tense of "will be" not only speaks to Yahweh's commitment to community, but to the on-going "privilege" as believers are "received into his favour" (Calvin 130). Thus, this call to community is not merely an announcement of political emancipation but speaks to "on-going self-dedication" to God

(MacKay 122) – as well as to God's commitment to His people. Thus, Exodus 6:7 highlights the importance of promise for a viable community of believers.

The concept of community expands further in Jeremiah 29:7, as community now includes broader society (עִיר). Jeremiah describes how God's community of believers will influence the overall welfare of city. As God's revelation is unveiled over time, it becomes evident that community has a cultural component, including even enemies and non-believers are included (Huey 253), for people do not benefit alone but together. While Bible translations differ in verse 7 – welfare, peace, prosperity, goodness, etc. – the overall idea is that "prosperity, peace, and well-being" involves correspondence between God's people and the surrounding community (Newman and Stine 590). This broad sense of community occurs as individuals respond to the "revolutionary" call to pray for *shalom* for Babylon – seeking peace for all, not merely peace for a few (Thompson 543). Jeremiah, therefore, draws attention to the need for peace for sustainable and prosperous community.

As the community of believers expands under the New Covenant to include an increasing number of people, Acts 2:42-47 provides fascinating insights into the earliest Christian community. The believers demonstrated devotion to four key areas: teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. Bruce argues that the breaking of bread refers to the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper (Bruce 73). Beyond these four key areas, the early believers engaged with each another in an interpersonal way, even sharing possessions with one another. On a daily basis, they evidenced "glad and generous hearts," which they expressed through worship to God and graciousness (χάριν) towards others (Acts 2:46-47). While this may in fact be an "ideal picture" (Bruce 73), difficult to

maintain at all times and in all places, the fact remains that a revolutionary Christ results in revolutionary community. In these verses, the term κοινωνία (discussed in more detail later in this section) grammatically stands in apposition to "breaking of bread" and "prayer" (Polhill 119) – which would specify that Christian fellowship centers around the recognition of Christ and dependence upon God. This spiritual emphasis matters because the ultimate goal was not an economic system to achieve the Greek utopia of communal ownership; instead, as demonstrated by the imperfect tense in verse 45, these verses describe the "recurrent, continuing practice" of meeting needs that would occasionally arise within the community (Polhill 121). Thus, Christian community did not result from an economic policy, a utopian ideal, or an organizational strategy, but by the work of the Lord Himself, who daily added to their number (Acts 2:47). Adding on to this, Jemar Tisby, the president of the Reformed African American Network, summarizes three essential elements of Christian community observable in Acts 2:42-47: spirituality (i.e., fellowship, teaching, breaking of bread, prayer), personal sacrifice, and evangelistic growth (Tisby). While Tisby notes this is not an exhaustive list ("at least three things"), it is true that spirituality, sacrifice, and evangelism are key elements not present in most secular forms of community.

Reflecting the importance of Christian community, Acts 4:32-35 again describes qualities evident in early Christian community: unity ("one heart and soul"), sharing ("everything in common"), self-revelation ("giving their testimony"), blessing ("great grace was upon them all"), generosity ("not a needy person"), and order ("distributed to each"). Looking at these verses, Polhill summarizes these qualities as unity, sharing, witness, and grace (Polhill 151). It is worth noting that this degree of fellowship is

possible amongst "those who had become believers," meaning that this is a uniquely

Christian experience that is present amongst "the whole company" (Zerwick and

Grosvenor 363). Community in general, therefore, may not evidence these qualities;

however, communities centered around "the resurrection of Jesus Christ" will evidence

some miraculous qualities, such as these described in Acts 4:32-35. Significantly,

expressions of outward material generosity are the result of inner spiritual unity within

the community (Barton 488). Thus, Christian community differs from forced versions of

community (e.g., communism) or explicitly regulated versions of community (e.g.,

Qumran) in that participation is expected but voluntary (Bruce 100-101) – a fact that

would emphasize spiritual transformation more so than written regulation.

From a biblical perspective, no community can be perfect due to the prevalence of

sin, and even the early church struggled with community, which is why Acts 6:1-7 serves

as a key passage for the establishment of Christian community. Acts 6:1-7 not only

shares the complications (rapid expansion, neglect, disorganization, lack of preparation,

etc.), but recommended solutions to restore healthy community (oversight, order, roles,

service, etc.). With Acts 6:1-7 being the fourth conflict mentioned in Acts (preceded by

4:1-31; 5:1-11; 5:17-41), the overall effect of these verses depicts "the community as a

whole coming together in order to address a need either among its own people or in the

city of Jerusalem as a whole" (Penner 262-273). In these verses, Luke does not devalue

community (or service in the community) at the expense of preaching but communicates

"the sensed need for a division of responsibilities among the people of God" (Utley 91).

As more people enter into a community, questions of background and culture must be

faced, and in that sense, this event serves as a "small-scale anticipation" of the Jew-Gentile debate regarding community inclusion (Wright *New Testament* 99).

Scripture does not present community as a heavenly ideal, but as an earthly reality – for example, the description of Christian community in 1 Corinthians 12-14. These ecclesiological chapters address divisiveness among believers, and the fact that Paul addresses these conflicts means that even Christian communities struggle with imperfections. While addressing the problem of disorder and competitiveness, Paul outlines practical solutions and offers the underlying principle: "We were all meant to drink of the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). Whether Paul was referring to water or spiritual baptism here, the overarching point remains the same – that is, "that every Christian has been made a part of one body and immersed in (or by) the Spirit" (Garland 591). As Paul develops his theological argument, the conjunction γὰρ connects verse 13 with what precedes and provides the theology basis for unity within Christian community; in other words, Christians are members of one body, and this is made possible through the Holy Spirit. Lest the point be missed, passive verbs (ἐβαπτίσθημεν and ἐποτίσθημεν) emphasize that Christian community was not manufactured by the disciples but created by the work of God Himself.

In Ephesians, Paul reaffirms the importance community throughout the epistle – referring to unity on a recurring basis. Chapter by chapter, the theme of Christian community is expressed through several metaphors: (1) family inheritance; (2) workmanship, citizenship, and household membership; (3) members of the same body; (4) oneness through baptism; (5) walking together in daylight; and (6) fighting together in the same army. This thematic recurrence suggests that the Ephesians faced a pervading

"struggle for identity" and a "serious flaw in the implied readers' self-understanding" that failed to recognize the new community in Christ (Mouton 125). According to Paul, Christian believers should partake in a community without a "dividing wall" (Eph. 2:14), now that reconciliation has made been possible, and Jew and Gentile can now join together in the body of Christ "to become, as it were, a 'third race' fitted for life in the new creation" (Ryken et al. 239).

Furthermore, in 1 Peter 2:9-12, Peter instructs his readers that community should form believers' identity – that is, community is not optional, but essential to Christian living. Peter uses a collection of metaphors (race, priesthood, nationality, kingdom) to describe the people of God; he then builds upon these metaphors further, using sojourners and exiles, to exhort Christians how to behave in light of their newly established community. By referring to the historic event of the Babylonian exile and applying terms that were previously reserved for the nation of Israel, Peter presents an understanding of Christian community that transcends genetic or cultural differences – arguing that Christians are of "common lineage" (Jobes 158). Indeed, Christians "though from many races, constitute a new race of those who have been born again" (Jobes 159). Or as N. T. Wright phrases it, there is "quasi-familial, quasi-ethnic life *as* a community" (Wright *New Testament* 450). Much can be said of these verses in 1 Peter, but it is worth noting how many Old Testament passages are referred to in these verses, including Exodus 19:5-6, Isaiah 43:20-21, Malachi 3:17, Hosea 2:23, Genesis 23:4, and Psalm 39:12 (Grudem 117-125). Significantly, the promises previously given reserved for the covenantal community of Israel are now applied to *all* members of the covenant – thus, condemning such vices as classism, cultism, colonialism, and racism. Additionally, as Wesley

commented on 1 Peter 2:9, this new community also implies positive communal obligations – utilizing the "whole behaviour" to practice the virtues of glory, mercy, wisdom, and power (Wesley 637).

In addition to Pauline and Petrine writings, John also affirms the essentialness of Christian community, particularly in 1 John. As elsewhere in Scripture, the first plural pronoun ("we") is used to emphasize the shared nature of this spiritual reality. Yet this is not merely implied, but explicitly stated when John equates "fellowship" with God and the people of God (1 Jn. 1:6). Then, John goes further to say that our fellowship with God includes "fellowship with one another" (1 Jn. 1:7). In sum, the epistle warns of heresy and false prophets, and a distinguishing mark of spiritual impersonators are those who do live according to community's values or those who do not love others within the community (1 Jn. 3:10; 4:7-8). By participation and alignment within Christian community, believers can be assured of their salvation in Christ and have confidence before God (1 Jn 5:13).

As a reader continues through the New Testament, an argument could be made that *all* of Scripture concerns the creation and restoration of community between God and humankind; that being said, the final passage to be discussed here is Revelation 21:3-4, which describes the people of God in perfect communion with God. The phrase "He will be with them, and they will be His people" echoes what all of Scripture has pointed to thus far: God establishes communion from among the nations of the world, drawing them to worship Him, and He draws lonely individuals into deep spiritual fellowship known as His chosen people. Perfect community, the result of God's saving work, finds its culmination in heaven – which is the "decisive essential feature of the end-time city of

God: God's direct and immovable presence among human beings" (Roloff 236). Even the

final verse of Scripture ends with a corporate emphasis: "The grace of the Lord Jesus be

with you all" (Rev. 22:21). Ultimately, eternal life involves eternal life in community;

while on earth the *shekinah* became incarnate in Christ, heaven is where the "communion

between God and his people becomes physical and absolute" (Osborne 734). Thus, by the

end of world, the community that was initially formed in Genesis 2 has expanded to

include a multitude, a diverse but united community of saints that dwells with God

forever.

Terminology wise, the Greek word κοινωνία is sometimes used to describe

Christian community. A textual search of the New Testament reveals that the noun occurs

nineteen times in the New Testament, and in the ESV, κοινωνία is translated as

contribution, participation, part, share, sharing, and fellowship. Especially significant,

Luke uses the adjective κοινος to describe how early Christians shared things in common

and demonstrated hospitality (Martin and Davids 373). Likewise, the author of Hebrews

uses the noun κοινωνία to describe sharing with the needy in prison, and James uses the

term to urge acceptance for others in the church body (Martin and Davids 374). Thus, the

word plays an important role in describing Christian community as it connotes values

such as interpersonal care, communion, interaction, and welcome.

However, it is important to note that the term κοινωνία and the word group as a

whole "does not exhaust the idea of Christian fellowship," nor does it exclusively refer to

Christian forms of fellowship (Martin and Davids 373). For example, in 2 John 11, the

same verb is used to describe participation in wickedness; the idea of cooperation

remains, but this is the opposite meaning of Christian fellowship (Martin and Davids

373). For that reason, an examination of Christian community would necessarily include

κοινωνία – in the ESV, every usage of "fellowship" comes from κοινωνία – but would

also need to go beyond κοινωνία.

As Ralph P. Martin points out, from a biblical viewpoint, community is not first

and foremost about human-to-human connection, but about mutual participation. The

koin- words "refer primarily, though not invariably, to participation in something rather

than to association with others" (Martin 217). Community in general involves sharing in

the same object or experience, and Christian community in particular concerns mutual

participation in the person of Jesus Christ.

Distance Education

Concerning the other aspect of this research project (i.e., an online Bible course),

it can be noted that "distance education" is commonly-used terminology in the modern

world, but the concept of teaching others from a long-distance has precedence as far back

as Bible times. In fact, Scripture itself includes examples of spiritual instruction at a

distance, even though it looked much different back then than it does today. While

modern technology was obviously not used in biblical times, other technologies (e.g.,

papyri scrolls) were used for educational and communicative purposes; the distribution of

papyri across wide geographical regions provides justification for the validity of

education apart from face-to-face, physical proximity (Pickering 143). In other words,

since the Bible itself includes examples of instruction from afar, such approaches can

(and even *should*) be used today.

The Old Testament includes numerous cases of spiritual teaching taking place

from a distance. Literary prophets wrote to audiences both near and far. For example,

while Jeremiah worked in and around the temple, many of his readers would have been distant and never have seen him face-to-face. Indeed, the very nature of written text allows for those distant, both temporally and physically, to engage in communication and instruction. Jeremiah and the other prophets did not merely communicate to whom they saw face-to-face; their words reached those who were far off. As a prophet who was calling people to repentance, Jeremiah was doing more than merely educating his readers; the point here is that he also communicated through non-proximate methods – such as written scrolls that did not require face-to-face communication. For instance, "Jeremiah sent letters to the exiles in Babylon (chap. 29) in which he gave the same message he had been preaching at home" (Lundbom 689).

The New Testament also includes several examples of spiritual instruction at a distance, particularly in the areas of doctrine and spiritual practice. The gospels were written for broad audiences, including both Jews and Gentiles, who would have received these documents in various locations (e.g., Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, etc.). Thus, the nature of gospel proclamation has, from the beginning, involved some degree of distant instruction. Of course, the most obvious example is that Paul used letters to teach learners who were far from him. He did not see these believers face-to-face at the time of the instruction, but he fully and confidently believed that instruction from afar could be used by God. In fact, it has been previously noted that texts were used "as a substitute" for personal presence (Duvall & Hays 253). Thus, like Jeremiah's letter writing to the exiles in Babylon, Paul's teaching takes place through non-proximate instruction, where the one giving the message was not face-to-face with those being instructed.

Interestingly, Felix Just analyzes "New Testament Letter Structure," and several observations regarding physical distance and Christian community can be made from his analysis (Just). Significantly, when Paul writes at a distance to provide theological instruction, he expresses concern for community – even while apart from that community. Every one of Paul's epistles include a general greeting, and Paul also includes individual greetings in 11 of his epistles: 1 Thessalonians, 1 Corinthians, Philippians, Philemon, 2 Corinthians, Romans, Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Timothy, and Titus (Just). Taking this even further, Paul also includes six personal postscripts, which like the greetings are not necessary per se to the main points of the epistles, yet they develop social presence with his recipients. What is significant for this study in particular is the fact that Paul did not divorce theological or spiritual instruction from personal relationship; even while teaching from afar, Paul recognized the importance of fostering Christian community.

Theological Foundations

Adding to the biblical passages discussed above, the following section offers a brief defense for Christian community from a theological perspective. The majority of this section, however, will highlight key practices evident in Christian community and summarize what theologians have contributed to the study of Christian community. These key practices will then frame the research, providing concepts in order to "code" the Christian community that is visibly practiced in an online environment.

Christian Community

An initial problem of studying Christian community concerns the fact that community has "no universally agreed upon definition" (Rovai et al. 5). For instance, as

Nisbet discussed in *The Quest for Community*, different groups have proposed different *kinds* of community. Liberal politics, for example, have pushed for national community, while conservatives have emphasized smaller, localized communities. Thus, when using the term "community," it can be helpful to establish what kind of community is being formed. Other scholars have echoed this sentiment when saying that "Community has come to mean many things — from a network of professionals (the medical community) to a neighborhood, to a very temporary group of college students in a dorm" (Branson and Martinez loc. 810). Additionally, Vanier properly distinguishes between false and "true community," meaning that not all apparent communities are real communities (Vanier, "Community" 4-5). Even in the Bible, the concept of community "is a complex subject, amenable to no simple definition" (Hanson 1099) – which can partly explain why Christian denominations are divided over definitions of Israel and the Church. The following section, thus, will summarize how scholars and theologians have understood and described Christian community.

Theologians have previously noted the importance of Christian community, such as Christine Pohl who reminds that "Human beings were made for living in community, and it is in community that we flourish and become most fully human" (Pohl loc. 68). Likewise, Barton points out that "community formation and maintenance were all-pervasive concerns in early Christianity" (Barton 94). It comes as no surprise, then, that "the communion of saints" is included in the Apostle's Creed as a core belief of orthodox Christianity. Or as Barth summarizes, "the basic form of the active life of obedience understood and affirmed as service of the cause of God is man's direct or indirect co-operation in the fulfillment of the task of the Christian community" (Barth 3.4 538).

Recognizing the centrality of community, Stanley J. Grenz and Jay T. Smith wrote an entire theology that focuses on Christian community. In *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living,* Grenz and Smith discuss each person of the Trinity and explain how fellowship with God and one another play an essential role in the narrative. In short, Christian community is the connection point between our belief (*doxis*) and practice (*praxis*). In explaining such an approach to theology, Grenz states that "the ultimate purpose of theology is not simply to establish proper belief but rather to assist the Christian community in its calling to live as the people of God in the particular social-historical context in which they are situated" (Grenz and Smith loc. 82). In other words, Christian community is central because it is within community that we express and practice our beliefs; conversely, we cannot exclude community from Christianity since it would be nonsensical to have "true" beliefs that have no actual bearing in the real world – that is, displayed within the context of community.

Christian community originates from the Trinity. That being said, rather than speculating about how the immanent Trinity translates to human relationships, focus should be put upon the economic Trinity – that is, the relation of the Trinity to humanity (Johnson 23). In a practical sense, the motivation and example for Christian community comes through "observing how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit relate to rebellious human beings" (Johnson 24). Thus, the entirety of Scripture speaks of the importance of relationship — how interpersonal relationships (God-to-human and human-to-human) provide the foundation and means for God's work amongst His people.

The nature of the Trinity, therefore, makes community a necessity for believers. The threefold, yet singular, divine essence stands in stark contrast to C.S. Lewis' comment in *The Four Loves* that "Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art, like the universe itself... It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival" (Lewis 70). For in the Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit exist together – essentially not optionally – as a community of three persons in one divine essence. Relationality is inherent to the very being of God. So, if God Himself experiences community within Himself, then far be it for humans to think that humanity can fully exist without relationship; without community, according to a Trinitarian perspective of existence, a part of us dies.

Because of the Trinitarian origin of community, theologians have also emphasized Christian community differs from other general or secular forms of community. As Bonhoeffer stated, "Because Christian community is founded solely on Jesus Christ, it is a spiritual and not a human reality. In this it differs from all other communities" (Bonhoeffer loc. 215). Likewise, Steve Seamands recognized that community relationships are based upon the fact that human beings are created in God's relational image (Seamands loc. 293). Because "modern individualism seriously distorts the biblical perspective," theologians emphasize the importance of embracing Christian community (Scobie 506). Thus, Christian community includes additional elements that are not necessarily observable in un-Christian forms. In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer not only defends the need for Christian community, but aptly points out that Christian community is not a matter of human creation nor "an ideal which we must realize" but "a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate" (Bonhoeffer

loc. 212). While human or secular forms of community abound, Bonhoeffer distinguishes

Christian community as being based upon the following attributes: truth rather than

desire; calling rather than devoutness; *agape* rather than *eros*; service rather than

pleasure; submission rather than subjection; God's Word rather than human subjectivity;

the Holy Spirit rather than psychological techniques; humility rather than strategy (loc.

212-23). In this manner, Bonhoeffer draws a firm line between human or secular ideals of

community and the unique reality of Christian community.

Of course, in the New Testament, social relationship between believers was not an

afterthought, but key to the overall message. The Pauline epistles are filled with concern

for Christian community (notably 1 Corinthians, Galatians, and Ephesians), to the degree

that it could be said that "The central issue for Paul is the inclusion and place of Gentile

Christians within the church and the relationship of Christianity to Judaism" (Hawthorne

et al. 590). Yet, even if that is considered an overstatement, one could hardly miss that

Pauline theology develops a robust "sectarian legitimation," a term that refers to the

"explanations and justifications" for the fledgling religious community (Hawthorne et al.

590). In other words, Paul seeks to define not only Christian theology, but in sociological

terms, to distinguish who can and cannot be included within the growing Christian

community.

To determine whether Christian community is present or absent, qualities or

elements of Christian community must be named. The idea of "Christian community"

remains nebulous unless it is defined, and any attempt to define "community" can be

especially challenging since communities form in varying degrees – ranging from basic

to complex – including stages of meeting, fellowshipping, synergizing, and life-long

bonding (Rogo & Portillo 300). When defining "Christian community," therefore, rather than only counting the final stages (e.g., life-long bonding) as true Christian community, this study will seek to establish unique qualities that can be seen in Christian communities.

In contrast to more abstract discussions of Christian community, Christine Pohl helpfully suggests that studying the *practices* of community offer a more concrete basis for improving community. As Pohl states, "Giving attention to practices opens up a more textured and grounded approach to community life…working with practices allows us to move beyond important but individually focused literature spiritual formation so that we can also attend to the formation of good communities" (Pohl loc. 156-164). As Pohl persuasively argues, only with discussion of practices do have "a framework for talking about what is good and holy in our ordinary communities" (Pohl loc. 164). Indeed, "Practices are at the heart of human communities" (Pohl loc. 120). Further, practices allow for more concrete study of communities in that "Practices are necessarily things we *do*, habits of *living*, irreducible to thoughts or emotions" (Brendsel 170). What follows, therefore, is an overview of practices pointed out by Christian theologians, starting with four practices suggested by Pohl.

Practice 1: Promise-keeping

From a theological perspective, Christian community begins with God's promise to His people, reacts through promising back to God, and extends to promise-keeping to one another. God not only promises to be loyal to His people (Deut. 7:8-9, but to be near in terms of relationship (Matt. 28:20). Since these promises were given to a broad

audience, Christians should expect that these promises are fulfilled not merely in an individualistic manner, but also within the context of community.

In *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices that Sustain Us*, Christine D. Pohl includes promise keeping as a practice of Christian community; this is essential because without promise, communities would quickly dissolve. As Pohl states, "Promises provide the internal framework for every relationship and every community" (Pohl loc. 1488). Pohl discusses how promising is a "relational activity" that involves both explicit and implicit promises (Pohl loc. 1529-1585). Baptism, for example, provides a visible reminder of the promising nature of our faith, but in everyday, interpersonal relationships, promises can be much less formal than this (Pohl loc. 1574-1669).

Promises also involve behavioral expectations for the community. In the Old Testament, behavioral expectations were set in place for the divine-human relationship, since God was establishing a community of relationship (Shelton 37-38). Likewise, in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul expected virtues to be practiced and vices to be avoided within the community (Best 645). Throughout Scripture, the biblical idea of a covenant involves expectations from all included parties; in fact, the very definition of a covenant includes the idea of promise: "A 'covenant' is an agreement enacted between two parties in which one or both make promises under oath to perform or refrain from certain actions stipulated in advance" (Mendenhall and Herion 1179). After all, without behavioral expectations, Christian communities would have no boundaries within which to function.

Thus, accountability (i.e., assuring that everyone is keeping their promises) is an essential part of Christian community. Ethics should be practiced by every person, not merely some. For Christians, commandments are not merely rules intended for

individuals, but behaviors expected for the entire community. The Sermon on the Mount was directed at disciples, a group of people, and was addressed to the plurality. Just as the Law of Sinai was established for the people of Israel, so the Sermon on the Mount was intended for the people of God. In other words, "Jesus' ethic is not directed to isolated individuals, but to the circle of disciples, the new family of God, the people of God which is to be gathered. It has an eminently social dimension" (Lohfink loc. 786). This is echoed by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 6:2, where he says that, within community, Christians should "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Practice 2: Truth-telling

Broadly speaking, social activities within a community can be defined as a "conversation mediated by meaning, images, symbols, and empathy" (Brower & Nye xv). In other words, community involves the back-and-forth between individuals, and this "conversation" or dialogue occurs through various means, including verbal communication, visual cues, shared experience, and emotional expression.

In Christian community, truth is an essential practice. As Thomas Aquinas wrote in *Summa Theologica,* "Since man is a social animal, one man naturally owes another whatever is necessary for the preservation of human society. Now it would be impossible for men to live together, unless they believed one another, as declaring the truth one to another" (Aquinas STh, II-II q.109 a.3 ad 1). Along these lines, it is difficult to imagine the existence of a "false" community comprised of deceivers and liars, especially in a Christian context, since Christians are defined by those who walk in the truth (1 Jn. 1:5-10). Indeed, "truth sustains community and lies destroy it" due to the interrelation between truth and faithfulness (Volf 258).

For Christians, truth-telling communities are not necessarily filled with niceties. In other words, Christian community is not necessarily easy or "tidy" (Pohl loc. 2691). Telling the truth involves confronting wrongs and correcting errors, as Paul demonstrated in his dealings with false teachers, calling them "dogs" and mutilators of the flesh (Phil. 3:2). Thus, in a Christian community, the practice of truth-telling does not merely involve avoiding hypocrisy and explicit lies, but pursuing accuracy – that is, correcting others' views that do not correspond to reality.

Furthermore, the practice of truth-telling avoids exaggeration and omission. Deceit of this kind includes a wide range of activities, including over-generalization, misrepresentation, and plagiarism. Because truth-telling concerns so much of interpersonal communication, Pohl even includes the concept of "spin" (or the effort to make things look better than they actually are) in the list of deceitful practices to avoid (Pohl loc. 2807). Likewise, expressions of personal affirmation that are overblown are "ultimately patronizing and destructive" (Pohl loc. 2857). Thus, truth-telling involves correspondence to reality – not merely in terms of facts ("accuracy"), but in terms of behavior ("reliability") (Pohl loc. 2734).

Practice 3: Hospitality

In the Ancient Near East, hospitality was essential not only for community, but in some cases, for survival. The most familiar Scripture passage is Abraham's welcome of the strangers in Genesis 18. In Abraham's invitation, where he offers help to sojourners who he has never met or seen before, a man of faith was willing to offer comfort and "remove their status as strangers" (Matthews and Benjamin 83-84). The fact that Hebrews 13:2 refers back to Abraham and instructs believers "not to neglect hospitality"

should lead Christian communities to affirm that "hospitality should be a trait of all

Christians" and not merely reserved for a few (MacArthur Jan. 13). Jesus stated this point

with even more force when He connected the concept of hospitality to membership

within Christian community – that is, those spared at the final judgment were those who

were hospitable to the Son of Man (Matt. 25:31-46).

According to Pohl, Christian community is "expressed in hospitality" (Pohl loc.

297). Hospitality involves welcoming the outsider, but also embraces the insider to meet

the basic human longings to belong, to serve, and to be valued (Pohl loc. 3848). Within

Christian community, hospitality goes far beyond offering food or a place to stay;

Christian community involves creating an environment that welcomes the stranger and

that makes it "safe to be vulnerable" (Pohl loc. 3869).

In a practical sense, Christian community is experienced through an individual's

perception, so the Psychological Sense of Community (PSC) developed in 1974 and

expanded in 1986 provides elements to gauge whether or not community is being sensed

(Bohus et al 19-20). These elements include membership, influence, integration and

fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection (Bohus et al 20). As McMillan and

Chavis summarized, community involves "a feeling that members have of belonging, a

feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that

members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (9). In other

words, community requires a sense of belonging to the group, the activity of mutual

influence between individuals, personal fulfillment through commitment to the group,

and the establishment of emotional bonds between individuals (Bohus et al 20).

Furthermore, PSC varies depending on context, including contexts amongst religious

groups, which raises the need for each community to be studied on its own terms (Bohus et al 20-21). Thus, "religious collegiate 'sense of community' is a fertile area of study with many opportunities of further research" (Bohus et al. 35).

Since hospitality involves welcoming the stranger, defining "stranger" becomes especially important. Pohl offers a poignant definition of the stranger that extends far beyond the normal definition of an unknown person: "Strangers are people without a place, disconnected from life-giving relationships and networks" (Pohl loc. 3954). In other words, strangers can include anyone from a homeless person to a disabled person to a teenager to a neighbor (Pohl loc. 3954-3964). With Pohl's definition of "without a place" and "disconnected," the definition of stranger can even include an individual who is met online.

As an example of hospitality within Christian community, early Methodists demonstrated this well in their camp meetings. As one scholar summarized this unique, hospitable environment: "Believers likened their fellowship not only to heaven, but also to family. 'These little families of love,' declared Bishops Asbury and Coke, 'mutually weep and rejoice, and in everything sympathize with each other, as genuine friends.'" (Schneider). Thus, Christian hospitality involved a common experience that was marked by sympathy and familial-like connection.

As a specialized expression of hospitality, Christian communities also include various forms of consolation. In a difficult world – where hospitality provides protection from the elements – community matters to "suppress or transcend the time between present woe and future bliss" (Barton 110). Thus, Christian communities provide a therapeutic function "to make possible an experience of millennial bliss as living reality"

(Gager cited in Barton 110). Whether a specific reference to heaven or a more general expression of comfort, Christians in community console one another as they sojourn – which is a practice that was initially demonstrated by the Apostles (as seen in James 1 and 1 Peter 1).

Again, hospitality includes a wide spectrum of expressions. For example, when Olga Soler offers some "quintessential aspects of community" in *Creative Ways to Build Christian Community* (Lathrop 42), the aspects are those that found in a hospitable environment. These elements include intercession, networking, socializing, sharing, listening, caring, creating together, having fun together, and helping one another. In summary, Soler states that effective Christian community has certain attributes: "hospitality, intercession, instruction, physical and spiritual nourishment, creativity, networking, outreach, and social interaction " (Lathrop 42).

Practice 4: Gratitude

With people who give thanks for Jesus Christ and His work, Christian communities are marked by the practice of gratitude. The Eucharist stands a defining practice of Christian community in an ecclesiastical context – so that the Church may be called a "eucharistic community" (Webber 503) – and the practice of gratitude extends to other expressions of Christian community as well. Indeed, the Greek word "Eucharist" means gratitude. For this reason, Pohl begins with gratitude, since "the Christian life is most of all a response to the grace we have received. Christian community begins in gratitude" (Pohl loc. 297).

Expressing gratitude to God is a crucial aspect of Christian community. For example, personal testimonies, or an individual's verbal expression of gratitude for God's

work, not only appear in ancient Israelite community (Ps. 18, 21, 30, 32, 34, 40–41, 66,

116, and 138), but in modern Christian communities as well (Hays and Duvall 274). This

practice of public testimony also extends to the broader community, as evidenced by

communal psalms of thanksgiving (Ps. 65, 67, 75, 107, 124, 136). Concerning this

importance of "witness to God," Duhm makes the point that expressing gratitude to God

is "the most pregnant expression of the religious practice of the community" (qtd. in

Barth 3.4: 79). Barth continues this thought when he defines believers in Christian

community as "the witnesses of the reconciliation of the world with Himself as it has

taken place in Jesus Christ" (Barth 4.1: 726) – particularly noting the role that witness

plays within Christian community. This is echoed by Wall, who includes "a common call

to bear witness" in his definition of Christian community (Wall 1103). Thus, the earliest

of Christian communities were centered around testimony to Jesus Christ of which

baptism and the Eucharist were the visible testimonies (Wright *New Testament* 448).

Gratitude in a community context also expresses itself through generosity and

encouragement. Christians in healthy community graciously help one other – that is,

"they cannot but be united together in brotherly love, and mutually impart their blessings

to each other" (Calvin 4.1: 3). Thus, for Calvin, Christian community did not merely

mean a collection of individuals with similar beliefs, but individuals who were mutually

helping one another. In community, believers encourage one another onward.

Thus, in Christian community, encouragement is an outworking of gratitude – that

is, the community's response to the experience of saving grace (Lane 553). This is

evident in Hebrews 13:16, where the author commands healthy community life (e.g.,

goodness and sharing with one another) because "such sacrifices are pleasing to God"

(ESV). Lane interprets this verse by looking to the Old Testament, explaining that this pairing – thankfulness to God and love for others – harkens back to "the praise offering of the old covenant" (Lane 552). Hebrews 13:16 teaches that because of gratitude to God, believers are called to "mutual encouragement and helpfulness as an incentive and aid to Christian maturity" (Lane 552). In other words, Christian encouragement is not merely a positive judgment of another's abilities (for example, "You are good at that"), but an "aid" to move others onward to maturity (for example, "You are good at that, so continue by the grace of God").

Practice 5: Self-expression

Community can only occur when the participants share who they are. It is not enough for a community to blend together, blurring the lines between individuals and becoming a singular mass. As stated by Jean Vanier, "communion is not fusion" (Vanier "From Brokenness" 17). Thus, it is important for each individual to be able and willing to distinguish one's self from the others.

According to Google's *NGram Viewer*, a research tool that tracks the usage of words in books, cultures around the world have become increasingly concerned with self-expression. Terms such as uniqueness, self-expression, expressiveness, creativity, individualism, and individuality have more than doubled in their usage since the 1850s – with a notable increase in the years leading up to the 1960s. This trend can be traced in English, German, Italian, Russian, and Spanish. This increase can also be seen in Mandarin, though there was a notable decrease after the early 1970s (Google)

In the past few decades, the term "creativity" has become more common than "individuality," and so creativity can be one way of observing self-expression in a

community environment (Google). Things like off-the-wall humor, fashionable attire, unique contributions to conversations, and other creative expressions can be ways that individuals distinguish themselves from the larger group.

Self-expression is as diverse as the persons on the globe (i.e., there is not a single way of expressing individuality within a group), yet memory is an important aspect worth noting in the context of community. Josiah Royce argues that the sharing and formation of memories is an essential aspect of community building (qtd. in Branson and Martinez loc. 823). He makes this point since memories are a "key aspect of personal identity" (Sutton), and memories connect individuals in a deeply personal way. Thus, community practices include the sharing of past memories as well as the creation of memories through shared experiences amongst the group.

Practice 6: Discipleship

Christian discipleship finds its locus within Christian community; in fact, the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19 calls Christians not merely to preach, but to develop disciples within their newly formed communities of faith. The healthiest communities, after all, involve "becoming" (Vanier "Community" 18). Because of discipleship foster certain tendencies, teaching methods should support and foster Christian community when possible. As philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff coined the term, "tendency learning" involves the cultivation of certain qualities or behaviors (Wolterstorff 15). Thus, if discipleship promotes individualism rather than community (e.g., scoring higher than others), it may cultivate an over-individualized or even competitive view of spiritual growth. Along these lines, Lohfink reminds that spiritual growth in the New Testament is not primarily an individualistic journey, but a corporate process that involves

responsibility towards one another (Lohfink loc. 1276-1280). As a result, Christian

educators — both in local churches and in theological schools — would be wise to

consider how community influences the discipleship process.

Church history reveals that teaching played an important role in the establishment

and furthering of Christian community. According to Eusebius, Pantænus, Clement, and

Origen established a community that was "designed not only to teach catechumens, but

also to appeal, by a system of philosophy, to cultivated pagans" (Scott-Moncrieff 115).

The fact that early Christians were sometimes referred to as "knowers" reveals the fact

that intellectual comprehension of Christianity was not optional, but an essential part of

participation in Christian community (Markschies 7-9). Thus, in the history of the church,

"pure teaching and proper administration [of sacraments] are the only condition of the

church's unity and therefore of fellowship" (Pannenberg 3:110).

Additionally, community can be described as "a learning environment where

teamwork is prevalent, diversity is incorporated, and individuals care about, trust, and

respect each other and share a vision for the future of the school, a common sense of

purpose, and a common set of values" (Rovai et al. 5). Thus, in light of previous research,

Rovai, Wighting, and Lucking asserted that community in an educational setting involves

both a social (a range of interpersonal feelings) and a learning component (shared goals

and values) (Rovai et al. 5-6).

Practice 7: Spiritual Enthusiasm

While enthusiasm is notoriously difficult to measure, community involves some

degree of passionate connectedness, as James D.G. Dunn pointed out in *Jesus and the*

Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First

Christians as Reflected in the New Testament. Dunn argues that Christian community is based upon common experience in the Holy Spirit, particularly the eschatological aspect of the Spirit:

> The early church's sense of community stemmed basically not from the first resurrection appearances but from Pentecost; not from an established hierarchy, not from an established tradition, not from an established liturgical or sacramental practice … but *from the common experience of the eschatological Spirit and the communal enthusiasm engendered thereby* (Dunn 188).

In fact, the Pauline epistles stress the Spirit's role to such a degree that community life is presented as "essentially charismatic, with a strong recognition of the mutual interdependence of members and an ideal of unity as the outworking of the diversity of members' contributions" (Barton 103). The Heidelberg Catechism echoes this when the communion of saints is defined not only as those who partake in Christ, but those who "employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members" (*Historic Creeds,* Question 55). Thus, spiritual gifts and their passionate usage should be visible in a Christian community.

Recognizing the "ecstatic features" present within Christian fellowship, Wolfhart Pannenberg makes a similar point when he says that the "ecstatic integration of this fellowship by the Spirit into the common praise of God can mediate the sense of an initial removing of alienation between this and that individual and therefore also of the antagonism between the individual and society" (Pannenberg 3:135-136). The point here is that the Holy Spirit enables spiritual conduct – that is, "the Spirit gives life by lifting

individuals above their particularity and finitude" – which includes faith, hope, and love

(Pannenberg 3: 135-211).

Practice 8: Prayer

The practice of prayer tends to be viewed in an individualistic way (e.g., a

person's conversation with God), but prayer should be considered a community practice

– as Calvin pointed out, "all our prayers ought to bear reference to that community which

our Lord has established in his kingdom and family" (Calvin 3.20: 39). While Calvin did

not negate the importance of individual prayer, he noted that "our mind is not withdrawn

from the view of this community, does not deviate from it, but constantly refers to it"

(Calvin 3.20: 39). In other words, prayer should not be divorced from community, and

community should not be divorced from prayer; as Calvin argues, the practice of prayer

should be integrated into Christian community. Even Christ Himself sought Christian

community through the means of prayer; in John 17:11, 21-23, "Christ's high priestly

prayer that we may all be one, *just as* His Father and He are one, is repeated four times,

more often than any other petition Christ makes" (Kornfield 91).

Prayer strengthens communities, including the family unit, as demonstrated by the

early Methodist movement on the American frontier. Explaining the success of Christian

communities despite physical disconnectedness, Schneider points out that prayer was an

important practice – a "duty" for fathers and a "ritual" for itinerant preachers (Schneider).

Along with other communal practices, "These communities were woven together by

family prayer…" (Schneider). Larger Methodist gatherings likewise included not only

communion, but prayer, which overall, had the effect of joining people together as family

(Schneider). In similar fashion, as an "an antidote to disunity," Lutherans in the 18th

century used prayer as to encourage unity in the community…" by forming people "into

prayer bands of two or three" (Rusten 295). Practices such as these reflect the spirit of 1

Timothy 2:8, which teaches that within a community, "commitment is expressed in the

act of prayer, moral purity in the unity of the praying community" (Richards 834).

Prayer also reminds that Christ is present in Christian communities. As N. T.

Wright notes, "in a promise that remains central to everything that Christians ever do

together, 'where two or three' (or two hundred or three hundred, for that matter, but it's

often the small groups that need this encouragement most) 'gather in Jesus' name, he is

there in the midst of them'" (Wright *Matthew* 36). In other words, prayer impacts *any*

community of Christian believers – not only as comforting assurance, but as a warning

that Christ is in their midst (Wright *Matthew* 36-37).

Practice 9: Love

Christian community should include loving interactions. As Martin Luther

pointed out, Christian love occurs in community contexts, not out of enslavement but out

of freedom (Seong 331). Summarizing Luther's view of community, it has been noted

that "love for neighbor is the only goal in the Christians' earthly life" (Seong 332);

although that may seem strongly stated, the overall point is that love should be a visible

mark not only in a Christian's life, but in Christian community that is comprised of

loving individuals. As Wesley comments on Acts 2:45, the early Church demonstrated "a

natural fruit of that love wherewith each member of the community loved every other as

his own soul" (Wesley 289).

Distinguishing Christian community from some other forms of community,

Christian love is a community practice that also extends beyond the current members of

the community. As Verhey points out: "John's epistles, like his Gospel, focus on the community as the place love must be put into practice, but this focus should not be understood as a limit or a restriction. If we know love from the death of Christ, and if Christ's death is not only for us but also for the whole world (1 Jn 2:1, 2), then it would be quite unreasonable for the author to restrict love to members of the community" (Verhey 351). In fact, love can serve an apologetic for the validity of the community (Reid 1193-1194).

Love expresses itself in many ways, including freedom. Moltmann, for example, grounded Christian community in a liberty made possible through "love that binds" and joy found in one another (Moltmann 220). Community involves the freedom of individuals, made possible through love, so that individuals are "respected and recognized" (Moltmann 215). Simply put, love enables community.

Practice 10: Witness

Christian communities are not intended as an end unto themselves; unlike other communities that can sometimes be self-centered (e.g., cliques), Christian communities are intended to witness to Christ in the world. Countless scholars have written about the need for Christian communities to be a counter-cultural entity – that is, the nature of the community itself should be distinct from (i.e., holy) other communities in a particular culture. The Apostle Peter was the first to make this this point, of course, when he talked about the Christian community as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Pet. 2:9), but Peter does not stop there; the purpose of such a calling is to "declare the wonderful deeds" of God. Thus, "the point is that an entire people give witness to God's plan for the world" (Lohfink 1658). Christian community itself is a

witness to the broader world. In addition to the entity itself (the Church) and its actions –

particularly, the practice of love and unity (Arnold 197). As Bonhoeffer wrote,

witnessing also involves using "human words to another person, bespeaking the whole

consolation of God, the admonition, the kindness, and the severity of God" (Bonhoeffer

loc. 1226-1227).

Mission and community are closely connected. What Jesus did for the believing

community also benefited the broader community (i.e., those not yet believing). For

example, in Jesus' earthly ministry, miracles were not solely done for the individual's

benefit but served a broader communal purpose. Miracles served as a visible sign of

Christ's authority over all things. As these miracles are seen by the disciples and

surrounding crowds, "the community can already taste the powers of the age to come"

(Lohfink 1046). Thus, as this fledgling spiritual community saw what Jesus was able to

do, Jesus "made his disciples witnesses" (Lohfink 1463). They were now a community

that would proclaim Christ's miraculous work to those in need – that is, witnesses sent

out into the world (Jn. 17:18).

<p style="text-align:center">Online Christian Community</p>

The following section will build upon the biblical and theological foundations

above by discussing unique aspects of Christian community that occurs online. To

accomplish this, relevant literature related to Christian education and online education

will be examined. Particular attention will be paid to the issue of "presence" and how

various kinds of presence (physical, social, and spiritual) relate to online Christian

education.

Physical Distance & Online Presence

Online "distance" education does not necessarily have to mean "far-off"

education. In fact, the term "distance" can be misleading if we do not take the time to

define the term. For example, in an online classroom, instructors are usually thought of

being not present or away from students, but students in Grant & Thorton's study

reported that "they interacted more with the teacher in [an] online course than in a face-

to-face course" (Maddix "Generating" 382). In that instance, instructors were physically

apart, but socially near. Thus, instructors and students need not feel distant from one

another, but can foster "present" relationships in a shared online environment.

Online educators must consider how "disembodied human presence" is made

possible through technology, by asking "Is there presence in distance?" (Mount 2)

Although some have doubted the possibility of the legitimacy of disembodied Christian

formation, others such as Mary Hess have argued that online education is not only

embodied, but *incarnational*, since students are learning in a real, home environment

rather than the artificial context of a classroom (Maddix "Developing" 33-34). In the

context of online education, social presence needs to be understood broadly to account

for *all* of a student's social relationships — what Lowe calls "a host of ecosystem

components" — and technology serves as tool to foster *additional* relationships (Lowe

59). In fact, technology overcomes physical boundaries to unite people with a unique

sense of presence that is not even found in traditional classrooms.

Furthermore, Christian educators not only consider teacher-student presence, but

Christ's presence. In this realm of online theological education, where is Christ? As

Mount asked, "How is the encounter with Christ handed on electronically through text on

a computer screen?" (Mount 3) This question takes the discussion further by asking how

Christ would want to speak to students in an online setting.

Some scholars, such as McLuhan, argued that electronic technology "fosters and

encourages unification and involvement" more so than print technology. Texts can be

fragmented, specialized, and detached, while electronic technology provides common

ground and a shared community for all users (Mount 24). While this view is certainly

debated, it is worth noting that online education has the potential to increase or improve

connections rather than prevent them, as is sometimes thought by non-internet users.

The concept of "social presence" can be traced back to 1976, when Short,

Williams, and Christie defined the idea as "the degree of salience of the other person in

the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships" depends

upon the quality of the medium (Short et al. 65). Eventually, the concept began to include

the significance of student perception (see Garrison "Critical Inquiry"). A student can *feel*

close to other students, even if not physically present, as long as there is emotional, open,

and cohesive connection (Borup 196). In particular, a student's sense of social presence

may relate more to group dynamics (the feeling of belonging) than interpersonal

dynamics (the feeling of being known) (Garrison *E-Learning* 33).

In a practical sense, videos help develop social-emotional dynamics more than

text-based forums do. To begin with, without any visual cues, audio technology has been

demonstrated to increase emotional and cognitive dimensions, thus improving

relationships within the online classroom (Oomen-Early et al. 59). Beyond this, studies

have shown that video has certain advantages to text, which "include rapid, worldwide

proliferation as well as enhanced credibility, as 'images tend to be perceived as more believable than simple texts'" (Clark & Stewart 478).

In addition, some students feel that online video provides even *more* social presence than traditional classrooms. In a study at Brigham Young University, for example, instructors responded to students individually through video messages. Students would send a video to the professor, and the professor would then respond to each student. Even though the instructor was not physically present, students remarked that the professor was "personable," "very good at communication," and "much more personable this way" (Griffiths "Potential" 16). In a second instance, students remarked that the instructor was "most caring and friendly I've ever had" and "Although I've never met the man, I feel like I know him really well and that he knows me. I loved this course!" (Griffiths "Potential" 18). Following the course, interviews with students revealed the "capacity of asynchronous video to form close relationships" (Griffiths "Potential" 18). Such personal, one-on-one interaction is not always experienced by students in traditional classrooms, which explains why social presence in online courses can sometimes be more effective.

Social Presence

Online education extends beyond the intellectual. As Kemp points out, the early history of distance education primarily focused on "content delivery" (Lowe et al. 42), but new technological developments require a re-envisioning of online education. As D.R. Garrison states, "The implicit detail of community has been the greatest shortcoming of traditional distance education with its focus on prescriptive course packages to be assimilated by the student in isolation" (Garrison *E-Learning* 30). There is

a proven need, as Sung and Mayer discovered with 472 online students, for students to feel a need to socially connect with one another in order to succeed (Sung & Mayer 1745).

Previous research has demonstrated that Christian online courses demonstrate a "community gap" that needs to be overcome (Rovai et al. 1). When comparing the sense of community in on-campus and online courses at Christian colleges, Rovai, Baker, and Cox confirmed that the primary difference related to social rather than learning aspects (Rovai et al. 1). Thus, Rovai, Baker, and Cox suggest that Christian colleges place extra emphasis on developing the social nature of online courses.

Small groups can be one way of increasing interaction. In *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, Robert Banks states that the "dilution of community is one of the problems facing theological institutions today" (Banks loc 2064). To address this problem, one of Bank's primary suggestions is the development of small groups in which students from diverse backgrounds interact with one another. To support the importance of small groups, he reminds that Augustine lived in a community, Luther lived in a house with students, and Bonhoeffer taught in a small seminary – all of which demonstrate how small communities and the discussions therein aid in spiritual formation (Banks loc 2069). Echoing Banks' suggestion but arising from research of small groups in early Methodism, Tom Albin affirms that spiritual growth occurs through the "interrelated dimensions" of knowledge, experience, and small groups (Stafford 44).

In increasing measure, educators are realizing that online education does not preclude or prohibit social interaction but can actually decrease the "transactional distance" between teacher and student (Lowe 45). This idea of transactional distance (i.e.,

how the interrelationship of "Dialogue, Structure, and Learner Autonomy" necessitates the need for increased dialogue) has been central to the concept of social dynamics since the work of Michael Moore in 1997 (Kemp 44). Formal structures tend to inhibit relationships, so informal dialogue becomes important for all courses, including online courses. Indeed, "Relationship is central to understanding the phenomenon of the online experience" (Mount 34).

Previous researchers have demonstrated that psychologically, a student's sense of distance is not primarily physical, but qualitative (Borup et al. 195). To see this demonstrated, one need only to observe a traditional classroom, where an instructor struggles to keep students off Facebook and Twitter (Kemp 41)! Being "close" in a physical sense does not always mean "closeness" in a qualitative sense. Furthermore, the assumption that online education is disembodied must be questioned in the sense that students learn in an embodied sense in their local context — such as their home, church, and everyday relationships — and employ "mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions" (Lowe 60). This matter of closeness to others is significant because social separation directly affects academic performance; previous research has indicated that peer-to peer interaction is "perhaps the most significant factor" for achieving learning outcomes (Heinemann 13).

Closeness to others directly influences the overall experience of online students. Over the past ten years, academic leaders have become increasing concerned with the retention of online students. In 2004, 27.2% believed that retention of online students was more difficult than face-to-face students. In 2014, 44.6% believe that retaining online students is more difficult (Allen and Seaman 28). Indeed, "we thrive because of the *one-*

anotherness we experience collectively," and relationships directly impact how well students thrive online (Lowe 57). The lack of retention is often thought to be the result of the lack of social presence in online courses, and peer-to-peer videos would be one way of furthering social interaction amongst classmates.

When comparing the effects of social interaction, online courses provide some advantages over traditional courses. Some of these advantages include that "students may post comments in a structured manner that allows them to be more thoughtful and deliberative, not just quick and impulsive. It allows (and usually requires) that all students participate substantively in each discussion because there is no place to hide or be overlooked. Conversations can last throughout the entire course, not just during a brief window of time…Vibrant and substantive personal interaction between students and faculty is a hallmark of the mentored online seminar course." (Lowe et al. 43-44). Indeed, it is true that time, convenience, continuity, and accessibility are all strengths of online theological education. Online instructors often respond to student emails within hours, for example, which is not always the case with traditional classroom instructors.

Online social interaction has become commonplace: "Whether one can have truly meaningful community interaction in an online environment is largely a question of the past. We now live in a world that is being shaped by the use of nearly ubiquitous online communication (e.g., uprisings in North Africa)" (Lowe et al. 44). Facebook, for example, not only has several billion users, but in 2018 expanded its focus to develop online communities — increasing the number of Facebook employees, initiating Facebook Groups, and awarding over 10 million dollars in grants — in order to "bring people closer together" (Constine). With online social interactions now an assumed

reality, and with businesses such as Facebook using the internet in creative ways for social interactions, the concern for online theological educators involves the effectiveness and strategic implementation of such social interactions, so that determined learning goals are met.

One study in particular demonstrated the need for purposeful, planned social interactions in online courses. At the University of Carolina at Chapel Hill, researchers compared social dynamics between traditional and distance/hybrid courses. Student satisfaction was notably lower in the hybrid courses. In particular, students in hybrid courses sensed a lesser sense of community, when compared to students in traditional courses, but their feeling of community increased when students participate in a small group (R. Moore 22). The findings confirm that "It is vitally important for course designers and instructors to work to recreate, as much as possible, in online courses, the sense of community that is created in a face-to-face class- room setting" (R. Moore 24). Social interaction does not accidentally occur, but must be guided by instructors, and this paper will explore how peer-to-peer video can help in that process.

The social dynamic is essential for Christian education. Kemp argues, "For Christian educators, social presence is not just a means to an academic end, but a foundational component of Christian education itself" (Lowe et al. 46). As previously pointed out, education involves relationship (teacher-student and student-student), not only transmission of information (Munro 39). And Maddix reminds that "Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated" (Maddix "Generating" 377). Thus, while it is admirable to use videos to transmit information, online courses should also incorporate videos to develop relationships amongst students.

A lack of peer-to-peer video directly impacts Christian universities that desire to develop Christian students online. The problem is obvious: "Due to the lack of non-verbal communication, the shift from spoken communication to written communication presents a challenge for establishing social presence" (Maddix "Generating" 375). If a Christian institution desires to develop not merely students, but Christian students, then social presence should not be overlooked. Of course, video interactions help overcome this problem by re-introducing non-verbal communication, so that social presence can be more strongly developed.

Previous studies have already demonstrated, through surveys and interviews, that social presence can be improved by using asynchronous video in an online course (Borup et al. 197). In particular, in a cross-course analysis of three courses, the majority of students expressed that video interaction with an instructor positively impacted their experience of the course — in terms of communicated information, emotional expression, and personal cohesion (Borup et al. 199). However, as demonstrated by Griffiths' research, these studies have focused more on instructor-to-student relationships than student-to-student relationships (Griffiths *Improving* 148) — which is why this study aims to further explore the role of asynchronous peer-to-peer video.

Regarding the few students that expressed negative comments in Borup's cross-course analysis, the results suggest that video can be taken even further. For example, one student commented that online instructors did not go on enough tangents, which limited emotional connection within the course, and that students acted too "professionally" and could have expressed even more (Borup et al. 199). This, of course, would not suggest

using less video, but more video. Instructors and students could use more informal or "tangential" videos to develop even more community within an online classroom.

Visual technology positively affects social dynamics in several aspects. First, students need to prepare something to share on video, which can be anything from a presentation to a small group response (So 143). Second, students re-watch, review, and critique their own videos. As previous research has shown, one of the most beneficial aspects of visual technology is the added benefit of repeat or "unlimited watching" (So 143). This echoes what one of my mentors has said about education — that "Learning is about slowing life down" (Heck). Third, students receive "emotional support" from other students (So 144), so they do not become disconnected or discouraged.

These studies, however, were not conducted in a theological context. Notably, Borup's cross-course analysis reflected a mixed response from students (e.g., 9 comments affirmed that video provided emotional support and 9 comments did not). In Borup's analysis, the negative comments suggested that the problem primarily related to students not fully participating in the video discussions (Borup et al. 201). That is, the problem is not peer-to-peer video as a tool, but the lack of student participation.

Borup's cross-course study suggests that further research is needed. First, course designers should know why video interaction, in the words of one student, was "awkward" but also "okay" and increasingly comfortable (Borup et al. 200). Second, online instructors would benefit from knowing how student perceptions change when more students view and respond to peer-to-peer videos. Third, Christian colleges and Bible colleges should explore how a specifically Christian application (such as personal testimonies) would influence a student's experience of peer-to-peer video. Fourth,

Borup's study itself recommends that more "holistic" research is needed (Borup et al.

202), and from a Christian perspective, this would include not merely the framework of

expression, communication, and cohesion, but spirituality as well.

Spiritual Presence

From a Christian viewpoint, online education is not separate from the real world,

but happens within the realm of God's creation. For that reason, online involvement is

not "less real," since online activities can be spiritual. As Palloff and Pratt put it,

"Everything we do as humans, including our interaction with technology, is spiritual"

(Palloff and Pratt 58). Keeping that in mind, it is important that online Christian

instructors view online classrooms as places of spiritual growth.

Decisions made by online educators, of course, influence the spiritual

development of students. Whether online tools are used or avoided, the choice made by

instructors will ultimately have a spiritual effect. Even more than non-Christians

educators, Christian educators need to think about how technological decisions reflect

their theology and anthropology (Maddix "Developing" 33). In other words, as Maddix

points out, online education has spiritual influence upon the participants.

While some might question the use of computer-mediated communication and its

appropriateness for spirituality, it is significant to note that computer-mediated

communication generally leads to more self-disclosure (Misoch 537). Previous research

has shown that students believe the communal nature of online courses do in fact

contribute to their spiritual growth — not subtly, but "impacted greatly through the

dialogue with others" (Lowe 55). While factors of anonymity and physical separation

certainly need to be considered in an online context, the point remains that online

communication provides a unique dynamic for communication — one that may effectively develop spiritual growth due to greater degree of self-disclosure.

Similarly, in "Religious Practice in Virtual Worlds," Corts observed that online users engage in spiritual activities (e.g., a church service in an online virtual world called Second Life) and that online religious practice replicates the structure of real-life religious practice (Corts 64). Despite having a reputation for being only for games or entertainment, virtual worlds can be places of "places of ritual, religion, and faith" (Corts 63). In fact, imagined environments, or online spaces with virtual engagements, can provide "greater freedom" for people to divulge information (Corts 63). Thus, according to Corts' research, online environments are not devoid of spiritual activity, but can actually foster spiritual growth (Corts 65) — thus raising questions for Christian educators, church leaders, and researchers about the role of religious activity, or performance in online environments.

Cultural Factors

As cultural analysts have pointed out, movement from text on(a page to images on a screen marks a fundamental shift in communication – which can be labeled as "post-text" (Manjoo). Especially when it comes to online experiences, reading has been decreasing, which Manjoo describes as "the decline of text, and the exploding reach and power of audio and video" (Manjoo). Recent statistics reported in *The New York Times* reveal the prevalence of online visual engagement: (1) YouTube users in 2017 watched a billion hours of video every day; (2) Netflix plans on investing $8 billion dollars, and Apple $1 billion dollars, into original video content that will stream online; and (3)

Instagram added a video streaming feature, in the likes of Snapchat, and Instagram users look at visual content for an average of over 30 minutes per day. (Manjoo)

In the same *Times* article, entitled "Welcome to the Post-Text Future," Manjoo describes the state of the internet as formerly text-based, and how in the past year, online communication has dramatically shifted towards multimedia (e.g., an increase in audio and video podcasts, YouTube channels, Instagram stories, etc.). According to Manjoo, text will never completely disappear, of course, but sounds and images have now become "the universal language." This shift is being caused, Manjoo explains, by the democratization of multimedia communication, which was previously reserved to professional studios but is now easily produced by anyone with a tech device. Concluding his analysis, Manjoo asks: "But what are we going to do? There seems to be no going back now. For text, the writing is on the wall" (Manjoo).

Visual technology is now commonplace in culture at large, and in increasing numbers, video usage is occurring via online and mobile mediums. As has been pointed out previously, a "revolution" is taking place — demonstrated by the fact that the average American increased online video usage by "three hours per month year over year, a 38% increase between the final quarters of 2013 and 2014" ("Welcome to the Video Revolution"). Likewise, over the course of the same year, the use of smartphone apps increased by over nine hours per month, illustrating how the average American is shifting away from traditional mediums (e.g., a 6-hour decrease of traditional TV viewing) towards digital apps and online video ("Welcome to the Video Revolution") As part of this trend, online video providers like Netflix "have suddenly found themselves playing a

new role: the establishment" (Steel par. 1). In fact, Netflix is now worth more than CBS,

Viacom, Dish, Twitter or Discovery (Spangler).

Whether intended or not, different forms of communication affect the content

itself because at least in part the "medium is the message" (McLuhan loc. 148). Looking

back upon the historical usage of various technologies, it can be observed that

"technology is not neutral" and has various "unintended effects" (Hunt 14). Any

technological decision that is made — whether to use less or more technology, which

technologies to use and how, etc. — has an effect. New technologies do not merely do

things "*for* us," but "*to* us" (Hunt 17), meaning that including each type of technology

will shape the users of that technology.

The abundance of video, some have previously noted, can be detrimental to

Christian education. As far back as 1985, Neil Postman argued that visual technology has

hurt students by implying and reinforcing that education must be entertaining. Postman

embraced visual technology for what it does well (namely, entertainment), but rejected

the medium for inappropriate ends (namely, education). In what might his surprise

readers, he even criticized *Sesame Street* for cultivating a culture that requires visual

entertainment. Specifically, Postman was concerned that visual technology can shorten

serious discussion and distract with over-stimulation. But even Postman, who warned

against the use of video, recognized that not all visual technology is the same. Some uses

of visual technology, such as *NewsHour*, are more educational than others. In Postman's

view, when used *properly*, visual technology can and should be used for what it does

best.

Today, social media continues to evolve. For example, Facebook's original

mission was "to make the world more open and connected," yet that was updated in 2017

to the following: "Give people the power to build community and bring the world closer

together" (Chaykowski). While the change in wording might seem small, the effect is not.

Under Mark Zuckerberg's updated vision, Facebook is not merely intended to increase

communication, but to develop communities. As a result, Facebook is seeking to develop

new groups in order to expand knowledge, perspectives, and experiences (Chaykowski).

Being aware of cultural changes, such as this development of Facebook, can help with

not only understanding culture and its media, but how to best interact with others in an

ever-evolving environment.

Philosophy of Online Christian Education

While some teachers rely on intuition rather than a formal philosophy, the reality

is that each instructor makes instructional decisions based upon his/her worldview. For

example, a behaviorist would likely emphasize the transmission of information; a social

constructivist may emphasize group collaboration; and a Socratic would emphasize

dialogue between students and the instructor (Hickey 18).

Philosophy of education thus impacts if and how technology is used. Like other

educational tools in the classroom, each technology requires justification for its use.

Indeed, "Technology choices depend on and will amplify our teaching philosophy so

examining our assumptions about teaching is essential when designing appropriate

learning interventions" (Hickey 16). In particular, the use of different technologies (or the

rejection of certain technologies) is driven by underlying assumptions or beliefs.

In addition to the instructor, each technology carries its own inherent assumptions — for example, sound influences human emotions, written concepts can be organized, pictures speak louder than words, etc. As McLuhan stated, "any medium has the power of imposing its own assumption on the unwary" (McLuhan loc. 271). For that reason, Christian educators must not be passive, but aware of the assumptions of each respective technology. What follows is a summary of how philosophy of education affects methodology, particularly in regard to visual technology.

George R. Knight raises a number of concerns related to a Christian philosophy of education. He points out that every aspect of our curriculum should be grounded in a philosophy, and even when we are careless, our educational decisions are *prima facie* influenced by our worldview. Eclecticism, or drawing from secular philosophies in smorgasbord style, does not reflect the ideal. The choices that we make determine the ends that we reach.

Knight points out that underlying philosophies should be critiqued. Philosophies of education can be broadly categorized in terms of Platonic (idealist), Aristotelian (realist), or Modern (existentialist). Christians should recognize both the contributions and shortcoming of these various philosophies, so that our curriculum can be shaped according to a Christian worldview. Whatever we include, indeed "everything," in Christian education programs "should be done for justifiable reasons" (Knight loc. 4409).

For example, with most online courses, "the instructor's role moves from social negotiator to structural engineer to facilitator to community member/challenger" (Lowe 45). Along these lines, Rovai et al. summarize their research of online Christian community in an educational context by stating:

Increased attention is needed on strengthening online communities and to close

the gap in sense of community and perceived learning between on-campus and

online student populations. The challenge for universities is to improve the social

and community experience for online learners. Active measures to enhance

community ties among online students need to be advocated and practiced. (Rovai

et al. 18-19)

This study, therefore, aims to give attention to the development of online

community – in particular, whether video-based small groups may assist in the

strengthening of social and community experience.

Philosophy of education also affects what is excluded. "Ignorance" or "absence of

something is not neutral," reminds Knight (Knight loc. 4409). In fact, this "null

curriculum is important" because "what is left out or avoided" says just as much as what

is included (Knight loc. 4409). Keeping that in mind, Christian educators must pay

attention to what is missing and ask why. Applying Knight's observations, with online

courses, instructors might ask why Christian colleges have not included more video

interaction between students, specifically within regards to small group discussions.

Philosophy of education also influences the moral or ethical framework within the

classroom. All educational institutions depend upon morality to some degree (e.g.,

plagiarism is wrong), but Christian institutions take a step further to state that certain

morals are absolute, universal for all and decreed by God. As such, Christian education

aims to not merely inform, but to shape a student's character. Christian educators should

not be merely concerned with right thinking (orthodoxy), but right living (orthopraxis). In

the words of Arthur Holmes, "education has to do with the transmission of values"

(Holmes *Shaping Character* vii).

Biblically speaking, character formation takes place within community, or to put

it another way, "a community of learners is an essential, core element of an educational

experience when higher-order learning is the desired learning outcome" (Garrison *E-*

Learning 19). The Apostle Paul addressed the importance of Christian community,

especially in Ephesians, where he emphasized the unity necessary within the local

church. The author of Hebrews also makes urges for Christian community by urging

Christians to assemble together; otherwise, they would not be able to spur one another on

to good works (Heb. 10:25). Each of these authors believed that people need people to

grow together in order to hear new perspectives, rub shoulders with disagreement, and

see purity exemplified.

Just as theology impacts philosophy of education, so does a holistic, a Christian

worldview impacts anthropology. From a Christian perspective, character development

should be understood in a holistic manner, which goes beyond the mind and considers the

entire person. In an online course, students need to be seen as integrated persons.

Instructors would benefit from taking an "ecological" perspective of online students that

views coherence between all aspects of the physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and

moral (Lowe 56-57). Considering the symbiosis within the human person (Lowe 57),

visual dimensions such as peer-to-peer video should not be considered superfluous, but as

an integral tool of developing students within an online classroom.

For the reasons mentioned above, this study is motivated by the desire to develop

students in a holistic manner. After all, growth in an online Bible college context is not a

matter of how many hours spent online, but "on the quality of these encounters and exchanges. There is a need to recognize that socialization is as important as instruction in online school environments" (Rovai et al. 19). Thus, from Rovai et al.'s perspective, social interactions must incorporate an effective use of the various online tools available.

As a specific example, Moody Bible Institute demonstrates how educational philosophy affects the tools used and not used. Moody's Course Design Manual for distance learning courses specifies what is advisable and unadvisable. For example, Moody Distance Learning (MDL) places current media and current textbooks at the fore, rather than using dated study guides or "canned video lectures" (Mahaffey 1). At the same time, MDL warns against using "gimmicks" that "come and go" and complicate the course design process (Mahaffey 2-3). Definitions of technological gadgets is somewhat subjective, of course (e.g., some might consider web-based courses gimmicky), and MDL lists "colorful, interactive Flash graphics, professionally laid out video productions, live webinar sessions," etc. as gimmicks (Mahaffey 2).

In order to prevent a gimmicky approach to distance education, MDL embraces a "Keep It Short and Simple" approach (Mahaffey 3). With this educational philosophy, the following values are embraced: avoiding overcomplicated assignments, allowing for quick access to course materials, and encouraging limited time online (Mahaffey 3). In other words, while technology can help, it can also hinder. Course design must use efficient technologies that (1) add richness to the course and (2) do not detract from the student experience.

MDL encourages the use of audio and video in course development, provided that the media is personal and concise (Mahaffey 17). In the current version of the MDL

handbook, there are not specific guidelines for media exchanged between students. However, the same principles of personal interaction ("extemporaneous") and brevity ("2-5 minutes in length") could also be applied to student interactions. If these principles are followed, students are more likely to stay engaged in the course.

When determining media requirements, much of the focus falls on the instructor introducing course content or sharing online resources to help students gather information. Only two paragraphs mention students developing or participating in media themselves. Interestingly, MDL notes that internet-based tools can be useful in developing social relationships, using Global Media Outreach and Second Life as examples. As Mahaffey notes, "*Global Media Outreach*, for example, allows students to interact with non-Christians and Christians alike as they offer spiritual advice, share the gospel, or pray for people around the world. *Second Life* offers interesting opportunities for interaction with non-Christians in a virtual environment" (33). Other research has focused on the usefulness of Second Life in educational contexts, but here it is useful to note that MDL recognizes that such tools can be used with a spiritual purpose in mind.

The following paragraph in the MDL handbook provides some specific samples of how internet tools can be used:

> Students might be asked to 'plant a church' in this virtual space, to develop evangelistic activities, or to participate in the formation of social activist groups. Though such activities take place in a virtual environment, the space and interactions are no less real. The *Second Life* platform and the services offered by *Global Media Outreach* represent low cost ways for students to gain practical experience in a number of different ministry areas. (Mahaffey 33-34)

While it may be questioned whether such activities would indeed substitute as "practical experience" for church planting, this statement from MDL makes a number of very significant points regarding the benefits of online media: its cost effectiveness, its encouragement of interpersonal interaction, and its spiritual applicability. Going beyond MDL's course design manual, it is worth noting that such online interactions can also involve fellow Christians and students within the same course. Within the context of Christian distance education, sharing videos between students costs practically nothing, helps students connect with one another, and encourages spiritual formation.

Technology & Online Christian Community

The following section explores how technology relates to the development of online Christian community. Due to the "location" of community online, it is impossible to ignore the tools being used to make such community possible. This section, therefore, reviews literature related to various kinds of online communication – with particular focus on asynchronous video, which will be used in this research project as a means for promoting online Christian community.

Modes of Communication

With online education, various methods are used to develop emotional and social interactions amongst students; some of these methods are more successful than others. Stephen Kemp categorizes these as common, worst, and best practices (Kemp 47-50). According to Kemp, common practices include discussion forums, posting of social media contact information, and support services. Worst practices include blog-type discussions, virtual lounges, virtual chapels, and virtual prayer rooms — because they cannot effectively replace the real thing. Best practices include threaded discussions,

detailed instructions for student interactions, a mixture of small and large discussion groups, advanced *netiquette* tips, faculty self-disclosure and social involvement, frequent communication, and the use of student cohorts.

Going beyond these, Kemp also suggests "next practices" that take these efforts even further (Lowe 50-51). These include assigned social responses (e.g., respond to the student most similar to you, respond with humor, respond to those you disagree with, etc.); a buddy system (working with a few students within a larger group); assessment tools for gauging social interactions; collaborative assignments with other students; and interactive assignments outside of class (e.g., interviewing a spouse or pastor).

Overall, the point is that online education does not *need* to prevent or prohibit social interaction. Quite the contrary, online education can actually encourage robust social interactions (both online and offline), as long as strategic decisions are made by educators. For example, online education provides a unique opportunity for students to share and hear stories from people around the world, and these stories play a significant role in how connected students will feel in an online course (Sung & Mayer 1746). Rather than thinking of online education as less social, therefore, instructors should thoughtfully employ educational methods (such as sharing personal stories through peer-to-peer video) that accentuate the unique offerings of online education.

Therefore, Christian educators make choices about tools to use online — not merely deciding between text, images, or audio, but deciding how best to integrate them. As Misoch summarizes, the more communication channels that are used, the greater degree of communication — particularly in terms of social presence and media richness (Misoch 536). Thus, richer communication takes place because more data is being

transferred (Misoch 536). In light of Misoch's findings, educators should seek to go

beyond merely one form of media, such as text, to include other forms, such as video.

John Medina, professor at the University of Washington School of Medicine,

further emphasizes the importance of visual elements in a learning environment.

According to Medina, vision should not be defined in terms of our eyes only, but in terms

of our entire cognitive process, since our brains spend most of their working function on

processing images. For educational contexts, previous research has shown that visual

content maximizes memorability: "Text and oral presentations are not just less efficient

than pictures for retaining certain types of information; they are far less efficient. If

information is presented orally, people remember about 10 percent, tested 72 hours after

exposure. That figure goes up to 65 percent if you add a picture" (Medina 192). Thus,

visual elements such as online video can help increase memory in a learning

environment.

Visual Cues for Christian Community

Throughout Scripture, visual dynamics play a role in God's redemptive work of

His people. Again and again, readers of the Bible "see" in their mind's eye a depiction of

these recorded events, but these visual events were also visible in their original context.

Thus, Christian communities are based upon historical, visible aspects. Examples include

(1) nature: from the start, creation declares the glory of God (Ps. 19:1); (2) miracles: from

the Red Sea to Lazarus, miraculous events display God's power; (3) the Tabernacle and

Temple: the Old Testament describes how Holy God prescribes visual specifications for

worship and dwells "in the sight" of His people (e.g., Ex. 36:8-39:43; 40:38); (4)

incarnation: in describing Jesus, Paul says that "He is the image of the invisible God, the

firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15); (5) sacraments: the water, bread, and wine serve as visible signs of grace (Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 11:17-34); and (6) spiritual gifts: in Acts, there is the actual "seeing" of the Holy Spirit outpoured on both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 2 and Acts 10). Of course, many other examples in Scripture could be listed, since clearly, the Bible is filled with visible signs of God's grace.

Christians should welcome the visual dynamics of faith primarily because Jesus Himself welcomed the visual. As Lohfink states:

> Jesus did not envision the people of God which he sought to gather as a purely spiritual, purely religious community-as a society in human hearts (*societas in cordibus*). Theses of this sort, which are frequently defended either covertly or openly, fail to do justice to his intentions. The discipleship to which Jesus called was not invisible discipleship; his eating with sinners was not invisible eating; his cures of the sick were not invisible cures- no more than his bloody death on the cross was an invisible event. Jesus' effort to gather Israel was very concrete and visible. (Lohfink loc. 370-373)

This is true from beginning to end. Jesus' incarnation, miracles, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension were visible events, and His return will also be visible as "every eye will see Him" (Rev. 1:17). Elsewhere, beyond the visual descriptions in Revelation, John further echoes these visual metaphors in describing Jesus Christ – such as "we have seen His glory" and "we shall see Him as He is" (Jn. 1:14,18; 1 Jn. 3:2). Jesus' followers do not live by sight solely (2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:1), yet we recognize the visible reality of Jesus' life and we await to see Him again. Thus, believers should not reject the visible realm as being wrong, optional, or something to be entirely avoided.

Why does the visual realm matter? Visual images have the ability to influence our emotions, often bypassing linear logic (Hunt 21). Compared to text, images require a more "immediate" emotional response, evident by the fact that images can draw emotional responses from abstract images. (For more information, see Jacques Ellul's *Humiliation of the Word.*) Visual cues provide additional clarity and immediate connection — for both content and interpersonal relationships. For instance, one online student described the affective influence of video by saying, "I just immediately felt a connection" (Borup et al. 199).

In an online classroom, visual cues can affect various aspects of interpersonal relationships, including a student's emotions. At Brigham Young University (BYU), students were required to collaborate for a group project using online video, and they then completed a Likert-scale survey after the course. Results from that survey show that students felt comfortable conversing, participating, and interacting with one another using video. Students also felt a strong sense of trust, acknowledgment, and collaboration. Even though BYU is outside the Protestant tradition, it can be observed that religious students believed that were many positive benefits of using video (see Griffiths' "Potential").

At the same time, students at BYU felt less enthusiastic about the "affective" dimensions of video interactions — that is, developing a sense of belonging and unique social relationships with fellow classmates (Griffiths "Potential" 20). This lower satisfaction for emotional, affective connection with other students may be the result of group work itself (Griffiths "Potential" 20) – such as poor group dynamics – so it would be helpful to further study the affective dimensions without the added requirement of group work. It should also be noted that the lower emotional satisfaction may also be due

to more student accountability (as the instructors pointed out) and a corresponding lack of participation (as some students admitted) (Griffiths "Potential" 21). Because this study at BYU was limited in scope, Griffiths calls for the need for additional development and research (Griffiths "Potential" 22).

Expression of emotion naturally plays a role in traditional classrooms, but it is sometimes reduced or absent from text-based online courses (Griffiths *Improving* 28). Emotiveness includes various ingredients, including humor and self-disclosure (Griffiths *Improving* 28-29). Online video, especially that between peers, would help with both humorous expression and self-disclosure with non-verbal expression.

Technology has the ability to reveal truth that otherwise might be hidden. As Heidegger put it, "Technology is a way of revealing… it is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth" (Heidegger 12). This is especially the case with media technology — such as showing a person from thousands of miles away in real-time. Visual technology, therefore, is not merely a matter of increasing comprehension for visual learners. It reveals truth that would otherwise be hidden, such as an instructor's care for students, the tone of voice of other students, and so forth. In fact, in Greek, there is a connection between *technē* and *epistēmē* — distinguished from one another by Aristotle — demonstrating that technology and knowledge share a close relationship (Heidegger 13). In a limited sense, human beings "drive technology forward" and thus take "part in ordering as a way of revealing" (Heidegger 18).

Significantly, research has shown that individuals disclose more personal information when using commuter-mediated communication, especially when that communication is unidirectional, meaning that the individual broadcasts without

necessarily an immediate response (Misoch 538). The finding that individuals disclose more personal information through unidirectional communication means that certain forms of technology, such as peer-to-peer video in an online course, could actually *promote* more self-disclosure than what occurs in traditional classroom settings. Thus, instructors can incorporate the benefits of student self-disclosure, so that online courses benefit from these findings.

In an online classroom, intimacy and immediacy are important aspects of "being" present. The character of the medium influences a student's perception, and has been noted in previous research, this sense of being present has a direct impact upon positive and effective experiences in online courses (Sung & Mayer 1739). Because both intimacy and immediacy benefit from the visual, non-verbal cues, this paper seeks to affirm how peer-to-peer video can assist in this sense of "being" within a technological context.

Synchrony & Asynchrony

Both synchronous and asynchronous tools offer benefits to students. Research indicates that synchronous online discussions are especially beneficial "in building relationships between students and faculty and providing an opportunity for live interaction" (374). For that reason, it is recommended that "online classes include both asynchronous and synchronous online discussions" (Maddix "Generating" 374). For the purposes of this study, what is being researched is whether asynchronous video provides benefits above and beyond asynchronous text-based forums. Asynchronous video interactions work well in online courses because videos provide more visual communication, closer to what would be experienced in a traditional classroom. As

Borup states, asynchronous video connects "*human touch* aspects of face-to-face communication with the flexibility of online environments" (Borup 195).

Although video has often considered a synchronous technology (e.g., video conferencing), in reality, it can be effectively used asynchronously. For example, Maddix discusses synchronous and asynchronous discussion, but only refers to video as synchronous (Maddix "Generating" 381). In a second example, during a discussion of online presence, Kemp discusses the centrality of online text-based discussions but does not discuss asynchronous peer-to-peer video (Kemp 50). For a third example, in a 2015 study of asynchronous communication, video was used for "vodcasts," and when over 400 students were surveyed, podcasts were considered the most highly satisfactory (Jackson ii), and 77% of students desired more video to be used (Jackson 73). However, in this case, videos broadcasted information from teachers to students, but excluded peer-to-peer video sharing (Jackson 60). These examples, along with others (Griffiths *Improving* 31), reflect how previous research has focused on text-based or synchronous-video discussions, and they reveal the need for further study of peer-to-peer asynchronous video in online classrooms.

Significantly, asynchronous communication has been shown to increase student self-disclosure. As Misoch summarizes, asynchronous technologies, such as student videos posted in a discussion forum, have been shown to "enhance the willingness to reveal authentic and/or otherwise hidden information about the presenters" (Misoch 538). In other words, when able to record and upload rather than live stream, students reveal more about themselves.

Ease of Access

Although video did not come to the fore by 1923, as predicted by Thomas Edison, Clark & Stewart point out that most students today can create and use online video. This is because "(a) videos can be created easily and at low cost, (b) distribution is almost cost-free, and (c) hosting is free, as the most popular Web hosting sites are supported by banner advertising and allow cost-free contributor uploads" (Clark & Stewart 478). In that sense, there is a low-bar of access, and nearly every student should be able to participate.

Asynchronous video overcomes a number of challenges, making online Christian education much easier. Unlike synchronous video conferencing that requires a fast internet connection, pre-recorded videos do not require a super fast connection (Griffiths *Improving* 15). At a particular time, half of the data is required because information is streaming uni-directionally rather than simultaneously. This is a major benefit of asynchronous video, ultimately reducing the frustration and improving the student experience (Griffiths *Improving* 31-32).

Student Resistance

Finally, regardless of how beneficial peer-to-peer videos may seem to instructors, they must also be embraced by students. In fact, in previous case studies, the main complaint involved the lack of student participation. Students felt that other students were sharing their own videos, but not actually viewing other videos or engaging with other students (Borup et al. 201). Of course, this raises the question of why students would resist peer-to-peer videos.

Despite being easy to record, upload, and view, online video might be resisted by students for a number of reasons. These reasons include the possible distraction, the lack

of perceived ability, the lack of actual ability, and lost opportunity costs (Hickey 19-20).

In short, students might feel that their time is better spent elsewhere — especially if they

do not want to connect with the instructor or other students. Excessive emphasis upon

social dynamics can turn students off because too much social presence can interfere with

cognitive presence (Garrison *E-Learning* 34). In light of this danger, instructors must be

careful to thoughtfully use technology to ensure that it does not waste time or hinder

students in their learning (Hickey 19-20).

Another significant reason worth mentioning is the perceived "awkwardness" of

video. Students can easily hide behind a computer screen and keyboard, but video

exposes them in ways that some students might not enjoy. A previous study by Borup et

al. confirmed that students initially sense awkwardness, but eventually adjust and become

more comfortable. Out of 18 students, 10 students felt that video communication was

more natural than text, while 8 students felt awkward. This is quite significant, but it is

important to note that 7 students felt the awkwardness was minor and/or subsided as the

course continued. Only 1 student out of 18 felt that the awkwardness was unpleasant

(Borup et al. 200). A number of factors contribute to how much a student will participate

and self-disclose information about themselves; these factors include motivation,

personality, cultural context, age, and gender (Misoch 538).

Research Design Literature

Qualitative research is appropriate for this research, since qualitative research

seeks the "meanings and essences of experience rather than measurements and

explanations" (Moustakas 21) from a variety of angles. As such, this research study uses

qualitative methods to explore the meaning and essence of community experience – as

reported by participants, coded in videos, and observed by the instructor. Even when numbers are observed in the study, the purpose of such numbers is to explore the reason (meaning or essence) behind those numbers.

One kind of qualitative research explores the shared experiences of groups. In particular, a phenomenological study "describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (Creswell 76). Thus, phenomenology offers "a description of the essence" of a phenomenon (Creswell 103).

Phenomenological research can involve a number components, including the following: (1) a specific phenomenon being studied; (2) a statement of philosophical assumptions; (3) data collected from individuals who experience the same phenomenon; (4) an analysis of statements regarding the phenomenon; (5) researcher-organized "meanings" from these significant statements; (6) a description of participants' experience and the researcher's experience; and (7) a descriptive summary of the "'essence' of the phenomenon" so that an outsider can better understand an experience of that phenomenon (Creswell 81-82).

Within a phenomenological approach, observation and inductive coding into categories is an approach tool for qualitative research (Saldana 176). For example, taking information – such as sentences in a video – and categorizing them is an appropriate task within qualitative research. Arranging by themes offers an overarching perspective by observing what recurs in the data (Saldaña 176). Such analysis is especially appropriate for studying beliefs and emotional experiences, which is particularly fitting for observing

a person's experience within a group (Saldaña 176). Thus, this research uses qualitative

research methods – an in particular, a phenomenological approach – to determine which

specific practices were visible or not visible of Christian community.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter offers an overview of the project and explains how the research questions were addressed through the research process. Regarding methodology, the chapter details the *context* of the research project, the *participants* of the research project, and the *procedure* for collecting and analyzing evidence (pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, follow-up interviews, and video observation). Then a defense is provided regarding the reliability and validity of the research. In sum, this chapter explains how the research explores the presence and/or absence of Christian community in video-based small groups within four Bible classes at Moody Bible Institute.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

This qualitative study examined the presence and/or absence of Christian community within asynchronous video-based small groups in an online Bible course. Specific attention was paid to student experiences and instructor observations in order to determine which practices (if any) of Christian community were evident. The purpose was to determine the effectiveness of interpersonal videos within small groups for cultivating Christian community in online undergraduate Bible classes at Moody Bible Institute.

As discussed in the literature review, Christians would affirm that Christians need community, not only for healthy living but also for spiritual growth. In light of that belief, Christian churches or Christian colleges that use online tools for teaching the Bible would benefit from inquiring into the presence or absence of Christian community within an

online context. It is dangerous to *assume* that Christian community exists; it must be demonstrated and described, so that Christian discipleship in these contexts can be effective.

Based upon the belief that Christians grow best within the context of community, this project sought to explore if and how video-based small groups enhance students' experience of community in an online Bible class. More specifically, the purpose of this project was to determine the effectiveness of interpersonal videos within small groups for cultivating Christian community in four online undergraduate Bible classes at Moody Bible Institute.

Research Questions

RQ #1. Prior to the small groups, what do participants report as their expectations of a video-based small group experience?

To assess participant expectations, a short answer questionnaire was used pre-intervention. This questionnaire collected the attitudes of students prior to their experience in video-based small groups. The questions concerned which aspects of Christianity community students expected to experience in the video-based small groups. Questions included the following:

1. What is your name? (Include your name if you would be willing to answer follow-up questions via email, in case the instructor has any follow-up questions to clarify your answers. Please know that your responses will be reviewed *after* the course has concluded, so your grade will not be affected either way.)

2. Do you believe that Christian community is possible online? If so, what aspects or part of Christian fellowship can be experienced online? If not, what would prevent community online?

3. Do you think that videos in an online-based small group enhance or detract from Christian community? Please explain.

4. In an online Bible course, what would you hope to experience in videos exchanged between students?

RQ #2. In the small groups, which practices of Christian community are evident (i.e., present)?

To observe which practices of Christian community are present within the video-based small groups, student interactions were analyzed after the course concluded. Students were asked (1) to submit a transcript of what they were to say and (2) to upload a video to share with their classmates. Analysis of the transcripts and observations of the videos were done after the course in order to avoid any interference with grading.

RQ #3. In the small groups, which practices of Christian community are not evident (i.e., absent)?

In the small groups, some practices of Christian community were either absent, less evident, or simply unobservable. This study also seeks to name these practices that were not observable at all or less observable than others. By inductively coding the transcripts and videos, the research will reveal which marks of Christian community were visible in the small groups. Analysis was done after the course to avoid any interference with grading.

RQ #4. Do participants report a sense of being in Christian community when describing their small group experience?

Following their experience in the small groups, students completed a questionnaire that gauged their personal experience of Christian community within the small groups. While previous studies have demonstrated student approval of video usage in an online course, this study examines the uniquely Christian practices of community, as reported by students.

The post-intervention questionnaire included the following questions:

1. What is your name? (Include this only if you would be willing to answer follow-up questions via email, in case the instructor has any further questions after the course has concluded. Your grade will not be affected either way.)

2. Did you feel that you experienced Christian community in the online class? If so, how do you sense Christian community? If not, what prohibited the sense of Christian community?

3. In your perspective, did the use of personal, student videos in the class enhance or detract from your experience of Christian community?

4. Did you feel more connected to students through the text-based discussion board or the video-based discussion boards, and why?

5. If you were to take another online Bible course, would you welcome the use of personal, student videos or would you prefer not to use videos? Why or why not?

To further clarify data, follow-up interviews were conducted with students via email to inquire about or to clarify specific comments in the questionnaire. This

additional research method allowed the researcher to delve deeper into shorter responses and/or responses that could use further explanation. Follow-up questions sought to clarify any responses that could use further development. Questions included the following:

1. What did you mean when you said, "_____"?

2. Could you further describe what you meant by, "_____"?

3. When you said that "_____," how or why did that happen?

4. Based on your responses, do you have recommendations for how to improve community in an online course? If so, what would you recommend? (This question could be asked after the conclusion of the course.)

Ministry Context for Observing the Phenomenon

Moody Bible Institute has approximately 908 distance education students ("Enrollment"), and this figure represents nearly a third of all undergraduate students (3234) at Moody Bible Institute. These numbers reflect the significance of this research. In other words, nearly one third of the Moody education takes place online, which makes the absence or presence of Christian community online an important topic to study.

This study was conducted within the context of a conservative, evangelical Christian education context. It important to recognize that, as a place that focuses on preparing students for ministry, God's Word places a central role at Moody Bible Institute. As such, important emphasis has been placed upon students reading texts and responding via text-based forums. Less focus has been placed on developing interpersonal relationships, and in the author's personal experience, students have been hesitant about using videos for personal introductions. Based upon this context, therefore,

this study aims to locate videos within a small group context and to use these videos for spiritually-focused interpersonal sharing.

<div align="center">

Participants to Be Sampled About the Phenomenon

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Criteria for Selection

To examine the effectiveness of video-based small groups in an online Bible class, students at Moody Bible Institute were part of this research project. "Selection" was the result of students registering for the Reading the New Testament course (50 students in 3 sections) or The New Testament and Theology (18 students in 1 section), both of which are part of a multi-course sequence in the online degree program through Moody Distance Learning. Each class ran for 8-weeks, with the classes ranging in time period from August 2016 to December 2017; the classes occurred subsequently, not simultaneously, and spread over the year.

To be more specific, Table 1 below provides a detailed overview of the participants, the dates of their participation, and in which parts students participated. In total, 68 students were initially enrolled in the classes, but some dropped or unenrolled in the course. Of those who remained, 57 students were organized into the video-based small groups; of that number, 42 completed a pre-intervention questionnaire and 36 completed a post-intervention questionnaire; a majority of participants (85%) submitted a final video, which is analyzed in the fourth chapter of this dissertation.

Table 1. Participant Summary

	Initially Enrolled Students	Small Group Participants	Pre-Intervention Questionnaire / Interviewees	Post-Intervention Questionnaire / Interviewees	Final Video Submissions (Week 8)

New Testament & Theology (Fall 2016, Aug. to Oct.)	18	15	7	11	14
Reading the New Testament (Spring 2017, Mar. to May)	18	14	12	7	11
Reading the New Testament (Fall 2017, Aug. to Oct.)	18	17	13	12	13
Reading the New Testament (Fall 2017, Oct. to Dec.)	14	11	10	6	10
Total	68	57	42	36	48

Participants were selected due to their enrollment in an online course taught by the researcher. Each participant enrolled online via Moodle Bible Institute's Distant Learning program – meaning that (1) each had the technological tools that were required and (2) each previously affirmed Moody's doctrinal statement. These factors matter because it means that each participant had affirmed an understanding and acceptance of Christianity prior to engaging in this study.

All of the students who were included in this research engaged in the following shared experience: (1) completion of the pre-intervention questionnaire to gauge their preconceived notions and expectations; (2) participation in video-based small groups for the last 4 weeks of class (i.e., weeks 5-8); (3) completion of the post-intervention questionnaire to collect their self-reported experience of the video-based small group

experience; and (4) submission of a final video with the exact prompt (Appendix G) for all four classes. The research focused on these shared elements of two questionnaires, the video-based small groups, and the final videos in week 8.

Description of Participants

Participants in this study were undergraduate students at Moody Bible Institute. Overall, Moody students reflect the following ethnic backgrounds: Asian (6%), Black (3%), Hispanic (5%), White (64%), Other (2%), and Not Specified (20%). The student body as a whole is made up of 54% men and 46% women ("Enrollment").

Based on previous offerings of this course, the instructor expected 10 to 20 students to participate in each class. These students were then organized into smaller groups of 3-5 students per group, based upon an alphabetic listing of their last names.

In this particular study, students included 39 males and 17 females, and as online students, they represented a wide variety of geographical locations. All of the students were professing Christian believers (according to their personal statement upon enrolling at Moody Bible Institute), and due to their enrollment at Moody Bible Institute, they were taking the course in order to prepare for some form of Christian ministry or social service.

Ethical Considerations

The research had no impact upon student grading. Although students were required to record videos for their grades, they had the option of completing the questionnaires as a part of the course, and at any point, they could request not to be have their responses included in the study. Via a course announcement posted in Blackboard,

students were assured that their grade would in no way be affected by their participation in or cessation from the study.

Following the research, to maintain confidentiality, student identities and student grades were not made public. The research focused on questionnaire responses and peer-to-peer videos. In addition, because the videos were personal in nature, the videos were made accessible outside of the course. Only the research coding is provided.

Again, the analysis of the videos was completed following the completion of the course. By analyzing the videos after grades were submitted, students were allowed to speak and respond freely, expressing their opinions honestly, without fear that their responses (or lack of responses) would affect their grade.

Procedure for Collecting Evidence from Participants

Data was collected online from students who volunteered to participate in the study. The same process was followed, and the same format was used for all four classes. In particular, the prompt for the final videos was exactly the same for all four courses. This was done to ensure reliable results from the gathered data.

Prior to the start of each course, the researcher arranged students in groups of three to five. Groups were formed alphabetically, according to each student's last name. Students were informed via the syllabus to participate in their small groups on a regular basis.

At the start of the course, the researcher sent a personal email to each student to invite him/her to participate in the research. Students were told that their participation in the study was optional, but that it would be beneficial to them, the school, and the instructor. Students were informed that a $5 Amazon gift certificate would be emailed to

any student who completed both questionnaires, as an expression of thanks and to assist

them with future book purchases. They were also informed that the analysis of any data

would be done at the completion of the course, so regardless of their participation, their

grade would remain completely unaffected. To clearly communicate this information to

students, a consent form was provided to all students via email and the course

announcement page. Students signed this document by returning the consent form by

email or stating their agreement in an email reply. This consent form is available in

Appendix A of this study.

Each week, until week five, an email reminder was sent to those who volunteered

to complete the questionnaire, but had not yet completed it. Reminders were also posted

to the course page via Blackboard. Such reminders stopped after week five, since the

intervention began during week five. The same kind of reminders were sent for the post-

intervention questionnaires after week eight – once a week, up to three weeks after the

course concluded.

Within a week of submitting their consent form, students were asked to complete

the pre-intervention questionnaire (Appendix B). This questionnaire was distributed using

SurveyMonkey to ensure confidentiality. For the encrypted features of SurveyMonkey, a

Pro subscription was used to keep the responses private and secure. Reminder

announcements via Blackboard were posted as a follow-up, reminding students who may

have forgotten to complete the questionnaire.

As the course progressed, students engaged with one another in their respective

small groups. As in other online courses, the instructor checked each group and provided

grades for each of the interactions. However, in order to ensure that grades were not

affected, the instructor did not view the questionnaires, conduct the interviews, or analyze the videos until after the course.

At the conclusion of the course, the researcher asked each student to complete the post-intervention questionnaire (Appendix C). Like the pre-intervention questionnaire, this questionnaire was distributed using SurveyMonkey. These questionnaires were not reviewed until after grading was completed and submitted to Moody Bible Institute. As a general reminder in the course announcement section, the researcher reminded students that this questionnaire would be read after their course grades were posted, so their responses would have no effect upon their grade. Students were also reminded that their responses would help shape future courses.

The researcher reserved the possibility of conducting follow-up interviews with any student who provided a name in SurveyMonkey. Follow-up questions sought to clarify any responses that could use further development. Questions included the following:

1. What did you mean when you said, "_____"?

2. Could you further describe what you meant by, "_____"?

3. When you said that "_____," how or why did that happen?

4. Based on your responses, do you have recommendations for how to improve community in an online course? If so, what would you recommend? (This question would only be asked after the final week.)

Additionally, the instructor gathered data from student interactions at the conclusion of the course. By observing the final videos, the researcher gathered

qualitative data through study of the transcripts and extemporaneous comments in the
Week 8 videos.

Procedure for Analyzing the Evidence Collected

This study explores the presence and/or absence of Christian community in video-based small groups within a New Testament class at Moody Bible Institute. The qualitative research methods were triangulated using two questionnaires (pre and post), individual interviews via email, qualitative coding of videos, and participant observation on the part of the instructor. The goal of qualitative analysis was to seek "meanings and essences of experience rather than measurements and explanations" (Moustakas 21) from a variety of angles, so this research project could explore how Christian community may or may not be evident in the context of a video-based small group.

Data Analysis for RQ #1 and #4

First, to study student perspectives, the researcher examined the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires for statements regarding the presence, absence, benefit, and detriment of Christian community. The questionnaires were scanned for any statements relating to Christian community, then colored according to positive (green), neutral/qualified (yellow), and negative (red). These questionnaires were examined for significant statements or recurring themes.

Each of the questionnaire responses were analyzed using a phenomenological approach. The researcher then collected data from these questionnaires – that is, significant comments were organized into a table. In one column, the researcher noted phrases and sentences that spoke of Christian community. In a second column, the

researcher noted which student made the comment with an anonymous code for each

student (e.g., 1A, 4G, 3F). In a third column, an observation was made regarding which

aspect of Christian community was being discussed. In a fourth column, the researcher

summarized the significance of the student's comment.

Second, as described in the data collection section, individual interviews were

conducted to follow-up with any student responses that would benefit from further

clarification and/or explanation. These interviews occurred within three weeks after the

completion of the course so that interviews did not interfere with grades or add an

additional time burden to students. Because this is an online course and most

communication occurs through online mediums, the interviews were conducted via email.

These follow-up interviews provided an opportunity to delve further into specific

statements, nodes, or themes regarding a student's experience of Christian community.

For analysis, the researcher reviewed these follow-up interview responses, and after

searching for comments related to Christian community, listed any responses that further

clarified that particular student's pre- or post-intervention questionnaire. (Permission for

the interviews were granted in question 1 of the pre-intervention and post-intervention

questionnaire; if they provided their name, then they were accepting the possibility of

being interviewed.)

Questions and answers from these interviews were added to the table in a fifth

column (i.e., "Interview Clarifications"). Because these follow-up interviews delve into

specific questionnaire comments, the question and answer were aligned to the

corresponding questionnaire response, in the same table. The reason for using the same

table was that these follow-up interviews were used to clarify specific responses in the

questionnaires.

Data Analysis for RQ #2 and #3

Third, after the course concluded, student videos from Week 8 were reviewed and

studied by the researcher. As described in the "Collecting Evidence" section above, the

researcher gathered data from the videos (i.e., nodes labeled on the video transcripts)

through the observation of what students shared in their responses to one another. As

with the questionnaires, nodes from the videos were categorized into broader themes for

the purpose of qualitative analysis.

The researcher looked for evidence of Christian community in what students

shared in the videos. Transcripts from the student videos were inductively coded to

observe which practices were present. That is, the content of the participants' final videos

were labeled according to the visible practices of Christian community. After reading

each transcript twice, the researcher coded with NVivo qualitative analysis software, so

that nodes could be marked and so that broader themes could be collected from the data.

To do this, videos were imported into the qualitative analysis software (NVivo), and the

data collection involved two parts: (1) transcripts were imported into NVivo software,

and evidence of Christian community was marked and labeled with a node on the video

transcript, and (2) extemporaneous statements that significantly part from the transcript

were noted for additional observation. The nodes, which were inductively gathered from

observing the videos, were provided in a list, according to a confidential code for each

student (e.g., 1A, 4G, 3D, etc.).

Using NVivo qualitative research software, all of the observed practices were labeled with a category ("node") that summarizes the kind of visible interaction. Video transcripts were then marked according to these nodes. These labels were marked each time a Christian practice was observed.

To analyze student comments, nodes were organized into broader, thematic categories. The researcher arranged references into themes ("nodes") because thematic analysis observes themes that emerge from the phenomenon (Saldaña 176). Organizing themes in an inductive manner is an approach appropriate for qualitative research (Saldana 176). Thematic analysis or "Theming the Data" provides a meta-summary of what occurs by looking for recurring categories or themes (Saldaña 176). Thematic analysis is especially appropriate for studying beliefs and emotional experiences, which is fitting for observing a person's experience with Christian community (Saldaña 176). Thus, the researcher categorized references (student statements) into themes (broader categories) in order to determine how specific observations reflected the presence or absence of Christian community – to determine particular practices that were present or absent.

Sentences were labelled once for each node – unless it was a complex sentence (which would be connected with a conjunction) and the second half of the sentence contributed a new idea, which was different than the first part of the sentence. These were then treated as two ideas rather than one. For example, if a participant said, "Thank you for your comments, and I love you all so much," then *gratitude* would be labeled once, and *love* would be labeled once.

As noted in the literature review, Christian communities are marked by at least ten visible practices: discipleship, gratitude, hospitality, love, prayer, promise-keeping, self-expression, spiritual enthusiasm, truth-telling, and witness. Using these as a starting point, student videos were coded according to these practices. Furthermore, since this is an inductive research project, the researcher noted additional visible practices that were observable in the participants' interactions.

The researcher also examined if any practices of Christian community seemed absent in the coding. To do this, the practices of Christianity community named in the literature review (Chapter 2) were compared with the researcher's observations of the student videos.

Data Analysis for RQ #1, #2, #3, and #4

Finally, appropriate for phenomenological research, this study's analysis concluded with a description of the phenomenon (Christian community) that was observed in a common experience (an asynchronous small group in an online Bible course). The researcher gathered the data, and after analyzing the data, provided an overarching description of the participants' experiences and a summary of which parts of Christian community were evident and/or non-evident (Creswell 81-82).

The researcher (who also taught the course) acted as participant observer. The research included a narrative summary that detailed, from an instructor's viewpoint, any differences noted between the first part of the course (without video small groups) and the second part of the course (with video small groups). Using a short story or narrative summary is another form of qualitative research (Saldaña 266).

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

To ensure reliability and validity, phenomenological research methods were used for this study. According to John W. Creswell, author of *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, phenomenological research is best suited for groups of individuals who share a common experience or phenomenon, for the purpose of developing a "deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon" (Crewell 81). In short, phenomenology is a qualitative method that offers "a description of the essence" of a phenomenon (Creswell 103). In this study, the common experience was the asynchronous video-based small groups in an online Bible course, and the phenomenon being studied was the presence or absence of Christian community within those groups.

Within a phenomenological approach, reliable data collection may include interviews, document analysis, observation, art, or other such items that reveal the experiences of multiple individuals (Creswell 105); data collection is then followed by an analysis of significant statements, meaning units, and descriptions. Hermeneutics can be applied to achieve "a fuller, more meaningful understanding" of an expressed experience (Moustakas 10). The goal is to collect the significant statements, discuss the meaning of those statements, and discern themes from those statements; these steps are taken in order to provide an exhaustive description of the phenomenon or the "synthesis of meanings and essences of the experience" (Moustakas 184).

The phenomenological method includes groups. For research purposes, studying a phenomenon (or shared experience) involves the activities of individuals within a group which "may vary in size from 3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15" (Creswell 78). For that

reason, video groups were organized into sizes of 3-5. Participants were required to interact with other group members (by responding to them in videos), and the post-intervention questionnaires were completed after participants shared a common experience (i.e., video small groups) with their fellow participants.

Thematic analysis was used to identify significant ideas raised by participants. This method was chosen because descriptive research helps to answer, "What is going on here?" and provides a foundation of what was seen and heard in general (Saldaña 88), which is fitting considering the nature of video interactions and their wide scope of possible observations. Because definitions of Christian community vary, as noted in Chapter 2, inductively-gathered themes were then categorized into broader topics (i.e., characteristics of Christian community) rather than predetermining categories ahead of time. Once organized, thematic analysis involves "elaborating on the themes through rich written description" (Saldaña 176).

Thus, this study incorporated three tools for gathering data about participants' experience of Christian community: (1) pre- and post-intervention questionnaires to determine attitudes about the experience; (2) coding of Christian community evident in the student videos; and (3) follow-up interviews to delve further into questionnaire responses. Because this was qualitative research, each of these tools were appropriate within a phenomenological approach. In fact, "phenomenological studies involve varied sources of data" (Creswell 79). Description of a phenomenon within a qualitative framework is not viewed as a deficiency, but as an essential component of research (Moustakas 11).

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter summarizes the data gathered in this research, which explored the visible practices of Christian community in online video-based small groups. In particular, the subsequent pages of this chapter details the data gathered in this research, including who participated in the research, how those participants responded, and how the researcher observed these groups in practice. In addition to analyzing pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, videos were inductively coded by the researcher in order to compare findings from the videos with participant self-reporting. As an additional data source, participant observation on the part of the instructor is offered as a narrative summary of what occurred in the intervention. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of major findings.

Participants

The research focused on 68 students at Moody Bible Institute. Over the course of a calendar year, 16 small groups were formed in 4 class sections. Of the 68 participants, 40 pre-intervention questionnaires (Appendix B) and 35 post-intervention questionnaires (Appendix C) were completed. Additionally, 29 participants provided their names, agreeing to be interviewed with follow-up questions (samples of which are provided in Chapter 3 of this dissertation).

The total number of enrolled students included 47 men and 21 women who were online students in Christian higher education. More specifically, the participants were enrolled in online undergraduate studies at Moody Bible Institute, in either Reading the

New Testament (50 students) or The New Testament and Theology (18 students). All of

the students were professing Christian believers, and due to their enrollment at a

Christian college that focuses on biblical education, the participants were taking an

introductory Bible course in the New Testament in order to prepare for ministry or social

service.

In total, 68 students were initially enrolled in the classes, and of those, 57

participated in video small groups. (Most of the non-participants had un-enrolled in the

course, which is discussed later in this chapter.) The groups were organized according to

last name, in order to ensure randomness, with 3-5 students in each group. A summary of

the participants is provided below. As seen, a majority completed the pre-intervention

questionnaire, and exactly half of the participants completed the post-intervention

questionnaires. (Anonymous participants completed a questionnaire, but by not providing

a name did not agree to a follow-up interview.)

Table 2. Participant Genders

	Total Small Group Participants	Pre-Intervention Questionnaire / Interviewees	Post-Intervention Questionnaire / Interviewees
Male	40	29	22
Female	17	11	8
Anonymous	N/A	0	5
Total	57	40	35

Demographical data of questionnaire participants was limited due to the

educational nature of the research. Questionnaires were distributed to men and women

over 18 years old who were enrolled in online courses. However, in order to protect

student privacy and avoid interference with grading, students were allowed to withhold

their name and demographic data. As seen in Table 3, the participants represented a

spectrum within the undergraduate years, ranging from freshman to senior.

Table 3. Small Group Undergraduate Demographics

	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
Male	27	7	11	2
Female	16	2	1	2

Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

Prior to the small groups, what did participants expect from the video-based groups?

To assess participant expectations, a short answer questionnaire was used pre-intervention (Appendix B). This questionnaire collected the attitudes of students *prior* to their experience in video-based small groups. The questions concerned which aspects of Christianity community students expected to experience in the video-based small groups. Responses to each question of the questionnaire are summarized in what follows in this section. Participants were labeled according to their group (number) and a code to designate them (letter); for example, "7B" would refer to the 7th small group and the 2nd student (B) in that group. Coding was used to protect the identities of participants.

Students had the option of including their name or leaving this response blank. In the pre-intervention questionnaire, everyone who completed the questionnaire (i.e., 40 respondents) included a name. Due to the nature of the question, students who offered a name also agreed to being interviewed after completing the questionnaire. Portions of these interviews will be included here (as they relate to expectations going into the small

group experience), and secondary interviews (which relate to experiences after the small group experience) will be included under research question 4 later in this chapter. Responses from follow-up interviews were coded with a number, letter, and "interview" – for example, 7B interview.

Belief in Online Christian Community

Overall, prior to participating in the online video groups, all of the 40 students who completed a questionnaire believed, affirmatively, that Christian community is possible online. A sense of optimism permeated the responses, in that 27 responses offered a positive affirmation without any qualification. At the same time, 13 of the 40 responses included a qualification of some kind, such as "yes and no," "sort of," or "to a certain extent." For the purposes of this research question, the entirely positive responses (27) will be distinguished from the qualified positive responses (13), in order to examine the nuances of those responses.

Entirely Positive Responses. Most participants (27) offered entirely positive responses and were often emphatic in that belief. For example, they said that it was possible to "know each other deeply, be transparent, love each other, and lead each other in the right direction" (1C); that the internet offers "direct and immediate access to worldwide Christian community networks," allowing Christians the capability of "connecting to and being a part of a much larger community" (6A); that it is "easier to be open and honest" in some online environments (4C); and that online, there are "very similar effects" as in-person forms of community (1C). In an interview, one student (2D interview) defended the possibility by stating that "a large majority of people" are already connected via social media, so it would be expected that such community would be

possible in an online Christian classroom. Responses like these repeatedly confirmed the group's belief that Christian community was indeed possible in an online environment.

It is worth noting, however, that few of the expected practices were shared in common. Practices that were mentioned more than once included prayer and support/encouragement. Yet, there was wide diversity. For example, while one student mentioned prayer, worship, and discussion, another mentioned encouragement, transparency, and love. In other words, while students believe that community was possible, the examples of community practices varied from student to student. To state it another way, consensus regarding the possibility of Christian community online was *not* similarly reflected in a consensus regarding the actual practice or the how-to of online Christian community.

Qualified Positive Responses. A minority (13 participants) believed in the possibility of Christian community online, but they noted certain limitations or qualified their responses. They explained their uncertainty by noting "somewhat of a disconnect" but "nothing like being in person" (1B); that it is not "the best method," that it is "not as good as in-person Christian fellowship" (1C); and that it is feasible "to a degree" (5A). In other words, students felt that online Christian community is "possible" or feasible "to a degree," yet they also recognize that "not as good as in-person" and "nothing like being in person." Thus, students mentioned both negatives (e.g., disconnection, inferior) and positives (e.g., support, encouragement, transparency, love, honesty, connection, discussion, inspiration, and fellowship).

Students who qualified their responses gave reasons for those qualifications. One student mentioned that Christian community is possible but needs to be in "a form that is

familiar to online community – i.e., Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat." This student went on to say that it was "possible, but difficult," since people can hide behind a computer screen, making online conversations seem "impersonal or robotic" (12B). This mixed response revealed the challenge of online communication, yet still expressed optimism in the possibility of Christian community, given that the right conditions (e.g., "a form that is familiar") were met.

All Responses. Looking at these two groups of responses, the overall finding is that participants believed in the possibility of Christian community in online small groups. Even the 13 who qualified their responses (i.e., expressed some kind of limitation) still affirmed that "yes" community was possible – even if that meant less than ideal or to a lesser degree.

In their questionnaires, as the 40 participants explained why Christian community would be possible, they mentioned specific aspects of Christian community that would be possible: prayer, Bible study, feedback, inspiration, transparency, encouragement, connection, discussion, and worship. In other words, there was a wide scope of practices that students felt that was feasible in an online environment.

Video Enhancement of Christian Community

When students predicted whether or not videos would enhance or detract from community, the predominant view was "enhance." The breakdown is as follows: 27 students believed that videos would "enhance" Christian community; 12 participants offered a neutral or qualified response; and 1 participant believed that videos would "detract" from Christian community. Overall, two general trends could be observed in the responses: (1) most students felt that video would help or enhance community, and (2)

several mentioned possible hindrances or detractions from the intended effect. Both of these trends are detailed below.

First, most students (27 of 40) believed that videos would enhance Christian community. In supporting their response, they stated that video offers a "more dynamic method of interacting" (4C); that videos "allow for a person to freely speak without intimidation" (1B); that videos "absolutely enhance" and "more personal connection is made" (6A); and that videos can serve as "illustrative tools and also help the group connect with certain situations and environments during study time" (5A).

Further supporting this perspective, two interviews pointed to the benefit of video-based small groups. One participant (4C interview) pointed out that "encouragement," "reproof," and "correction" would be aspects of Christian community that would occur in an online video small group. In another interview, a participant (1A interview) stated that "discussion boards are not community," but that video could help overcome this. He went on to state the problem with most discussion boards: "most people post because they need the easy points… also, there isn't much discussion only posts and half given responses." Then, he said that with video, he has to "discuss and respond but also there's a more personal element to it" (1A interview). In his view, in comparison to text-based discussion boards, videos force a student to share more.

A significant number of participants (12 of 40) offered either a neutral or qualified response. These participants frequently mentioned possible hindrances or cautionary remarks. For example, one student mentioned that videos might not help with community because he did "really like the way I come across on video" and that kind of nervousness "doesn't exist in print" (1B). Another student mentioned that it "depends on

the video" and "there are a lot of variables" in relation to interest, length, dialogue, and interaction (1C). Thus, according to these students, certain factors (e.g., nervousness, technical limitations, boredom, irrelevance) could prevent the formation of Christian community.

That being said, most of the qualified responses were generally positive in nature. For example, students who qualified their response with "it depends" or "to a degree" usually provided an explanation of why. These following comments are examples of such qualifications from three different students:

1. I don't believe it's the best method but of course it's possible. In many cases, it's easier to be open and honest with others while being "protected" by distance. Prayer and connection to one another can be accomplished from any distance through any medium if the participants are genuine and honest. (4C)

2. We have a tendency to be distracted away from immediate relationships as we attempt to connect to the impersonal videos. At the same time, it broadens our potential to build connections with people/content we may not have otherwise been exposed to. (13C)

3. Yes, to a certain extent. I do think that encouragement and exhortation and rebuke can be experienced in an online format: 'iron sharpening iron.' However, the aspects of worship and prayer and practical assistance to others in the Christian community is not present, which is vital as well. (12C)

Only one student felt that videos would detract from community. This student explained that "I just get frustrated because the format almost never works, so when I finally get it downloaded, I am frustrated and disengaged" (12B). This student also added

that enhancement might be possible, "but in my experience with Moody so far, videos are difficult for a lot of people to make and they don't really feel like a conversation. More like a one-way opinion speech" (12B). Even though the student recognized a remote possibility, this student expresses the "detract" perspective.

Student Hopes for Online Peer-to-Peer Videos

When asked about their hope(s) for videos exchanged between students, responses varied. Comments included the mention of "free to fully and clearly express," the usage of "a cautious eye," "get to know the person more," and "a more thoughtful discussion." In sum, students expressed desires for transparency, honesty, feedback, non-verbal cues, thoughtfulness, increased knowledge, and so forth.

While there was great diversity in these responses, the participants' comments can be inductively categorized into the following categories: physical, emotional, relational, and intellectual. Five responses could not be categorized due to vagueness (e.g., "I have no expectations" or "it would be a great tool" but with no explanation). However, the other 30 responses can be categorized as emphasizing one aspect more than others. The spread of responses is evident in the following table:

Table 4. Expectations from Peer-to-Peer Videos

	Physical	Emotional	Relational	Intellectual
Number of Students	3	3	10	14

Significantly, few students explicitly mentioned physical (e.g., "smile" or "expression") or emotional (e.g., encouragement) elements, while most students mentioned relational aspects (e.g., deepening relationships) and/or intellectual aspects

(i.e., understanding one another better). The greatest number of responses (14) referred to understanding course content or other students' thoughts.

Overall, responses primarily focused on the experiential aspect of video. Participants believed that "being able to hear" would offer more freedom and lead to better communication (1B); that video is "more personal" (1B); that video would "build stronger relationships" (6A); and that video would help to allow to "get to know" the person more (1C). One student mentioned that, unlike in-person conversations, recorded video "gives a delay," which can lead to more thoughtful discussions (4C). In an interview, the participant further explained that he hoped to "experience more of classmates' personalities" (4C interview). The visible and audible cues would be more "impactful," to use his words. These responses share in common the experiential nature of video, yet there is diversity in what experiences stand out to students: sound or hearing, personal expressiveness, time delay, and non-verbal cues.

It is also observable that students expect or look forward to *different kinds of experiences* when it comes to using video in an online course. Overall, there is not a single, unifying experience, but a collection of experiences that students mentioned in their responses.

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

In the small groups, which practices of Christian community were evident (i.e., visibly present)?

To observe which practices of Christian community are present within the video-based small groups, student interactions were analyzed after the courses concluded. That is, after final course grades were submitted, the researcher went back to analyze each of

the final videos, which were submitted in the final week of class. As discussed in Chapter 3, only the final videos of the course were analyzed due to (1) the fact that community requires time to develop and (2) the time required to analyze a large number of videos.

These videos were submitted by students during the final week of each class. New Testament & Theology (Fall 2016) submitted 14 videos, Reading the New Testament (Spring 2017) submitted 11 videos, Reading the New Testament (Fall 2017, Aug. to Oct.) submitted 13 videos, and Reading the New Testament (Fall 2017, Oct. to Dec.) submitted 10 videos – resulting in 48 total videos. For these final videos, students had uploaded both a video and a transcript. Thus, 48 videos (along with their accompanying transcripts) were analyzed and coded by the researcher.

As previously discussed in the literature review, Christian communities are marked by at least ten visible practices: discipleship, gratitude, hospitality, love, prayer, promise-keeping, self-expression, spiritual enthusiasm, truth-telling, and witness. Using these as a starting point, student videos were coded according to these practices. Furthermore, since this is an inductive research project, the researcher noted additional visible practices that were observable in the participants' interactions. What follows is an overview of this coding.

Using NVivo qualitative research software, all of the observed practices were labeled with a category ("node") that summarizes the kind of visible interaction. Video transcripts were then marked according to these nodes. These labels were given for each time a Christian practice was observed.

Sentences were labelled once for each node – unless it was a compound sentence (connected with a conjunction) and the second half of the sentence contributed a new

idea, which was different than the first part of the sentence. These were then treated as two ideas rather than one. For example, if a participant said, "Thank you for your comments, and I love you all so much," then *gratitude* would be labeled once, and *love* would be labeled once.

Labelling did not overlap because a single node was assigned to each sentence (or complex sentences connected with a conjunction). Overlapping nodes were not used, since that would not only add more subjectivity, but could also lead to an endless task of layering nodes upon nodes. If there was any question as to the nature of a sentence, the researcher assigned a node to the most predominate idea in the sentence. The researcher also limited nodes to sentences rather than words or phrases in order to maintain the original meaning of each sentence. In total, 1432 sentences were coded.

For the sake of clarity, the nodes are defined in the following table:

Table 5. Definitions of Nodes

Node	Definition
Blessing	Farewells, good tidings, well-wishing.
Discipleship	Biblical content, teaching/learning, intellectual discussion, course content.
Formality	Reviewing/repeating what was previously said, formal tone, academic or constrained language.
Gratitude	"Thank you" comments, statements of appreciation, encouragement of others, positive cheering of other students.
Hospitality	Greetings, listening, culture connecting, admitting the "other," creating a warm or welcoming environment.
Humility	Admitting fault or incorrectness, apologizing to someone, being humbled by a student or course content, depending upon the Holy

	Spirit.
Humor	Jokes, laughter, satire, silly metaphor, not-serious speech.
Love	Statements of care, evidence of interpersonal compassion, use of the word "love" when applied to a person or a person's ideas.
Mutuality	Small-talk, "filler" words (intended to develop camaraderie), discussion of community in the classroom.
Prayer	Prayers for others, prayers received by others, discussion of praying.
Promise-Keeping	Commitment to the group, showing up in the discussion, talk of connecting in the future.
Self-Expression	Personal divulgence, self-disclosure beyond course content, self-revealing comments, perspective sharing, preferences/opinions, stories/narratives of personal nature.
Spiritual Enthusiasm	Talk of spiritual life / spiritual journeying, expressing a commitment to change, passionate spirituality, evidence of spiritual maturing, ecstatic or exclamatory remarks that relate to spirituality.
Truth-Telling	Honesty, preachy language, correction of a student or instructor, defending a position in an either-or, critique of person/idea.
Witness	Talk of evangelism, church and personal mission, cultural transformation.

As mentioned above, the videos were coded using nodes. The following table

offers examples of actual participant quotations that were labeled. For additional detail

the table goes beyond a definition in order to demonstrate how particular statements were

coded:

Table 6. Sample Quotations from the Videos

Quotations	Node
"God bless you."	Blessing

"I wish you guys God's best." "I hope for you good things." "Hope you have a great Christmas."	
"I had my eyes opened to the prominence to the subject of the kingdom in the gospels." "Hearing different denominations and different levels of maturity in the word really helped open my eyes to others' understanding of Scripture." "I think that there was a great deal of information that I could take away from this course."	Discipleship
"I will start with my recap." "Part two of the discussion board assignment for week eight asks us to share some major lessons we have learned from the course." "I am typing out all of my thoughts." "Just a few closing comments."	Formality
"I really enjoyed your thoughts." "I appreciate your perspective." "Thank you for your kind words on my last video." "Your point was very encouraging." "Great encouragement in the beginning of your video."	Gratitude
"Hello and welcome to the almost end of WEEK 8!" "I completely relate to you in this." "As you can see, I changed my background every time I made a video, I hope you liked the change. I hope you like my cool book collection and lamp." "Welcome to the final post of the semester."	Hospitality
"I was humbled by how challenging Revelation was last week." "It's dangerous and scary to think that we could do this on our own." "It is extremely humbling to lay aside my pre-conceived ideas and beliefs.	Humility
"Here's the link to my last video featuring a special guest the one and only [proper name], or my wife. " "Also, here is a cool T-Rex head that I hang up on the wall. I killed it myself." "It's good to know there are some other Cubs fans out there."	Humor
"I loved doing this class with you all." "Love you guys" "I love one of my classmates... she has a down-to-earth approach." "I love your brevity."	Love
"Here we go!" "I have really enjoyed getting to know all of you guys through this." "It was cool to see we all agreed in the end." "This immediately brought a sense of community to the class in my	Mutuality

opinion." "The discussion boards have been the most engaging and helpful of any class I've had." "These video discussions have been really good for me." "It's been fun talking with you via video."	
"Thank you both for your prayers!" "I pray that your ministries will go well and that we seek God's will in everything of what we say, think, and do and that our heart's affection and mind's attention may be on him." "I pray that God uses you in the future in powerful and affective ways for His kingdom!"	Prayer
"I hope that we cross paths again." "I know we do not have another video response after this, but I wonder how your word study of the word poor affected your thoughts here?" "Hope to see you guys in classes." "I look forward to having you in future classes." "I'm actually going to be a little bit sad that we don't get to keep doing this."	Promise-Keeping
"I am going to get a little real here." "I was challenged emotionally as I studied." "I've been challenged in many ways, but primarily in the way of finding a renewed passion to study the gospels." "I struggled a bit to follow the lecture last week." "I am feeling much better now."	Self-Expression
"That is a verse I want to live by!" "Spiritually, I was impacted." "I can say I have a renewed interest in the book because of what we learned in this class." "My spiritual notions have been challenged."	Spiritual Enthusiasm
"You made a great point." "That is such a vital theme that we need to take seriously." "My constructive feedback would be to tighten up your argument (maybe outline of main points) to be more concise." "Dr. Beale left a lot to be desired when it came to supporting his argument."	Truth-Telling
"What story are my actions telling?" "Amen to no one being beyond God's reach, but how easy is that to forget?" "We need to have compassion for the outcasts." "I think one way we can do this is going on mission trips and staying in regular contact with missionaries that reside in those foreign countries."	Witness

Evidence of community practices was observable in each of the 48 student videos that were shared. Each of the 48 videos (i.e., videos from the final week) was coded, and each code ("node") was assigned to each statement ("references") that could be considered to fit within the practices of Christian community. Per student, the table below summarizes this coding according to his/her number of nodes and references. Some students did not contribute a final video, which is indicated by 0.

Table 7. Contributions per Student

Student	Number of Nodes (i.e., visible practices)	Number of References (i.e., coded sentences)
1A	7	11
1B	6	15
1C	8	22
1D	13	43
2A	0	0
2B	7	24
2C	7	12
2D	0	0
3A	5	13
3B	9	23
3C	9	21
4A	6	18
4B	8	20
4C	0	0
5A	5	9
5B	5	18
5C	5	19
6A	5	17
6B	0	0

6C	7	33
6D	0	0
7A	0	0
7B	0	0
7C	9	15
7D	6	14
8A	9	46
8B	7	18
8C	0	0
8D	9	37
8E	9	27
9A	6	15
9B	10	48
9C	0	0
9D	4	9
9E	0	0
10A	0	0
10B	7	18
10C	8	30
10D	9	21
10E	7	28
11A	0	0
11B	8	36
11C	11	57
11D	7	26
12A	7	20
12B	7	28
12C	9	42
12D	9	42
13A	6	12
13B	0	0
13C	11	35

13D	0	0
13E	0	0
14A	0	0
14B	6	10
14C	6	23
14D	9	34
14E	10	28
15A	0	0
15B	0	0
15C	8	44
15D	8	25
15E	12	69
16A	0	0
16B	7	37
16C	11	84
16D	8	35

Not all of the participants submitted a final video, though they participated earlier in the course. For example, 2A submitted three videos, but not the final video. In total, 68 students enrolled in the courses. Of these, 57 participated in the video discussions – with 48 submitting all of the videos and 9 submitting other videos but not the final video. Of those who did not participate, 3 participated in the text discussions only (i.e., no videos); and 9 students dropped the course at some point. Discussion of why these numbers matter will be included in the "Description of Evidence" section later in this chapter.

The data above shows that each student expressed a variety of aspects of Christian community in their posts — as few as 5 and as many as 13. The "nodes" reflect which of the practices of Christian community were reflected in their comments, while the "references" reflect how many phrases were highlighted in their responses. The data,

then, speaks to both breadth (the number of nodes) and the quantity (the number of references).

At a categorical level, the table below summarizes which practices of Christian community appeared and how frequently. In other words, looking at all of the conversations that took place in the final week, these are the nodes that were labeled and the number of occurrences. In the following table, "sources" refers to the number of videos that included that element, and "references" refers to how many phrases expressed that element:

Table 8. Visible Practices of Christian Community (According to Participant)

Element (Nodes)	Sources (Participants)	References
Self-Expression	48	28
Discipleship	43	232
Gratitude	40	172
Formality	37	115
Mutuality	36	115
Hospitality	31	67
Truth-Telling	29	104
Spiritual Enthusiasm	28	29
Witness	23	52
Blessing	23	40
Prayer	15	23
Promise-Keeping	12	14
Love	10	16
Humor	5	8

The data shows that every student exhibited self-expression, and nearly every student included some expression of discipleship and gratitude; on the other hand, very

few expressed humor, promise-keeping, or prayer. The coding demonstrates that self-expression, discipleship, gratitude, and formality occurred most often – according to the number of students who exhibited those aspects – while humor, promise-keeping, love, and prayer occurred the least.

Since this research is inductive in nature, several other categories (i.e., nodes) were coded in the student responses. These included humor, formality, mutuality, humility, and blessing. These were added to the list of practices noted in the literature view, and these inductive codes occurred multiple times in the final online videos. For example, 23 of 48 videos in the final week included a blessing of some kind — either a literal "Blessings!" or a wishing of "God's best" or a bidding of future blessing. While "blessing" was not noted as a specific practice in the literature review, such blessings were frequently present in almost half of the final videos.

Finally, "formality," which was inductively added as a node, reflects a necessity of communication – that is, formal language for organizational purposes – and was observable in conversation, but is not necessarily unique to Christian community. This node was added since it occurred frequently enough to be noted as a common occurrence in the discussions.

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

In the small groups, which practices of Christian community are not evident (i.e., absent)?

In the small groups, some practices of Christian community were either absent, less evident, or simply unobservable. This study also sought to name those practices that were not observable at all or less observable than others. While all the Christian practices

that were named in the literature review were visible at least once in the coded videos, some aspects of Christian community were less common than others.

As mentioned above, forty-eight videos from the final week were coded by the researcher. As grounded research, this coding used an inductive method of coding — that is, beginning with the categories named in the literature review and expanding beyond that to any other themes that arose during observation. The table below lists the most frequent and less frequent practices that were observed in the videos (ranked from most visible to least visible, according to the number of references).

According seen in the table below, it is evident that there is a wide discrepancy between the occurrence of the most common practices and the least common practices. For example, in the various discussions, there were more than 27 times the occurrences of self-expression than promise-keeping, and 16 times more occurrences of self-expression than prayer. Chapter 5 will discuss why some practices were less visible than others, as well as how some aspects can be developed within such communities.

Table 9. Visible Practices of Christian Community (From Most References to Least)

Element	Sources (Participants)	References (Sentences)
Self-Expression	48	383
Discipleship	43	232
Gratitude	40	172
Formality	37	115
Mutuality	36	115
Truth-Telling	29	104
Spiritual Enthusiasm	28	75
Hospitality	31	67
Witness	23	52

Blessing	23	40
Prayer	15	23
Humility	12	16
Love	10	16
Promise-Keeping	12	14
Humor	5	8

The following tree map, created within NVivo, offers a visualization of the coding. This visualization shows the frequency of the most visible practices, according to sentence/reference quantity, that were observable in the 48 final videos:
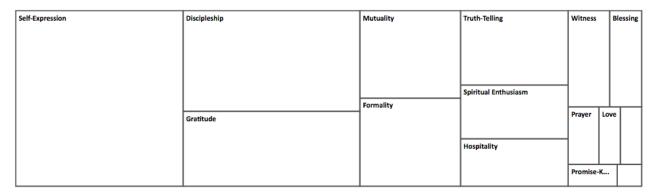
Fig. 1. Visualization of Visible Practices of Christian Community in Student Videos.

All of the ten practices of Christian community defined in the literature review were visible, more than once, in the online videos — plus four additional practices that were inductively added. In terms of frequency, the five most common practices were the following: self-expression, discipleship, mutuality, formality, and truth-telling. The least common practices, according to the number of references, were prayer, humility, love, promise-keeping, and humor.

Research Question #4: Description of Evidence

Do participants report a sense of being in Christian community when describing their small group experience?

Following their experience in the small groups, students completed a questionnaire that gauged their personal experience of Christian community within the small groups (Appendix C). As discussed in Chapter 3, this study examines the uniquely Christian practices of community, as reported by students. Each part of the post-intervention questionnaire will be summarized below in further detail. Data from the questionnaires will provided in the following format: number-letter (for example, 3A).

Additionally, 29 students who provided their name (see question 1 of the post-intervention questionnaire) agreed to be interviewed after the post-intervention questionnaire. These interviews served as another source of data collection (Appendix D). In the post-intervention questionnaire, nearly every participant (29) included a name, but 5 participants chose to remain anonymous. Selections from these interviews are included below, respective to the question response that the participant was clarifying. Data from the interviews, which followed up on the questionnaires, will be provided in the following format: number-letter-interview (for example., 3A interview).

Self-Reported Experience of Christian Community

When asked if Christian community was experienced in the video-based small groups, participants were overwhelmingly positive, as the following data reveals. In the questionnaires, 31 of 35 students stated that they experienced some sense of Christian community in the small groups. The positive responses pointed out that community was

felt through sharing prayer requests and "daily life" with each other (5C); through

additional engagement through video (2D); and by seeing "how God works in their lives"

(5B).

Of the 31 who stated that they experienced community in the online video groups,

7 students offered a qualified response. Examples of these mild or qualified responses

include comments like "a little bit" (1D), "to a lesser extent" than an in-person classroom

(4C), and "some of the course yes" (5C). As one participant explained, "There was very

little, but yes some. It's hard to create and maintain any kind of authentic Christian

community online. For being an online class, there is some opportunity. However, it can

only accomplish so much" (9B). An anonymous student put it this way: "Yes and no.

Yes, because many positive comments were offered that were encouraging. No because it

is difficult to offer constructive feedback to people you don't have a personal relationship

with. Both are part of authentic Christian community."

To explain their qualified responses, these students pointed out that online

education is a "synthetic substitute" for a real classroom environment (1D) and that

online courses do not offer as much community, but they do offer "more thought out"

responses between students" (4C). Including these qualified responses (e.g., "yes and

no," "a little," or "some"), it can be observed that most participants (31 of 35)

experienced some sense of Christian community – even if that community was limited or

imperfect.

Significantly, 25 participants offered an unqualified "yes" when asked if they

experienced Christian community. This group tended to express a strong, positive

affirmation of Christian community – which included responses such as "Yes,

absolutely" and lengthier responses such as the following: "Yes, I really experienced community through my personal video discussion board group. I loved the atmosphere it created (with the people that participated) in that we were able to communicate face to face, rather than screen to screen." Of these responses, emphatic affirmations such as "absolutely" and "really" stood out. In other words, half of students not only said "yes," but emphatically so, as this group tended to respond very positively to the experience.

In explaining why responding with a "yes," one student remarked that online small groups might result in more personal sharing. When interviewed after the questionnaire, the student remarked: "Relative anonymity gives each of us a boldness we might not otherwise have. I can and do say things to classmates that I wouldn't say in a classroom. I feel like it's easier to be open and vulnerable when I don't run the risk of seeing classmates outside of class." (4C) In other words, this student voiced the opinion that online video groups can lead to *more* sharing than in-person interactions.

In an interview, the instructor asked why the student felt "more thoughtful" discussions occurred in the videos, since he had made that remark on his questionnaire. He explained: "This is true because we have time to prepare what we are going to say and if we say it wrong or it doesn't come across the way we thought it would we can erase the video and re-record. In a classroom situation, my thoughts and comments would be more off the cuff rather and less polished" (4C interview). This comment relates to the asynchronous nature of the online videos; it would not apply to chatrooms (which are mentioned by another student below).

In a subsequent interview, one of the students who answered "no" clarified her responses. Prior to the course, this student was very positive and open to the idea of

videos. However, her response after the course was that she "personally did not experience a feel of community support online" and that the discussion boards were more effective than the videos. The student clarified that short, lecture videos would be strongly welcomed, but that "The personal videos we submitted for class assignments however did not seem to build a sense of 'community' and some people even seemed to be put-off by making them" (5A interview). This represented a minority perspective compared to the total response from students.

In a different follow-up interview, another student (1A interview) shared that he did not understand how the video groups would work, and he was "pretty nervous" about submitting a video. The student thought the videos could "enhance" Christian community, despite his nervousness. He mentioned that he found comfort in that he knew that there was "someone else in my situation," who was also "plugging away faithfully at courses online."

Self-Reported Video Enhancement of Christian Community

The post-intervention questionnaires also revealed how students felt about the effect of videos on Christian community – that is, whether or not the videos enhanced Christian community in the small groups. As above, the post-intervention questionnaire responses will be coded as number-letter (e.g., 5C). In addition, follow-up interviews (based on the post-intervention questionnaires) provided extra insights, and these are coded as number-letter-interview (e.g., 5C interview). The questionnaire and the interview are available in Appendix B and Appendix C, respectively.

After the small groups, 32 responded positively – that video aided the development of Christian community. Of this number, 27 participants stated, without

qualification, that the videos enhanced their experience of Christian community. Most of

the responses mentioned *feeling* and *personal connection*. For example, participants felt

that "with video I get a much better feel" for what a person means (4C) and that videos

make Christian community "feel real, authentic, meaningful, and engaging" (1D). Other

responses focused on connection, such as "I can now visually see someone talk about

God and their emotions beyond just knowing words" (5B), "we gain a connection that is

lost in only type[d] communication" (3C), and "The old adage 'it's good to have a name

with a face' is still relevant and true" (2D). As one participant summarized, video can

"make the online experience as real and personal as it can be" (1D).

In a follow-up interview, one student added that video provided a

multidimensional aspect to learning: "I feel the addition of video gives a

multidimensional way of interacting. Meaning that instead of reading just

someone's written word I get to see the look on their face and hear the tone in their voice.

I think this method gives a more full [sic] picture of what someone is trying to say

without the use of more words" (4C interview).

Beyond the 27 entirely positive responses, 5 offered a positive but qualified

response. That is, they felt that video enhanced Christian community, yet mentioned a

limitation, a hindrance, or a suggestion in their response. For example, some pointed out

that lack of participation can be a hindrance to community: "I thought they enhanced the

class but if everyone doesn't participate it detracts from the connections" (Anonymous) or

"It helped, but some students did not participate" (16C). Another student affirmed that

the videos contributed to a sense of Christian community, making greater personal

connection between students, but that he/she "hated making" the videos (Anonymous). In

a similar response, another student (16B) stated that "At first it was a distraction as I had trouble figuring out how to upload and post a video, but once I learned how it was helpful to connect face to face in a sense." Several participants (16C, 11B, 14C) suggested sharing videos in a larger group, in order to meet more people and to protect against low participation. Thus, there was some downside or discomfort, but overall, these 5 students still saw overall benefits.

Only 3 students of the 35 were neutral or negative – that is, they stated that there was no benefit to Christian community. One student took a neutral stance: "It was neither a benefit nor a detractor. No added value with it or decreased value without it" (Anonymous). Another student took the only negative stance in the four classes, and she expressed her perspective in the following manner:

> I, personally, did not feel that the video portion of the course added much to the Christian community aspect of the course. It seemed a bit redundant in some aspects, meaning that we were asked to simply verbalize what would have otherwise been said in a discussion board post. Seeing faces did not, for me, seem to 'add' any value to the course or enhance a feel of Christian community. (5A)

From these questionnaire responses, it is evident that 27 participants positively affirmed that video enhanced Christian community; 5 participants were supportive of the videos but mentioned some cautions; and 3 participants took a neutral or negative stance.

Comparison of Text Discussions and Video Discussions

The post-intervention questionnaire explored whether students felt more connected in the video-based small groups more than the text-based ones. This comparison explored participant experience, specifically whether more connection

occurred in the text or video groups. Following the intervention of the video-based small groups, through the post-intervention questionnaire and interviews, each participant self-reported on their experience on their experience of Christian community. (Data from the questionnaire and interviews are noted in a similar manner as above – i.e., number-letter or number-letter-interview.)

In the questionnaires, 25 out of the 35 questionnaires preferred video groups over text groups. In other words, they felt that "more connected" in the video groups. Overall, the responses were emphatic. Students said that they felt "far more personal and real" (1D); that the comparison is "not even close" and that videos were "super helpful… more impactful and personal (1A); and "much more personal" (4C). In explaining why, students pointed to the personal nature of videos, which they felt offered more humanity or personality than the text-based discussions. For example, one student said, "videos made me feel more inclusive… things were far more personal, authentic, and real. The text-based discussion boards felt impersonal to me" (1D). The student added that it was the favorite part of the class. Other students pointed out that the video groups "enhanced communication through hearing their tone and seeing their body motions" (5B), situate participants "face to face and it is like you are talking to them" (5C), "put a face to a name" (Anonymous); and "gave a better idea" of who someone was due to additional length (16B).

Eight participants took a neutral position. They felt that text-based and video-based were relatively equal. While these responses were generally vague, one response stated that both were equal because more participated in the text discussions, while fewer participated in the video discussions. In other words, this participant preferred the usage

of video for the sake of interpersonal connection, but less participation in the video discussions made text and video equal. (The significance of this statement will be further explored in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.)

Along similar lines, another participant offered a mixed or neutral opinion. While "video-based discussion boards are great," this student pointed out that "the uploading process causes the concept to lose some luster" (2D). For that reason, it is unclear whether the participant preferred text groups or videos groups. However, the comment is considered neutral, since as stated by the student, technical problems can cause the concept "to lose some luster."

In contrast to the positive responses, a small minority (2 of 35 participants) preferred text more than video. One student mentioned the "many more opportunities" to connect in a text-based discussion board, since "more space" allows students to be "more precise in their assertions and responses" (3D). The point here was that the text-based boards involved a lot more posts or banter, whereas the video groups had less of this; once a video was posted, there were no response videos and only a handful of text responses. Another student echoed this comment by stating that she "felt more connected through the text-based discussion board experiences than through the videos. The videos just felt too strained, it seemed people were not as at ease in presenting their comments via video as they were in a discussion board post" (5A). This comment reflects that some students were nervous or not "at ease" in videos, which would not be noticeable in text-based groups.

Preference of Video Groups in Future Bible Courses

In the post-intervention questionnaires, 33 of 35 participants would welcome video-based small groups in the future. They emphatically felt this way, as one student expressed "a hundred times yes, more video" (1A). Others expressed that they would "love" to use videos in the future and that the videos "bring dynamic and create a tightly knit group and community" (1C). Explaining their response, students said that the videos "create a deeper and richer" experience to an online Christian experience (1D), that videos were more efficient than text-based groups (5B), and that they were more challenging (3D).

Of those 33, three students offered a mixed reaction. In other words, they would welcome some videos, but to a limited degree. One student said either would be fine (Anonymous). One expressed that there is a visible "benefit of community," but the "videos are more time consuming" and that community is already experienced "in the local church" (Anonymous). Another mentioned that a "mix of video and text" would be best; videos are "fun to watch and make but should not be overused" (4C). In a follow-up interview, this student explained that more organic responses would help – or that students would "more randomly respond" to one another (4C interview).

For the students who responded in the middle, the most unique response revealed an important issue about student personality. Along with typos, a student expressed it this way: "i would like too. but my English is a limit to me. And we also need to considerate why people take online class. flexible is one reason, personal character is also one factor" (5C). In other words, he points out that some students take online classes for schedule flexibility, but another reason is a student's personality (i.e., he/she might now want to be

in a traditional classroom). This significance of this comment, as well as the underlying issue, will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Only two students out of 35 expressed disapproval and would not want to use videos in the future. Since they express a minority perspective, both of these responses are worth reading in full. First, one student expressed discomfort with video-based small groups: "As an awkward person I hated making them. I also felt like I had to change out of pajamas which sucks" (Anonymous). It is observable that the videos made the student feel uncomfortable.

Another student argued against the use of student videos, but softened the response, as noted below:

> Well, I know that God stretches us and takes us out of our comfort zones as a means for growth, and just because I did not prefer the video portion of the course here does not indicate that it is not beneficial for some, and it does not indicate that I don't 'need' to participate in such an exercise. I don't prefer videos that are one-sided, I think live, group discussion would play a more effective role in bringing about a more prominent sense of Christian community. Would I welcome the use of personal student videos? Not so much. But, would I graciously undertake the process as a means of growth? Yes, I would." (5A)

Then, in a follow-up interview, this same participant went on to talk about the need for online community:

> The thing about participating strictly in online courses is that there is little opportunity to develop relationships with people that are like-minded, interested in the same topics and issues that you as the student are interested in. Some of us

do not have family or even friends that support our faith, or our educational endeavors, and in that case, the only place where like-minded people can be found is in the online courses. Even in my church there is little opportunity to have a conversation about this journey. (5A interview)

She also added: "All that being said, I DO feel that interactive video chatrooms (monitored and overseen by the instructors of course!!) would be a more effective means of building the community feel for online courses" (5A interview). In other words, this student distinguished between asynchronous video (which are posted at any time) and synchronous video (which stream simultaneously). She expressed a preference toward the latter, saying that video in real-time could be effective for community building.

Research Questions #1-4: Description of Evidence

What did participant observation, on the part of the instructor, reveal about the visible practices of Christian community in the online video-based small groups?

In addition to the questionnaires and the coding described above, this study also includes participant observation on the part of the researcher, who instructed the course. Chapter 3 details how such participant observation is useful for qualitative researcher, as well as how such participant observation by the instructor can confirm/disconfirm the self-reporting by students that took place in the questionnaires. For the purpose of this research, participant observation includes an overarching summary of the usage of video – that is, a description of what the instructor observed during the second half of the course (when videos were used). What follows, therefore, is an overview of the Christian community practices that were evident in the online small groups.

At the beginning of the intervention, in email communication and written discussion board posts, several students stated that they had never experienced video-based discussions before, mentioning that they felt awkward making videos. I assured them by providing directions of how to upload videos, in order to address any confusion and ease any concern. These directions are provided in Appendix D. Several students thanked me for providing that guidance.

The initial week was the most difficult, as students learned how to record and upload their videos. I received emails that asked, "Can you let me know if it works?" and similar questions to check on their video submissions. Other students expressed difficulty in getting "a handle on creating my videos on my computer and uploading to YouTube" and redoing their videos (e.g., "I just redid the video and uploaded it in a different way because the link was just not working so I am going to try again!") A couple students emailed their videos rather than uploading them, and one posted his video in the wrong way (i.e., private rather than unlisted) so that it was not visible until changed.

Students also commented to one another about some of the difficulties that they faced. For example, in a discussion board post, an older student made the following comment to a younger student:

> I have never done anything like this before, (record videos), so I have a lot to learn. I guess we have to respond next week via a video but I really appreciated the quality of your video and you taught something that will lend to the quality. It looks like you had your information right on your screen and if you needed to read something you were able to keep good eye contact. Duh, why didn't I think of that. The answer...that's how it is for old people in school, LOL.

Overall, students seemed comfortable on camera, though some were noticeably more comfortable than others. Several students mentioned that they were not going to use notes or look at their computer screens, while others directed their eyes to notes somewhere to the side. Some students took time to find a nice location for their videos (i.e., a clean or neat background), while others seemed to record in random or mobile locations. The same goes for attire in that some students dressed professionally, while others dressed in t-shirts or lounge clothes. A few students expressed their nervousness on camera, but then seemed to become comfortable as the weeks progressed. As one student said, while smiling, "while I didn't initially like doing it, I do see the benefit of it. It makes the class feel a little more personal" (10B). Another student echoed this feeling: "At first the video's made me really nervous, but the more I did the easier they were and viewing other videos helped, too. I felt more connected in class, then with regular discussion board" (16B).

The majority of this research focuses on the final video, but for the weeks leading up to that final video, students seemed increasingly engaged. In other words, several students kept a formal tone, as if presenting in a classroom, while others smiled on video and expressed their excitement for using video. Students tended to become calmer in subsequent weeks (6 and 7), until they reached the final video in week 8. Humor was one indication that students were letting down their guard and feeling more comfortable on camera. Thus, from the perspective of an observer, there was increased engagement as students progressed towards the final video.

Overall, 57 students participated in the video discussions (which occurred weeks 5 through 8), 3 participated in the text discussions only (not contributing any videos), and

9 students dropped the course. No reasons were given for why some did not submit videos or why some students dropped the course. Most significant, however, are the 3 students who participated in the course, except for the videos. The reason for this significance will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

In the final videos (the primary source of data in this research), as well as in the three preceding videos in weeks 5, 6, and 7, participants engaged in spiritual discussions. According to word counts in the final videos (i.e., the videos uploaded in week 8), the participants' discussions focused on Christian topics. Words that participants used frequently included God (117x), the Bible (90x), testament (89x), Revelation (63x), scripture (55x), Jesus (54x), Luke (40x), hope (32x), spiritually (31x), salvation (28x), theology (26x), believe (25x), gospel (25x), church (38x), Paul (23x), and love (22x). In fact, these words alone made up 5.94% of all words used in the final videos – not to mention all of the other spiritual conversation that took place. Merely in terms of subject matter, therefore, there was a predominance of Christian discussion. Using NVivo, I created a word cloud to visualize what students talked about most in their final videos:
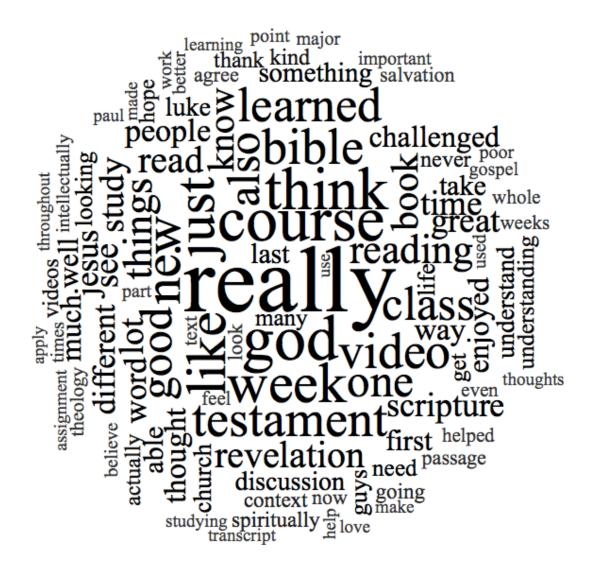
Fig. 2. Word Cloud that Visualizes the Most Common Words in the Final Videos

It was observed that follow-up comments to videos were always typed rather than recorded. The reason for typed replies is because recorded responses were required in subsequent videos; however, students could have responded with video if they had wanted to. Yet, without exception, students used text in the discussion boards to reply to one another after posting their required video. The usage of text replies seems to reflect

the fact that text responses are easier in terms of time and effort, which was echoed by student comments – such as one student who said the videos were "a bit more work" (11C).

According to the viewpoint of the instructor, Christian community seemed evident due to the fact that participants regretted that the videos needed to end. In fact, one student (1A) entitled his last video, "Last Post. Sad day," reflecting his desire to continue the conversation. His video mentioned that it was a "great class" and a "great 8 weeks," along with a handful of other positive comments. This sense of connection was evident in at least 11 other videos, including comments like this: "I am extremely grateful for the class and sad to see it go. I will miss my video small group – I wish that I could continue in the same group all through undergrad!" (9A). The fact that students wanted to stay together shows that the group relationships mattered to them.

Further evidence of the existence of Christian community included this final comment from a student: "This has been awesome. This is my last year at Moody, and I've never done discussion boards like this. Just kind of seeing my students and being able to interact with them has been awesome" (1A). The repetition of the adjective "awesome" stands out, as well as the comment that he had never had an experience like this during his years of study. In addition, the student connected "seeing" and "interact," which is one of the dynamics that this research sought to explore — namely, whether or not "seeing" aids interaction in an online Christian community. Finally, these comments were made to classmates in his video — not in a questionnaire or interview. In other words, the student offered an unprompted comment, which summarized his experience in the online small groups.

Another evidence of Christian community involved a student who increasingly divulged more personal information over the weeks. This particular student engaged in a lot of humorous behavior, including personal jokes focused at fellow students and the usage of funny locations (e.g., his bathroom floor). The humor was warmly received by his fellow classmates, who complimented his humor and appreciated his jokes each week. What was most surprising was that in the final video, the student divulged his personal struggle with pornography and how Galatians was helping him to overcome that addiction. This act of self-revelation came at a risk (i.e., he could face disciplinary action from the school), yet he felt safety in this Christian community to share a deeply personal concern. It is especially revealing, in my perspective, that this confession took place on video (where he was seen) rather than in a text discussion board (where he could hide behind a computer screen).

Another student explained to me how videos helped him. In a follow-up conversation, the student shared the following:

> The addition of video presentations each week is what made the difference. I had one other course that attempted to do this, but the method was "off" – the instructor tried to have us all there "live" and it was a disaster. Your approach was perfect. I really felt a connection with the people due to the way we spent that time each week addressing each other. (11C)

In summary, the student appreciated how I used an asynchronous approach that included peer-to-peer interaction. This approach did not require Skype or other live-video tools; instead, students would watch their peers' videos and respond to their group members

each week. Significantly, the student "felt a connection" with fellow students and attributed the cause: asynchronous video.

The value of asynchronous, peer-to-peer interaction was echoed by another student (10B), who said that in a different class, videos were used at the end, but there was no chance to interact with peers. She mentioned that she liked knowing the "passion" of fellow students, and she proceeded to share those. What is significant here is that she admitted that she did not normally like using video, but she did enjoy them for this class. The reason she gave was not video itself, but the way video was used – that is, enabling interaction ("feedback") between group members.

In comparing the text-based discussion boards and the video-based discussion boards, evidence also points to a more holistic expression of Christian community in the video-based groups. Specifically, one student remarked: "One thing I learned from this course which is probably kind of weird, was that this was one of the first times I have had to talk out loud with adults about religious concepts. I have this fear of judgment [and these video responses were a big step for me. I have typed up stuff a million times about my thoughts, but never really said them out loud" (2E). As the student pointed out, the act of talking out loud is a crucial part of Christian community – and video creation requires "out loud" speaking rather than just typing. This student was a senior in a Bible college, which underscores the fact how much video can help online students; this was "one of the first times" that she had spoken out loud about her faith.

Summary of Major Findings

This study has led to some important findings in the use of videos to develop Christian community in the context of an online small group. In particular, this study

revealed strong trends, a variety of community practices, and strong opinions on the effectiveness of using video to develop Christian community. The most important findings can be summarized as the following:

1. *All participants, prior to the experience, predicted that Christian community could occur in online video groups.* Everyone who completed a pre-intervention questionnaire (40 out of 40 participants) held a positive attitude towards the usefulness of video groups to develop Christian community in an online setting. As outlined earlier in this chapter, a few of these participants qualified their responses, yet even those qualified responses were positive. This unanimity reveals a belief held in common by those in this study: Christian community is possible in an online environment.

2. *Self-expression is the most visible element of Christian community.* Participants revealed personal information and/or feelings in 383 out of the 1432 coded instances. Ranging from personal testimonies to emotional confessions, such disclosure revealed a participant's self to the group. All participants went beyond reporting course content to discuss themselves. For the sake of comparison, every participant (48) included personal disclosure, while only 15 included prayer. It became evident that revelation of the self is crucial to the development of community, where the goal is not only to know others but to be known.

3. *Gratitude is commonly visible in the online small groups.* Kind speech, such as "thank you" and personal compliments, occurred very frequently. By sentence count, 172 of the 1432 coded instances included thankful,

appreciative, or kind words towards others, representing 12% of the video communication. As would be expected in any Christian community, positive, thankful, and gracious comments were made; however, this gratitude was distinctly Christian in that such gratitude related to spiritual matters and included spiritual encouragement. Strikingly, the amount of gratitude seen in the online classroom (172 occurrences of students speaking kindly to one another) was far greater than what one might experience in a traditional classroom environment. This is a significant finding since nothing in the assignment prompt required students to express thankfulness or kindness to other students.

4. *Certain aspects of Christian community were less visible in the videos than other aspects.* As shown in Table 8, the less visible aspects of Christian community were prayer (23 instances), humility (16 instances), love (16 instances) promise-keeping (14 instances), and humor (8 instances). Out of 1432 instances that were coded, these were least common. Chapter 5 will discuss how these less visible aspects could be further developed in the online small groups.

5. *Students experienced Christian community and believed that video enhanced Christian community in an online small group*. Out of 35 participants who completed a post-intervention questionnaire, 31 of 35 students stated that they experienced Christian community in the small groups. Additionally, 25 participants believed that the videos "enhanced" rather than detracted from Christian community; 8 others felt positive about the videos but had some

qualifications. Most significantly, only 2 out of 35 felt that videos detracted from the course.

6. *A strong majority of these Christian students would welcome the use of videos in future discussion groups*. In fact, 33 of 35 are open to videos in future courses. This finding is significant. Some students pointed out that it was their favorite part of the course; that they had never experienced video discussions in a course before; and that videos made the course seem more real and personal. Because isolation is the primary problem of online education (which is discussed in Chapter 2), videos would be a possible way to promote Christian community in an online environment.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this project was to determine the effectiveness of interpersonal videos within small groups for cultivating Christian community in online classes at Moody Bible Institute. The research explored whether or not asynchronous, video-based small groups enhanced a sense of Christian community amongst 57 small group participants at Moody Bible Institute. This final chapter will review the lessons learned from this research, summarized according to the major findings, as well as a discussion of limitations and recommendations.

Major Findings

First Finding: Common Expectation for Online Christian Community

The first major finding is that all participants believed that Christian community could occur in an participants (40 of 40) held a positive attitude towards the usefulness of video groups to develop Christian community in an online setting. This research finding, gathered from the questionnaires, revealed a shared belief held by those in this study: Christian community is indeed possible in an online environment.

This finding aligns with previous research that online community is possible. Interpersonal interactions can sometimes occur more often in online classrooms, which assist in the development of community (Maddix "Generating" 373-374); electronic tools can provide a common ground for discussions to take place (Mount 24); and an additional study at BYU students felt online community was possible (Griffiths "Potential" 18).

These previous research findings were affirmed by the participants' common belief in this study. Prior to the invention, participants' life experiences (e.g., online interactions, Christian community, social media, etc.) led them to the belief that online Christian community is indeed possible.

In a similar way, while not addressing technological scenarios, Scripture also confirms that Christian community at a distance can be a reality. The clearest biblical example is that of Paul, who included personal greetings and postscripts in his epistles that are intended to develop Christian community (Just). Paul's epistles do more than teach theology; they show that Christian communities can be nurtured at a distance. Keeping the Pauline epistles in mind, it is fair to expect that Christian community does not always require in-person interaction but can also be developed/experienced at a distance.

Therefore, the likely reasons why all the participants believed in online Christian community are the following. First, each participant is living in a world saturated with visual media, and on top of that, each is enrolled in an online course, so already has some comfort with online interaction. Second, all the participants were Christians, so they are familiar with and believe in the concept of community – having experienced that (assumedly) in the context of the local church. Third, the recent increase in online video technology (e.g., Facebook Live, Periscope, Snapchat, Instagram Stories, etc.) means that participants were likely exposed to such video tools prior to enrolling in this course.

Second Finding: Most Visible Practices of Christian Community

In the online video small groups, certain visible practices of Christian community were more evident than others. The visibility of Christian practices was determined

through a variety of data sources, including self-reporting from participants (through post-intervention questionnaires), participant observation by the course instructor, coding and analysis of student videos, and follow-up interviews with participants. The visible practices of Christian community that were most observable in the online video small groups (i.e., self-expression, discipleship, gratitude, and mutuality) are displayed in Figure 3 below and will be discussed in what follows.

Self-expression was the most frequent practice seen in the online Christian communities. All 48 participants who submitted a final video went beyond course content to share personal information about themselves. Self-expression included personal disclosure, life stories, personal perspectives, and other self-focused information. The video coding in this research revealed that self-sharing occurred very frequently (383 instances in 48 videos) in the asynchronous videos.

The researcher observed, through participant observation, that revelation of "the self" is crucial to the development of community, where the goal is not only to know others but to be known. Students talked about how much they enjoyed the videos, and part of that is because they liked sharing themselves and knowing others in greater depth. In the videos, some of tangents were off-topic (e.g., a student saying, "We went to Boston for the day") but such moments of personal sharing contributed to a greater sense of community within the groups.

Why was self-expression so common in the videos? To begin with, students became increasingly comfortable with sharing personal information in the videos, as some students expressed in their questionnaires and final videos, so by the final video,

students had gotten used to sharing with other students. Several students explained that they felt awkward at first but ended up enjoying the videos by the end of the course.

Further, internet users are becoming more familiar with video sharing tools like Instagram Stories, where users share personal information, including video updates of their day. As of 2017, Instagram has over 800 million monthly users, and Instagram's story feature went from 0 to 300 million in only one year, with 50 million new users in only two months (Kastrenakes; Wagner and Molla). As Instagram put it, the app is now a "place for people to share all of their moments – the highlights and everything in between" (Constine). To encourage connection through video, Instagram went even further by adding a video conferencing feature, with a unique dual-screen social feature to allow other users to watch and chat ("Go LIVE"). Likewise, Facebook added "group video chat" to allow users to share live video "when text just isn't enough" ("Introducing Group Video"). Thus, through Instagram, Facebook, and other similar apps, internet users are becoming more accustomed to divulging parts of their personal lives in online contexts, which they may or may not have previously shared in other forms of communication. As comfort levels increase with online video sharing, so does the amount of self-expression.

Previous research has highlighted the need for personal connection (i.e., to overcome isolation) in online contexts (Rovai et al. 1; Matthews 213), and self-expression plays an important role in the development of such connections. Stories, especially, have been shown to help students connect with one another and hear from other students around the world (Sung & Mayer 1746). That previous research is confirmed by the current research through the high degree of self-expression observed in

the video discussions – that is, multiple efforts made by students to connect on a personal level.

Christian theology also points to the importance of self-expression, as the three persons of the Trinity are continually revealing themselves to one another – perfectly in union, with nothing hidden between the persons. Because Christian community originates from the Trinity (Johnson 23), these findings correspond to the personhood seen within the Trinity. Eternal self-disclosure within the Trinity suggests that human efforts at community will also include a high degree of self-disclosure.

Discipleship was also frequently evident in the discussions. Because of the academic environment and the fact Bible discussions tend to have an intellectual and scriptural focus, the high frequency of discipleship was expected. Stated another way, given that the groups took place within an academic context (specifically, an online Bible course), it was expected that participants would discuss spiritual topics and Bible content. After self-expression, discipleship was the second most observable practice in the online discussions. The primary reason for this is that the prompt lent itself to the sharing of Bible and course content.

Previous research aligns with this observation, since much of distance education focuses on the delivery of "content" (Lowe et al. 42). Online videos in academic context tend to emphasize facts, knowledge, and understanding. As scholars have pointed out, community is "a learning environment" where participants share ideas, purpose, and values with one another (Rovai et al. 5). Since "discipleship" in this research project was defined as the sharing of "content" from the Bible, readings, and lecture content, a similar finding was found in this research project. Students frequently shared (232 instances in

48 videos) what they knew or learned about the Bible, thus they frequently shared knowledge (which was coded as "discipleship" since these comments related to how they were growing).

Gratitude was the third most common practice in the discussion groups. Participants often expressed thanks to others and encouraged other students. The videos included many instances of statements like "I really appreciated your good point" or "Thank you for your insight." The prevalence of gratitude stood out in the data analysis since there was no requirement for students to be grateful to one another. That is, "discipleship" could be considered a requirement of the assignment, since students needed to share content with one another; in contrast, gratitude went beyond the assignment's requirements. Gratitude occurred in 172 instances in 40 videos.

Theologians have pointed out that gratitude expresses itself in various ways, including encouragement (Calvin 4.1: 3; Lane 553). Pohl adds that the Apostle Paul "understood the communal importance of gratitude when he encouraged the early Christian congregations" to give thanks to God, since ingratitude to God led to the breakdown of community (Pohl loc. 359). With this understanding, it can be observed that members of a Christian community often express gratitude in terms of encouragement. In a local church context, for example, congregants will likely compliment church staff by saying "I really appreciated your sermon" or "I enjoyed the music today." (Worded differently, this could be phrased as "Thank you. You did a good job for me.") Encouragement is thus connected to what a person does, yet it should be remembered that Christian encouragement originates from God's work (grace), so we can encourage others on towards further good works (Lane 552). This definition of gratitude

(which includes encouragement) partly explains why gratitude was so common in the video discussion groups; students were not only being appreciative in a general sense, but they were encouraging their fellow students.

Mutuality was the fourth most common practice evident in the videos. Nothing in the prompt required participants to discuss amongst themselves the nature of the video discussions, yet many students chose to do so (115 instances in 36 videos). For example, "I've really enjoyed getting to know all of you through this course" was not required to say. Such meta-discussion was not only positive (e.g., "I really enjoyed these video discussions with our group"), but reflected that community was formed amongst the participants. They were not only able to discuss what they learned in terms of content (i.e., discipleship), but they were able to discuss the group's dynamics — thus the community was an "entity" itself. A group dynamic was being formed, and together, participants discussed how they were interacting with one another within in the group. In other words, interpersonal connections formed to the degree that participants were able to talk about other group members and the group itself.

According to Christine Pohl, Christian communities include specific practices and can be observed to see if those practices are occurring. Indeed, "practices are at the heart of human communities" (Pohl loc. 120). Pohl's visible practices included promise-keeping, gratitude, truth-telling, and hospitality, and these four practices are essential for Christian community. For example, it is difficult to imagine a group of Christians who broke commitments, acted entitled, told lies, and excluded – and still claimed that their group was still "Christian" in nature. Yet this is just a starting point, for as Chapter 2 discusses, Pohl's concept (i.e., Christian communities display certain practices) can be

expanded to include additional practices, such as self-expression, discipleship, spiritual

enthusiasm, prayer, love, and witness, just to name a few.
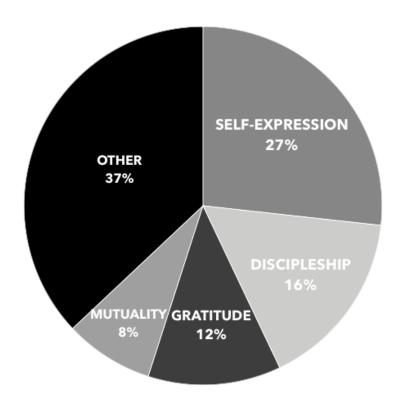
Fig. 3. Most Visible Practices of Christian Community in the Online Video Small Groups

Third Finding: Gratitude in Online Video Small Groups

The current research showed that kind speech, such as "thank you" and personal

compliments, occurred very frequently in the online videos. In total, words of gratitude

represented 12% of the video communication. Although most Christian communities

include some form of gratitude, the gratitude visible in the online videos were related to

spiritual matters and included spiritual encouragement of others. The high amount of

gratitude seen in the online classroom (172 occurrences of students speaking kindly to

one another) was far greater than what one might experience in a traditional classroom environment, considering the fact that it is possible to attend class in a traditional classroom and never hear an encouraging word from another student.

The current research aligns with previous research, which has highlighted the essential practice of gratitude for Christian communities. For example, Webber points out that with gratitude for grace at the center of Christian identity, we might even label a Christian fellowship as a "eucharistic community" (Webber 503). Pohl expresses a similar viewpoint by saying, "the Christian life is most of all a response to the grace we have received. Christian community begins in gratitude" (Pohl loc. 297).

A number of these comments (61 of 172) offer encouragement to others. Examples include: "Good job," "Keep up the good work," "You made a great point," and "I've been greatly encouraged by the video recordings." In total, 27 of the 48 participants offered encouraging comments. As Lane points out, Christian gratitude can also be expressed as encouragement to others, since encouragement is an outworking of gratitude – that is the Christian community's response to the experience of saving grace (Lane 553). In a Christian community, therefore, kind words to one another are not meant to boost egos, but to foster maturity (i.e., nudging a fellow believer onward in a life of divine grace). Thus, the current research confirms how important gratitude (including both thankfulness and encouragement) can be within a growing Christian community.

Fourth Finding: Less Visible Practices of Christian Community

In the research, certain aspects of Christian community were less visible (or less frequently displayed) in the online video small groups. The least visible aspects of Christian community were prayer (23 instances), humility (16 instances), love (16 instances), promise-keeping (14 instances), and humor (8 instances). Of 1432 instances that were coded, these practices were least common.

Prayer did not occur very frequently in the online videos. Although 15 students mentioned prayer or prayed for others, that number represents less than a third of the videos. Through participant observation, the researcher felt that the instances of prayer were meaningful (since no prayer was required or really expected); however, considering the role of prayer in the life of Christians, even more prayer would be beneficial to the development of Christian community.

Humility was also not very common in the videos (only seen in 12 of 48 videos). Through participant observation and coding of the videos, it was evident that students did not often admit their incorrectness. Students would encourage other students when others made a good point, but they did not often express changing their mind, receive correction from others, or show humility in other ways. The researcher observed that in an online course correction is given (from instructor to student, or student to student), but is not often expressly received (i.e., from a student).

Love was also not very prevalent – only evident in 10 videos out of 48. To be fair, love can be considered to be an all-encompassing category (e.g., the great commandment), so that even things like blessing could be considered an expression of love. Even still, the current research did not observe many instances of compassion in the online videos. Due to obvious limitations – for example, limited time spent with one

another and no physical interaction – an online setting cannot replace in-person interaction. Recently, for example, the researcher read in an online setting that a former student was sick with a fever and had recently had her water turned off; when posting "Be careful. You're sick and have no water?" love was shown in an online setting. Clearly, physical help would also be necessary (e.g., delivery of actual water), but that does not exclude expressions of care in an online context (e.g., expressed concern, advice/counsel, help with planning, etc.).

These practices – prayer, humility, and love – play a crucial role in Christian community. Prayer is a frequent connection point for distant Christian communities, as demonstrated by the Apostle Paul who continued to pray for believers when he was not with them (Rom. 1:9-10); Calvin mentions that prayer should keep in mind the "community which our Lord has established in his kingdom and family" (Calvin 3.20: 39); and in John 17, Christ prays repeatedly to develop unity among believers (Kornfield 91). Humility, often considered an inner attitude or a state of mind, is also a community practice, and in the words of Bonhoeffer, Christian community is marked by humility rather than selfish strategy (loc. 212-23). Love, as the greatest commandment, can even be described as "the only goal in the Christians' earthly life" (Seong 332) – so that binding love leads each member of the community to love others as his/her own soul (Wesley 289).

From a Scriptural viewpoint, the practices of prayer, humility, and love are essential to the health of Christian community. Prayer, for example, is not merely an individualistic activity, but a corporate activity; not only did Jesus encourage and practice corporate prayer (Mt. 18:19-20; 26:26), but Paul also tells believers as a whole to "pray

continually" (1 Thess. 5:18-20). Humility, likewise, is a call for each individual to "submit one to another" (Eph. 5:21) – an act that requires plurality or community in order to be practiced. Love, of course, is not an isolated act, but a demonstration of compassion towards others – illustrated how a person would love a body (Eph. 5:28-29) – and is the bedrock of community formation. Thus, any Christian community that lacks prayer, humility, or love would be in danger of losing its distinctiveness as a Christian community and begin to resemble generic or secular forms of community.

Finally, *promise-keeping* was coded for twelve participants — for example, those who explicitly mention connecting in the future and/or a desire to remain in relationship. However, the mere contribution to the final discussion is an act of promise keeping (i.e., faithfulness), since group members participated in their small group. In that sense, 48 of 57 small group participants contributed to the final video discussions. Thus, "online presence" might not be accurately represented in the coding above because the act of submitting a final video and participating on a weekly basis could also be considered an act of promise-keeping. (In other words, the mere act of contributing – i.e., "showing up" to the group – might make all 48 participants into faithful promise keepers.)

Beyond the literature review and the inductive coding in this research, it is worth noting that other community practices exist that were not visible in the online video groups. For example, in a collection of essays in *Called to Community*, compiled and edited by Charles E. Moore, several other community practices are suggested, including repentance, solitude, vocation, financial giving or possession sharing, table fellowship, and forgiveness. Of course, some of Christian practices, such as forgiveness, cannot be

"assigned" or forced in an online setting. Other practices may be difficult to visibly observe in an online group, but future research could explore ways of developing some of these practices as well — such as assigning solitude outside of the group and reporting back to the group how solitude helped them. Thus, other communal practices beyond those observed in this research could be incorporated in an online setting. Creativity may be needed to develop some of these areas in an online context, but the point here is that other practices (outside of those coded in Chapter 4) could be present, particularly if intentional efforts were made.

Fifth Finding: Experience of Christian Community in Video Small Groups

In this study, nearly all students experienced Christian community and believed that video enhanced Christian community in an online small group. Specifically, at the end of the course, of those who completed the post-intervention questionnaire, 33 of 35 participants felt that the videos enhanced Christian community. Thus, the fifth finding is that nearly every participant felt that videos helped with the development of Christian community.

Previous research has pointed out that social presence is a key aspect, if not the most important aspect, of online education. As originally defined, social presence is "the degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships" and depends upon the quality of the medium (Short et al. 65). Previous research has shown, and this research confirms, that even when not physically present, participants can experience a sense of community as long as there is an emotional, open, and cohesive connection (Borup 196).

Other studies have pointed out that increased social presence decreases isolation (which is the primary struggle for online students, who often feel disconnected from fellow students). For example, Sung and Mayer demonstrated that there is a need for students to socially connect with one another in order to succeed (Sung & Mayer 1745). For that reason, the fact that students 31 of 35 students experienced Christian community in the online video groups should not be taken lightly but should lead Christian online educators to use videos as one way of developing social presence and limiting isolation amongst online students.

The students in this research who sensed community in an online setting confirm what other research has demonstrated – namely, that electronic engagement "fosters and encourages unification and involvement," providing common ground and a space for sharing among all users (Mount 24). Further, as previously shown, asynchronous videos have the capacity to help students "form close relationships" (Griffiths "Potential" 18), and this current research confirms that previous finding. Thus, videos would be a possible way forward for increasing a sense of Christian community in an online environment.

Sixth Finding: Preference of Video in Future Small Groups

A majority of the participants in this study would welcome the use of videos in future discussion groups. Specifically, 33 of 35 were open to using videos in future courses. When asked in the post-intervention questionnaire, only 2 preferred text-based discussion over video-based discussion. This finding echoes a similar finding with 77% of students in a previous study with online video (Jackson 33). These 33 students shared a variety of responses, including: the asynchronous peer-to-peer videos were their favorite part of the course; that they had never experienced video discussions in a course before;

videos made the course seem more real and personal; and videos were challenging but beneficial. In short, most students would like videos to be used in other online courses.

This research can be compared to research from 2015 with 1500 online students. When these students were asked about their preferred mode of communication, they ranked their preferences as follows: text, video, infographics, audio, and other (Clinefelter and Aslanian 29). The researchers point out that written text should take priority, yet it is significant that video is prioritized over images alone (infographics) and audio — thus confirming that video plays an important role, even if secondary to text, in the online education experience (Clinefelter and Aslanian 29).

Video contributes rich multimedia practices to online discussions, and the importance of visual interaction should not be overlooked. Theologically, Christians rightly prioritize word over image – as illustrated by the fact that God speaks the visible world into existence – but that does not mean that creation or the visual realm should be deemphasized. We should not go as far as John Medina, who argues that "Vision trumps all of the other senses" (Medina 182); yet it can be agreed upon that "visual processing takes up about half of everything your brain does," so we would be remiss if we tossed vision aside when it comes to online communication (Medina 190). As this research has shown, not only does video offer non-verbal cues that seem to increase a sense of community, but the students in this study look forward to the usage of videos in future online discussions.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

While there are many possible applications, especially in our current media-saturated culture (Manjoo n.pag.), several key applications stand out after this research.

In addition to the increased popularity of online education, this past decade has seen a rapid increase of online video usage – as evidenced by Facebook Live, Periscope, Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube, Vimeo, and various other video-streaming services. Since fast internet speeds and internet videos are here to stay, the question "How can ministries use streaming video technologies to enhance teaching and Christian discipleship?" will confront us more frequently in the coming years. Individuals who are concerned with the use of media – whether in a church, a Christian college, or other ministry contexts – will need to explore how to best use technology, not only for individuals, but for the broader Christian community.

The most obvious application would be increasing the usage of peer-to-peer videos in online Bible courses at Moody Bible Institute. In questionnaire responses and final videos, participants shared that they had not previously used asynchronous peer-to-peer videos. Most of their prior experience was with one-way videos from instructors to students, and those who had used discussion videos said that it was done once (as in a student presentation) so there was no opportunity for students to engage with one another on video. Another student said that a different course attempted synchronous video (e.g., a Skype meeting in real-time), but it was a disaster trying to align everyone's schedule, so this student much preferred the asynchronous videos used in this study. Given the highly positive response from students following the intervention (i.e., the introduction of asynchronous peer-to-peer videos for weeks 5 through 8), the most direct application is to use such videos in other online Moody courses for the development of Christian community.

As a Christian college, Moody has a long history of progressing in distance education, and based upon this research, using more videos would be a practical next step. In contrast to dated forms of distance education – correspondence courses or online independent study courses, which are not only individualistic but isolating; or text-only discussion boards, which lack non-verbal communication and visual "presence" – this research demonstrates the benefits of incorporating asynchronous, peer-to-peer videos for the purpose of developing Christian community in online contexts. Beyond assisting with student retention – since isolation is the primary cause of student dropout (Garrison *E-Learning* 30; Lowe 57) – asynchronous, peer-to-peer video small groups can be used to enhance Christian community in an online context. As explained in Chapter 2, Christian community leads to better Christian discipleship, since individuals are not siloed but incorporated into a broader body of believers who are all growing together.

Of course, not all students will have the technological equipment or skill to be in an online video group. Those students may need to take an independent study course. However, this research shows that video uniquely contributes to communal learning. For that reason, it should be recommended whenever feasible for a student. What video contributes to Christian community is obviously lost when video is excluded.

At the same time, Christian educators should recognize the need for balance when designing online courses. In other words, it is not necessary to overload a course with video. For those with less experience with technology or those with slower internet speeds, it would be wise to not overwhelm a course with video sharing (Wiseman 288). Likewise, just as some students prefer video, others may prefer text – which may be due to a learning disability or personal preference (Wiseman 109). Thus, as much as video

can contribute to the experience of online students, Christian educators should keep in mind the great variety found among students, including their preferences, abilities, equipment, location, and so forth. Such variety should remind instructors to take a balanced approach to the integration of video, though the very definition of "balance" will depend upon location, time, participants, etc.

Video small groups assist students in voicing opinions that may otherwise remain silent. Online small groups are unique in the sense that they require participation; especially with asynchronous videos, a participant cannot remain an observer, but must contribute to the discussion. Thus, online video groups foster conversations that may not normally take place in other contexts such as a large traditional classroom. It is possible that some students could avoid video groups altogether, but those who choose to participate benefit from sharing their voice, on a recurring basis, with the entire group. Most importantly, with asynchronous video, everyone has a turn to share with the group.

Other applications include developing the less common practices of Christian community in online courses. Since these practices play such an important part in Christian community, those who form online Christian communities should be careful not to neglect less common practices such as prayer, humility, or love. Going forward, instructors could think of a wide range of creative ways to better incorporate these practices, but here are a few simple ideas that could help:

Prayer. Although prayer was not very common in the online videos, it would be simple for instructors to emphasize prayer in discussions. One idea would be to have students share a prayer request each week. Students could even pray while recording their video to add another dimension of community. Each week, students could have a prayer

partner and/or pray for every member in his/her group. These ideas would be simple to implement, without much additional effort on the part of the instructor or the participants.

Humility. Since Christian community is developed through mutual submission/sacrifice, it would be helpful for group members to share how they might be wrong and/or to offer to help fellow other group members. Paradoxically, in a Christian college, "humility" might run counter to the educational curriculum (which tends to emphasize "rightness" and raising one's own grade), so instructors might need to be creative about how to encourage greater humility within the classroom. Video peer review might be a feasible way of working toward this, as students would need to humbly receive correction and also serve one another. Furthermore, special attention should be paid to how participants disagree with one another. It is easy for online discussions to become "petri dishes" or "echo chambers" for pride — where arguments not only infect the community but create animosity between students. To foster humility, it may help for participants to not only compliment others, but to admit their own shortcomings. For example, participants could be given prompts like "How has your perspective changed after hearing what was shared in the group?" or "Which of your ideas was modified, corrected, or improved by someone else in the group?" Humble attitudes could create a more welcoming environment for dialogue, learning, and ultimately, discipleship.

Solitude. While it might seem counter-intuitive to develop solitude in a public setting – i.e., online small groups designed for community – creative methods could be employed to foster solitude that contributes to community. As Henri Nouwen argues, "Solitude is the ground from which community grows. When we pray alone, study, read, write, or simply spend quiet time away from the places where we interact with each other

directly, we enter into a deeper intimacy with each other" (Nouwen 13-16). To foster

Christian community in this way, students could be given an assignment of solitude (e.g.,

pray for 15 minutes and journal for 15 minutes), and then each student could report back

to the group. In that way, the inner life is developed, but not merely for its own self, but

for the health of the entire group.

Love. Although it can be difficult to foster love in an online environment (where

things like physical touch and physical service are impossible), there could be practical

ways for students to express love in an online community, such as working together on a

fund-raising project, where each student contributes towards a shared loving act. One

way of doing this would be to make a video presentation about a social issue and

promoting financial giving on social media; with an online resource like GoFundMe, the

class could track their success by seeing how many people support the service project.

Whether online or offline, such projects can help in making online experiences what

Maddix calls "incarnational" (Maddix "Developing" 33-34). In other words, there are in

fact ways for Christian love to be further developed in an online group context.

While this research is limited to the online community in a specific educational

institution, it would be fascinating for others to explore or test these findings in other

contexts, such as local churches. Since this research demonstrated that Christian

community can be enhanced in online Bible courses, churches might also use video

groups to further develop community. For example, megachurches might use video

groups to help members connect throughout the week, as an alternative to traditional

small groups. While this might seem "less than ideal" compared to other forms of church

community building, it may help church members who work overnight shifts or who are

homebound for health reasons. These church members might find it impossible to join a traditional small group, but they would be able to join a video small group. The current research confirmed that in online Bible classes videos can help to develop a variety of dimensions of Christian community, and this finding could be further explored in local church contexts.

Another possible application of this research would be video support groups or video accountability groups. In an academic context, there was a high degree of personal sharing (i.e., self-expression was the most evident practice of Christian community), so it would be interesting to see how this might apply in other ministry contexts. Physical trauma, emotional pain, or various addictions can be hard to share in person – especially if they have never been shared before. (For example, in the current research, one of the participants shared about an addiction that he personally struggled with, and he chose to do so in the online videos rather than the text discussions.) An online video group provides an initial step to help people voice their struggles, while experiencing Christian community. This may help some people take the next step and join an in-person support group. In cases like these, video small groups might not be the end, but a starting point, for Christian community; to determine that, this concept would need to be tested in other contexts by future researchers.

Yet another application would be in developing community in online Christian groups around the world – particularly in regions where Christians are geographically spread apart or have limited ability to meet in person. For example, when this research was presented to a Christian worker in Hong Kong (who will be named "Matthew" here to protect his identity), he informed me that this research was incredibly important and

applicable in his context. As Matthew reported to me, hundreds of Chinese Christians interact through apps like WeChat or WhatsApp to share information and learn from one another. The findings of this research, as Matthew affirmed, reveal that Christian community can indeed be formed and developed in these online settings. Moving forward, it would be exciting to see how video, and particularly video small groups, could be used in furthering Christian community in remote locations and persecuted areas.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this involves its focus at a single Christian college, at one particular time in history. For that reason, the research cannot be applied to every context, to every college, or to every ministry. Further, the findings relate to college students at a particular time in history (which, as discussed, is a time of proliferation of online video), so the findings might change in future years. Additional research would need to be done to test these research findings.

Relatedly, the study was further limited due to one cancelled class of The New Testament and Theology in Fall 2016. The instructor had signed a contract to teach that course, but due to low student enrollment, the class was cancelled, so the researcher did not teach that course. As a result, three Reading the New Testament and one The New Testament and Theology classes were included in this research.

Because this research was conducted in an academic setting, the research results might differ outside of an academic setting, such as in a local church. For example, outside of academia, participants can decide whether or not to join such a group, so there may be lesser or greater participation. Voluntary participation might mean greater

participation, such as longer videos, which could affect the dynamics of group discussions. For that reason, before applying this research outside of academic contexts, similar research would need to be conducted in non-academic contexts.

Another limitation of this study concerns students who do not want to use online videos. This research did not fully explore why students admitted to nervousness or hesitation in their questionnaires. Their fear, which is similar to the fear of public speaking, may be greater due to the permanence of videos that can be watched again and again. However, this is merely one possibility and would require further investigation. The nervousness felt by students may explain why tw0 students participated in the text discussion boards (during weeks 1-4), but then suddenly stopped participating in video discussions (weeks 5-8). This research project only focused on participants, not non-participants, which is a limitation of this study.

Another limitation concerns variations in technology. Not all participants were using the same equipment (computer, microphone, camera, internet connection, etc.), and not all participants have the same degree of comfortability with recording and uploading videos. The lack of technological equipment or technological experience may hinder the experience of Christian community for some participants. Future researchers may decide to explore how technology itself affects a user's experience and/or how to make video groups easier for less technologically-prone users.

As with many studies, participation was high, but more participants were desired. Overall, there was tremendous participation, including four online courses with 57 video small group participants, 40 pre-intervention questionnaires, 48 final videos, and 35 post-intervention questionnaires. Even with that high number of participation, however, 68

students were originally enrolled in the courses, meaning that nine students dropped the course for unknown reasons and two students remained in the course but did not participate in the video discussions. A major limitation concerns that final number – that is, the 2 students who did not contribute videos. The reason why 11 of the 68 did not participate is as follows: students drop courses for a wide variety of reasons (often related to external reasons beyond the course), and two non-video-contributing students remained in the course but ignored the video discussions. As a small minority, these students decided not to submit any videos, and it would be helpful to know why. This research only studied participants (not non-participants), so it was beyond the scope of this research to explore why those two students did not participate.

Unexpected Observations

This research study led to several unexpected observations. The researcher expected that videos would be received well due to the recent growth of online video in recent years. However, several aspects were extremely surprising in the view of the researcher.

First, student expectations prior to the course – which were gathered in the pre-intervention questionnaire – were stunning. Every student (40 out of 40 who completed the pre-intervention questionnaire) felt that videos could enhance Christian community. The unanimity of perspective may or may not reflect the broader cultural trend towards greater usage and increased comfort with online video. Whatever the cause, however, the unanimous response was surprising, as a greater diversity of opinion was expected.

Second, gratitude reached an unexpected level in the video small groups. Students very frequently complimented one another, often saying "thank you" multiple times in a

video. Case in point, one student (1C) had 16 expressions of gratitude in the final video, and another student (1D) expressed gratitude in a surprising 31% of his final video (i.e., how many times gratitude was coded in comparison to other nodes). The prevalence of gratitude was unanticipated because gratitude was not required by the assignment prompt, so the willingness of students to express encouragement and thankfulness was even more significant than some of the other visible practices.

Third, while it was expected that students would enjoy the use of video, it was surprising to see participants change their minds and become more favorable to the concept. That is, participants who were originally unsure about video small groups – saying that videos were awkward or uncomfortable – changed their minds by the end of the course and said how much they appreciated the videos. In other words, the awkwardness and anxiety of online video groups can not only be overcome, but as self-reported by several students, the peer-to-peer videos can be beneficial to their personal, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth.

Fourth, several aspects of community beyond those outlined in the literature review were observed in the video discussions. Practices such as humor, formality, mutuality, and blessing were noted through inductive observation. Of course, these might be considered a subset of the ten existing categories defined in the literature review, but they occurred enough times that they could be considered their own respective practices. It was surprising to see so many instances of mutuality and blessing – that is, students talking about the community itself ("meta-community") and wishing other students well by bidding them well (blessing them for the future). While unexpected, these practices verified that genuine community was occurring in the online groups.

Recommendations

Further research could explore the length of videos, the frequency of videos, and the size of small groups. Some students contributed short videos (such as 3 minutes), while others preferred long videos (such as 8 minutes). It would be helpful to know which length of video provides the ideal experience for both contributor and viewers. Second, this research required participants to contribute one video per week, which was helpful due to time (i.e., only one video needed to be recorded). Additional research could explore how more frequent videos would help build more community. Third, groups were 3-5 participants, but additional research could experiment with larger groups. When someone did not participate, then that likely hindered the experience of community, in comparison to groups of fully-active participants. Several students suggested larger group sizes (e.g., 5-6 participants), and I agree this could lead to interesting results— though the group size cannot become too large or students may not watch all of the videos, so there must be balance.

Additional research could also focus on the location of such videos. For example, some participants recorded videos in their cars, some recorded in their bedroom, and others recorded in creative locations (e.g., a music recording studio). It could be interesting to see how changing the locations affects the usefulness of videos. For example, group members could use video to show their neighborhood (e.g., to discuss ministry contextualization) or their church sanctuary (e.g., to discuss artifacts in their worship context). This is one way that video-based small groups could offer something unique to discussions.

More studies could be conducted on instructor videos within the small groups. This study focused on peer-to-peer small groups, with an emphasis upon mutual growth. It would be interesting, however, to study how more instructor videos within the groups (e.g., for mentoring), considering the fact that previous research has shown that an increased amount of instructor videos can be beneficial (Griffiths *Improving* 154-155). However, recording and uploading multiple videos for multiple groups each week could be very time consuming, so additional study could focus on how best to do that, while also not detracting from other aspects of teaching online.

Future research could also explore if gender has any effect upon the results. Due to the students who were enrolled in the courses, more men than women participated in the small groups. It would be helpful, however, to study how results might change if these ratios were different. It would be fascinating to know if men or women liked the video groups more, depending on group dynamics. In other words, one gender or another might like the experience better, and this might change if the groups were arranged differently. It would help to repeat this study with a greater number of women. It is unfortunate that the gender ratio of this research project was not 50:50, but this ratio was beyond the control of the researcher.

<div align="center">**Postscript**</div>

This study provided me with a much greater insight and appreciation for the importance of Christian community. Through observation of online classes and the addition of video-based small groups in those classes, not only have I realized the importance of community-based learning, but I have embraced the importance of visual interaction in the development of online community. My perspective has broadened in

that I now believe Christian discipleship is not Word-only (at the exclusion of our other senses), but Word-prioritized, with our other senses as an integral part of our Christian experience. As a Christian educator, I will strive to reach students in a variety of ways to decrease isolationism and to increase the appreciation of Christian community. Since "isolation is not the divine norm for human beings" (Matthews 213), I will greater emphasize Christian community in both my personal life and my teaching philosophy.

Finally, I have gained a new tool for studying Christian communities. While my research was focused on online Bible courses, the findings can serve as a starting point for analyzing other Christian communities. The following rubric may need to be added to or modified, depending on ministry context, but at a minimum, these visible practices will likely be present in all healthy online Christian communities. Excluding formality (which is necessary communication for any group) and humor (which is often helpful but optional), the list is provided below:

Table 10. Rubric for Online Christian Community Practices

Visible Practices of Christian Community
Self-Expression
Discipleship
Gratitude (Thankfulness & Encouragement)
Mutuality
Truth-Telling
Spiritual Enthusiasm

Hospitality
Witness
Blessing
Prayer
Humility
Love
Promise-Keeping

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

Dear Student,

I am part of the Doctor of Ministry program at Asbury Theological Seminary, and I am conducting research on the topic of Christian community in online Bible courses. I would like to survey all of the students in Reading the New Testament/New Testament and Theology, as well as analyze your videos after the course concludes. You are warmly invited to assist in the study by allowing me to review your questionnaire responses and uploaded videos to be confidentially after the course concludes. Your involvement will help improve your experience in future courses, as well as help future students who take this course.

Because this is an educational course, I want to assure you that your responses will be kept confidential, and your responses will not be reviewed until **after** the course is complete. Whether you decide to participate or not, your grade will not be affected in any way. Additionally, all of the research will be conducted after the conclusion of the course. The data will be collected using a code, and all videos will remain unlisted and will not be shared with anyone outside the class, so your name will be kept confidential.

Christian community is a complex subject, and it deserves our attention. Online courses attempt to build community in various ways, but instructors are still learning the best way to do this. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to the questionnaire questions. You are welcome to write as much or as little as you would like to, but the feedback you provide will greatly contribute towards the future of Christian education in an online context.

Once the research is completed in approximately three months, I will destroy the individual questionnaires and video links. You can keep your videos "unlisted," so that no one else will view your videos. I keep the confidential data electronically for an indefinite period of time, at least until my dissertation is written and approved.

Please know that you can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions on the questionnaire. While the videos are part of the course, you are also free to refrain from having the videos analyzed by informing me of your request via email. I realize that your participation is entirely voluntary, and I appreciate your willingness to consider being part of the study. Feel free to call or write me at any time if you need any more information.

If you are willing to assist me in this study, please reply to joel@joeljupp.com with the information below to indicate your voluntary participation. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Joel Jupp

I volunteer to participate in the study described above, and I so indicate with my digital signature below:

My Name: _____
Date:_____

APPENDIX B: PRE-INTERVENTION QUESTIONNAIRE

1. **What is your name?** (Include your name if you would be willing to answer follow-up questions via email – i.e., in case the instructor has any follow-up questions to clarify your answers. As a reminder, your responses will be reviewed *after* the course has concluded, so your grade will not be affected either way.)

2. **Do you believe that Christian community is possible online?** If so, what aspects or part of Christian fellowship can be experienced online? If not, what would prevent community online?

3. **Do you think that videos in an online-based small group enhance or detract from Christian community?** Please explain.

4. **In an online Bible course, what would you hope to experience in videos exchanged between students?**

APPENDIX C: POST-INTERVENTION QUESTIONNAIRE

1. **What is your name?** (Include this only if you would be willing to answer follow-up questions via email, in case the instructor has any further questions after the course has concluded. Your grade will not be affected either way.)

2. **Did you feel that you experienced Christian community in the online class?** If so, how do you sense Christian community? If not, what prohibited the sense of Christian community?

3. **In your perspective, did the use of personal, student videos in the class enhance or detract from your experience of Christian community?**

4. **Did you feel more connected to students through the text-based discussion board or the video-based discussion boards, and why?**

5. **If you were to take another online Bible course, would you welcome the use of personal, student videos or would you prefer not to use videos? Why or why not?**

APPENDIX D: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

You mentioned that "Not as much as other classes I have taken through MDL." Can you explain what you mean? Any details you provide would be very helpful.

You mentioned the following: "Absolutely, and more than previous courses at Moody." Could you explain what you mean by that?

You mentioned the following: "I can not say I experience 'community' in the online setting."
Could you clarify what you meant by that? I ask because later in the questionnaire, you mentioned that "I think the videos provided some community."

In a questionnaire, you mentioned the following: "I'm not entirely sure what this means. If you're referring to videos of one another or something like FaceTime, absolutely not. That is helpful. As far as videos go, if a small group online has 30 minutes to meet and watches a video from a third party for 15 minutes and discusses for 15 minutes, that is not helpful." Could you explain what you meant there? In particular, when you said "absolutely not" after FaceTime, was that a typo? I mean, did you mean to say "absolutely" there, and then "not helpful" for the second example?

When asked if you preferred video or text discussions, you mentioned that "I would recommend both of them." Could you explain what you mean? In other words, do you prefer one over the other? Why or why not?

You mentioned "similar belief" in response to this question: Did you feel that you experienced Christian community in the online class? If so, how did you sense Christian community? If not, what prohibited the sense of Christian community? Could you explain what you mean by "similar belief?"

When asked, "Did you feel more connected to students through the text-based discussion board or the video-based discussion boards, and why?" You mentioned video. Could you explain why?

APPENDIX E: DIRECTIONS OF HOW TO UPLOAD VIDEOS

For weeks 5-8, you will be using videos for the discussions. Everyone will be in small groups of 3 to 5 students, so it is important that everyone participates in a timely fashion. You can access your group in the "Video Discussion Groups" section on the left side -- right under where you normally click on "Discussions."

HOW TO

1. Upload your video to **YouTube**, **Vimeo**, or any other service of your choice.

2. If using YouTube or Vimeo, select **Unlisted** rather than Private. (Unlisted is different than Public, since only people with the direct link will see the video.) If you select Private, no one but you will be able to see your video.

3. **Copy and paste the link** to your video in your discussion group.

Tips

- You can use any device for your videos, including a cell phone or laptop.
- Feel free to use lower recording quality, if that makes things easier. You will not be graded on the quality of your video.
- Try uploading videos ahead of time, so that you don't face frustration at the last minute.
- If you live in an area with a slow connection, try uploading overnight, then let it upload while you sleep.

Additional Options

Dropbox and Google Drive are two additional ways of sharing videos to the discussion board -- in case one of those is easier for you than YouTube. Google provides 15 GB for free, which should cover all of your needs for this course.

Let me know if you have any questions!

APPENDIX F: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS IN THE VIDEO SMALL GROUPS

Reading the New Testament Discussion Questions

Week 5: Post a video response to the following: A friend says to you, "The New Testament should be read literally, not figuratively. Because the New Testament is literal, I believe that everything in the New Testament should be applied to me directly. Anyone who takes exception to that does not believe the Bible." In thinking about your readings about the epistles, how would you respond to this? What would you agree and disagree with in your friend's statement?

Week 6: Post a video that includes two parts. First, watch last week's videos from the students in your group, and then spend at least one minute responding to those videos. Second, you have learned about the distinction between literalism and symbolism. Using a specific passage in Revelation as an example, how does the distinction between literalism and symbolism help you when reading Revelation, and how can you apply that passage to your life?

Week 7: Post a video that includes two parts. First, watch last week's videos from the students in your group, and then spend at least one minute responding to those videos. Second, select one of the New Testament debates that you have learned about this week. How do you see this occurring in your current context, or how does this debate affect you personally? (Maybe you have noticed people debating this issue in your church, family, workplace, community, or broader culture.) Then explain how you would respond to that debate.

Week 8: Post a video that includes two parts. First, watch last week's videos from the students in your group, and then spend at least one minute responding to those videos. Second, as you complete the final week, what are some major lessons you have learned from the course? In what ways were you emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually challenged? (Keep in mind the course readings, course assignments, and peer-to-peer video interactions.) In 3-5 minutes, share with your group via your video recording. Provide a written transcript of what you share in the video.

(Note: Week 8 videos were the coded videos in this research, so the same final prompt was used in all four classes.)

The New Testament and Theology Discussion Questions

Week 5: Post a video to respond to the following questions. Does your church emphasize the Holy Spirit to the degree that Paul does in Galatians and his other letters? What can you learn from Paul's instruction about the Holy Spirit here in Galatians?

Week 6: Post a video that includes both parts: First, watch last week's videos from the students in your group and spend at least one minute responding to those videos. Second, in the style of a devotional or personal testimony, explain how Peter's teaching about exile and land influences you personally. Specifically, what are some key ideas from 1 Peter that can influence your spiritual life?

Week 7: Post a video that includes both parts: First, watch last week's videos from the students in your group and spend at least one minute responding to those videos. Second, as you study the Gospel of Luke, what are some big ideas that stand out to you, which maybe you missed before? Think in terms of Luke's primary emphases and how those emphases should apply to your personal life.

Week 8: Post a video that includes two parts. First, watch last week's videos from the students in your group, and then spend at least one minute responding to those videos. Second, as you complete the final week, what are some major lessons you have learned from the course? In what ways were you emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually challenged? (Keep in mind the course readings, course assignments, and peer-to-peer video interactions.) In 3-5 minutes, share with your group via your video recording. Provide a written transcript of what you share in the video.

(Note: Week 8 videos were the coded videos in this research, so the same final prompt was used in all four classes.)

APPENDIX G: FINAL PROMPT FOR VIDEO SMALL GROUPS IN EACH CLASS

Post a video that includes two parts. First, watch last week's videos from the students in your group, and then spend at least one minute responding to those videos. Second, as you complete the final week, what are some major lessons you have learned from the course? In what ways were you emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually challenged? (Keep in mind the course readings, course assignments, and peer-to-peer video interactions.) In 3-5 minutes, share with your group via your video recording. Provide a written transcript of what you share in the video.

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