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# ADOPTING THE ABANDONED: CHANGING THE APPROACH TO STUDENT MINISTRY AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

Michael W. McEntyre

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# Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

ADOPTING THE ABANDONED: CHANGING THE APPROACH TO STUDENT  
MINISTRY AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

Written by

MICHAEL MCENTYRE


and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

  
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Kurt Fredrickson

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ADOPTING THE ABANDONED: CHANGING THE APPROACH TO STUDENT  
MINISTRY AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

MICHAEL MCENTYRE  
MARCH 2019



## ABSTRACT

### **Adopting the Abandoned: Changing the Approach to Student Ministry at First Baptist Church in Columbia, Missouri**

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Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2019

The purpose of this doctoral project is to lead the congregation of First Baptist Church to first understand the effects of systemic abandonment of adolescents by Western culture and the Church and then confront these effects by applying what can be learned (about identity, belonging, and attachment) from a biblical and cultural (secular) understanding of adoption, in order to reshape ministry praxis to more faithfully align with the work of God's Kingdom. This will require education for church leadership and adults as well as implementation of new student ministry practices. The project uses the process of practical theology to guide this work.

This project is divided into three parts. Part One explores systems of adolescent support—and ultimately, abandonment. It also examines the Church's reaction to the rise and fall of such systems and its shift to a focus on doctrinal beliefs, moral behavior, and misguided belonging when it comes to young people. This context is essential to creating a felt need for action within the local church.

Part Two employs theological reflection and insights from secular disciplines to examine the idea of adoption into the family of God as foundational for identity. It also borrows from lessons gleaned from adoptive parents and their children on attachment and identity. This adds greater depth and understanding when creating a ministry praxis to respond to the problem of systemic abandonment.

Part Three draws from the previous parts to propose an implementation plan for a new ministry strategy that addresses the need for belonging through understanding how people are adopted (both spiritually and culturally) into God's family, the Church, within the context of First Baptist Church. This approach is leading the congregation into creating a more faithful praxis. The project concludes with a summary of what was learned and insights for future ministry.

Content Reader: Chap Clark, PhD

Words: 300

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## INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the twenty-first century has proven to be a challenging time for the Church. National and denominational politics, public scandal, loss of social standing, and changing norms on issues such as women in pastoral roles and same-sex marriage/homosexuality have exasperated leadership, divided congregations (and denominations), and created a culture of fear and anxiety in many churches.<sup>1</sup> Despite the seriousness of these woes, none of these challenges should concern church leaders as much as the continued reports of the exodus of youth and young adults leaving the faith.<sup>2</sup> Many believe that the issues listed above are largely responsible for this loss of interest in the Church. Depending on one's denomination or faith tradition, different groups often are assigned blame: fundamentalists, liberals, progressives, conservatives, parents, preachers, the pope, and the list goes on. News outlets from *Christianity Today* to the *Washington*

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Beinart, "Breaking Faith," *The Atlantic*, April 2017, accessed March 19, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/04/breaking-faith/517785/>; David Masci, "The Divide Over Ordaining Women," Pew Research Center, September 9, 2014, accessed March 19, 2019, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/09/09/the-divide-over-ordaining-women/>; Timothy Williams, "Why a Vote on Gay Clergy and Same-Sex Marriage Could Split the United Methodist Church," *The New York Times*, February 26, 2019, accessed March 19, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/26/us/united-methodist-church-gay-same-sex-marriage.html>; Robert Downen, Lise Olsen, and John Tedesco, "Abuse of Faith," *Houston Chronicle*, February 10, 2019, accessed March 19, 2019, <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/investigations/article/Southern-Baptist-sexual-abuse-spreads-as-leaders-13588038.php>; Craig Barnes, "The Post-Anxiety Church," *Christian Century*, January 29, 2016, accessed March 19, 2019, <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2016-01/post-anxiety-church>.

<sup>2</sup> A quick internet search of "young adults leaving the church" generates many results on this topic from bloggers, Christian books and magazines, and academic research. Here are a few key examples: Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003); Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith—And How to Bring Them Back* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010); Kara Eckmann Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011); David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011); Pew Research Center, "America's Changing Religious Landscape," May 12, 2015, accessed November 17, 2018, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

*Post* even have weighed in on the topic.<sup>3</sup> However, all of these thoughts focus on the wrong question. “How do we stop youth and young adults from abandoning the Church?” is not the question. Instead, we should be asking, “How can the Church stop the abandonment of our youth and young adults?” Behind the issues and exodus is a nagging reality that the world of adolescence is changing and that these changes have profound repercussions in the context of our culture, our country, and our congregations.

The term “abandoned” is a powerful word and calls to mind being neglected, rejected, deserted, or outcast. The word conjures images of homes lying vacant and in disarray, cars gutted and broken, trash left in a vacant parking lot, and spouses lying awake at night waiting for a partner who is not coming back. Emotions escalate even higher when the term is applied to children. The idea of a defenseless infant left on its own to survive—or worse, to die—inflames even the most calloused heart. Thus, when Chap Clark chooses the word “abandonment” to describe the current cultural response to adolescents, a natural “knee-jerk” reaction against the term is not unusual. Clark explains that “this concept of systemic abandonment as a people group seems to capture the widest range of descriptors used by careful observers of adolescents and adolescents themselves.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For specific examples, see Daniel Burke, “Millennials Leaving Church in Droves, Study Finds,” *CNN*, May 14, 2015, accessed September 27, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/05/12/living/pew-religion-study/index.html>; Robert P. Jones, “Why Are Millennials Leaving the Church?” *HuffPost*, July 8, 2012, accessed September 27, 2017, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-p-jones-phd/why-are-millennials-leaving-the-church\\_b\\_1475231.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-p-jones-phd/why-are-millennials-leaving-the-church_b_1475231.html); Marisa Meltzer, “A Congregation in Skinny Jeans,” November 2, 2011, accessed September 27, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/03/fashion/millennials-in-church-up-close.html>; Erin S. Lane, “Why So Many Young Christians Are Leaving Their Churches— And Coming Back Again?” March 20, 2015, accessed September 27, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/03/20/why-so-many-young-christians-are-leaving-their-churches-and-coming-back-again/?utm\\_term=.93675ca9aafe](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/03/20/why-so-many-young-christians-are-leaving-their-churches-and-coming-back-again/?utm_term=.93675ca9aafe).

<sup>4</sup> Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today’s Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 28.

Systemic abandonment is the idea that as a society Western culture in many ways has imposed the needs of adults over the needs of children.<sup>5</sup> As this project will demonstrate, many of the systems initially created to support the adolescent's journey from childhood to adulthood have been redesigned functionally with the needs of adults as the prime directive. The effects of this shift cannot be ignored when considering the attitudes of youth and young adults towards the Church. This is the backdrop against which a local congregation must re-imagine its call to adolescents and their families. The task is not only essential to reconnecting with the souls of future generations but to continuing the work of Christ's Kingdom.

Like churches all across the United States, the congregation at First Baptist Church of Columbia in Missouri is wrestling with how to effectively live out the Gospel in the midst of these struggles. First Baptist has a long history, dating back to its establishment in 1823, and has been a fixture in the Columbia community. As a result, it has enjoyed a close relationship with the city. First Baptist's building is located less than half a mile from three college campuses in Columbia: The University of Missouri, Columbia College, and Stephen's College (which First Baptist helped establish in 1833).<sup>6</sup> Youth and young adults have been an important part of the faith community at First Baptist Church since its creation (the church records show how it formed its First Baptist Young People Union in 1894). As a result of the church's connections to these college communities, a tradition of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 28. While the term "systemic abandonment" originated with Clark's work, he readily ties the idea to the concept of "the hurried child," discussed in David Elkind, *The Hurried Child: Growing up Too Fast Too Soon* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1981).

<sup>6</sup> John Daniel Day, *How Firm a Foundation: A History of the First Baptist Church of Columbia, Missouri, 1823-1865* (Columbia, MO: First Baptist Church of Columbia, 1989). All historical information mentioned here in the Introduction is taken from this source, unless otherwise noted.

ministering to students that began over a century ago, and due to its long history in Columbia, First Baptist is well aware of the effects of the current attitudes of youth and young adults towards the Church. Both leadership and members of this church actively seek ways to better connect and minister to and with the community they serve, in order to proclaim and celebrate belonging to the Body of Christ.

When looking at the opposite of “abandoned,” several concepts stand out as something that the church could use to help build a framework of ministry to stem the tide of systemic abandonment. Words like “chaste,” “supported,” and “cherished” all resonate with Christian desires for children and youth. However, as this project will demonstrate, the most fitting of these terms is the term “adopted.” Adoption replaces abandonment with belonging. In recent history, the Church has predicated belonging based on belief and behavior. This can be seen in articles and books that equate church membership (belonging) with assimilation (learning to believe and behave like those within one’s environment).<sup>7</sup> As Mark Tidsworth, president of Pinnacle Leadership Association, writes: “We know the typical way people entered faith and church life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in a Christian culture during a modern period. They first gave intellectual assent to a body of beliefs (theology and doctrine). Then pilgrims ‘belonged’ to a church

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<sup>7</sup> Here are a few examples: Lyle E. Schaller, *Assimilating New Members* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002); Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Growth Church. *Assimilation: Incorporating New People into the Life of Your Church* (Pasadena, CA: The Institute, 1988); Joel D. Heck, *New Member Assimilation: Practical Prevention of Backdoor Loss through Frontdoor Care* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1988); George Ernest Thomas, *Twenty-Five Ways to Assimilate New Members* (Nashville: Tidings, 1958); Roy M. Oswald and Speed Leas, *The Inviting Church: A Study of New Member Assimilation* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1987); Nelson Searcy and Jennifer Dykes Henson, *Fusion: Turning First-Time Guests into Fully Engaged Members of Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017).

as members.”<sup>8</sup> With assimilation, belonging starts with belief.<sup>9</sup> It is true that belief, behavior, and belonging are all essential components to Christian faith; yet to best address the effects of systemic abandonment, shifting a church’s initial focus from belief to belonging is key.<sup>10</sup> A ministry model built on adoption into the family of God allows a church to redirect ministry focus, while maintaining theological integrity.

A model of ministry based on adoption into the family of God should resonate deeply with Christians. Kelley Nikondeha asserts, “When it comes to describing belonging in Scripture, family is the metaphor of choice.”<sup>11</sup> The image of adoption is woven into the text of the New Testament as a picture for humanity’s relationship with God through Christ. Ephesians 1:5 states that God “destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ.” (NRSV).<sup>12</sup> A theology shaped by the study of adoption has much to offer to the current context at First Baptist Church. As such, it is the purpose of this doctoral project to lead the congregation of First Baptist Church to first understand the effects of systemic abandonment on adolescents culturally as well as by the church and then confront these effects by applying what can be learned (about identity, belonging, and attachment) from a biblical and cultural (secular) understanding of

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Tidsworth, “Today’s Seekers Prefer Belonging Before Believing,” EthicsDaily, December 2012, accessed November 20, 2017, <https://www.ethicsdaily.com/todays-seekers-prefer-belonging-before-believing-cms-20279/>.

<sup>9</sup> With assimilation, belief in Christ is a prerequisite but often is clouded by, or overshadowed by, the importance of aligning with doctrinal beliefs or traditions of a particular church or denomination.

<sup>10</sup> For a comprehensive dealing of the concepts of believing, behaving, and belonging as components of faith: Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 103-214.

<sup>11</sup> Kelley Nikondeha, *Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017). 8.

<sup>12</sup> *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990).

adoption in order to reshape ministry praxis to more faithfully align with the work of God's Kingdom. The project's goal is to create a new praxis that repairs and reinforces believers' identity in Christ by internalizing their belonging to God's family, based on their adoption as full sons and daughters of God (2 Corinthians 6:18). In student ministry, this is done by strategically helping students connect to God and to God's family through the church in various and lasting ways. These connections reinforce the value of the person first and is not a value based on beliefs and behavior, since these are in the process of being transformed by God and strengthened by interdependent relationships within the congregation (1 Corinthians 3:17-18). To accomplish this task, the project will use the tools of practical theology as a framework, unfolding in three parts.<sup>13</sup>

To engage this project requires an understanding of how the process of practical theology is applied. Practical theology gives Christians the tools to respond faithfully to the prompting of the Holy Spirit in order to best join what God is doing. Richard Osmer defines it this way:

Practical theology is that branch of Christian theology that seeks to construct action-guiding theories of Christian praxis in particular social contexts. In part, it focuses on "how to"—how to teach, preach, raise children, influence society, and so forth. But this "how to" is informed by a strongly developed theory of "why to"—why we ought to practice the Christian way of life in certain ways in light of an interpretation of a particular social context and the normative claims of the Christian community.<sup>14</sup>

Don Browning notes practical theology is based on an interdisciplinary correlation occurring between theology and human sciences. He was one of the first to propose

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<sup>13</sup> For a deeper understanding of practical theology, see Michael McEntyre, "Thinking (Practical) Theology" in *Adoptive Youth Ministry: Integrating Emerging Generations into the Family of Faith*, Youth, Family, and Culture Series, ed. Chap Clark (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 97-114.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), xiv.

practical theology's concept of praxis-theory-praxis.<sup>15</sup> It is important to recognize that the Aristotelian term *praxis* is not the same as practice. Hyun-Sook Kim explains:

The Greek term *praxis*, frequently translated into English as "practice," implies more than the typical English definition for "practice." According to *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, practice was described as something pertaining to action, whereas *praxis*, itself, meant action or activity. Practical (Greek *praktikos*) referred to anything related to action, whereas the Greek *theoretikos* is classified as the theoretical or related to thought.<sup>16</sup>

Practical theology's pattern of praxis-theory-praxis, focus on interdisciplinary strengths, and consideration of context is why one often will hear this process described as "doing theology from below."<sup>17</sup>

Osmer calls this return to praxis at the end of the process the pragmatic task of "determining strategies of action that will influence situations in ways that are desirable."<sup>18</sup> Clark clarifies that these desirable ways refer to God's desires for the world.

Regarding this part in the process, he states:

*Praxis* is generally understood to be inseparable from the end goal *telos*. . . . *Telos* describes both the ultimate or final outcome, or for our purposes the eschaton, as well as the essence of the practice itself. *Praxis* cannot move towards the goal of *telos* unless embedded within it are the values and ethos of the *telos*. This movement towards the *telos*, or the culmination of God's intended purpose for creation and redemption, drives and infuses any practice that can be described as *praxis*.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 1-7; see also Hyun-Sook Kim, "The Hermeneutical-Praxis Paradigm and Practical Theology," *Religious Education* 102, no. 4 (September 2007): 429.

<sup>16</sup> Kim, "The Hermeneutical-Praxis Paradigm and Practical Theology," 421.

<sup>17</sup> Paul H. Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society* (London: SPCK, 1996), 80.

<sup>18</sup> Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Chap Clark, "Youth Ministry as Practical Theology," *Journal of Youth Ministry* 7, no. 1 (October 2008), 67.

In this way, practical theology requires that once a response is derived from the reflection process (theory), consideration must be given to how that response is best applied to the current context of ministry in order for actions taken to best align with the work of God’s Kingdom. For the purposes of this project, the term “Kingdom trajectory” will be used to describe the conclusions made that will guide ministry actions towards the desired future or *telos*, which the project calls “faithful action.”<sup>20</sup>

In light of this understanding, this project engages in the process of practical theology to shape a new praxis guided by identifying a Kingdom trajectory in order to ensure faithful action within First Baptist Church of Columbia. Part One of this project examines the context of the existing ministry praxis from a broader historical, cultural, and ministerial vantage point in an effort to understand the factors that have contributed to creating key systems of adolescent support—and ultimately, abandonment—in Western society and the Church. This thorough understanding of the context will reveal the deeper, underlying currents that contribute to the loss of trust and relationship between younger generations and adults and the Church and society as a whole. This is necessary in order to lead the congregation of First Baptist to understand systemic abandonment and create a felt need for action in Part Three of the project.

With the examination of the context confirming the project’s call to action, the work of practical theology continues with theory as the second part of the process to

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<sup>20</sup> The terms of “lens of theological reflection,” “lens of secular discipline,” “Kingdom trajectory,” and “faithful action” come from a model of practical theology detailed in the paper presented by Chap Clark to the Association of Youth Ministry Educators on October 11, 2011. Chap Clark and Michael McEntyre, “A New Practical Theology for Youth Ministry” (paper presented at the Association of Youth Ministry Educators, Seattle, WA, 2011), Association of Youth Ministry Educators, accessed March 19, 2019, <https://www.aymeducators.org/wp-content/uploads/A-New-Model-for-Practical-Theology-in-Youth-Ministry-by-Chap-Clark.pdf>.



engage with interdisciplinary strengths to better understand and create a proper response to the issue. Consequently, Part Two of this work uses the tools of theological reflection and the knowledge gained from human sciences and cultural understandings—much like the two-colored lenses of three-dimensional movies glasses of old—to provide depth, perspective, and foundation to possible actions. It examines the idea of adoption into the family of God as the foundation for belonging and uses the lessons gained from secular psychology to address abandonment and restore attachment between adoptive parents and their children. Utilizing this as an impetus for ministry, the project will bring understanding of the issues that help inform a better, more faithful praxis.

With these lenses applied, the final part this project turns back to praxis by considering the conclusions reached to guide a plan of action designed for the specific context to achieve a more faithful action. Establishing the necessary Kingdom trajectory from the general conclusions, Part Three uses the insights gained to create an implementation plan to shape a new praxis based on the concept of being adopted into the family of God as an effective approach to ministering to youth and young adults, who have experienced systemic abandonment and do not feel as if they belong. This implementation plan, guided by the Kingdom trajectory, then is applied in the specific context of First Baptist Church to evaluate its effectiveness in creating a new ministry praxis that leads to faithful action for the congregation. Through understanding and accepting the havoc caused by systemic abandonment and living out the new ministry praxis created, First Baptist can move beyond the model of assimilation built on right

beliefs and behaviors and instead focus on becoming a forever faith family that demonstrates belonging through the healing power of Christ found in adoptive ministry.<sup>21</sup>

This process of practical theological work will be demonstrated by the specific chapters presented in the project. Part One will consist of three chapters. Chapter 1 will seek to understand systemic abandonment by defining the term and exploring the foundation and creation of the “systems” that supported adolescents during the creation and rise of modernity. Chapter 2 will seek to understand systemic abandonment by looking at specific examples originally intended to support adolescents and how those examples, as well as the view of children and adolescents in general, have changed in postmodern times. Chapter 3 will examine the role the Church has played in adding to the systemic abandonment of adolescents, as it has attempted to respond to the rise of adolescent culture and faith by focusing more on doctrinal beliefs, moral behavior, and a misguided sense of belonging. It also will describe the specific context of First Baptist Church, where the adoption of a new praxis of ministry will take place.

Part Two will have two supporting chapters designed to help reframe the Church’s response to systemic abandonment. Chapter 4 will use the Lens of Theological Reflection to explore how a better understanding of adoption into the family of God through Christ can foster belonging and change identity. This will be done by examining the theological ramifications of adoption in Scripture, understanding the differences

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<sup>21</sup> The term “adoptive ministry” comes from Clark’s work in *Adoptive Youth Ministry* and is defined as the biblical calling describing believers’ roles in recognizing and participating in God’s declaration that in Christ they have been called “children of God” (John 1:12). As churches attempt to build community among those who gather together as God’s people, adoption is the term used as the biblical foundation for drawing disparate people into the family-like intimacy through invitation by Christ. Adoptive youth ministry provides the biblical foundation for the inclusion of young people into the core of Christian community. Chap Clark, ed., “The Strategy of Adoptive Youth Ministry,” in *Adoptive Youth Ministry: Integrating Emerging Generations into the Family of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 11.

between the Old Testament concept of sonship and the New Testament use of adoption, and discussing how adoptive theology affects Church tradition. Chapter 5 will seek to gain insight from the best practices of earthly adoption using the social sciences (through the Lens of Secular Discipline) in order to address the concerns of systemic abandonment by fostering attachment and belonging in the local church. Special consideration will be given to what these lessons might teach the church about how to repair the hurt and loss caused by abandonment.

Part Three contains the final two chapters. Chapter 6 will lay the groundwork to accomplish a new ministry praxis. It will summarize the conclusions reached by this project through the work of practical theology and create a needed set of goals and guidelines for the evaluation of current praxis. This chapter also will describe the preferred future envisioned and propose an implementation plan for a new ministry strategy designed to achieve the desired future. Chapter 7 will report on the application of this implementation plan within the specific context of First Baptist Church and discuss the results. The chapter will highlight each step of the process, with special attention given to growth areas.

PART ONE

UNDERSTANDING ADOLESCENT SUPPORT AND ABANDONMENT

## CHAPTER 1

### THE BROAD CONTEXT OF ADOLESCENT SUPPORT: MARTIN LUTHER, THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION, AND FAMILY

This chapter provides an understanding of systemic abandonment by defining the term and exploring the foundation and creation of the “systems” that supported adolescents during the creation and rise of modernity. This idea of a system-wide abandonment of adolescents necessitates the assumption that there was a time when adolescents were not abandoned, and the system(s) described worked to help youth transition successfully into adulthood. These systems can be seen as the culminating work of modernity. David Elkind describes modernity in this way:

In the broadest sense, modernity arose in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a revolt against the autocracy of the premodern world. It eventually overturned medieval forms of government, religion, science, art, and education. Modernity was a continuing revolution in the sense that it did not occur all at once or in one particular country or one specific domain of society. Rationalism, humanism, democracy, individualism, romanticism were all modern ideas that took root and flourished at different times in different places. Moreover, modernism was largely a western phenomenon.<sup>1</sup>

Ultimately, this chapter seeks to understand how the influences of modernity and the incidents that led to its rise birthed and shaped the systems of adolescent support.

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<sup>1</sup> David Elkind, *Ties That Stress: The New Family Imbalance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 17-18.

Recognizing that the concept of adolescence did not form as a cultural idea until the twentieth century, the chapter also will explore changes to the family and the role of children in general that set the stage for the recognition of adolescence as a stage of life.

### **Systemic, Not Systematic**

Systemic abandonment is not the same as systematic abandonment. It is important to differentiate between these two terms, as they are incorrectly used interchangeably at times.<sup>2</sup> The term “systematic” implies that the abandonment of adolescents has been intentional, as if part of some formulated or methodical plan to neglect the young. This suggests causality and that adolescents are abandoned, because society sets out to abandon them. This is not the idea intended by the concept of systemic abandonment.

The term “systemic” is more of an observation or description. It does not place blame; it simply states a reality. Clark chooses this term as a result of his research with the Hurt study.<sup>3</sup> Clark also drew from Elkind’s “hurried child” concept. Elkind believed that society has compensated for added stress and rapid change by promoting the idea that the child is competent and resilient. By assigning these values to children, adults tend to place

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<sup>2</sup> Searching the internet for “systemic abandonment” yields several entries that use the term “systematic abandonment” in reference to Clark or the Hurt study, which both pointedly use the term “systemic abandonment.” Orchard Hill Church, “Five Strategies to Turn the Tide of Systematic Abandonment ‘Hurt’,” *Chaos* (blog), August 27, 2010, accessed May 18, 2013, <http://chaosatnaz.wordpress.com/2010/08/27/five-strategies-to-turn-the-tide-of-systematic-abandonment-hurt/>; Michael Manning, “Systematic Abandonment of the Youth,” *Wandering Journey of Faith* (blog), January 10, 2012, accessed May 18, 2013, <http://wandering-journey.blogspot.com/2012/01/systematic-abandonment-of-youth.html>; Grace Community, “Systematic Abandonment,” *Grace Notes* (blog), April 30, 2008, accessed May 18, 2013, <http://gracenotestheblog.blogspot.com/2008/04/systematic-abandonment.html>; Jeremy Zach, “Two Responses to Systematic Abandonment,” *Youth Leaders Blog*, Churchleaders, March 14, 2012, accessed May 18, 2013, [http://www.churchleaders.com/youth/youth-leaders-blogs/159558-jeremy\\_zach\\_2\\_responses\\_to\\_systematic\\_abandonment.html](http://www.churchleaders.com/youth/youth-leaders-blogs/159558-jeremy_zach_2_responses_to_systematic_abandonment.html).

<sup>3</sup> Clark served as a participant observer at Crescenta Valley High School in northern Los Angeles for over six months. He used qualitative research through an ethnographic study to better understand the lives of mid-adolescents. Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, xvi.

their own emotional and psychological needs above those of the child. The result is what Elkind calls “hurried” and what Clark identifies as “abandonment.”<sup>4</sup>

Clark identifies markers of abandonment both in external systems (school, sports, church) and internal systems (immediate family, extended family, network of meaningful adult relationships) intended to support adolescents.<sup>5</sup> He observes, “In every system and structure, organization and institution, we have literally left our kids adrift in a growing tempest without the power or compassion to help them navigate their way around and through the storms that life will throw at them. . . . Our children have been wounded as a result of our neglect.”<sup>6</sup> Clark is not claiming that this neglect was or is intentional. Instead, it is the result of massive sociological changes that have been at work for generations. The culmination of these changes have reached a tipping point in recent decades, with menacing results. “Society transferred the responsibility of nurturing, guiding, and ultimately assimilating the young from society itself to children. Kids are essentially on their own to become adults, and this is now true in nearly every modern culture around the world.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Understanding the Beginning**

While many support structures designed to help children transition into adulthood were established or repurposed sometime after G. Stanley Hall popularized the idea of

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<sup>4</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 27-28.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-35.

<sup>6</sup> Chap Clark and Dee Clark, *Disconnected: Parenting Teens in a Myspace World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 73.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

adolescence in the early 1900s,<sup>8</sup> the foundations that made this new stage of life possible can be traced all the way back to the birth of the Protestant Reformation. While much of this chapter will focus on the effects of modernity on Western culture, and particularly Western culture in the United States, in regard to adolescent systems of support and abandonment, understanding how these systems came about requires a much broader purview. When Martin Luther penned his Ninety-Five Theses in 1517,<sup>9</sup> he could not have imagined how far and how wide the repercussions would spread. His words would be the spark necessary to ignite a seismic shift in power, authority, religion, family, economics, legislation—and eventually, adolescence.

Luther's acts and the events surrounding them would come to be known as the Protestant Reformation or the Great Reformation. As Phyllis Tickle states, there is “a very good reason why most general lectures about the Great Reformation today commence with the simplistic, but accurate observation that as a hinge time, it was characterized by the rise of capitalism, of the middle class, of the nation-state, and finally of Protestantism.”<sup>10</sup> Protestantism would become the religious reflection of the changes to the cultural context brought about by the Great Reformation. Historian Diarmaid MacCulloch captures the importance of these changes in the West. He writes: “American life is fired by a continuing energy of Protestant religious practice derived from the 16<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (London: Appleton and Company, 1904). See also Mark Senter, *When God Shows Up: A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 113.

<sup>9</sup> Donald K. McKim, *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 214.

<sup>10</sup> Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 51.



century.”<sup>11</sup> Specifically, MacCulloch says that the dominant ideology in the United States has been influenced largely by the English form of Protestantism, which still be can be seen as central to the culture, despite its decline in influence in its homeland. Historian Leon McBeth identifies the dominant form of this English Protestantism as Puritanism. He notes that when the Puritans separated from the Church of England, they firmly embedded themselves in the fabric of the newly forming colonies of the Americas.<sup>12</sup> The influence of Puritan education, morality and work ethics are still very much a part of American values today. Understanding this heritage is vital in understanding the systems that would later influence the development of adolescents.

A shift in power and allegiance was taking place during the time of Luther’s protest in 1517.<sup>13</sup> Various conflicts and tensions, as well as the introduction of gun powder to the battlefield, were pushing previously independent merchant republics, city-states, and fiefdoms to centralize for the sake of protection. These emerging nation-states created a shift in loyalty away from the local lord or manor to an often-distant king.<sup>14</sup> Freedom from the authority of the nearby landowner resulted in a new sense of self-responsibility. This period can be seen as the birth of individualism. Tickle observes, “Cash money, not blood and land, became the basis of power.”<sup>15</sup> This formula of money equaling power can be seen as the seeds of capitalism. The influence of capitalism would come to dominate

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<sup>11</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2004), 41.

<sup>12</sup> Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987).

<sup>13</sup> The references to Luther’s actions in 1517 are not intended to suggest that this one event marked an instantaneous shift. Instead, it is used as a reference point in which the farther away one moves in either direction the more dissimilarities arise. It is an axis point, or hinge, marking the transitions that followed.

<sup>14</sup> Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 43-50.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

the political and cultural landscape for almost five hundred years in the West—until the dawn of the twenty-first century, when economic power began to be determined not by wealth but by information.

Along with the rise of individualism, the collapse of serfdom created the need for a new social structure. The importance of the tribe or clan gave way to the centrality of the nuclear family.<sup>16</sup> The home was the new castle, and each man declared himself king.<sup>17</sup> The hierarchy of the home set the man at the head, as protector and provider. The man's wife was second in the line of authority, whose influence and responsibilities were usually focused on household survival and possibly social affairs. Children occupied the bottom rung. However, as Tickle notes, "there was no question that in most cases, it was for them and their furtherance that the family existed."<sup>18</sup> This was a shift in thinking from medieval times, when children were simply seen "as miniature adults ready to enter the workforce."<sup>19</sup> Again, this can be attributed to fall of feudalism, where the future of the child would have been influenced more by the lord or noble of the manor than the parents.

### The Re-formation

Political and social structures were not the only systems undergoing change at this time. After all, the Protestant Reformation was an attempt to reform the Catholic Church of the day, and the Body of Christ had many challenges to overcome. For more than a

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Origins of the phrase, "a man's home is his castle," can be traced back to sixteenth-century England. Chrysti M. Smith, *Verbivore's Feast: Second Course—More Word & Phrase Origins* (Helena, Montana: Farcountry Press, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 108-109.

<sup>19</sup> Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, 24.

thousand years, the authority of the Church had been grounded in the authority of the pope. In 1378, political tensions between Italy and France would overflow into the religious realm, after the death of Pope Gregory XI. Two popes eventually were named, each claiming legitimacy and waging war against the other and his followers. This is referred to as “the Great Schism of the West” and would continue for almost forty years between two (and, at one time, three) different papal lines of authority. The struggle for papal authority and the slanderous campaigns of the opposing parties during this second Great Schism forced many members of the Catholic Church to question the authority of the pope—or at least one of the men claiming to be pope.<sup>20</sup> Until 1378, with minor challenges, the pope had served as God’s final authority on earth; but with the rise of multiple popes, each claiming the other was an imposter, the assurance of papal authority began to waiver.<sup>21</sup>

It was against this backdrop that Luther answered the question of authority with resounding certainty. *Sola scriptura, scriptura sola* was his clarion call. For Luther, authority was found only in Scripture and the Scriptures alone.<sup>22</sup> Luther was adamant that all believers were part of one body and as such there was no spiritual distinction between clergy and laity. His call for reform was driven by a desire for renewed unity of all

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<sup>20</sup> The first Great Schism usually refers to the East-West split between the Roman Catholic Church and the Byzantine Church in 1054. Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 21.

<sup>21</sup> Francis Oakley, “The Great Papal Schism,” *Christian History* 9, no. 4 (November 1990): 23.

<sup>22</sup> McKim, *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, 214-219.

believers. Later followers would use this teaching to form the basis for the idea of “the priesthood of all believers.”<sup>23</sup>

Both *sola scriptura* and “the priesthood of all believers” would be used to reinforce the fledgling concept of individualism that has become so dominant in Western culture today. An intriguing four-part documentary series, *The Protestant Revolution* traces numerous lasting effects of this period. While *sola scriptura* and “the priesthood of all believers” were central to Protestantism,<sup>24</sup> they were also somewhat at odds with each other.

### The Priesthood of All Believers

When Luther openly questioned the authority of the pope and spoke of an equality among believers, he opened the door for a new process of question and reason in every area of life. Humankind now could bring questions directly to God without needing a human mediator. An unexpected side effect of Luther’s work was a rise in literacy and education. Since all individuals now could appeal to the Scriptures for direction and understanding in their life, it stood to reason that each person would need to be able to read the Scripture personally. This new emphasis on reading and reason would be the groundwork for the Enlightenment, the scientific method, and the birth of modern times.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, education became an essential part of the system designed to support adolescents.

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<sup>23</sup> Timothy J. Wengert, *Priesthood, Pastors, Bishops: Public Ministry for the Reformation and Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 1-16. While many credit this teaching to Luther, Timothy Wengert makes a compelling argument that what Luther intended was not exactly what this concept had transformed into in Protestant understanding. For further insight, see his first chapter titled “The Priesthood of All Believers and Other Pious Myths.”

<sup>24</sup> *The Protestant Revolution*, directed by Joseph Maxwell (IWC Media, 2007), DVD (BBC Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 46.

This focus on education led to a new reality: not only was a man's home his castle, it also became his church. It was in the home that Scripture would be read, examined, and first discussed. The home became a place of prayer, communion, and worship. Luther elevated the importance of home life even further when he married Katharina Von Bora.

In the Catholic Church, marriage was honored, but celibacy was seen as a superior way of life. *The Protestant Reformation* explains it well:

At its heart, the Mother Church had an ambiguous attitude to marriage and family life. On the surface, Catholics proclaimed that they were important, even sacred institutions. But despite this, everyone knew that they were a second-class state of affairs. In Catholic Christendom, only one relationship counted, a passionate, but sexless love affair with God.<sup>26</sup>

Luther had been a German monk and Catholic priest. Von Bora was a former nun.

Luther's decision to marry was a religious and political statement, but his love and tenderness towards his wife created a new model of marriage. For Luther, equality under God elevated the union of marriage and the importance of family.<sup>27</sup> Luther writes: "In God's sight there is no higher office, estate, condition and work (next to the Gospel which concerns God Himself) than the estate of marriage."<sup>28</sup> Marriage and family would be elevated to a state of calling and vocation. In Protestantism, the centrality of marriage and family would cement the idea of the nuclear family deep within the psyche of Western culture.

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<sup>26</sup> *The Protestant Revolution*.

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

<sup>28</sup> Martin Luther, Henry Eyster Jacobs, Adolph Spaeth, *Works of Martin Luther: With Introductions and Notes*, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1943), 321.

## *Sola Scriptura*

Combined with Protestantism's idea of equality and underlying current of question and reason runs a different, more concrete facet: the final authority of Scripture. The difficulties come when this authority is interpreted differently by different people. For example, while Luther may have used Scripture to elevate the role of wives in the family, others used Scripture to restrict the role of women at home, in the work place, in society, and in the local church. Where some saw the rise of reason and the scientific method as a part of Protestantism, others saw such questions as a direct violation of God's Word. Debates about such tenets as baptism, communion, and election splintered and divided the young Protestant movement.<sup>29</sup>

It is important to note that these debates, as well as the spread of the Protestant Reformation itself, would not have been possible without the contributions of German inventor, Johannes Gutenberg. The printing press made possible the spread of ideas to the masses for the first time. Ideas were disseminated, discussed, and debated near and far. While the printing of the Gutenberg Bible made Scripture accessible to the commoner, it also opened up the world of secular thought and science. The writings of thinkers like Niccolo Machiavelli and Nicholas Copernicus not only challenged the authority of the pope (intentionally or unintentionally) but also threatened the beliefs of the emerging Protestant churches.<sup>30</sup> Luther's vision of unity through reform quickly splintered into various factions and denominations. Roger E. Olson writes: "From 1520 on, no single

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<sup>29</sup> *The Protestant Revolution.*

<sup>30</sup> Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 56.

church has existed to unify Western society, and in that sense Christendom died. The medieval synthesis of the one church headquartered in Rome ceased to exist. The era of denominationalism was ushered in against Luther's own wishes."<sup>31</sup> Understanding the roots of the Protestant Reformation is essential to understanding the context which helped shape Western society. These values of family, individualism, freedom, and faith firmly guided the social structures later created to nurture adolescents.

### **From Reformation to Revolution**

It is important to understand that the seeds of the Protestant Reformation did not bear fruit overnight. The movement towards the importance of the nuclear family, the changing view of women and equality, the rise of individualism, and the dominance of capitalism would ebb and flow over the following centuries as modernism took shape. These ideals would form the cognitive framework that would champion adolescent support and ultimately lead to its abandonment. While the Protestant Reformation laid the foundation for modernity and a societal shift in thinking, the Industrial Revolution provided the fuel to fully transform Western culture.<sup>32</sup>

The Industrial Revolution began in Great Britain in the eighteenth century with the use of machinery to replace manpower in the textile industries. In 1789, Englishman Samuel Slater fled Britain for America in hopes to make his fortune by reproducing this

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<sup>31</sup> Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 372.

<sup>32</sup> The effects of the Industrial Revolution on Western society are vast. The point of this writing is not to create an exhaustive analysis of how the Industrial Revolution impacted society but to highlight a few ways in which the systems of adolescent support were affected by changes to society brought about as a result of the Industrial Revolution.

new machinery. He was incredibly successful. Innovations in manufacturing led to the creation of factories and mass production. These innovations, combined with more effective farming practices and a rise in consumer goods, were the kindling needed to ignite the revolution in industry that shaped Western culture and the world.<sup>33</sup>

#### From *The Waltons* to *I Love Lucy*

Among the many changes that the Industrial Revolution brought, one of the most dramatic was urbanization. Cities grew as factories were built. These factories needed workers. Answering the call were the sustenance farmers, young people, and immigrants that poured into the cities looking for a better way of life. Mark Senter comments on this in *When God Shows Up: A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America*. He writes: “Whereas 53 percent of the labor force in 1870 were engaged in farming, by 1920 73 percent held nonagricultural jobs.”<sup>34</sup> This rush to city life had drastic effects on the roles of women, family life, the economy, and the creation and recognition of adolescence.

In many ways the family farm had come to embody many of the ideals of the Protestant Reformation. While farm life remained patriarchal in authority, both women and children found affirmation, purpose, and value in their contributions. For most farm families, survival required the work of every member. In this sense, children were of great value as they were needed to perform the daily tasks necessary to live. Children were often given adult responsibilities at an early age out of necessity. The responsibility of education rested primarily with the family. These factors created a close-knit social unit,

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Grayson, *The U.S. Industrial Revolution* (Edina, MN: ABDO Pub., 2011), 8-12.

<sup>34</sup> Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 152.



which provided the foundation for society at large.<sup>35</sup> They also fed the rugged ideas of self-sufficiency and individualism, as captured by Chester E. Eisinger, who has asserted, “Not only could man possess his own farm, but he was his own master, rising and falling on his own efforts, bargaining in a free market.”<sup>36</sup> However, this “free market” and the ever-growing power of capitalism eventually would undermine this way of life.

Most family farms in the American north were subsistence farms, growing enough food to meet their needs and hopefully provide a small amount of income. As changes in agriculture and foreign demands for grain increased, many southern land owners abandoned growing tobacco in favor of corn and wheat. Many northern farmers found the competition too much and turned to the growing industries to find work.<sup>37</sup> Moving to the cities, these farmers left the security of their extended families and joined with the influx of immigrants and youth to build the labor force.<sup>38</sup>

### The Changing Role of Wives and the Family

For women—and more specifically, wives—the Industrial Revolution resulted in a dramatic shift in how they contributed to the well-being of the home. Women were no longer seen as co-laborers and partners in maintaining the economic survival of the

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<sup>35</sup> Diana S. Richmond Garland, *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999).

<sup>36</sup> Chester E. Eisinger, “The Freehold Concept in Eighteenth-Century American Letters,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (January 1947): 46-47. See also Chester E. Eisinger, “Land and Loyalty: Literary Expressions of Agrarian Nationalism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *American Literature* 21, no. 2 (May 1949): 160-78; and Chester E. Eisinger, “The Farmer in the Eighteenth Century Almanac,” *Agricultural History* 28, no. 3 (July 1954): 107-12.

<sup>37</sup> Joyce Appleby, “Commercial Farming and the “Agrarian Myth” in the Early Republic,” *The Journal of American History* 68, no. 4 (March 1982): 836-844.

<sup>38</sup> Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 152.

household. As men went to work in the factories and as the merchant class grew, women were left at home to look after the children. Now mothers, not fathers, would become the central figure of the home, providing education, religious discipline, and service. In *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, Stephanie Coontz writes: “Wives took over many of the activities that their husbands had formerly dominated, becoming the emotional and moral center of family life. Increasingly, cultural norms assigned ambition to man and altruism to women, expecting love to bridge the widening gap between the two experiences.”<sup>39</sup> These changes in responsibilities led to what is commonly known as the nuclear family.

Due to the spread of urbanization, the early nuclear family (traditionally the father, mother, and children) often found themselves separated from their extended family and the traditions and values of their home community. The unfamiliarity of city life made the value of home life even more important. Elkind states:

This dependence often made the larger society appear exploitative and uncaring, while the home provided a place of nurturance, security, and relaxation. These circumstances contributed to the formation of three sentiments that, together, gave the nuclear family its unique emotional tone; romantic love (the tie of the parents to one another), maternal love (the tie of the parents to offspring), and domesticity (the tie of family to community).<sup>40</sup>

These sentiments came to embody the Western understanding of the modern family and guide in the creation of the support system for adolescents. The idea of romantic love meant that children no longer were seen first as contributors to the family but as blessings to soul mates. The concern for children became the primary job of mothers, protecting the

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<sup>39</sup> Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992), xiv.

<sup>40</sup> Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 39.

child from the adult world; and both parents sought to protect their family from the dangers of the outside world.<sup>41</sup> As the building blocks of society (the nuclear family) focused more on their children, society as a whole came to reflect those values.

### The Middle Class Emerges

The rise of the middle class is arguably one of the most influential factors in the development of adolescence. As the Industrial Revolution widened the gap between the poor and the wealthy, it allowed for a large group of merchants, entrepreneurs, and businessmen to see a substantial increase in wealth. In the words of Nobel Prize winner Robert E. Lucas, Jr., “For the first time in history, the living standards of the masses of ordinary people have begun to undergo sustained growth. . . . Nothing remotely like this economic behavior is mentioned by the classical economists, even as a theoretical possibility.”<sup>42</sup> An increase in the standard of living and purchasing power allowed the sentiments of the nuclear family to flourish.

However, the disparity between the rise of the middle class and the oppression of the working poor exposed the limits of the nuclear family, and the need for greater systems of support for adolescents were revealed. Coontz brings this into focus:

The middle-class Victorian family depended for its existence on the multiplication of other families who were too poor and powerless to retreat into their own little oases and who therefore had to provision the oases of others. Childhood was prolonged for the nineteenth-century middle class only because it was dramatically foreshortened for other sectors of the population.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 39-49.

<sup>42</sup> Robert E. Lucas, Jr., *Lectures on Economic Growth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 109–10.

<sup>43</sup> Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 11.

Due to such discrepancies, the dangerous working conditions of many factories, the changing needs of the American economy, and the growing support for the concept of adolescence proposed by Hall, society began to respond to the exposed needs of young people.

### The Law of the Land

As cities and factories grew, so did the employment of child labor. Contrary to popular belief, child labor was not a new concept. For centuries children had worked on the family farm from a very early age.<sup>44</sup> It was not uncommon for teenagers to leave the farm to begin apprenticeships, although this training usually occurred within the same community.<sup>45</sup> However, as the Industrial Revolution progressed, children migrated from the farm to the factory in search of new sources of income.

Factory life for children proved to be difficult. Whereas apprenticeships often treated children as part of the master's own family, factory work offered little compassion.<sup>46</sup> Often children as young as ten years old would be conscripted into labor. Long hours, lower wages, and dangerous conditions were all a part of experience for young workers.<sup>47</sup> Also of growing concern was the apparent lack of discipline and supervision of urban youth. The rise of urban gangs and the perceived threat to the values of the middle class caught the attention of authorities. Jon Savage writes: "The increasing

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager* (New York: Perennial, 2000), 58.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-75.

<sup>46</sup> Not all apprenticeships were so kind. Thomas Hine notes that some apprenticeships more closely resembled indentured servitude. Often apprenticeships were used as a way of dealing with the poor in efforts to alleviate public burden; yet for the privileged, apprenticeships were a common way of providing training for those in their teens. Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 67-75.

<sup>47</sup> Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 123-127.

focus on adolescence during the 1900s took the form of official and public concern about youth's most visible manifestation: the savage underclass that ran so wild in inner cities that it threatened to taint the children of the bourgeois."<sup>48</sup>

Books such as *The Bitter Cry of the Children* and *Youth and the City Streets* stirred the American public to action.<sup>49</sup> Elkind notes that these reforms led to "more effective regulations of child labor by the states, creation of juvenile courts, the establishment of the Federal Children's Bureau, and improvement in child welfare services at all levels."<sup>50</sup> The Juvenile Court Act created a new system of justice designed not to punish but to protect. Savage says, "The court made national news. . . . It introduced a progressive approach that elevated the influence of nurture rather than nature on human behavior . . . it also inspired a more accurate definition of that troubled second decade of life. Clearly, calling the young man of 16 a 'child' was no longer adequate."<sup>51</sup>

### **The Birth of Adolescence**

At the dawn of the twentieth century the ideals of modernity, with its rugged individualism and embracing of capitalism, were well rooted in life in the United States. Westward expansion and industrial opportunity gave rise to the American dream. The nuclear family and its values had become the building block of society in the United

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<sup>48</sup> Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (New York: Viking, 2007), 92.

<sup>49</sup> John Spargo, *The Bitter Cry of the Children* (New York: Macmillan Co, 1906); Jane Addams, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (New York: Macmillan, 1906).

<sup>50</sup> Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 73.

<sup>51</sup> Savage, *Teenage*, 65-66.

States. The rise of the middle class created a growing consumer market that would come to represent the dominant culture.

The idea of nurture over nature along with the ideals of the nuclear family (romantic love, maternal love, and domesticity) combined to form the building blocks of adolescent support systems. In 1904, Hall published his theory of adolescence, drawing from Darwinian theories of evolutionary biology. Hall concluded that adolescence was more than just a biological event; it was also a social construct.<sup>52</sup> Savage observes, “Hall proposes nothing less than the creation of a new, generally recognized stage of life that would increase dependency and delay entry into the world of work.”<sup>53</sup> Hall believed that adolescence needed to be a safe haven where, free from the demands of industrial society, youth could be nurtured and guided beyond the savagery of childhood into the adult world.<sup>54</sup>

By 1950, almost fifty years after Hall introduced his new theory of adolescence, Western society had fully embraced the concept as a new stage of life.<sup>55</sup> Regarding this phenomenon, Elkind writes: “The Darwinian revolution ushered in the humanitarian perception of the child as a young organism. Like the young of other species, the child was regarded as innately innocent, playful, and in need of protection.”<sup>56</sup> The 1950s are often seen as the heyday of the modern family and the network of adolescent support

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<sup>52</sup> Hall, *Adolescence*, v-xix.

<sup>53</sup> Savage, *Teenage*, 66-67.

<sup>54</sup> Hall, *Adolescence*, v-xix. See also Savage, *Teenage*, 66-72.

<sup>55</sup> John W. Santrock, *Adolescence* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), 7. Additionally, Hine rightly notes that Hall’s concept of adolescence as a new stage of life lived on while many assertions he made about this new period of life were later disproved; but if Hall had not defined the field and posited his theories, these later studies may never have occurred. Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 158-161.

<sup>56</sup> Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, xiv.

provided by society. All of this happened just as the United States began emerging as a world power both politically and culturally.

As a result of Industrialization, the Great Depression, and two World Wars, society sought to protect youth from the dangers of the world while giving them the care and nurture needed to become capable adults.<sup>57</sup> Child labor laws as well as compulsory school attendance laws were well established, and the growing public school system had given birth to an undeniable, unique adolescent culture.<sup>58</sup> Activities and organizations such as youth sports leagues, the Boy Scouts of America, the YMCA, and the YWCA wove themselves into the fabric of adolescence.<sup>59</sup> Church and parachurch ministries established as community leaders were effectively turning their attention towards the needs and support of young people.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, the might of the economy in the United States continued to increase the standard of living for those in the middle and upper class. Society had created a “safety net” of support to safeguard the adolescent journey from childhood to adulthood.<sup>61</sup> On the surface, the system of adolescent support, created by the ideals of modernity and the desire of maternal love to protect the innocence of youth, was a success. However, the adolescent systems of support would start to unravel, as Chapter 2 of this discussion will show.

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<sup>57</sup> Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 23-27.

<sup>58</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark, and Dave Rahn, *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Youth Specialties/Zondervan, 2001), 86.

<sup>59</sup> Boy Scouts of America, “About the BSA,” accessed February 11, 2019, <https://www.scouting.org/about/>; YMCA, “History: 1900-1950s,” accessed February 11, 2019, <http://www.ymca.net/history/1900-1950s.html>; YWCA, “History,” accessed February 11, 2019, <https://www.ywca.org/about/history/>.

<sup>60</sup> Mark Senter, *The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 89-104.

<sup>61</sup> James E. Côté, *Arrested Adulthood: The Changing Nature of Maturity and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 163.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE RISE AND FALL OF THE ADOLESCENT SYSTEM OF SUPPORT

In order to understand how such strong systems meant for support have led to the systemic abandonment of adolescents, it is important to look at the key elements of these systems and examine the cultural context in which they exist. In doing so, the journey towards systemic abandonment becomes clearer. Consequently, this chapter will explore the specific and overarching dynamics that have contributed to adolescent abandonment. The first is the formation of the juvenile justice system and the public school system (both external). The second consists of changing family dynamics over the last century, which essentially have functioned as an internal system. Ultimately, this chapter will address how the view of children and adolescents has changed from modern to postmodern times.

#### **The Legal Landscape**

While it is true that child labor and compulsory education laws helped to end the terrible working conditions of adolescents,<sup>1</sup> upon further examination the motives for such laws were not exactly altruistic. By the beginning of the 1900s, changes in

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<sup>1</sup> Savage, *Teenage*, 94-95.



technology and machinery created the need for fewer workers with higher skills. Thomas Hine illustrates this with a quote by Chicago settlement house worker Edith Abbott: “The most convincing argument for the extension of child labor laws is to be found in the fact that at present there is so little demand for the labor of children under 16 years of age that it is impossible for more than a small percentage of the children who leave school at age 14 or 15 to find employment.”<sup>2</sup> Employers also realized that the work of those under fourteen years of age was individually inefficient and actually lowered the efficiency of the entire department.<sup>3</sup>

There was also a discrepancy between state legislation and federal laws. By 1900, twenty-eight states had passed laws against child labor.<sup>4</sup> Congress passed its first law addressing the issue in 1916, only to have it declared unconstitutional in 1918. In 1924, a proposed amendment to the constitution on the same subject also failed. It was not until the Great Depression, when jobs were increasingly scarce and adult competition was high, that the federal government successfully enacted labor laws to protect children. By then, organized labor had become one of the biggest supporters of child labor laws in an effort to remove low-wage competition for union members. Hine writes: “By the time they were effective, child labor laws simply recognized changes that the economy and the society had, over nearly 4 decades, made on their own.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenage*, 170.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Savage, *Teenage*, 95.

<sup>5</sup> Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenage*, 171.

This is not to say that all those who fought for child labor laws were self-serving. Activists such as John Altgeld, Lucy Flower, Julia Lathrop, the Honorable Judge Richard Tuthill, Jane Addams, and Benjamin Lindsey worked tirelessly for the rights of children and stirred support among the wealthy and middle class to effect change. Their efforts would help bring about the formation of the juvenile justice system, which was designed to protect and nurture all adolescents and not just the wealthy. The work of these reformers and psychologists, such as Hall and others, helped popularize the idea that adolescents needed protection from the adult world in order to reach healthy adulthood. This led to tremendous changes in the way the courts viewed adolescents.<sup>6</sup>

Two of the earliest transformations in juvenile systems to gain notoriety were in Denver and Chicago. Both were sparked by lawyers who were appalled by the practice of housing children with hardened criminals. In *Juvenile Justice in the Making*, David Spinoza Tanenhaus reports how in 1882 Altgeld found that in Chicago “263 out of the 7,566 individuals (3.5 percent) incarcerated in the House of Corrections were fourteen years old or younger, including twenty children less than eleven years old. According to Altgeld, the majority of these children had been arrested for being homeless or for wandering the streets and should never have been imprisoned.”<sup>7</sup> As a philanthropist, Flower partnered with Lathrop, who was a social worker, to take up this plight; and after a decade of lobbying, the Illinois state legislature passed the Chicago Bar Association

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<sup>6</sup> For further readings regarding the efforts of these reformers, see David Spinoza Tanenhaus, *Juvenile Justice in the Making* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Hugh D. Hindman, *Child Labor: An American History* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002); and Chaim M. Rosenberg, *Child Labor in America: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Tanenhaus, *Juvenile Justice in the Making*, 6.

bill, effectively creating Chicago's newly formed juvenile justice system. On July 3, 1899, Judge Tuthill adjudicated the first case.<sup>8</sup> He was a progressive who embraced the budding concept of nurture over nature. Savage writes:

In assessing what should happen to each delinquent, the judge required that the court probation officer take into account three considerations: "the welfare of the interest of the child," "the welfare of the community," and "the intellect and feeling of parents and relatives." This was a remarkably holistic program that provided for frequent home visits by probation officers at the same time as it aimed to prevent crime before it occurred. "It is the desire of the Court to save the child from neglect and cruelty," Tuthill wrote; "also to save it from the danger of becoming a criminal or dependent."<sup>9</sup>

This was a new approach to justice that began with the best interests of the child.

Similarly, as a lawyer in Denver, Lindsey was hired to represent two young boys for burglary. Upon meeting his clients for the first time, he was indignant that the boys had been housed with hardened adult criminals for nearly two months.<sup>10</sup> Lindsey argued that such actions, in effect, were training children to become criminals. In 1900, Lindsey would find and preside over Denver's newly established juvenile court system. What made this accomplishment so remarkable was not the court's dispensing of justice but rather its interpretation of what was truly just. Hine comments:

Lindsey did not propose merely to punish young people differently, or separately, for the crimes they had committed. He sought, rather, to place young people in an entirely different relationship to the law. The traditional goal of the legal system is to be detached and impartial, and trials seek to determine guilt or innocence and to punish appropriately. Lindsay's version of the juvenile court was, in many ways, the opposite. It would become part of the lives of the young people who came in contact with it. . . . He further argued that determining guilt or innocence was not the court's goal. Rather, it was to encourage, induce, or coerce young

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>9</sup> Savage, *Teenage*, 65.

<sup>10</sup> Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 172.

offenders into changing their conduct so they would not grow into adult criminals.<sup>11</sup>

The court would “become a part of the lives of the young people” in order to help them transition from childhood to adulthood. This kind of involvement is evidence of the support system of adolescence.

What started out as a localized legal shift from punishment to protection for adolescents quickly spread throughout the country. Hine observes, “This theory of juvenile justice had wide appeal and great influence. By 1909, ten states, including several of the most urbanized and populous ones, had separate juvenile court systems, and by 1945, all states did.”<sup>12</sup> While the creation of such systems might have appeared to defy the idea of adolescent abandonment, hindsight suggests differently.

From the beginning, it was clear that the juvenile courts tended to exert a form of parental influence that favored the values of the middle class. By default, this devalued the parenting practices of the poor and immigrant class, who often could not afford for their children not to work. In this case, courts often saw parents as part of the problem and deemed them unfit.<sup>13</sup> Laws geared to the protection of children and youth, however, did not necessarily translate to what was best for the parents. Furthermore, strict laws in regard to marriage and divorce kept many adults in unhappy marriages, because the cost of divorce—both financially and socially—was so high.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 174-175.

<sup>14</sup> Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 74.

The parental approach of the juvenile court system served to protect most adolescents; but this protection came with a cost, namely most of one's constitutional rights. In order for this new process to work, youth offenders often gave up "the right to counsel, trial by jury, adherence to the rules of evidence, cross-examination, public view of the trial, and the right of appeal."<sup>15</sup> James E. Côté argues that these loss of rights resulted in a loss of status and participation in the adult world, which led to discrimination against the young in the work place and also in their daily lives.<sup>16</sup> Ironically, when the United States Supreme Court restored the adult right of due process to juveniles in a 1967 ruling, the lower courts began to ascribe more and more adult punishments to young people. Since then, the ideals of the modern juvenile court have disappeared bit by bit. The thrust of the modern era was to "protect children from others and to recognize the special developmental needs of children and adolescents."<sup>17</sup> Elkind notes that today "the emphasis is no longer on protecting children but rather it is on protecting children's rights."<sup>18</sup> The results have been a rise in juvenile crime and a loss of protection within the prison system.<sup>19</sup>

Ultimately, the effective components of the juvenile justice system ironically ended up pushing the courts towards systemic abandonment. By striving for involvement in the lives of adolescent offenders in an effort to nurture them towards adulthood, the system became unsustainable. Hine observes the following:

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<sup>15</sup> Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 174.

<sup>16</sup> Côté, *Arrested Adulthood*, 168.

<sup>17</sup> Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 73.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>19</sup> Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 174.

The juvenile justice system, at its outset, operated on a more emotionally complex, taxing, and time-consuming basis of establishing trust, examining behavior, setting standards for approval, registering disappointment when they are not met, and exacting punishment that's intended to improve. . . . Because this is an approach that depends so deeply on establishing relationships with the offenders, their families, and their probation officers and others working with them, it is not one that can easily be bureaucratized.<sup>20</sup>

However, as the juvenile justice system expanded throughout the United States, bureaucracy was unavoidable. This unintentional move away from individual nurture and protection is a part of the systemic abandonment adolescents still experience today.

### **The Oasis of Public Schools**

The pervasiveness of Hall's ideas about adolescence on modernity in the first half of the twentieth century is unmistakable.<sup>21</sup> In 1906, just two years after his book, *Adolescence*, was published, Hall turned his attention towards what he saw as the failings of adolescent education. Hall criticized the educational system in the United States as too easy and lacking in structure. He did not think schools provided the shelter and guidance necessary to prepare adolescents for adulthood. Hall believed that education was key to the country's future and to taming the savagery of childhood and thought it a national scandal that only 44 percent of young Americans between five and twenty-one were attending school.<sup>22</sup> His influence, combined with the rise of child labor laws and changes

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 158-159.

<sup>22</sup> G. Stanley Hall, interview by *Worcester Telegram*, 1906, GSH Papers, vol. 15, item 234e, Clark University Library, Worcester, MA; see also Savage, *Teenager*, 93.

in the economy, led to the rise of the public school system and the establishment of an independent youth culture.<sup>23</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the education of students prior to college took place either in the home or in private academies. Such academies limited educational opportunities to wealthier families. In 1874, the Michigan State Supreme Court changed that precedent with its ruling in *Stewart et al. v. School District No. 1 of Kalamazoo*, which allowed the state to use tax money to fund free, graded secondary high schools. This case became the basis of the taxation codes for many states and launched the beginning of the modern-day public school system.<sup>24</sup> Hine recounts, however, that “the high school movement did not hit like a tidal wave, but rather like a glacier, slowly insinuating itself into American life.”<sup>25</sup> Still, the ideals of the high school movement “began in the spirit of democratic pragmatism, with the goal of providing a new kind of education to help all kinds of students adapt to a changing world.”<sup>26</sup>

Part of the slow growth of education was due to the financial needs of families. Although families no longer had to pay for schooling, the potential loss of income provided by working children prevented many from enrolling. This was especially true for boys. Côté writes:

Around 1900 only a small number of male teens attended secondary schools; almost half were involved in agricultural labor, and the rest were employed in one of the three major labor force sectors (i.e., in the resource, manufacturing, and

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<sup>23</sup> Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 162-176.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Sisson, Christian K. Zacher, and Andrew R. L. Cayton, *The American Midwest: An Interpretive Encyclopedia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 822.

<sup>25</sup> Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 139.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

service sectors)—often making a living wage or close to it. Many lived with their families, but there was paid work available for them. . . . For working-class families, their most prosperous years were often when they're female and male children worked and lived with them.<sup>27</sup>

Although it is true that child labor and compulsory attendance laws would challenge this reality, it was not until the 1930s (due to the Depression and the lack of available jobs) that a majority of what are now high-school-age youth would enroll in school.<sup>28</sup>

While Hine notes that Hall's work would become the catalyst that sparked the acceptance of the need for compulsory school attendance,<sup>29</sup> Elkind points out that how and what students at those schools should be taught had much less consensus. Classical education had promoted Latin and Aristotelian thought in preparation for college. These subjects had little perceived value to the working class of industrial America.<sup>30</sup> A growing number of businessmen began to lobby for the creation of a system that promoted the needs of industry and created better workers for the factories. Others saw education as the way out of factory jobs and resisted the focus on industry.<sup>31</sup> Still others believed schools needed to be child-focused places of nurture and protection.

The age-old metaphors of childhood, the child as a growing plant or organism versus the child as blank slate or raw material, were in conflict. Elkind observes:

In contemporary America, those who work regularly with children—teachers, counselors, caretakers—tend to adopt the metaphor of a growing organism. They envision the school, thus, as a farm where living things grow freely, each

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<sup>27</sup> Côté, *Arrested Adulthood*, 166.

<sup>28</sup> Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 139.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>30</sup> Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 70.

<sup>31</sup> Savage, *Teenage*, 95-96.



according to his or her own rhythm and season. On the other hand, it is not surprising that the denizens of government (administrators, law enforcement officials, juvenile authorities, and so forth) prefer the view of children as malleable entities awaiting the imposition of form from without. From their perspective, schools are less farms than factories, and the child in question is less a tree than assembly-line product, predictably fashioned and quantitatively measured.<sup>32</sup>

While this struggle played out in the courtroom and the classroom, ultimately the progressive educationalist thought led by John Dewey prevailed as the template for late modern education.

Dewey championed a child-centered model of education. He believed education should reflect the values of the family and be seen as an extension of the home. Again, the ideals of the nuclear family were elevated. Dewey sought to establish methods of education that were age appropriate.<sup>33</sup> Elkind writes: “For Dewey, the mind was a social product, dependent for its growth on the social environment. We learn not through direct experience with the environment but through the interpretation and re-presentation of the environment by the accumulated experience of the human race. . . . Education is part of life, not separate from it.”<sup>34</sup>

Progressive thought provided a sturdy framework for the structure of adolescent support through the education system. The agenda of schools expanded beyond the classroom to the student’s overall health, vocation, family life, and place in the community. School systems applied the philosophy of Hall and other emerging social scientists to their pedagogical principles. Instruction was tailored to individual needs

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<sup>32</sup> Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, 23.

<sup>33</sup> John Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum: The School and Society* (1915; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 7; see also Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 126.

<sup>34</sup> Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 70.

within the classroom, while both the new sciences and continued pursuits of the arts were valued as part of such education.<sup>35</sup>

Progressive thought also sought to transition adolescents into adult society by promoting common values to build the community. Savage states:

The high school was designed as an assimilation machine from the very beginning. Because of the need to integrate many different races and nationalities, America developed a highly conservative, conformist social structure. The classroom had become an all-important homogenizing instrument. The progressive educationalists John Dewey thought it the ideal place to prepare the young for the particular ethical demands and standards of American society: once the individual has become “a sharer or partner” in group activities, his beliefs and ideas would “take a form similar to those of others in the group.”<sup>36</sup>

Dewey was right, but in ways he never imagined or intended. The beliefs and ideas of adolescents did begin to look similar to one another but not necessarily to those of adult society. In 1934, comprehensive child labor laws finally were put into effect at a national level, resulting in a crackdown on truancy at the state and local level.<sup>37</sup> In the 1930s, high school enrollment increased to more than 6.6 million students per year. The birth of a new adolescent culture no longer could be denied.<sup>38</sup> The power of the public high school not only created teen culture, but teenagers themselves. Referring to high school, Hine writes: “It brings young people together, providing a fertile ground for the development of youth culture. By enrolling both young men and women, the high school gave teenagers control over their own social life, something that parents controlled before

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 70-71.

<sup>36</sup> Savage, *Teenage*, 99.

<sup>37</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 183.

<sup>38</sup> Dean, Clark, and Rahn, *Starting Right*, 86.

everyone went to high school. Without high school, there are no teenagers.”<sup>39</sup> Senter suggests that perhaps the greatest change created by the rise of public high schools was the shift of focal points for the community, from church to school. He asserts, “Education functioned as the religion of the day. Salvation from life’s problems (no longer viewed as sin) was acquired through knowledge applied to life.”<sup>40</sup> All of these changes, intended or not, were birthed from the child-focused, nurturing environment designed to protect the adolescent journey to adulthood.

By 1950, the American public high school was a well-accepted triumph in Western society; but that would change in 1957, when the Russians launched the first low-orbit satellite into space. Sputnik sparked a frenzy of criticism and reform for the education system. Elkind writes: “Progressive education came to be looked upon as permissive and coddling and in need of much more rigor and discipline.”<sup>41</sup> Examination of educational material found that it was dated and in need of revision. This launched the curriculum movement of the 1960s that brought in academics from major universities to rewrite material. Math, science, and language textbooks were all updated, and reforms of established teaching methods were taught and integrated. While these specialists were very informed in their fields, they lacked the understanding of child development and age appropriate learning. This resulted in destructive academic pressure and unobtainable

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<sup>39</sup> Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 139.

<sup>40</sup> Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 186.

<sup>41</sup> Elkind, *Ties That Bind*, 126.

expectations. Elkind writes: “If progressive education made too few intellectual demands on children, the new curricula made too many.”<sup>42</sup>

The reforms to education failed to achieve the desired goals. Education had moved away from a child-centered approach to a curriculum-centered approach but refused to see this transition as part of the problem. By the mid-1970s, children were doing worse than they previously had been before the reforms. Proponents of the curriculum-based change blamed failures on the lasting effects of the permissiveness of the child-centered approach and promised to get tougher on kids. This kind of systemic change pictured the shift of importance from the student to the value of results. The “Back to Basics” movement, designed as a more stringent curriculum-based program, actually allowed for a return to some of the successful practices of the child-centered approach. Students began to rebound until another warning bell sounded the alarm: students in the United States were falling behind in comparison to their Japanese counterparts.<sup>43</sup>

In 1983 the Committee on Educational Excellence published *A Nation at Risk*.<sup>44</sup> This report confirmed that students were academically worse off than in the past and that their performance was lagging behind that of other Western and Asian countries. This report was met with a public outcry for reform that led to some of the most sweeping and radical changes to the education system since the creation of public high schools. Unfortunately, these changes did little to stem the tide of regression and instead further

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Committee on Educational Excellence, *A Nation at Risk* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, April 1983), accessed February 11, 2019, <https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>.

alienated the well-being of the student in exchange for efforts to quantify improvements and measure results. The current system-wide focus on test scores, achievement, and retention has transformed one of the icons of adolescent support, the public school system, into a glaring example of abandonment.<sup>45</sup>

### **There's No Place Like Home**

While the changes in the juvenile justice system and the public school system as external systems of support contributed to the systemic abandonment of adolescents, the changes occurring within the family system, as internal support, present an even clearer picture of abandonment. The rise of the nuclear family and the dominance of the values it represented became the standard of society in late modernity.<sup>46</sup> The idea of the child as an innocent organism in need of protection was at the heart of reforms in both legislation and education. This shift of focus in family life, combined with the changes brought about by industrialization, initially created a unique developmental space designed to nurture the needs of adolescents. These changes, however, neglected the holistic needs of the family and had deeper consequences that ultimately betrayed and abandoned the youth it sought to help.

The influence of family in the history of the United States is undeniable. Côté writes: “Around 1800 the family and religion were the institutions providing most of the normative structure for the transition to adulthood for the vast majority of the population. It is most likely that the family exerted the greatest influence for most people, especially

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<sup>45</sup> David Elkind, *All Grown up & No Place to Go: Teenagers in Crisis* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1984), 163-166.

<sup>46</sup> See Chapter 1 of this discussion for further details.

in the frontier communities.”<sup>47</sup> Hine expands on this in regard to colonial life, stating that “the family was the primary economic unit. It was the location of production. It was the chief policing authority. It was the only social safety net.”<sup>48</sup> He goes on to say that during this era parents were charged with religious instruction, education, and career training. Indeed, the health of the family unit was crucial to the survival of the community.

As the fervor of the Industrial Revolution mounted, the centrality and primacy of the family in society began to wane. These changes were slow at first, but the impact was dramatic. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton point out that the “Industrial Revolution separated work from home, production from consumption, and public from private life. In larger, related processes, domestic nurture was differentiated from national economic advance, and the education of youth was increasingly formalized and detached from household life.”<sup>49</sup>

In the midst of these changes, social science declared the emergence of a new stage of life known as “adolescence.” These same scientists popularized the idea that children were, at their core, innocent and in need of protection from the dangers of life. This responsibility naturally fell to the parents.<sup>50</sup> These trends were complimented by the decline in both fertility and mortality rates, allowing for more attention to be given to children.<sup>51</sup> Hine writes: “The decision to have smaller families . . . was an important step

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<sup>47</sup> Côté, *Arrested Adulthood*, 163.

<sup>48</sup> Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 59.

<sup>49</sup> Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 183.

<sup>50</sup> Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 121-122.

<sup>51</sup> Côté, *Arrested Adulthood*, 19.

in the evolution of the teenager we know today. It focused parental energy on fewer children and helped shift teenagers of this class from a potential income source to a locus for investment.”<sup>52</sup> This investment often took the form of the newly accessible public education system. Education was seen as a path to independence, allowing for economic opportunities that before had been unobtainable. In essence, the teen years shifted from the beginning of a lifetime of employment to a time of preparation for the future.<sup>53</sup>

The effects of urbanization and the emerging views of adolescence changed the shape and scope of the family and its members. The need to travel to seek newly created jobs severed the agricultural roots of the extended family, in favor of the mobility of the nuclear family. This new nuclear family developed its own emotional tone, built around what Elkind identifies as three unique sentiments. These sentiments shaped how families treated children and directly bolstered the internal system of support for adolescents.

Elkind writes:

The sentiment of romantic love led us to view children as the precious progeny of a romantic union. Likewise, the sentiment of maternal love presupposed a vulnerable child who could not survive without maternal nurturance. Finally, the sentiment of domesticity, together with the value of togetherness, took as given that children were in need of the protection and security that could only be provided in a constant and sheltered home.<sup>54</sup>

The jobs of the industry often required men to report to the factory or mine for work (the public life), leaving the wife to care for the responsibilities of the home (private life), including the emotional and moral moorings, formerly the purview of the

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<sup>52</sup> Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 110.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Elkind, *Ties That Bind*, 118.

husband.<sup>55</sup> This new family dynamic did allow for more intentional and individual nurturance for the children, especially from the mother, but it also had a cost. This relegation to private affairs for married women resulted in a decrease of status relative to their male counterparts for those in the emerging middle class. With the rise of the nuclear family, the labor of women at home became less valuable in the view of society than the more public, industrial contributions of men.<sup>56</sup>

While these changes for the role of women may seem subtle or even desirable to some, it is important to note how they altered the underlying family form. Côté offers some clarity on the issue: “Most pioneering men and women worked together in the same ‘sphere’ of household production; men generally tended the fields and the barn, and women were ‘responsible for the house, dairy, and garden’ (Pleck 1993, 1948). Sociologists of the family referred to this family form as a ‘household unit of production.’”<sup>57</sup> In most cases, this system was patriarchal in nature; but functionally it was more of a partnership, requiring the contributions of all family members to survive. Côté reveals that “by most accounts women enjoyed much higher status in this preindustrial setting than they did during the following industrial eras, when men were drawn into the paid labor force and women were relegated to home and unpaid labor.”<sup>58</sup> Hine states that “once money was able to trump duty, the economic system based on family values was on its way out.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, xiv.

<sup>56</sup> Côté, *Arrested Adulthood*, 21.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>59</sup> Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 59.



Ultimately, the principles of capitalism would come to replace the values of the family, transforming the family into a “household unit of consumption.”<sup>60</sup>

With the changing economic values, the rise of the middle class, the acceptance of adolescence as a new stage of life, the establishment of the public school system, and the sentiments of the nuclear family shaping culture, the systems of adolescent support became firmly established in the American mindset by the mid-1950s. Iconic television shows such as *Ozzie and Harriet* and *Leave it to Beaver* clearly projected the ideal image of family and support.<sup>61</sup> The wise father returned home for dinner after a hard day’s work to a doting wife and respectful, well-behaved children. The nurture and protection provided to children resulted in no problem that could not be resolved, with a little heartfelt parental guidance, by the end of the show. It is a familiar standard. Whether or not it was ever actually true is not as relevant as the perception by many that it should be.

Often this period is referred to as the “good old days” and is lauded as something current culture needs to recapture.<sup>62</sup> However, the “good old days” were short lived. Bookended by the Depression and two World Wars on one side and the social and sexual revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s, the Vietnam conflict, and the Cold War on the other side, this snapshot of American virtue faded almost as quickly as it began. For many—such as minorities, the poor, divorced and/or single parents, and countless women frustrated by

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<sup>60</sup> Côté, *Arrested Adulthood*, 21.

<sup>61</sup> *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, ABC, 1952-1966; *Leave It to Beaver*, CBS, 1957-1963.

<sup>62</sup> Illustrating the idea is this magazine, *Good Old Days*, accessed February 11, 2019, <http://www.goodolddaysmagazine.com/>. This publication describes itself as “the magazine that remembers the best of times. Feature stories and photos of the good old days of 1930 through 1960 are all contributed by readers.” The pages of this publication drip with lament for days gone by and frustration with something that is missing from society today. Ironically, one can access the *Good Old Days* online through modern-day technology, something not available during “the good old days.”

domesticity and the loss of status—this was not an era of idealism but of repression and discrimination, which fully explained the stress and turmoil of the decades to follow.

In examining how the family system moved from one that supported adolescents to one that abandoned them, it is important to further explore the treatment of women at the end of the modern era. Elkind uses the term “imbalance” to describe the root or fundamental flaws in the family system of the “good old days.” He posits that “whenever one group meets its own needs at the expense of another, the stage is set for stress and conflict. In the old imbalance, mothers were the ones who most often felt exploited.”<sup>63</sup>

With the rise of industrialism, wives were limited from being productive members of society and were expected to focus more on home life and children. Côté explains:

Eventually, the change in the status of children and teenagers affected the status of women. As children were increasingly viewed as “innocents” to be protected and educated, they were expected to contribute less and less to household maintenance, so the menial labor they once performed was taken up by their mothers. . . . Women found themselves performing essential labor for which they were neither paid nor fully recognized.<sup>64</sup>

Even worse, women were expected to enjoy these changes as they were seen as part of the calling of motherhood. This can be seen in Elkind’s discussion about the confusion of psychiatrists to the growing number of depression cases in women. He notes: “The assumption of maternal love—the idea that women instinctively wanted, and needed, to devote their lives to their children—often blinded mental health professionals to the plight of those women who were unhappy and depressed because they had no outlet for

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<sup>63</sup> Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 9.

<sup>64</sup> Côté, *Arrested Adulthood*, 21.

their abilities and talents.”<sup>65</sup> To illustrate the unhealthiness of the idealized nuclear family even further, Coontz reports the following in *The Way We Never Were*: “Tranquilizers were developed in the 1950s in response to a need the physicians explicitly saw as female. Virtually nonexistent in 1955, tranquilizer consumption reached 462,000 pounds in 1958 and soared to 1.15 million pounds nearly a year later. Commentators noted a sharp increase in women’s drinking during the decade.”<sup>66</sup> These sources clearly show that for many women, the “good old days” were not so good.

Adding to the social angst in the 1950s was the “Rosie the Riveter” experience of many women during World War II. With the need for labor during the war, the United States appealed to the maternal instinct of women in a plea to help take care of the fighting men overseas. Women answered in overwhelming numbers, taking up the jobs that traditionally had been held by men, not in the name of liberation but rather from a sense of loyalty. Nevertheless, this taste of equality and freedom in the workplace had an unintended effect once the war ended and women, by and large, returned to their domestic role.

It can be hard to remain content with the confines of domesticity, after one has tasted the social and fiscal benefits of contributing to the public good. For many women, this unsettled feeling was not a confrontational force but more of an erosive stream that increased over time. Adding to the anxiety were advances in technology driven by the war. No longer did the domestic duties of chopping wood, scrubbing and hanging laundry, and sweeping and mopping the floors require a day’s work. Inventions such as the furnace, washing machines, and vacuum cleaners (to mention a few) gave rise to free

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<sup>65</sup> Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 74.

<sup>66</sup> Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*, 36.

time and, for some, a lesser sense of contribution. Also important was the impact that “Rosie” had on the next generation. Many of the children of World War II experienced a different set of domestic politics and structure, even if only for a short time. As these children grew up, many of them challenged the sentiments of the nuclear family and the cultural status quo.<sup>67</sup>

### **The Implosion of the Nuclear Family and the Permeable Solution**

It is difficult to summarize the complexities of the changes to family systems, the reasons for such change, and the effects that they had on children and youth during the modern and postmodern era; yet it is important to understand that the growing imbalance within the modern, nuclear family structure eventually created an instability that ultimately challenged the core sentiments of culture and family. As the sentiments of culture changed, the family structure was redefined. As with the creation of the nuclear family, changes within the family system sparked reflections of those transformations throughout society. These sexual and social revolutions publicly exposed the imbalances in the nuclear family, leading to a need for reform. Elkind sees this shift in family values as marking a larger cultural shift from modernity to postmodernity.<sup>68</sup> While this recognition of change in the socioeconomic and cultural reality—from an industrial to a service or information-based economy—in latter decades has relevance to the discussion of adolescence abandonment, it is not a major focus for the present discussion. Rather, in

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<sup>67</sup> Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 110-111.

<sup>68</sup> Elkind, *All Grown up & No Place to Go*, 10-15.

the decades following the 1950s, it is clear enough to note that the sentiments defining the nuclear family began to be abandoned.

Elkind has identified a new set of values that have arisen from postmodernity: consensual love, shared parenting, and urbanity. For example, romantic love's idea of saving oneself for a destined soul mate in marriage came under heavy attack during the sexual revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s. Divorce, premarital sex, and cohabitation slowly became socially acceptable in the decades following the 1970s. As a result, the idea of romantic love was replaced by what is best described as "consensual love."<sup>69</sup> Consensual love recognizes that the relationship is more of a partnership between equals that at some point can be ended, if one or more parties so desires.

Gone, too, is the idea of maternal love. This idea that resulted in an inordinate amount of parenting pressure for mothers has been traded for the idea of shared parenting. Shared parenting recognizes the importance of both men and women participating inside and outside the home and opens the task of childrearing to non-parental caregivers as well.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, the walls of the family castle and the protection from the outside world offered by domesticity have been ransacked. Whereas in modern times the home served as a retreat from the outside world, the new urbanity embraces the external environment. Family dinners have been replaced by fast food restaurants. Backyard baseball games have given way to traveling sports teams. Cell phones, television, and the internet welcome a steady stream of information into the home. The need for nurture has been consumed by the stress and busyness of life, leaving adolescents and children often feeling abandoned

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<sup>69</sup> Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 49-53.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-56.

and alone despite a virtual world of connection. Elkind embodies these new sentiments in what he calls “the permeable family.”<sup>71</sup>

The permeable family is the result of the adjustment to the old imbalance of the nuclear family. It is important to understand that the permeable family is not a solution to the problems of the nuclear family; rather, it is a reaction to the imbalance of the family system. Whereas the nuclear family placed a large imbalance on parents and particularly mothers, the reshuffling of the responsibilities of the permeable family has shifted this imbalance to the children. The key to understanding how the permeable family now contributes to the abandonment of adolescents is by understanding its core shift away from viewing the child as one in need of nurture and instead embracing the idea that the child is competent.<sup>72</sup> Elkind traces this transition:

During the Puritan era, the child was viewed as born with original sin, and in need of salvation. The Darwinian revolution ushered in the humanitarian perception of the child as a young organism. Like the young of other species, the child was regarded as innately innocent, playful, and in need of protection. With the social revolutions of the 1960s, the child came to be seen as competent, ready, and able to deal with all of life’s vicissitudes. These included divorce, extended day care, two parents working, media bombardment, and more.<sup>73</sup>

Viewing the child as competent, resilient, and sophisticated “shifted much of the responsibility from child protection and security from parents and society to children themselves.”<sup>74</sup> This has liberated many postmodern parents from the guilt of self-

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 49-59.

<sup>72</sup> Elkind, *All Grown up & No Place to Go*, 14.

<sup>73</sup> Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, xiv.

<sup>74</sup> Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 119.

absorption and concern. Child competence combines with the sentiments of the permeable family to strengthen systemic abandonment. In *Ties That Stress*, Elkind writes:

The sentiment of consensual love extends to children, who were deemed able to voluntarily withhold or bestow their affections. Shared parenting, in turn, takes as given that children are competent to accommodate to nonparental caregivers and out of home settings from an early age. The sentiment of urbanity and the value of economy presupposes children ready and able to process an unending flow of information and to make sound choices and decisions from an early age. Childhood confidence thus also supports the belief in the appropriateness of mutual authority in the permeable family.<sup>75</sup>

This belief in mutual authority places an undue amount of stress on the child. Elkind refers to the effects of this stress as “hurrying the child.”<sup>76</sup> As previously stated, Clark more aptly labels it “abandonment.”<sup>77</sup>

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated how some of the specific systems (both external and internal) originally intended to support adolescents have shifted over time to functionally promote the systemic abandonment of the very people they were designed to protect. These changes also are reflected in the subtle shifts in family values that have placed more responsibility on children by viewing them as competent and resilient, putting the onerous on children to adapt to adult needs rather than vice versa. The chapter also has revealed that previous systems of support, although beneficial for adolescents in many ways, still had flaws.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Elkind, *The Hurried Child*.

<sup>77</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 27.

By understanding the broad context of adolescent support and abandonment, one can conclude that the solution is not simply a “return to the way things used to be.” As such, in regards to adolescents, First Baptist Church of Columbia (and the Church in general) must find a way forward that understands its cultural context, is faithful to the following of its intended Kingdom trajectory, and is applicable to its current situation.<sup>78</sup> An important part of that process is understanding ways in which the Church as a whole also has contributed inadvertently to the systemic abandonment of adolescents.

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<sup>78</sup> Kingdom theology refers to the process of aligning one’s actions with the work of the Kingdom of God on earth. Clark and McEntyre, “A New Practical Theology for Youth Ministry,” 7-8.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE ROLE OF STUDENT MINISTRIES IN SYSTEMIC ABANDONMENT: ET TU, CHURCH?

The success of youth ministry in this country is an illusion. Very little youth ministry has a lasting impact on students. I believe we're no more effective today reaching young people with the gospel than we've ever been. In spite of all the dazzling super stars of youth ministry, the amazing array of YS products, the thousands of youth ministry training events, nothing much has changed.<sup>1</sup>

— Mike Yaconelli, *Getting Fired for the Glory of God*

These challenging words expose the effects of the current of systemic abandonment flowing beneath the Western Church's approach to adolescent faith development. Yaconelli was a pioneer in the world of today's youth ministry, founding Youth Specialties with Wayne Rice in the 1960s. Youth Specialties was the first independent resource provider for youth ministry and later partnered with Zondervan to publish hundreds of resources for youth leaders. The company went on to start the National Youth Workers Convention, an annual gathering of youth workers designed to

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<sup>1</sup> Mike Yaconelli, *Getting Fired for the Glory of God: Collected Words of Mike Yaconelli for Youth Workers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 96.

train, encourage, and equip leaders, and became one of the leading influencers of youth ministry and youth ministers in the world.<sup>2</sup>

The argument can be made that Yaconelli served as one of the preeminent leaders in observing and influencing youth ministry as a whole during the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s. However, he wrote the following as part of “The Failure of Youth Ministry,” a controversial letter he penned in 1992: “Youth ministry as an experiment has failed. If we want to see the church survive, we need to rethink youth ministry.”<sup>3</sup> Yaconelli passed away before he was able to offer his thoughts on what was driving this failure or how to correct the course of youth ministry, but systemic abandonment and a misguided focus on belief, behavior, and belonging appear to be a crucial part of the puzzle.

The Church has not remained immune to the effects of the systemic abandonment of adolescents.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the present chapter now explores how the Church’s response, or lack thereof, to cultural changes over the past century have contributed to the abandonment of adolescents. To illustrate this, the chapter offers a brief history of movements and ministries that have contributed to present-day practices of youth ministry and explores how the Church’s loss of status in the community and its loss of internal community have fostered adolescent abandonment. Finally, the chapter examines the underlying principles of assimilation and belonging that have guided youth ministry in recent history and how these concepts need to be reconsidered.

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<sup>2</sup> YS: Youth Specialties, “The Story of YS,” accessed November 14, 2017, <http://youthspecialties.com/about/history/>.

<sup>3</sup> Yaconelli, *Getting Fired for the Glory of God*, 96.

<sup>4</sup> For further details, see Chapters 1 and 2 of this discussion.

To frame this chapter, it is important to remember that systemic abandonment, as it has been defined in the Introduction, refers to how systems originally created to support the adolescent journey from childhood to adulthood have been redesigned functionally with the needs of the adult as prime. Clark explains, “One of the hallmarks of abandonment is the cultural shift from a nurturing focus on individuals to a focus on the group, the crowd, the statistic, the record, the program, the institution.”<sup>5</sup> These changes are not necessarily intentional and are by no means systematic, but the effects are nonetheless observable in today’s adolescent world.

The role of the local church in contributing to this problem is both active (by placing more emphasis on adult goals and agendas in ministries designed to support youth) and passive (by failing to recognize the changes to adolescence, the pervasiveness of systemic abandonment, and how the relationship between the Church and society has affected youth and youth ministry). In order to best embrace a functional model of ministry created around a biblical and cultural understanding of adoption into the family of God, it is essential for a church to understand not only the broad shortcomings of the Church in regard to systemic abandonment but also the specific transgressions of the local congregation within its community. Only then can a congregation hope to rebuild trust within its faith family that will lead to sustained growth and formation for all generations.

### **The Rise of Congregational Youth Ministry**

One of the main ways the Church has contributed to systemic abandonment, ironically, is through the ministries that originally were designed specifically for youth.

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<sup>5</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 191.

To understand, it is helpful to look at a brief history of youth ministry and how the Church's focus on belonging, believing, and behaving has shifted over time.<sup>6</sup> Systems of support for faith development (or discipleship) from childhood to adulthood are relatively new, as would be expected with the concept of adolescence taking shape in the early 1900s. When tracing the history of youth ministry, one might be tempted to point to Robert Raikes and the creation of the Sunday School movement. While this mission does highlight the changing world of adolescence brought on by the Industrial Revolution, its origin served more of a social need rather than faith development.<sup>7</sup> As such, the creation of the Society for Christian Endeavor in 1881 can be seen as the best starting point for the roots of contemporary youth ministry.

Francis E. Clark, a pastor in Portland, Maine, was looking for a way to nurture young people in his church who had already made a profession of faith. He fell into the spiritual formation philosophy espoused by Horace Bushnell,<sup>8</sup> calling the theologian's *Christian Nurture* "the most thought-provoking and fascinating volume ever written on this subject of Christian training of children."<sup>9</sup> F. Clark wanted to incorporate youth into the life and leadership of the church but was met with resistance over whether or not youth could be full members of the church.<sup>10</sup> The question of full membership is a

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<sup>6</sup> The purpose of this section is not to compile an exhaustive telling of the rise of contemporary youth ministry. Instead, the goal is to show what youth ministry focused on in its beginning to better understand how this area of ministry has changed over time and how it has contributed to systemic abandonment. See Senter's *When God Shows Up* for a more in-depth history of youth ministry.

<sup>7</sup> Dean, Clark, and Rahn, *Starting Right*, 79.

<sup>8</sup> Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Co., 1876), 9-64.

<sup>9</sup> Francis E. Clark, *World Wide Endeavor* (Chicago: W.S. Reeve, 1895), 137.

<sup>10</sup> Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 154.

question of belonging. These young people already had made a profession of faith in Christ; but before the revival movements of the Great Awakening, people did not normally join a church until their early to mid-twenties, which usually happened at the direction of their parents.<sup>11</sup> While yearly revivals brought converts, it was recognized that these professions often failed to sustain Christian commitment.<sup>12</sup> It was clear that discipleship and church leadership were F. Clark's primary focus, with evangelism seen as a secondary effort.

F. Clark realized that there was little opportunity for youth participation within the traditional prayer meetings and worship settings within the church. Of this he writes:

It was the rarest thing in the world to hear a young voice in the weekly prayer-meeting of the church, and the very rarity of such an occurrence placed a seal on the lips of most young people. The youngest could not teach in the Sunday-school because they were too inexperienced. The so-called young people's prayer-meeting was, as was usual in most churches, in the hands of the more experienced and more fluent young people, and the average convert could not find there a place for his first stumbling confession of Christ, nor was there any appropriate work for him to do, even if his heart were warmed to desire a larger service. How to change this state of affairs; how to provide some natural outlet for these young energies; how to furnish appropriate work which should not be merely playing at work but actually accomplishing something for Christ and the Church, was the great problem of the hour.<sup>13</sup>

F. Clark decided to create the Society for Youth Endeavors to help address this problem. He declared that the Society's objective was "to promote an earnest Christian life among its members, to increase their mutual acquaintance, and to make them more useful in the

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<sup>11</sup> Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 80.

<sup>12</sup> Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 155. "Christian commitment" in this instance most closely describes right behavior. Their profession did not lead to expected life changes (i.e., assimilation).

<sup>13</sup> F. Clark, *Worldwide Endeavor*, 55.

service of God.”<sup>14</sup> F. Clark’s plan was to accomplish this through accountability. He drafted the first constitution of the Endeavor, laying out the guidelines and requirements expected. Participants pledged to attend and take part in every meeting and report once a month on their progress in the Christian Endeavor. Society members also were assigned to committees to help maintain the ongoing work of the Christian Endeavor.<sup>15</sup> Christian Endeavor was open to young people between the ages of thirteen and thirty.<sup>16</sup>

When looking at the intent of Christian Endeavors regarding believing, behaving, and belonging, it is clear that F. Clark recognized the need of young people to know they belonged to the family of God and the local church. However, to accomplish this, F. Clark wanted to modify the behavior of young people in order to prove their value to adults. F. Clark writes about introducing these expected behaviors to the young people in his church for the first time:

With a good deal of natural hesitation he [F. Clark writing in third person] presented it to them and read the constitution through, page by page. A deathly stillness fell upon the meeting. Those strict provisions were evidently more than the young people had bargained for. They had not been accustomed to take their religious duties so seriously. Nothing of the sort had ever been heard of in that church, or, to their knowledge, in any church, before. To some of them it seemed that more was expected of them than of the deacons even, and other officers of the church, and they felt keenly their own inexperience and awkwardness in Christian service.<sup>17</sup>

F. Clark writes that even some of the other adult leaders who were there that evening, including his wife, shrunk from the rigorous demands of the pledge. However, before the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 57. Senter surmises that F. Clark’s efforts were meant to “demonstrate to parents, church leaders, and the community the capacity of young people for sincere spiritual commitments.” Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 156.

<sup>15</sup> F. Clark, *World Wide Endeavor*, 57-59.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 122. See also Dean, Clark, and Rahn, *Starting Right*, 83.

<sup>17</sup> F. Clark, *World Wide Endeavor*, 60.

evening was over, one by one the leaders and students affixed their names to the newly crafted document and the Christian Endeavor was born.<sup>18</sup>

This was a subtle shift in responsibility, putting the onus of faith development on youth. Whereas previously adults (mainly parents) bore the responsibility of determining a child's readiness to join the larger faith community, Christian Endeavors now planted the seed that this decision was to be made outside the home, by the local church. Acceptance would be determined by a young person's personal commitment and ability to uphold the personal pledge.

That is not to say that this was F. Clark's intent, but it was a result of the progression of the Christian Endeavor's ministry and those that would follow. For F. Clark, focusing on behavior was less about moral performance and more about opportunity for learning by doing. Nurture was essential to his philosophy. Nurture is teaching belief by example, like an unofficial mentorship, and this is a very healthy approach.<sup>19</sup> When belief is based on nurture, it runs much deeper than just a simple profession of faith. F. Clark was trying to shape belief by shaping life. He recognized the deficiencies of the revival efforts to ongoing faith development and saw the skepticism it was generating in adults toward young converts. F. Clark's goal, arguably, was to help young people experience belonging; but his solution was to use behavior to shape belief in youth, in hopes of demonstrating belonging to adults. On a small scale, F. Clark could keep the dangers of this approach in check with a strong focus on nurture, but the Christian Endeavor movement would not exist on so small a scale for long.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, 370.

F. Clark began the Christian Endeavor society in 1881. The following year, it grew into six societies. In 1883, some fifty-six societies of Christian Endeavors from fourteen states across seven denominations attended an annual conference. The same conference in 1891, just ten years after Christian Endeavors had begun, registered over 14,000 societies around the world. Endeavor groups, or some reiteration of the idea, would be represented in almost every major evangelical denomination in the United States.<sup>20</sup> At its height in 1906, Christian Endeavors peaked “with nearly four million members spread across sixty-seven thousand societies in eighty denominations and fifty countries.”<sup>21</sup> Young people were looking for belonging, and ministry to young people quickly became a staple of the religious landscape in the United States.

F. Clark left his pastorate to oversee the massive new ministry of Christian Endeavor. Eugene Francis Clark, F. Clark’s son, recounts that his father’s acceptance of the presidency of the Christian Endeavor Society was conditioned on the acceptance of six guiding principles. First, F. Clark wanted to be clear that the societies were to be loyal to the local congregation and its pastor and not the Christian Endeavor movement. Second, the movement was to be ecumenical, with no one denomination holding sway. Third, the focus was to remain on spiritual growth through prayer and Bible reading; preparing leaders for the Church was paramount. Fourth, while the movement remained sympathetic to all moral reform, it did not serve as a platform for personal piety or moral crusades. Fifth, the societies must be managed economically, relying heavily on volunteer involvement with minimally paid staff or missionaries. Finally, F. Clark expected the

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<sup>20</sup> Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 157-159.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.



support of the state and local leadership to keep the focus and vision of the Endeavors clear.<sup>22</sup> These conditions clearly showed F. Clark's desire to keep the Church at the center of this movement. His focus on nurture and ecumenical collaboration pushed his teachings about belief away from moralism or doctrinal stances to focus on faith development through shared community. Unfortunately, the overwhelming success and growth of the Endeavors made it impossible for F. Clark to preserve these ideals.

It is from this incredible movement that the concept of ministering specifically to groups of young people became common place. This concept emerged as Hall's recognition of adolescence being a new stage of life gained acceptance. This, combined with the rise of public schools, further refined and cemented the need for intentional ministry focus on this age group; yet several factors hampered the rise of youth-focused ministry and raised difficult questions for local churches. A new, budding youth culture began to take shape as the appeal of youth societies such as Christian Endeavor began to wane in the 1930s. Churches recognized the need to engage youth and youth culture in a new way. This led to the rise of what would be known as "youth fellowships."<sup>23</sup>

Youth fellowships were linked with local churches and specific denominations, not an overarching organization. The new model "tied together the Sunday school and a new kind of Sunday evening meeting designed to foster fellowship with both God and peers."<sup>24</sup> This concept recognized the growing influence of high school peer groups and

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<sup>22</sup> Eugene Francis Clark. *A Son's Portrait of Dr. Francis E. Clark* (Boston: The Williston Press, 1930), 101-102; see also Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 165-166.

<sup>23</sup> Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 198-199.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

the changes in youth culture. Youth fellowships also addressed the leadership concern of the declining society models. Since there were no limitations on the age requirements for youth leadership in the society model, many leaders grasped leadership well into their adult years, effectively freezing out younger leaders. Youth fellowships set clear boundaries for participation. Fellowships were open to those in the church between twelve and twenty-four, requiring only three consecutive weeks of attendance to qualify for membership, a far cry from membership requirements and pledges needed to join the Christian Endeavors. Furthermore, fellowships subdivided these age groups to represent older youth (eighteen to twenty-four), seniors (fifteen to seventeen), and intermediates (twelve to fourteen). Due to the involvement of so many older youth in World War II, fellowship groups gravitated their focus to those in the senior category over time. Youth fellowships were mainly led by adult leadership councils, as widespread professional youth workers were virtually non-existent. By the mid-1940s, most mainline denominations had instituted the idea of youth fellowships.<sup>25</sup>

First Baptist Church was no exception to the religious currents shaping the Western Church. According to the *Annual Report* from 1944, the church changed its model for high school ministry from the Baptist Young Peoples' Union (started in 1894) to the High School Youth Fellowship. The Fellowship was led by a large team of adult volunteers and worked independently from the previous ecclesiastical relationships that had guided it as the Baptist Young Peoples' Union. The church even began to budget money for youth work in efforts to expand its influence. These decisions show a commitment to students and a

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 200.

strong thread of social capital from adults willing to give their time and energy. It also highlights a change in direction from the collaborative partnerships with multiple churches under the union model to a more individualized approach. The church began to use events, such as a New Year's House Party (one of the first church lock-ins) and opening the Student Center on Saturday nights, to attract young people to become involved in the fellowship. This could be seen as shifting one's belonging from the larger church to the ministry designed for students within the church.<sup>26</sup>

Youth fellowships set the stage for modern-day congregational youth ministry: church-driven programming focused on young people (mainly teenagers) with a combination of Christian education and cultural engagement, designed to bring youth together in community with God and one another. The addition of an evening gathering specifically for young people would become a staple of the church youth ministry identity. However, many mainline churches struggled to gain ground with the youth fellowship models, and many of the criticisms of these fellowships still nag at youth programming today. Charles Webb Courtoy wrote poignantly about the issue:

The weakness of the fellowship era are legion. The youth fellowship was too institutional. Vast amounts of time and energy were spent on organization and "programs," and too little on God's mission to the world. Salvation became identified with membership in the fellowship. Christian witness too often was translated into membership recruitment. By having their own organization, the congregation tended to think in terms of youth as the church of tomorrow rather than to incorporate them into the life and mission of the church as fellow

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<sup>26</sup> First Baptist Church of Columbia, *Annual Reports 1900-1999* (Columbia, MS: First Baptist Church, 2000), 109. First Baptist Church has an impressive set of digitized records going back to several of the church's founding documents. Each year the church creates an annual report of ministry that includes updates on all areas of ministry for that year and are maintained in the archival area at First Baptist Church. These were extremely helpful in exploring the history of the church's student ministry context.

Christians. The youth fellowship was too often program centered rather than person centered.<sup>27</sup>

Courtoy wrote these words over forty years ago, yet many of his sentiments have been shared regarding the shortfalls of church-based youth ministry programs today. Courtoy's frustration is echoed in the lament of Yaconelli at the opening of this present chapter.

### **Loss of Social Status: Losing Influence in the Public Square**

Another layer to the Church's story of abandonment lies outside its reaction to the emerging youth culture of the early twentieth century. For the purposes of this project, it is important to examine two additional factors that have contributed to the Church's role in the systemic abandonment of adolescents: the Church's loss of social status within the greater culture and the growing loss of community within the local church. This sense of loss helped to push adult needs ahead of adolescent care within the broader Body of Christ in the Western Church.

It is easy to see the centrality of the local church in American life during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As discussed in Chapter 1, the influence of the local church began to be challenged by the rise of industrialization and families moving to urban centers for work. This urbanization, along with the effects of World War I, would challenge the Church's ideals and vision.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the biggest single event that would prove to break the cultural moors of the Church in the United States was the court case of *The State of Tennessee v. John Thomas Scopes*.

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<sup>27</sup> Charles Webb Courtoy, "A Historical Analysis of the Three Eras of Mainline Protestant Youth Work in America as a Basis for Clues for the Future of Youth Work" (DMin diss., Divinity School of Vanderbilt University, 1976), 78-79.

<sup>28</sup> Senter, *The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry*, 71-97.

The Scopes Monkey Trial, as it would come to be known, occurred in 1925 when teacher John Scopes was sued for violating the Butler Act, which forbade the teaching of human evolution in any state-funded school. While Scopes lost the legal battle, it was the Church that ultimately lost in the eyes of the public. Council for the prosecution, William Jennings Bryant, a leader among fundamentalist Christians, was publicly humiliated as defense attorney Clarence Darrow made a spectacle of Bryant and his beliefs. As Senter recounts, “The impact on the credibility of Bible believers across the nation seemed to have been destroyed. Fundamentalists were relegated to the intellectual scrap pile.”<sup>29</sup> While most mainstream churches did not suffer the same stigma as their fundamentalist brethren, the damage had been done. With questions and doubts being raised about the Church, the stage was set for a new leader in the community to rise. Embraced due to job scarcity caused by the Great Depression and the growing values of the nuclear family, the public school system would emerge as the heart and soul of society in the United States.<sup>30</sup>

After World War II the Church saw a resurgence of growth and influence but never would regain the prime spot of authority in the community it once enjoyed. To complicate matters further, the events of the 1960s and 1970s proved quite difficult for churches. The Civil Rights Movement, the Women’s Rights Movement, the Sexual Revolution, the Vatican II, and a cadre of other social challenges would bombard the Church with questions of authority, morality, relevance, and more.<sup>31</sup> These challenges

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>30</sup> Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 139.

<sup>31</sup> Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 67-76; see also Joanne C. Beckman, “Religion in Post-World War II America,” National Humanities Center, accessed March 12, 2019, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/trelww2.htm>.

would lead *Time* magazine to ask the daunting question on its April 8, 1966 cover, “Is God Dead?”<sup>32</sup> All of these factors left the Church searching for answers.

Rodney Clapp’s book, *A Peculiar People*, captures the frustration of the Church’s waning influence with a story told by Henry Nouwen. Nouwen recalls an encounter he had with a ship captain during a particularly foggy night when he served as a chaplain for Holland-America cruise line. The experience left him with a deeper understanding of the state of the modern Church. He says of the plight of the local church, “There was a time, not too long ago, when we felt like captains running our own ships, with a great sense of power and self-confidence. Now we are standing in the way. That is our lonely position: We are powerless, on the side. . . . Not taken very seriously when the weather is fine.”<sup>33</sup>

Nouwen’s illustration is a great example of the loss of power and prominence that the Church has experienced. This loss had a profound effect on the ministries and methods used to engage young people, generating incredible stress and anxiety for many congregations and their leaders. As Elkind points out, “People who are stressed, like those in ill health, are absorbed with themselves—the demands on them, their reactions and feelings, their hydra-headed anxieties. They are, in a word, egocentric, though not necessarily conceited or prideful. They have little opportunity to consider the needs and interest of others.”<sup>34</sup> As the Church fought to regain its place in society, it shifted its focus on children from a system of nurture, which placed the responsibility of

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<sup>32</sup> John T. Elson, “Is God Dead?” *Time Magazine*, April 8, 1966.

<sup>33</sup> Henry Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 86-87; see also Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church As Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 17.

<sup>34</sup> Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, 25.

discipleship and growth on parents and adults, to one of evangelism, which focused on children and adolescents taking responsibility for their sinfulness by seeking salvation through repentance. This move away from nurture altered how the Church understood believing, behaving, and belonging. Belief changed from learning by doing in community with others to individual confession: the sinner's prayer. Behaving was no longer a way to work out one's faith, and repentance was used to demand a strict code of do's and don'ts, which became a litmus test of moral behavior. Once these were embraced, and specific doctrines or traditions were normalized, then one could belong to the fellowship of the church.<sup>35</sup>

### **Loss of Community: Rise of the Parachurch**

Early youth ministry efforts focused on spiritual formation, religious education, and the importance of the Church. These efforts helped create community and offered a sense of belonging. While many mainline denominations chose to pursue youth programming based on these ideals, the rise of evangelicalism in the middle part of the twentieth century pushed the Church's attention towards youth in a different direction. Senter gives insight to this impetus as he describes the culture after World War II. He states:

American service personnel returned home convinced that they had saved the world. Soon Christian young adults were ready to participate in another crusade—a campaign to change the spiritual convictions of the nation and the world. No longer closely bound by providential perspectives on their Christian faith, the worldly-wise young believers returned home to lead the church in cooperative efforts of evangelism.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 159.

<sup>36</sup> Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 214.

The new crusade came in the form of mass revivals targeted at young people. These rallies were usually led by ministries outside any one particular church or denomination and focused on evangelism, personal repentance from sin, and the need for salvation.<sup>37</sup> These foci further eroded the meaning of belonging, as it applied to the local church family.

In his book, *Riding the Wind of God*, Bruce McIver recounts his personal experiences in the youth revival movement that began at Baylor University in the 1940s. Inspired by the Youth For Christ rallies in Chicago, McIver and his friends wanted to hold a youth revival in Waco. Encouraged by their professors and the director of the Baptist Student Union, the students organized and led the revival in April 1945. Thousands of youth and adults attended nightly. In the end, McIver recalls, “There were 281 public commitments to Christ and to Christian ministries.”<sup>38</sup> This would be the first of many youth revivals McIver and his friends orchestrated.

These youth-led revivals (as they would come to be known, to differentiate them from the Youth For Christ rallies) eventually swept across the entire southeastern United States with thousands upon thousands making professions of faith.<sup>39</sup> While the revival efforts that sprang from Waco were particularly important in Baptist life, they paled in

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 257. The idea of revivalism affecting young people was not new. The Great Awakenings (the first Great Awakening in the 1730s and 1740s, the Second Great Awakening in the 1790s through the 1830s) both challenged religious norms of adolescents (although adolescents had yet to be identified as a stage of life). Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 81-83 argues that these early revivals began to raise questions about faith decisions for young people. As a result of revivalism, personal decision would come to replace the parents’ prerogative as to when the child was ready to enter the church. Young people were given permission to trust their emotions. In some ways, responsibility for conversion was being moved from family (specifically the father) to the individual or child. While this was not widely favored in the time of the Great Awakening, attitudes had changed by the 1930s and 1940s.

<sup>38</sup> Bruce McIver, *Riding the Wind of God: A Personal History of the Youth Revival Movement* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2002), 33.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 236-269.



comparison to the magnitude of Youth For Christ. Youth For Christ, under the preaching of Billy Graham and many others, became one of the greatest factors in the growth of evangelicalism in the United States. Youth For Christ rallies could be found across the United States and even spread internationally. In 1949 alone, Youth for Christ held rallies in 1,450 cities. Revivalism reached its peak in the late 1940s but continued to be influential for the next two decades.<sup>40</sup> Lasting well beyond crusades and rallies, the model of parachurch ministries in the lives of youth would become a driving force in youth ministry.

As youth culture began to take shape, the newly identified group of “teenagers” began to be seen as a new mission field.<sup>41</sup> While churches were slow to recognize the changes in youth culture, parachurch organizations like Youth For Christ’s Campus Life, Jim Rayburn’s Young Life, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and many others stepped in to embrace a call to evangelize this new mission field.<sup>42</sup> As the revival fires began to die down, mass rallies gave way to much smaller “club” meetings. With evangelism still the main objective, these organizations recognized the loss of belonging and offered community—not to a church but to a club. Instead of drawing youth to Christian events, these ministries embraced an incarnational theology of taking Christ to where the students already were, namely public schools. They relied on relational evangelism instead of alter calls to bring students to faith,<sup>43</sup> emphasizing building friendships and gaining respect before presenting the message of Christ. Not only was

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<sup>40</sup> Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 267-268.

<sup>41</sup> Savage, *Teenager*, xv.

<sup>42</sup> Dean, Clark, and Rahn, *Starting Right*, 86-87.

<sup>43</sup> Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 214.

this different than the youth revivals that had swept the nation, it was a new alternative to the youth fellowship model that most churches were still replicating. While these methods appear to be more person-oriented and supportive of faith development, these ministries had unintentional side effects.

The idea of parachurch ministry was to come alongside the local church to complement ministry.<sup>44</sup> However, the main parachurch ministries that began in the 1940s and beyond did not share the same focus as the much earlier Christian Endeavors or youth fellowships. Influenced by the widespread emphasis on evangelism, parachurch ministries such as Campus Life and Young Life often stressed conversion over nurture and club attendance over church membership.<sup>45</sup> Initially, clubs also were guided by adult leaders who served as the primary speakers. This was another shift from the youth fellowship models offered by most churches. Additionally, parachurch ministries began to introduce the idea of youth camps into their offerings. Camps and/or conferences started to replace rallies as an exciting way to bring young people together to hear the Gospel. In leading Young Life, Rayburn paved the way in this area, and Campus Life and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes both followed suit.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>45</sup> These thoughts are meant to be general descriptors gained by hindsight and are by no means criticisms or attacks on any of the parachurch ministries described. While I believe many of these parachurch ministries contributed to the systemic abandonment of adolescents, I do not think any of them intentionally were trying to harm Christianity or the spiritual formation of teenagers any more than the countless churches and youth groups that also have contributed to systemic abandonment. I do think that examining and understanding the history and legacy of these ministries helps us better understand how to holistically engage the current youth culture.

<sup>46</sup> Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 211-232. It is worthy to mention that Senter notes that the Fellowship of Christian Athletes helped avoid this to some degree as the leaders were usually adult volunteers (coaches or teachers), who did offer some level of support and provide social capital for students.

All of these innovations were beneficial in creating opportunities for students to hear the Gospel message, but one could argue that the very nature of the parachurch ministries also unwittingly devalued the importance of belonging to the larger Body of Christ, which is found in the local church family. Parachurch ministries (unintentionally) pulled many students further away from Church and the opportunity to connect in cross-generational faith experiences found in local congregations. Ministries that were intended to complement local churches ended up competing with them for students' time, talents, and influence. As youth ministry veteran Duffy Robbins writes:

A parachurch ministry comes into town and launches its club in a new school by recruiting students out of and away from a local youth ministry that is already doing relational ministry, seeking to be a presence on a local high school campus. In doing so, this parachurch ministry often causes long-term harm to the church outreach as well as to the students themselves. The unfairness of such an approach is compounded by the tragedy that when we wean students away from the local church to a parachurch program, we are weaning them away from the one ministry that will continue to be available to them after they graduate from high school and college.<sup>47</sup>

The influence of parachurch ministries, such as Young Life and Campus Life, (for the positive or negative) on youth ministry cannot be understated. These ministries recognized the changes in youth culture, the need for belonging, and were able to connect with students in a meaningful way when many churches were struggling to understand the effects of the world around them. The paradigm of these parachurch ministries served as the foundation for the rise of today's church-based youth ministry.

As churches witnessed the success of parachurch ministries in regard to the numbers of students they attracted, they did what they had done in generations past and

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<sup>47</sup> Duffy Robbins, *This Way to Youth Ministry: An Introduction to the Adventure* (Grand Rapids, MI: Youth Specialties Academic/Zondervan, 2004), 365.

began to imitate and adapt the parachurch ministries' practices. Using these techniques, churches began to attract students back to church ministries designed for students. Even many mainstream churches, which as a group had moved away from a more formal youth ministry approach, started to create youth group opportunities. Church-based youth ministry began to rebound due in part to the work of Yaconelli and Rice. Youth Specialties produced lessons and ideas geared towards youth, making them widely available to youth workers across denominational lines. However, this new influx of ideas was not without its downside. Senter explains:

Consistently, they [Yaconelli and Rice] generated programming ideas which had once been the domain of the parachurch agencies and marketed them to every church youth worker in the nation. The net effect was a rapid and broad distribution of parachurch ministry technology to people who were more interested in methods for keeping students active in youth groups than in full-cycle discipleship.<sup>48</sup>

As congregational youth ministries embraced the attractional model of ministry found in parachurch ministries, they unfortunately incurred some of the downfalls that led to reinforcing systemic abandonment.

### **The Rise of Student Ministry: Missing the Mark**

Clark asserts that “one of the hallmarks of abandonment is the cultural shift from a nurturing focus on individuals to a focus on the group, the crowd, the statistic, the record, the program, the institution.”<sup>49</sup> As a result of the shift of ministry impetus from belonging to belief, the stress on church leadership caused by the corporate decline of influence in society, and the loss of community within the Western Church due to less

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<sup>48</sup> Senter, *The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry*, 149.

<sup>49</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 191.

focus on belonging, these hallmarks of stress can be seen in contemporary churches and their student ministries. To address the stress caused by the loss of influence in society and the decline of church attendance, many churches in recent decades have begun to seek models for church growth.

This has given rise to the numerous materials alluded to espousing some form of Assimilation Model designed to attract new people and bring them into the fold of the church. Roy M. Oswald and Speed Leas of the Alban Institute have noted the following in their study of new-member assimilation: “Most books about managing churches say that if you want to grow you should have an assimilation process which is clear, planned, agreed on, with trained volunteers without gaps to help newcomers move from outside the church into its center.”<sup>50</sup> This desired growth was primarily expressed numerically, meaning pastors were most focused on adding new members to their congregations. This focus was also driven by the rise of the mega-church and status assigned to the leaders of these congregations. This shift from individual needs met in small community to the perceived need for growth of the larger institution fits the hallmark of abandonment Clark describes.

Student ministry in recent decades also was influenced to adopt models driven by the need for growth, yet other factors were influencing its path towards abandonment as well. Student ministry’s rise as a standalone ministry within the church, its push towards professionalism (both in academia and with specialized pastoral staff), and the creation of its own industry designed to resource and support and profit from the emerging field all have distracted from the original intent of nurturing student development and belonging in

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<sup>50</sup> Oswald and Leas, *The Inviting Church*, 17. Interestingly, Oswald and Leas’ study revealed that congregations who were flourishing at the time did not have a high commitment to an organized assimilation process.

the local church. While this goal remained stated in some form, the reality of establishing the program became dominant in order for youth pastors to keep their jobs. Competition with parachurch ministries led to the creation of bigger, more attractational models of student ministry that further drew students into a program and away from the church,<sup>51</sup> prompting Stuart Cummings-Bond to describe these isolating effects as a “One-Eared Mickey Mouse.”<sup>52</sup> While many student ministries recognize the need to communicate belonging to students, too often that belonging is associated with the student ministry and not the church. As such, this loss of community, when students graduate from the program, severed belonging and the effects of abandonment were reinforced.

Finally, the professionalization of age-graded ministries unintentionally played into the abandonment of parental responsibilities for the spiritual development of their kids and eroded the perceived authority parents had to speak into their children’s lives. Age-graded ministerial pastors faced pressure to create reproducible programmatic structures, define clear markers for ministry evaluation, meet expectations of growth tied to ministerial job security, and promote right beliefs. These demands unwittingly replaced the primary goal of nurturing the child. Parents’ relinquishment of the role of primary spiritual educator for their child further reinforced the concepts of child competency and resiliency Elkind has noted about the new permeable family. This added imbalance combined with the adult-centered dynamics listed above further demonstrates the Church’s role in adding to the effects of systemic abandonment.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Senter, *The Coming Revolution in Youth Ministry*. 140-185.

<sup>52</sup> Stuart Cummings-Bond, “The One-Eared Mickey Mouse,” *YouthWorker Journal* 6 (Fall 1989): 76.

<sup>53</sup> Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 291-295.

Identifying ways in which the Church has added to the effects of systemic abandonment is not meant to discredit its ministry efforts. Understanding the effects of systemic abandonment is not about assigning blame but rather recognizing the need to adjust how the local church approaches student ministry. By looking at the context of an issue, practical theology allows for a deeper understanding of what is going on as a necessary step to begin the creation of a more faithful ministry praxis.

In the process, understanding this deep context has exposed the influences that have led to the Church's tendency to stress right beliefs and behavior as a requirement of belonging. John Wimber, the founding director of the Department of Church Growth at Fuller Theological Seminary, has described this approach as "bounded-set," which means focused on rules that define the boundaries of belonging. Tickle writes that "'believe-behave-belong' fits the bounded-set approach of both traditional Roman Catholicism and historic Protestantism. It requires adherence to certain rules or doctrinal belief and human conduct as prerequisites to membership in their ranks."<sup>54</sup> Wimber reversed this historic approach with what he has described as a "center-set." Tickle notes that Wimber's center-set begins with belonging first and recognizes that "as behavior begins to condition living, it also begins to shape belief until the two become one."<sup>55</sup> This concept is the focus of Part Two of this project. The concept of belonging first is essential to counteract the effects of systemic abandonment on adolescents by reinforcing their proper identity in Christ and stressing the importance of attachment and connection between them and the Church.

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<sup>54</sup> Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 159.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Et Tu, Church?**

Armed with an understanding of the depth and effects of the currents of systemic abandonment within Western Culture and religious life, a critical look at the history of ministry at First Baptist Church of Columbia reveals the ways in which these currents have shaped and influenced the church's relationship with young people. As with many congregations, First Baptist understands the pains and stress that cultural changes, decreased attendance, loss of influence, and financial strains create within a church. First Baptist is an interesting case study in response to adolescence, as its history predates the rise of adolescence by over three quarters of a century. First Baptist was on the forefront of ministry to youth and college students for most of the twentieth century yet still fell victim to the trappings of systemic abandonment. In hindsight, much can be learned about the victories and shortfalls of these efforts and the currents that have silently influenced the congregation along the way.

In 2023, First Baptist Church will celebrate its 200<sup>th</sup> birthday. As the church's founder, William Jewel was a prominent physician of his day who would become a historical figure in Missouri Baptist life. He started the church along with ten other founding members on November 22, 1823. This would be the first church of any denomination in the city of Columbia, which consisted of approximately 130 residents at the time. The church was originally named "Columbia Church" and first met in homes but, thanks to the influence of Jewel, moved into the Boone County Court House from 1828 through 1836. In 1836, Jewel and a Methodist lay pastor, Moses U. Payne, personally financed the construction of the Union Church building, in which both congregations would meet for the next twenty years. In the 1850s the two churches



separated when Jewel arranged for the purchase of a lot on the courthouse square. On May 26, 1856, First Baptist dedicated the first building in Columbia wholly owned by Baptists. The congregation would remain at this location until it moved to its current spot in 1891, due to the construction of the new courthouse. The present-day sanctuary replaced its predecessor in 1957 and has served as an anchor in the ever-changing landscape surrounding the church.<sup>56</sup>

Columbia is a college town and home to the University of Missouri, established in 1839. First Baptist has a rich history of collegiate community and education. Four colleges have begun as a result of Jewel's church plant. Jewel helped purchase the property for the University at Columbia (now Columbia College), which sits only a few blocks from the current day church; and Jewel is best known for his help in establishing a college in Liberty, Missouri that bears his name (Jewel actually died helping build one of the buildings). William Woods University, now in Fulton, Missouri also can trace its beginning back to members of Jewel's Columbia Church. Perhaps the clearest connection between the church and the college community can be seen in the history of Stephens College, whose campus is adjacent to the church.

For many years, the president of the college (a merger of the Columbia Female Academy and the Baptist College) also served as the pastor of the church. Even after this tradition ended, the college (which was the oldest female college west of the Mississippi River until it became co-ed) required students to attend church on Sunday. Being in such close proximity, First Baptist was a natural draw. Some church members have noted that

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<sup>56</sup> G. Hugh Wamble, *History of First Baptist Church of Columbia, Missouri 1823-1973* (Columbia, MO: First Baptist Church of Columbia, 1973), 1-29. All historical information in this chapter is taken from this general source, unless otherwise noted.

the influx of female college students contributed to the large numbers of male students who joined the church from the other surrounding colleges.

First Baptist also has been at the forefront of collegiate ministry. In 1906, the church organized the first Baptist Student Union (BSU) of its kind in the country. As this ministry grew, the church built a four-story student center in 1927 to accommodate student gatherings and education. A four-page article from the BSU's periodical in 1930 (archived in the church records) details the church's college ministry at the time, which included multiple Sunday School classes, Evening Services for Youth, a Social Half-Hour, and the Baptist Young People's Union. These same records show that students made up 40 percent of the church's congregation at that time, which records indicate had approximately a thousand members.<sup>57</sup>

It was around that time that the American Baptist Association began to contribute money along with Stephen's College to hire a staff member at the church to oversee the collegiate ministry. This practice continued for over three decades and was complemented by a host of adult and student volunteers. The collaboration ended after the Baptist Student Union moved from the church to its own location on the campus of the University of Missouri. After this, the church continued its practice of employing someone, either part time or full time, to oversee the ministry to college students.

Beyond collegiate ministry, First Baptist also has a long history of student ministry (although records show that the success of the college ministry garnered much of the church's attention). First Baptist was one of the early adopters of the Sunday

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<sup>57</sup> Luther Wesley Smith, "Our Program for Reaching the Baptist Students," *The Baptist Student*, September – October 1930, 4-5, 14. The Reverend Luther Wesley Smith was pastor of First Baptist in this era.

School program (sometime in the 1850s), which originally met in the community to help with childhood education as a missionary arm of the church. Almost a century later, the program would become part of the Christian Education arm of the church known as the Church School and focus on religious education from birth to adults.<sup>58</sup> In the early 1900s, The Baptist Intermediate Young Peoples Union and Junior Young Peoples Union would take shape. These would later become the Baptist Youth Fellowships and the Intermediate Baptist Training Union, for high school and middle school students respectively. Both of these iterations (Unions and Fellowships) were a part of a larger national movement with state and national elements in which the students took part. These programs remained until the mid-1970s, when national ties were relinquished and the church-based junior high and senior high ministries that are central to youth ministry programs today emerged. Eventually these ministries would move from under the umbrella of churchwide Christian Education and become a stand-alone ministry with its own paid minister.<sup>59</sup>

On paper, First Baptist Church reached the height of its success in the 1960s and into the 1970s, recording more than 1,400 members, many of whom held key leadership roles within the community. After this time, First Baptist began to experience a slow decline of attendance and loss of community influence. The number of college students active in the church began to decline in the 1960s, shortly after the Baptist Student Union

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<sup>58</sup> Wamble, *History of First Baptist Church of Columbia, Missouri 1823-1973*, 217.

<sup>59</sup> First Baptist Church of Columbia, *Annual Reports 1900-1999*. These yearly reports were issued by church leadership to record membership changes, financial statements, ministry activities, memorable events in the life of the church, volunteer activity, Christian Education programming and attendance, and general happenings in the church community. Data was determined by comparing the sections of each report that highlighted college and student activities.

moved from the church to an off-site location on the University of Missouri's campus. Church historian G. Hugh Wamble notes that this was not the only reason for the decline in collegiate ministry at First Baptist Church. Wamble cites that students in the 1960s and 1970s seemingly were not as interested in religious connections as their predecessors. He credits the change in the mandatory church attendance requirements of Stephens College and its refashioning of itself as a non-sectarian school for this decline as well. He also recognizes that proliferations of churches, specifically Baptist churches, that occurred in Columbia in the years between 1930 and 1970 opened up options to students that did not previously exist. Interestingly, Wamble also mentions that the ministry focus towards students changed from group activities and gatherings to build community to one of essentially intellectual focus, concerning faith and beliefs.<sup>60</sup> These factors helped create a tipping point in the congregation. By many metrics (recognizing the unique spiritual needs of adolescents, creating a network of adult support for students to increase social capital, promoting belonging through financial backing and encouraging the leadership of adolescents within the church), First Baptist Church had created a ministry that defied the hallmarks of systemic abandonment. However, as the church's history since the 1970s has shown, the students and ministry programs at First Baptist could not escape the reality that systemic abandonment had created.

One could say that First Baptist went through an identity crisis in the last half of the twentieth century. The church saw one of its core ministries leave the church community to embrace the parachurch experience. Ministry to college students continued at the church in the form of Sunday School classes and Bible studies, but there was a marked change in

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<sup>60</sup> Wamble, *History of First Baptist Church of Columbia, Missouri 1823-1973*, 223-224.

focus and belonging. On top of this, the church (which had taken progressive social stances since allowing slaves to be members of the first congregation) faced backlash for its decisions to ordain women into the ministry (first female deacon in 1968, first female minister in 1977) and taking a welcoming stance towards the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender [LGBT] community in the 1990s). As a result, the church parted ways in 2000 with its long-time partnership with the Southern Baptist Convention (the church had remained dually aligned with the Southern Baptist and Northern [American] Baptists since the two split in the mid-1800s) and embraced a new partnership with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and Alliance of Baptists.<sup>61</sup> Not all in the congregation were happy with these decisions, which a sharp decline in membership reflected.

First Baptist did find its way through this difficult period and currently is in a much healthier place. The congregation is not trying to be the church it once was; instead, it is looking forward and asking God to reveal the church it can be. These trends have plateaued and attendance is rebounding, but the cost was dear. These factors also affected the ministries to students. In 2018, while the membership numbers of the church could still be counted, are close to four hundred; but in reality, First Baptist has averaged 142 worshippers in attendance on Sunday mornings.<sup>62</sup>

Participation in youth and college programming continued to ebb and flow in the last half century. As professional youth ministry took shape and multiple parachurch ministries formed on college campuses, First Baptist attempted to adapt and adopt the

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<sup>61</sup> Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, accessed March 23, 2019, <http://www.cbfheartland.org/wp/>; Alliance of Baptists, "Who We Are," accessed March 23, 2019, <https://allianceofbaptists.org/about>.

<sup>62</sup> First Baptist Church of Columbia, *Annual Report* (Columbia, MO: First Baptist Church of Columbia, January 20, 2019). Attendance is counted each week by an usher and submitted to the office. An administrative assistant keeps tally and averages the numbers per month and then for the entire year.

methods of outreach and ministry. In retrospect, the ministry years that might be deemed most successful numerically were also the ones that pulled students away from the influence of their parents and the larger church identity and stressed belonging to the group or program. When First Baptist hired me in 2013, the middle school and high school Sunday classes met during the second morning service (the traditional service), and parents were not encouraged to be involved in leadership of the student ministry. The arduous task of faith development by the community had been replaced by the presumed expertise of the age-graded program. The larger church celebrated moments of conversion, baptism, and graduation, but the ongoing process of sanctification went largely unnoticed. This reality was not from a lack of caring or concern but from a lack of understanding the changes that systemic abandonment had created.

As such, First Baptist has all the necessary tools needed to confront the systemic abandonment of adolescents and reshape the way the church engages students in ministry. Using the tools of practical theology, this project will develop a method by which to examine the current praxis of the church to better align it with the Kingdom trajectory of belonging to the family of God. From this, an implementation plan will be created and a timeline given to guide the transformation of a new praxis by applying the lessons learned from a theological and cultural understanding of adoption. Discussion surrounding these theological and cultural understandings form the core of Part Two of this project.

PART TWO

APPLYING THE TOOLS OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

## CHAPTER 4

### LENS OF THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Part Two of this project will use the Lens of Theological Reflection and the Lens of Secular Discipline like the two different colored lenses of the three-dimensional glasses of old to explore what is needed for a worthy response to the problem of systemic abandonment of adolescents. It examines the idea of adoption into the family of God as the foundation for belonging and uses the lessons gained from the psychological work to understand how to restore attachment between adoptive parents and their children as an impetus for ministry. In doing so, this project will create an added layer of depth to the understanding of adolescent issues that can help inform a better, more faithful praxis.

#### ***A Titanic Disaster***

In this present chapter, the work of practical theology begins by remembering the *RMS Titanic*. It was just before midnight when the unthinkable happened. In the frigid waters of the North Atlantic, the ship struck an iceberg just a few hours into its maiden voyage and sank. There had been warnings of dangerous conditions that went unheeded, concerns about preparedness that were dismissed, and poor workmanship (which ultimately could not survive the stress inflicted upon it) that had not been properly



examined. The result was that the “unsinkable” *Titanic* failed and abandoned all of its 2,224 passengers to the watery darkness. Only 705 would survive.<sup>1</sup>

The real tragedy of the sinking of the *Titanic* is, by all accounts, that it could have been avoided, or at least the loss of life significantly reduced. Some twenty-one warnings about the icy conditions along the *Titanic*’s course were ignored. Instead of slowing down to assess the situation, the ship maintained full speed ahead.<sup>2</sup> The ship’s designer had planned for the *Titanic* to carry forty-eight lifeboats, enough to safely rescue all passengers. Instead, the ship launched with only twenty. Safety was sacrificed for the sake of appearances.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the biggest contributor to the magnitude of the tragedy was the prevailing mindset that nothing could go wrong. Those who designed the ship thought it unsinkable.

Talking about the systemic abandonment of adolescents today elicits much the same response as talking about the *Titanic* sinking prior to its maiden voyage. The natural tendency is to look at the lives of known adolescents and focus on the many systems of support that seemingly can be identified. This creates a false sense of assurance that allows adults to resist engaging with the broader scope of the problem; yet the size, grandeur, and appearance of the system of support for adolescents ultimately hides flawed material, ignores warnings of danger, and does not truly provide for the safety of those it carries—much like the *Titanic*.

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<sup>1</sup> Terry McIver, “A *Titanic* Disaster, That Could Have Been Avoided,” accessed August 26, 2017, <http://www.contractingbusiness.com/galleries/titanic-disaster-could-have-been-avoided>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Dave Fowler, “*Titanic* Facts,” accessed August 26 2017, <https://www.titanicfacts.net/titanic-lifeboats.html>.

By examining the larger picture of how culture and the Church interact with youth,<sup>4</sup> one is able to accomplish what Osmer calls the descriptive-empirical task of practical theology, which he defines as “gathering information that helps us to discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations, and contexts.”<sup>5</sup> To put it another way, “practical theology starts by recognizing that the Holy Spirit is constantly inviting us to join in God’s ongoing work of redemption and creation. In this discipline, when we realize a specific way in which God is inviting us to be involved, our proper response should be to first step back and try and observe what is going on.”<sup>6</sup> This step is imperative in building a case for change within the Church and for determining what the true issues are. In order to lead congregants at First Baptist to understand the reality of the situation and shift their focus and values regarding student ministry, it is necessary to present a compelling argument for why such a change is needed and what it is that the church should try and correct.

Through the work of practical theology, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it is apparent that the Church’s current praxis to help adolescents find their rightful place in the family of God is anemic. After thorough examination, the root of the issue is linked to the sense of abandonment felt (perceivably or not) by adolescents themselves. Pastors preach that to become a Christian, all one needs is faith in Christ to belong; but to be a part of the Body of Christ through the local church, that belonging is seemingly dependent on doctrinal affirmation and following whatever behaviors are deemed

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<sup>4</sup> For details, see Part One of this project.

<sup>5</sup> Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

<sup>6</sup> McEntyre, “Thinking (Practical) Theology,” 105.

acceptable by the leadership. This is not the Good News of the Gospel. Whether this reality is true or just felt does not really make much difference to those who are already distrustful and feel abandoned.<sup>7</sup>

As such, a new praxis is needed. One that repairs and reinforces believers' identity in Christ by internalizing their belonging to God's family based on their adoption as full sons and daughters of God. This is done by strategically helping students connect to God and to God's family through a local congregation in various and lasting ways. These connections reinforce the value of the person first and are not based on demonstrated beliefs and behavior. Subsequently, the person is strengthened by interdependent relationships within the congregation.

Adolescents need to know—and feel—that they belong to the Body of Christ. The assurance of Romans 8:38-39, “neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord,” needs to be tangibly demonstrated by the community of faith. The Bible embodies this kind of acceptance in the idea of the church as family and its people as members of God's household (1 Timothy 3:15; Ephesians 2:19-22; Galatians 6:10; 1 Peter 4:17). Scripture describes God in terms of a parent (Matthew 6:9; Isaiah 66:33), and those who have faith in Christ are God's children (John 1:12; 1 John 3:1-2; Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 3:26). Through faith, believers relate to God as sons and daughters (2 Corinthians 6:18; Hebrews 12:8) and to one another as siblings (Matthew 12:46-50). Paul makes it clear that this

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<sup>7</sup> This is a personal observation based on twenty years of working in student ministry.

establishment as family comes through God’s adoption of believers through Christ and the testimony of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:4-6).

This is where this project intersects the issue of systemic abandonment of adolescents and uses the Lens of Theological Reflection to explore how a better understanding of adoption into the family of God through Christ can foster belonging. It must be done by comprehensively examining the theological ramifications of adoption in Scripture, understanding the differences between the Old Testament concept of sonship and the New Testament use of adoption, and discussing how adoptive theology affects the Church’s tradition. Overall, it will demonstrate this: in Christ, it is not who the believer identifies with that changes but rather the believer’s identity itself that changes. This is the core of belonging.

### **Galatians: A Promise of Belonging**

Paul’s writings in Galatians have been chosen as a starting point for understanding the theology of adoption in Scripture. At the heart of the letter to the churches in Galatia is the issue of belonging. Specifically, did Gentiles through their faith in Christ alone belong to the Church, or did they need to become Jews by keeping the law first, before they could be faithful followers?<sup>8</sup> Paul rebukes the Galatians for seeking justification through the law with their actions and behavior. In Galatians 3:3-5, he writes: “Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing

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<sup>8</sup> Erin M. Heim, *Adoption in Galatians and Romans* (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2017), 326.

what you heard?”<sup>9</sup> If Galatians ended here, one could simply chalk this statement up to the idea that believers are saved by grace through faith alone and that salvation is the act of being saved from sin. However, Paul not only addresses what believers are saved from, but he makes a point of emphasizing specifically to what they are saved: the family of God (Galatians 3:26-29). He goes on to explain that the Law has been a guardian, but before the Law there was a promise.

The promise Paul refers to is the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, 18:18, and 22:18. Essentially, Abraham and his seed would be given “the promised land.” The land would be symbolic of the place where they would belong and live. Paul goes on to say that Christ is that seed (Galatians 3:16) and through Christ the promise is made available to all who believe (Galatians 3:22). This belief is not a set of doctrinal ideas or right beliefs but rather faith in Christ (Galatians 3:23-26). Doctrinal belief places importance on correct understanding of a codified set of principles or instructions. This more closely relates to the Law, which does not offer salvation (Galatians 3:10-13). However, through faith believers are one with Christ, they belong to Christ (Galatians 3:27-29); and if they belong to Christ, they receive the promise and they receive an inheritance. This is transformational and, arguably, the foundation for understanding belonging to God’s family.

Paul uses the imagery of family, specifically family created through adoption, to demonstrate the shift from law to grace, from a system based on right belief and behavior to one that begins with belonging. In Galatians 4:2-3, Paul speaks of the law as being a

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<sup>9</sup> All Scripture is taken from *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), unless otherwise noted.

guardian and points out that under a guardian, an heir would have no claim to the inheritance. Then he lays out an important progression that can be lost easily on today's reader. In Galatians 4:5-7 Paul says that Christ came to redeem those under the law, so they could be adopted into sonship, filled with the Spirit of Christ, to be a child of God. This does not mean simply a child in God's household, but a child of God who will share in the inheritance of God's Kingdom. Paul is declaring that adoption is not simply a change in who believers identify with (this child is now in the care of that family, family remains outside the child), but a change in believers' very identity itself (this child is now family, the family is part of the child and the child is part of the family).

This is a new understanding for the people of Israel. Kristin Johnston Lagen notes this in her article, "I Love to Tell the Story: Reshaping the Narrative of Adoption," for *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*. She writes:

What Paul has gifted to the whole church with this metaphor is a compelling way of seeing oneself as an everlasting, beloved child of God, welcomed into God's family with open arms—regardless of one's imperfections, mistakes, and sin. In other words, adoption is a visible, tangible reminder that God accepts us just as we are, with all our unique quirks and characteristics.<sup>10</sup>

While Paul's primary audience in Galatians consists of Gentiles, he is addressing the actions of Jewish believers as well. These two groups would have understood this idea of sonship and adoption in two different ways: the first based on Roman law, the latter on rabbinical teaching.<sup>11</sup> Paul's intention was to transform how the Jews comprehended the concept of family and belonging. For this reason, he addressed his original point to

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<sup>10</sup> Kristin Johnston Lagen, "I Love to Tell the Story: Reshaping the Narrative of Adoption," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 51, no. 4 (December 2012): 287.

<sup>11</sup> Francis Lyall, "Roman Law in the Writings of Paul: Adoption," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88, no. 4 (December 1969): 459. These two ways will be discussed at length later in this chapter.

Gentiles, as truly “Good News,” that they did not need to change their cultural and religious identity in order to follow Christ.<sup>12</sup> This can be seen by how Paul ends the progression of relationship in Galatians 4:7 by calling believers not only “children of God” but also “heirs.” To understand the importance of this addition, one must explore how Paul uses the idea of adoption in Scripture and how this concept would have been understood differently by Jews and Gentiles.

### **Adoption Versus Sonship: Inheriting Identity**

The Greek word for adoption found in the New Testament, *υιοθεσία* (transliterated *huiiothesia*), speaks to the idea of belonging. As Michael A. Milton explains, the term for adoption “is a ‘presumed’ compound of the Greek word *huios*, ‘son,’ and the word ‘*titheoemi*,’ to place.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, according to the Greek word, adoption is employed by the Holy Spirit and most properly becomes “the placing of a son, or child, into a welcoming family.”<sup>14</sup> The *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* defines adoption as “the legal establishment of a kinship relationship between two people that is recognized as being equivalent to one based on physical descent,”<sup>15</sup> while *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary* asserts that for Christians this term “draws meaning from the theological realities of belonging, connectedness, relationship, and inheritance

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<sup>12</sup> Heim, *Adoption in Galatians and Romans*, 326.

<sup>13</sup> Michael A. Milton, *What Is the Doctrine of Adoption?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2012), 7.

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

<sup>15</sup> *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 2000 ed., s.v. “Adoption.”

established by God’s promise to human beings.”<sup>16</sup> Paul’s use of the term translated as “adoption” (Romans 8:15, 23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5)<sup>17</sup> raises some questions as to the influence of its origins. Some theologians believe Paul’s use of *υιοθεσία* is clearly a product of Greco-Roman law, while others see it as a new embodiment of the Jewish idea of sonship.<sup>18</sup>

The actual word for “adoption” did not exist in the Septuagint and only is found in the New Testament letters mentioned above.<sup>19</sup> Ophir Yarden explains, “It often is claimed that adoption has been practiced from biblical times, and it seems well regarded in rabbinic sources. However, Judaism has no *halakhic* (that is, referring to Jewish law) structure for adoption, and the Hebrew language didn’t even have a term for it until modernity.”<sup>20</sup> However, the lack of specific legal terms and structure does not mean the Hebrew canon is without stories that fit the idea of adoption. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner points out that the absence of formal adoption language “in no way discounts the informal adoption of Moses (Exodus 2:10), of Joseph’s sons (Genesis 48:5-6), or of Esther.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, 1996 ed., s.v. “Adoption.”

<sup>17</sup> Also used in Ephesians 1:5, but Paul’s authorship of Ephesians is debated.

<sup>18</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Romans* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 452; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians*, vol. 42, gen. eds. Bruce M. Metzger, David Allen Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), 25; Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 261; Gerhard Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), s.v. “*υιοθεσία*.”

<sup>19</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2001), 133.

<sup>20</sup> Ophir Yarden, “Adoption in Judaism,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 51, no. 4 (December 2012): 276.

<sup>21</sup> Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, *The Spirit of Adoption: At Home in God’s Family* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 103.



Yarden supports this by noting that in Israel's history, non-legal situations that resembled the concept of adoption would have been widespread due to the Jewish commandment (or good deed) to care for orphans. Still, for the purposes of this project it is important to understand these discrepancies.

Beyond the physical care of children often associated with adoption, the Hebrew Scripture contains several allusions to God's role in divine adoption. In *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary*, William E. Brown points out:

The adoption metaphor was not lost to Israel. . . . God declares that he is the Father of the nation Israel, whom he loves as his child (Isaiah 1:2; Hosea 11:1). He tells Pharaoh, "Israel is my firstborn son" (Exodus 4:22). More specifically, he says to David (and the Messiah), "You are my son; today I have become your Father" (Psalm 2:7); and of David's descendant, "I will be his father, and he will be my son" (2 Samuel 7:1).<sup>22</sup>

This idea of sonship is easily equated with adoption to the modern reader. Nevertheless, there are distinct subtleties that hold theological consequence for Paul's argument in Galatians and Romans.

While Hebrew Scripture uses language familiar to adoption—words such as "child," "son," and "father"—the relationship is not so much parent/child as it is members of God's household. As Roger Good writes: "These Old Testament passages are best taken not as indicators of divine adoption, but rather as a reflection of God as the source of Israel in creation and reflection of His aspiration to have many sons sharing in His life and nature."<sup>23</sup> This makes sense when one considers that according to Jewish law at the time, those who took in children as part of their family were seen more as

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<sup>22</sup> *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary*, s.v. "adoption," accessed October 26, 2017, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/adoption.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Roger Good, "Sonship or Adoption as Sons?" *Affirmation & Critique* 5, no. 4 (October 2000): 40.

guardians (*apotropos*) or foster parents than mother or father. This had to do with the fact that a child's identity and inheritance were tied to that child's biology. Yarden comments:

The Hebrew word for parent is related to the word for pregnancy. Parenthood is not a legal construct but an outcome of a biological process. In contrast to Roman law, in Judaism adoptive parents do not entirely replace biological parents; the family connection is not abrogated. Adoptive parents' roles are different, which leads to some unique features and to some questions and challenges. There is no mechanism in Judaism that severs the connection with the biological parents and family. A child's identity is based on his birth father; the biological father determines a child's Jewish "tribal" status as Kohen, Levi, or Israel. The adopted child inherits from the biological parents and does not inherit from the adoptive parents.<sup>24</sup>

So when Paul declares that not only are Christians children of God but also co-heirs with Christ, it is transformative to believers' role in the divine relationship. By inheriting God's Kingdom, the believer's ontological identity is transformed to that of Christ. Christians no longer are simply part of God's household with ties to ancestral earthly tribes; they belong fully to the family of the King (cf. Galatians 4:6-7; Romans 8:14-17).

Adoption was well understood in the Roman world of Jesus' day. Nikondeha brilliantly illustrates this in the opening chapter of *Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World*. Nikondeha writes: "Imperial families wielded adoption as a tool of the empire to ensure their throne always had an unquestioned heir."<sup>25</sup> With the backdrop of Luke 2 and 3, Nikondeha explains how Julius Caesar had adopted Augustus to ensure that the imperial inheritance, the Roman Empire, would stay in the family. Augustus is named in Luke 2:1 as the ruler who issues the decree that a census should be taken, leading Joseph and Mary to that fateful stable. Luke 3:1 states that it is the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar when John the Baptist begins his ministry. Tiberius came to power through

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<sup>24</sup> Yarden, "Adoption in Judaism," 278.

<sup>25</sup> Nikondeha, *Adopted*, 22-23.

adoption, and he used the adoption of Germanicus and Nero to ensure his dynasty.

Nikondeha points out that “Jesus was born under Augustus and crucified under Tiberius. And the Apostle Paul lived through the reign of these men. The places where his letters circulated—those communities in the region of Galatia, in Rome, and the surrounding areas—all endured this dynasty. . . . Adoption was clearly not a foreign concept in the Greco-Roman world.”<sup>26</sup> Nikondeha concludes, “The common understanding of adoption in the Greco-Roman world has been functional: it was a tool of the elite (especially the emperors) to secure succession, legacy, and inheritance.”<sup>27</sup> It is against this backdrop that Paul introduces the concept in a new way for those who follow Christ.

Paul brings together Jewish and Roman thoughts on sonship and adoption to interpret and expound on the ideas of inclusion, family, and belonging for those who follow Christ. Erin M. Heim has written an in-depth work examining and analyzing the different characteristics of Paul’s use of the *υιοθεσία* metaphors in both Galatians and Romans. Heim writes: “Rather than Paul merely appropriating material from precursor texts, Paul uses his own metaphor (*υιοθεσία*) to function as a reflecting surface that constrains and interprets the texts he draws upon.”<sup>28</sup> Heim thoroughly explains the influences and nuances of each use of the adoption metaphor in Galatians and Romans and draws upon their different Jewish and Roman roots to create a more robust picture of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Heim, *Adoption in Galatians and Romans*, 324-325.

what Paul is doing with this imagery.<sup>29</sup> In essence, Paul is using the term to expand both the Jewish and Gentile understanding of belonging to the family of God through adoption. Heim goes on to observe:

Because Paul's primary objective in Galatians was to convince the Galatian believers that their inclusion in the community of God is through the faithful death of Jesus rather than through observance of the law, he uses the υιοθεσία metaphor to highlight another facet of God's initiating act to bring humanity into relationship with him. Thus for the Galatian audience, the υιοθεσία metaphor primarily functions to enrich their understanding of God's inclusive action towards them and, as a result of that action, their full inclusion in the community of God.<sup>30</sup>

The Galatian audience would have understood from their Roman context that an adopted heir was a full, legal member of the family that would share in the family's inheritance. Applied to their faith in Christ, it meant they belonged by way of their adoption, not due to adherence to the Law. Completing this imagery for Paul's Jewish audience in Romans, Heim writes:

For the community in Rome, Paul uses the υιοθεσία metaphors primarily to highlight the eschatological and existential tension that characterizes life in the community of faith. Moreover, the combination of the three υιοθεσία metaphors in Romans highlights the commonality between Jews and gentiles by emphasizing that God extends sonship to both groups through adoption.<sup>31</sup>

Here Paul uses the metaphor to clearly signal to the Jewish believer that the identity granted to them as sons of Abraham now has been given to the Gentile believers as well. In both cases, Paul draws from these different understandings about adoption to create a better understanding of the believer's identity in Christ for all involved in the conversation.

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<sup>29</sup> As earlier noted, there is debate about Paul's use and meaning of the term υιοθεσία and some of their seeming contrasts within the Scriptures. I found Heim's work as one of the best and most well-balanced approaches to understanding these verses and gaining a better understanding of Paul's intent.

<sup>30</sup> Heim, *Adoption in Galatians and Romans*, 326.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

For the Gentiles, Paul draws from their understanding of Roman law to reassure them of their place in the Kingdom. Their inheritance cannot be taken away. The focus is on the vertical—in other words, their relationship with Christ as King. For the Jewish people, Paul’s use of the adoption metaphor brings them from members of the household to members of the family. This is a change in identity. By including them as co-heirs with Christ, not only does Paul remove the tribal divisions from the Jews but he makes room for Gentiles to experience full community in Christ as brothers and sisters with Jewish believers. The focus here is horizontal, understanding God’s desire to be in right relationship with all humanity.

By looking at the adoption metaphor in this way, it is possible to see echoes of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 22:37-40, where “Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Paul’s teachings highlight the reality that through Christ, believers are part of God’s Kingdom, God’s eternal home, and God’s community, the Church. That place of belonging is the fulfillment of the promise made possible by Jesus.

This is an important concept in crafting a praxis that connects to those who feel abandoned and refocuses the Church’s approach to inclusion. As Christians, not only do believers inherit eternity in Heaven as children of God, but Christ-followers also inherit earthly community in the Church as a family of faith. Douglas J. Moo writes:

Through our faith in Christ, the Son of God, we become his “brothers and sisters” (see Heb. 2:10-13), children of God and co-heirs with Christ of all that God has promised those who love him. We belong to the ultimate “in group,” those who

are the dearly loved children of the God of the universe. Nor do we have to worry about being rejected from this relationship. As Paul has been teaching throughout these chapters and will do again in 8:18-39, our adoption is permanent. Nothing can change that; nothing and nobody can keep us from enjoying God's favor and blessing forever.<sup>32</sup>

Paul's use of the adoption metaphor in a Roman setting adds a legal twist to this theological understanding. Historian William Mitchell Ramsay alludes to this when he comments:

The Roman-Syrian Law-Book . . . where a formerly prevalent Greek law had persisted under the Roman Empire—well illustrates this passage of the Epistle. It actually lays down the principle that a man can never put away an adopted son, and that he cannot put away a real son without good ground. It is remarkable that the adopted son should have a stronger position than the son by birth, yet it was so.<sup>33</sup>

Believers' adoption into the family of God is through faith. With this faith Christians belong first and foremost, as they are identified with Christ (Galatians 3:26-29). Their behavior and right beliefs are developed over time as they learn what it means to be family. This is central to the Good News.

### **Dangerous Family Traditions**

Traditionally, the Church has struggled to understand the fullness of a theology of adoption. Katarina Westerlund agrees. She writes in *Adoption as a Spiritual Praxis in Individualized Times*: "The theme of adoption is, however, not particularly well-explored theologically. Not surprisingly, most theological interpretation found on adoption refers to

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<sup>32</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 263.

<sup>33</sup> William Mitchell Ramsay, *A Historical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, William M. Ramsay Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1979), 353.

it as a spiritual category, stressing God’s fatherhood.”<sup>34</sup> She notes that Protestant theology draws heavily from Paul’s writing on redemption and election through Christ but finds that the doctrinal development of adoption within those same circles is “scarce.”<sup>35</sup> According to Marie A. Failing, Luther championed earthly adoption as an image of divine adoption, stressing the nature of redemption found in bringing poor orphans into one’s family.<sup>36</sup> This theme was picked up on in the late-twentieth century by some Protestant church leaders who interpreted the Scripture’s use of the adoption imagery to encourage their members to adopt children in need into their families.<sup>37</sup> The charge to care for the poor, especially orphans and widows, is a command easily found within the pages of Scripture (Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Leviticus 19:10; Isaiah 61:1; Zechariah 7:10; Matthew 19:21; James 1:27; 1 Timothy 5:3-16). Nevertheless, the recent resurgence of focusing on adoption mixes the theological and earthly practice in a way that can be troublesome.

By focusing on the abhorrent conditions that some children in orphan care must endure and calling on Christians to adopt these children—in essence, to save them from such peril—much like Christ saved believers and adopted them into the family of God, sets up an unhealthy power dynamic. The idea of the act of adoption being seen as

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<sup>34</sup> Katarina Westerlund, “Adoption as Spiritual Praxis in Individualized Times,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 51, no. 4 (December 2012): 326.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Marie A. Failing, “Co-Creating Adoption Law: A Lutheran Perspective,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 51, no. 4 (December 2012): 267-268.

<sup>37</sup> The Southern Baptist Convention recently passed a resolution concerning adoption and orphan care. The motivation behind the language comes across as concerning in light of this project. See Southern Baptist Convention, “On Adoption and Orphan Care,” accessed November 17, 2018, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/1194/on-adoption-and-orphan-care>; see also Kathryn Joyce, “The Evangelical Orphan Boom,” *The New York Times*, September 21, 2013 accessed on March 19, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/22/opinion/sunday/the-evangelical-orphan-boom.html>; Carla Barnhill, “Churches Adopt Adoption,” *Christianity Today*, July 6, 2010, accessed on March 19, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/july/11.23.html>.

someone in power rescuing or saving someone whom society seems to deem as having little to no worth or value is harmful. This mentality creates a dynamic of indebtedness or servitude. Not only is it damaging, but it is misguided both in the act of physical adoption and in discussing the theology surrounding adoption in Scripture. God's motivation for adopting believers into the Body of Christ was not pity but rather love (John 3:16). The same should be true for people seeking to bring a child into their family through adoption. Adoption is not about power dynamics and control; more correctly, particularly through a theological lens, it is about family. When it comes to adoption and the Kingdom of God, Scripture is clear that believers are siblings with Christ and not simply servants in the household.

When a local church begins to embrace adoption as a driving concept for ministry and community, it is important to understand how that relationship works. Theologically, in the adoption metaphor, God stands as divine parent bringing believers into the family as beloved children. The Body of Christ, affectionately referred to by God as "the bride" (Ephesians 5:25-27), can be seen as an earthly parent. Christians as individuals are siblings, equals through Christ. As such, believers do not hold the authority to declare who is or is not part of the family. That responsibility belongs to God. The responsibility of Christians is to learn to live together as brothers and sisters. Anyone with siblings, sons, or daughters knows that is a messy process.

In an effort to avoid the trappings of the hierarchical dynamics that can be associated with adoption, Clark offers the term "Adoptive Ministry" to help clarify Christians' relationship with one another:



The primary critique people have with the concept of adoption as a basis for all ministry is that it sounds paternalistic; they consider the idea as starting from the church as parent. The power of the adoptive ministry is not that we are adopted by a group of “surrogate parents” (the older people in the church) but rather that *the inner circle of the gathering does whatever it needs to do to make sure that the adopted person experiences the family of God as a fully embraced and included participant.*<sup>38</sup>

Clark goes on to stress the importance of recognizing each believer’s equality before God and working to use each person’s maturity and gifts to reinforce a sense of family and belonging to all brothers and sisters in Christ.

Clark’s delineation is an important piece in the discussion of adoption language applied to ministry. One helpful addition to his thoughts is to clarify the difference in the roles of Christians, individually and corporately. Individually Christians are siblings (Matthew 12:46-50), co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:4-6), and therefore equals before God. When believers come together corporately as a local expression of the Body of Christ, collectively they assume the larger mantle of parent. Together as a church, Christians speak with authority for their faith community (Acts 15:22), offer guidance (Ephesians 4:1-16), work towards the efforts of the Kingdom (Romans 12:3-8), and seek to express the values of the family of God to all those they encounter (Ephesians 3:10). Understanding the different functions of the individual and corporate body is tricky when lived, but a church and those who come together to take part in its life must work to exist and press into this duality. This concept is not foreign or without understanding. Many people function as a child, a sibling, and a parent simultaneously. It is important to comprehend the function of each of these aspects and to understand that relationships do

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<sup>38</sup> Chap Clark, ed., “Introduction: Adoption—Reenvisioning Youth Ministry and the Family of God,” in *Adoptive Youth Ministry: Integrating Emerging Generations into the Family of Faith, Youth, Family, and Culture Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 2.

not work well when the responsibilities or characteristics from one role are applied to another. The same is true for living as authentic family called “church.” As individuals, Christians must learn to treat other believers with a gut-level acceptance as family (Ephesians 4:2-6), even if they are drastically different from one another. This is the beauty of family and the strength of belonging that many churches are missing.

## CHAPTER 5

### LENS OF SECULAR DISCIPLINE

This chapter seeks to gain insight from the best practices of earthly adoption using the social sciences, specifically the Lens of Secular Discipline. To do this, the chapter highlights and responds to current research and lessons learned from adoptive parenting and how they can be applied, given the context and theological understandings discussed in previous chapters. This is done to help create a more faithful action in the church, which can lead to a praxis that embraces belonging and celebrates the believer's adoption into the family of God. In this way, a substantive effort can be made to address the concerns of systemic abandonment and belonging in the Church. Special consideration is given to what these lessons might teach about how to repair the hurt and loss caused by abandonment.

#### **The Role of Words and Their Psychological Impact**

Psychology teaches that the way words are used can have a deep impact on the meaning behind those words.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly true of the word “adoption.” In this

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<sup>1</sup> Naom Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965); Trevor A. Harley, *The Psychology of Language: From Data to Theory*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (East Sussex, GB: Psychology Press, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014); Christina U. Pfeuffer et al., “The Power of Words: On Item-Specific

discussion, “adoption” is not used as an adjective (e.g., adopted child). It is as Russell Moore argues: “Adoption is a past-tense verb not an adjective.”<sup>2</sup> He likens it to having a child born prematurely. One does not introduce that child later in life as “my premature child.” Rather, the boy or girl is simply “my child.” It is the same with adoption. This is not to suggest that adoption is a negative term. Rather, it is simply to recognize that it is not a qualifier. For example, I do not have adopted children. I have an incredible son and amazing daughter that became family through adoption. In *The Everything Parent’s Guide to Raising Your Adopted Child*, Corrie Lynne Player, Brette McWhorter Sember, and Mary C. Owen capture the beauty and complexity of this idea in the way they choose to define adoption. They describe the process as “building a family through the process of concentrated, dedicated, enduring love, rather than biology.”<sup>3</sup> This concept can be aptly applied to the metaphor of adoption found in Scripture.

Sometimes metaphors are best applied only at a surface level, and other times they offer much deeper insight and revelation the more they are explored. The adoption metaphor used in Scripture is the latter. When only looking at the theological insights of adoption, believers gain a beneficial understanding of their identity through Christ and of where they belong in God’s eternal family (Galatians 3:26-29; Romans 8:14-17) but are left with a superficial approach to address the obstacles that prevent them from accepting

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Stimulus—Response Associations Formed in the Absence of Action,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*. 43, no. 2 (February 2017): 328-347.

<sup>2</sup> Moore, *Adopted for Life*, 191.

<sup>3</sup> Corrie Lynne Player, Brette McWhorter Sember, and Mary C. Owen, *The Everything Parent’s Guide to Raising Your Adopted Child: A Complete Handbook to Welcoming Your Adopted Child into Your Heart and Home* (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2008), v.

their belonging. This is why this chapter seeks to gain insight from the best practices of earthly adoption using the social sciences (through the Lens of Secular Discipline) in order to address the concerns of systemic abandonment and belonging in the church.

### **What Lies Beneath: Lessons from Adoption**

The journey of adoption is multifaceted. My wife and I have been blessed to expand our family through both domestic and international adoption. In each instance, we partnered with Bethany Christian Services (adoption agency) to help guide us.<sup>4</sup> Bethany required months of preparation and classes for each adoption to prepare us for the life change. We learned about adoption from many perspectives. We met with birthparents who had previously placed children for adoption and heard their stories. We spoke with adults who had been adopted as children and discussed what was helpful growing up and what was not. Through Bethany, we explored the difficulties that can come with transracial and/or multicultural adoption. We also read countless books on the importance of fostering attachment and the possible difficulties our children might encounter emotionally and developmentally. Bethany made sure that we understood the magnitude of our decision and were as well prepared as possible to start our family.

Even though we began the adoption process for our daughter first, our son was the first one to come home. We started our domestic adoption two years into the process of our daughter's adoption from China. Our son's birth parents chose us based on a portfolio we submitted to Bethany. Our son was born at a hospital near our home, and we were there by the time he was first brought into the nursery. Our daughter was sixteen months

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<sup>4</sup> Bethany Christian Services, "Adoption," accessed March 21, 2019, <https://www.bethany.org/adoption>.

old, when we first got to hold her. Her adoption took nine years of work and waiting (and literally travelling around the world), before we could bring her home. Despite the vast difference in our children's stories, these are just two examples of the many ways that children can form families through adoption. Their stories, and our journey together as a family, has profoundly shaped my understanding of life, family, and belonging.

When the idea of adopting moves from the ethereal to the real, adoptive parents begin to understand the intense responsibility they are choosing to embrace. No longer are they simply focused on the dream of growing their family by bringing a son or daughter home. They must adjust to the reality of committing themselves to the life and welfare of a human being with distinct personality, needs, desires, story, and difficulties that will need help resolving. The same should be said about Adoptive Youth Ministry. This is where the Lens of Secular Discipline has much to add to this conversation of adoption into the family of God. When talking about adoptive ministry, it is easy to mistakenly engage in initially focusing on the work it will take to change the structures, systems, and expectations involved rather than considering where students are coming from (a world shaped by systemic abandonment) and the responsibility the Church has for their welfare. Several dynamics emerge that must be faced: the importance of developing and maintaining a healthy connection or attachment with the adolescent; the need to understand, acknowledge, and appreciate the differences and similarities in teen versus adult cultures; the importance of a spiritual parenting approach and how the Body of Christ might act or react; and the struggle that can come with identity development and how a church can foster the feeling of belonging within the adolescent.

To add to the complexities of the adoption metaphor, it is important to realize that adoption stories do not follow a set script. While adoption usually involves young children, someone can be adopted as an embryo, adult, or anywhere in between. Adoptions can cross borders, cultures, ethnicities, and socioeconomic barriers. They can come about from outside the family, through kinship placement, through foster care, adoption agencies, or private arrangements. Adoption arrangements can be open or closed, planned or unplanned, involve a single child or multiple siblings, with a single parent or a parental partnership.

Reasons for relinquishing a child also can vary wildly. Birth parents might realize that they cannot provide the kind of life they wish their child to have, or they may see the child as something that will keep them from having the lives they want for themselves. A child might be taken from a home because of abuse. They might be tearfully relinquished due to economic hardship. A baby might be handed to a forever family moments after being born or have lived in an institution for years before finding a home. A birth mother may choose to carry a pregnancy to full term, despite health risks and the financial burden, in order to place her child for adoption, because she cannot fathom having an abortion. A different birth mother might abandon her child, because she is mentally incapable of caring for the infant. As difficult as these circumstances can be to imagine, awareness of all these scenarios creates a rich dichotomy that can bring incredible depth to understanding the conversation of adoption into the family of God—particularly since each believer brings his or her own unique faith journey into the community of faith that is the church.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Since this project focuses on the reformation of youth ministry, the key theological questions that arise for most adopted children—namely, “Who are we adopted from?” “Who are our birth parents?” “Who abandoned us?”—are not able to be explored here. However, Nikondeha’s resource, *Adopted: The Sacrament of Belonging in a Fractured World*, is the best book I have found that addresses these questions.

In *Hurt 2.0*, Clark offers a look at what lies beneath the veneer of adolescent culture today. He uses the term systemic abandonment to describe society's loss of a caring and nurturing environment designed to connect child and community. This felt abandonment has real consequences. Clark observes:

Systemic abandonment has created an environment in which midadolescents believe they are truly on their own. As a result, they go underground; they pull away from the adult world. This causes a uniquely ordered society, a world beneath, a world in which rules, expectations, a value system, and even social norms are created to maintain an environment in which the middle adolescent can achieve the single most important goal of this stage of life: survival.<sup>6</sup>

Clark goes on to posit that to survive, adolescents create multiple selves in order to navigate the expectations of the adult world and the "world beneath." He writes:

The home base of a midadolescent is the world beneath. Therefore, any entry into a layer of living that is ordered and controlled by an adult (or even under the influence of an adult-controlled system, such as a student-led and -run endeavor like the school yearbook, student government, etc.) is a temporary excursion into potentially hostile territory and is, therefore, basically not safe. An adolescent will move back as quickly as possible into the world of adolescence, where he or she feels included.<sup>7</sup>

This portrait of adolescent life is challenging and creates many difficulties for current ministry efforts.

In their book, *Parenting the Hurt Child*, Gregory Keck and Regina Kupecky offer help and hope to adoptive parents seeking to raise children who have been hurt by someone they should have been able to trust (an issue at the core of systemic abandonment). They write: "Children who have been hurt—either emotionally or physically—have fears that differ from those of other children. They are particularly

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<sup>6</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 39.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52.



sensitive to their own vulnerability and perceived weaknesses. They are terrified of losing control, and they are fearful of control by others. They are afraid of anything they think might hurt them, and they are threatened by anyone they think might not protect them.”<sup>8</sup> Looking at Clark’s comment about the “world beneath” previously referenced, one can see that the actions and attitudes of the students he observed mirror those of the hurt child that Keck and Kupecky describe.

Systemic abandonment, as it has been defined in this project, is the idea that as a society, Western culture in many ways has imposed the needs of adults over the needs of children. The result has been that adolescents have a perceived or felt understanding that adults are using them for their own gain and cannot be trusted. In *The Unofficial Guide to Adoptive Parenting*, Sally Donovan describes the parenting challenges presented by the perceived reality of hurt children who have been adopted. She writes:

Of course nothing we can inflict upon our child will be any worse than what they have already experienced. They have learnt that adults are untrustworthy, that they take things from them, shout at them, deny them good times, leave them alone. We need to challenge that learning, not reinforce it by falling into the trap that Trauma has set for us. We need to be careful not to unthinkingly replicate the behavior of the original perpetrators.<sup>9</sup>

This observation carries a stern warning for the Church. By understanding that systemic abandonment has hurt adolescents, churches must examine the ways in which they have contributed to that abandonment and seek new practices to ensure that its ministries are not adding further to a broken system.

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<sup>8</sup> Gregory C. Keck, Regina M. Kupecky, and Lynda Gianforte Mansfield, *Parenting the Hurt Child: Helping Adoptive Families Heal and Grow* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2009), 39.

<sup>9</sup> Sally Donovan, *The Unofficial Guide to Adoptive Parenting* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2015), 31. Donovan talks about “Trauma” as a devious person working to destroy attachment.

While the Lens of Theological Reflection in Chapter 4 reveals that a person's relationship to others in the Kingdom of God is as sibling, it is vital to understand that the church functions as parent. Recognizing the hurt and loss caused by abandonment, a deeper understanding of the adoption metaphor provided by the Lens of Secular Discipline can help demonstrate the value of this concept. Again, Donovan's words provide insight into addressing this challenge:

Adoption is life-changing and life-affirming *and* it has come about through loss. Loss and grief can hang around a family home like an unwelcome and unwashed guest at a party, stoking resentment, bitterness and anger. They refuse to move on until looked at full in the face and touched and accepted with courage. Having suffered monumental loss (so much has been taken from them), our children need adults around them strong enough to accept and to some extent hold that loss and grief with them.<sup>10</sup>

Coming to grips with the reality of loss in adoption and in ministry is important to the role of healing. It must not be glossed over. Until the local church is willing to accept and hold the loss created by systemic abandonment, youth ministry as an experiment, to recall Yaconelli's words, will continue to fail. This is what Clark is getting at when he writes in *Hurt 2.0*. He emphasizes, "This is not a how-to book but rather a wake-up call to help every adult recognize and struggle with what our choices as adults have done to the children of today's society . . . We as adults need to roll up our sleeves and invest in the lives of individual young people."<sup>11</sup> Recognizing the Church as parent allows the Lens of Secular Discipline to further inform the conversation and help local congregations find effective approaches that reject abandonment and build family.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>11</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 21.

## Overcoming Abandonment

When looking for ways to best promote belonging and healthy development in children who have been adopted, several reoccurring themes emerge across different resources. Of these ideas, three main concepts can help shape the discussion of a church's response to systemic abandonment: the need to rethink parentings methods, the vitalness of attachment, and the need to understand where identity formation for those who have been adopted begins and how to best shape that formation in positive ways. Adoptive parents must be willing to approach parenting a child who has been adopted differently. Not only must they work towards the normal goals of parenting, but they also must learn about and recognize the tangled and disrupted parts of the parent-child relationship. Adoptive parents need to work intensely on developing healthy bonds of attachment and trust. Common sense says that this would be essential when the child first comes home. However, Patty Cogen points out the following in *Parenting Your Internationally Adopted Child*: "The trust and attachment that developed after adoption are not in all cases stable and permanent."<sup>12</sup> Recognizing the necessity to reinforce this cycle of need and trust changes the way adoptive parents need to engage their children. This reality underscores the factors that can make identity development more difficult for a child that has been adopted. Healthy development depends on being able to answer this multifaceted question: "Who am I, and who are you, and where do I fit in this world?"<sup>13</sup> These inquiries center around issues of belonging, and they are at the heart of understanding adoption and family. Consequently, understanding how to become a

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<sup>12</sup> Patty Cogen, *Parenting Your Internationally Adopted Child: From Your First Hours Together through the Teen Years* (Sydney: ReadHowYouWant Ltd., 2011), 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

proactive parent, how to engage in the power of attachment, and how to foster true identity are three areas rich in lessons for addressing abandonment and belonging. Together they offer positive steps that can help reshape a framework of ministry.

### Becoming a Proactive Parenting

Healthy family starts with healthy parenting. It is easy to focus on the struggles of children who have been adopted and how they need help to adjust, but the reality is that parents must first educate themselves if they truly wish to help their children. It is important to understand that traditional techniques used to parent children born into a family are often not the best approach to use with children adopted into a family, as fears of rejection and abandonment can linger in the conscious and subconscious of these children. For many adoptive parents, this means parenting differently than they were parented. Parents and children, especially children who have been adopted, can assign very different values to situations they share. For example, the simple task of getting a child dressed for the parent can be about getting somewhere on time but for the child could embody a struggle for control or evoke a feeling of insecurity. As such, adoptive parents must become proactive and work hard to recognize the child's needs and how best to anticipate those needs, rather than be reactive or simply responding to situations as they arise. Donovan writes: "Adopted children need to be parented in a manner which takes full account of *their* past experiences, not ours."<sup>14</sup> In the early 1990s Vera I. Fahlberg addressed this need.

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<sup>14</sup> Donovan, *The Unofficial Guide to Adoptive Parenting*, 22.

In her book, *A Child's Journey through Placement*, Fahlberg uses the “Arousal-Relaxation cycle” (initiated by the child expressing displeasure and completed by the parent’s response to satisfy the need) and the “Positive Interaction Cycle” (positive interaction initiated by the parent, which elicits positive response by the child) to overcome the early negative experiences a child of adoption may have; these help to reinforce attachment and bonding with the new caregiver.<sup>15</sup> Cogen uses the term “contingency parenting” to describe Fahlberg’s approach and notes that this would become the primary model for adoptive parenting classes for years to follow. Cogen states that this model of parenting “helps parents recognize that responding quickly and fully to a child’s distress, either physical or emotional, is important and appropriate following adoption and will not result in bad habits or a spoiled child. The concept reassures parents that they do not need to worry about giving ‘too much attention.’”<sup>16</sup> Contingency parenting seeks to foster attachment between parent and child through responsiveness and empathy.

As a practical example, when our daughter still struggled to sleep through the night after being home for over six months, we were encouraged not to let her cry it out or find ways to sooth herself; rather, we were advised to continue to go to her and comfort her every time she cried. While this was exhausting as a parent, it was necessary to reinforce the feeling of safety and dependability that our daughter was lacking. Cogen says, “Most adoptive parents view contingency parenting as a temporary parenting

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<sup>15</sup> Vera I. Fahlberg, *A Child's Journey Through Placement* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2012), 32-40.

<sup>16</sup> Cogen, *Parenting Your Internationally Adopted Child*, 2.

approach that can be set aside, once trust and attachment are established, in favor of the more traditional parenting approach that centers on parents' age-appropriate expectations and how the child must learn to control himself and must learn to wait to have his needs met."<sup>17</sup> However, this approach can be problematic.

As noted above, for children who have been adopted (especially for international adoptions), trust and attachment have not been a stable or permanent experience for them. A child's questions of belonging, lack of resiliency, and/or difficulty connecting often necessitate a different approach, one that works beyond the first year at home and can anticipate as well as respond to the child's needs. Several resources recognize this necessity and offer helpful alternatives and suggestions (such as therapeutic parenting, elite parenting, the investment model of parenting).<sup>18</sup> For the purposes of this project, Cogen's idea of proactive parenting has the most to offer.

Proactive parenting uses the tools of traditional parenting while keeping at the forefront the reality that simple issues may have deeper meanings related to larger issues of self-control, identity, and adoption. This approach offers long-term parenting strategies to help respond to negative and rejecting behaviors in order to overcome and decode mix-message communications.<sup>19</sup> Proactive parenting takes a holistic approach and often ignores ages and stages of developmental guides in order to create space to acknowledge

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>18</sup> Therapeutic parenting and elite parenting are terms defined by Donovan, *The Unofficial Guide to Adoptive Parenting*, 22-32, whereas the investment model of parenting comes from Karyn B. Purvis, David R. Cross, and Wendy Lyons Sunshine, *The Connected Child: Bring Hope and Healing to Your Adoptive Family* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> Cogen, *Parenting Your Internationally Adopted Child*, 2-6.

the need for healing, as it is not uncommon for internationally adopted children to have setbacks or revert back to earlier stages of behavior when stressed. As Cogen explains, “Parenting an internationally adopted child is a *process of building connection* on many levels, including sensory, emotional, cognitive, and physical. The process includes not just building connection but also *recognizing and repairing* tangled or disrupted parts of the parent-child relationship.”<sup>20</sup> This focus on connection (the term Cogen prefers for “attachment”), building trust, and creating space for healing helps foster resiliency and reinforces the sense of belonging for the child.

The proactive parenting model has many lessons for a church when it comes to systemic abandonment and student ministry. Given the social, generational, and cultural differences, raising up tweens and teens in the Body of Christ can often make adults feel as if they are crossing international boundaries when they try to connect with adolescents. The focus and attention youth ministry gives to students is similar to the approach of contingency parenting. The Church is willing to overly indulge youth with specialized staff and volunteers, over-the-top facilities designed to invite and comfort, age-graded classes to respond to specific needs, and high-energy activities and emotional experiences to provide deep connections. That is not to say that these indulgences are necessarily bad. However, when viewed from a broader perspective, it can be observed that the Church by and large assumes these indulgences will come to an end soon after high school graduation in exchange for a more traditional approach to “parenting.” For example, young adults will know how to behave in worship, they will not be disruptive to church

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 15.

life, and they should be willing to wait to have their needs met. This failure to parent proactively misses the fragile nature of the student's connection and instead reinforces the patterns of systemic abandonment. This is a critical flaw with ministry models based on or using the idea of assimilation that was discussed in Chapter 1 of this discussion.

Consequently, the church needs a new approach to "spiritual parenting." The church body needs to understand that student ministry actually begins in preschool (by building ties to parents and families) and continues through young adulthood (with ample opportunities for young adults to stay connected). The church must be willing to demonstrate that students belong in the congregation (not just the youth ministry) and work diligently on creating opportunities for connection and attachment that apply to the whole self and not just to beliefs and behaviors. Leaders and congregants have to be willing to make space for setbacks and not allow a child to retreat and withdraw from the church. Instead, they need to be willing to stand with them through the meltdowns and tantrums. By recognizing the similarities between a teenager growing up with the effects of systemic abandonment who comes to the family of God and a child who has experienced abandonment and hurt being adopted into an earthly family, the need and value of reevaluating how the church approaches ministry to and with students becomes evident. Adapting Donovan's words serves as a poignant wakeup call: "Instead of allowing our parenting [insert approach to student ministry] to tumble unthinkingly out of our mouths [insert churches], as therapeutic parents [insert leaders who care about



students] we have no choice but to get educated, learn new methods, forgive ourselves for our mistakes and gradually rebuild ourselves into the new model.”<sup>21</sup>

### The Power of Attachment

While understanding proactive parenting is helpful in creating a framework for parenting internationally adopted children, the concept also has tangible ideas for churches that can help shape a better approach to ministering to those who have been hurt by the effects of systemic abandonment. While the framework (ministry goals, programming, staff and volunteer training, and the like) is important, it is equally vital to remember that the frame exists to support the work and ministry that it surrounds. For adoptive parents, the real work of proactive parenting is the formation, establishment, reinforcement—and when needed, repair—of attachment that leads to healthy identity formation. For Cogen, attachment is about the parent-child connection that occurs when the child realizes that the parent knows how he or she feels. This is called “attunement.” Just because a parent feels connected to their child, they cannot assume the child feels the same. Attunement is a complex process that involves building resiliency through emotional and behavioral (right-brained) reinforcement in order to promote a sense of acceptance, belonging, and family.<sup>22</sup> This resiliency, as Cogen defines it, is “the ability to bounce back from a stressful situation, without getting stuck in a stress-based reactivity and the fight-or-flight response. Resiliency is needed to manage or control strong feelings—hunger, fatigue, excitement, joy, anger, grief. Resiliency includes behavioral

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<sup>21</sup> Donovan, *The Unofficial Guide to Adoptive Parenting*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Cogen, *Parenting Your Internationally Adopted Child*, 24-28.

and emotional self-control.”<sup>23</sup> Attunement and resiliency are key components to attachment which are reinforced through faithful repetitions of the attachment cycle.

A successful attachment cycle occurs when a child realizes a need, expresses that need in the ways available to him or her, has that need gratified by a caregiver (who simultaneously reinforces attunement through actions such as eye contact, comforting words, physical touch, and the like), thus building trust between the child and others.<sup>24</sup> This usually occurs in the first months and years of a child’s life but often is disrupted in the lives of children who have been adopted or have experienced trauma, especially with international adoption. Cogen stresses, “Children with attachment issues have missed thousands of cycle completions, and it is up to us to make them up. This takes time. Lots of time. . . . When a child has not securely attached as an infant, it is critical to give him the opportunity to experience the attachment cycle with his adoptive parents.”<sup>25</sup> The need for adoptive parents to build attachment cannot be overstressed. The child’s sense of belonging and connectedness is essential for true emotional development.

In the case of our adoption story with our daughter, this involved activities like choosing to revert back to bottle feeding (juice) for a time in order to promote closeness and left-eye to left-eye (right-brained) connection. We also carried her . . . a lot. Healthy touch is essential to connection and by carrying her we reinforced that she was safe and that we could be trusted. When she did walk on her own, we stayed close to her so that when she realized she had wandered away a bit and turned around, she saw that one of us was still

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 59.

there. For those times when the world was too much and she fell apart, we held her while she screamed at us, shook, and cried uncontrollably. She needed to know that no matter what she did, we would be there and that she belonged. It was brutal, but it got better.

For our family, proactive parenting helps us to remember that better is not the same as behind us now. We are still careful to monitor a temper tantrum to see if there is something more going on behind those tears, something that is trying to tell our child we cannot be trusted or that she does not belong. When we see it, we try to be quick to stop what we are doing, connect with our daughter on her level, and help her know we hear her and that she is loved. It is all at once a heartbreaking and joy-filled part of parenting I never anticipated, but it is vital to becoming family.

The importance of attachment has not been lost on the Church, but the lack of effective methods to communicate this truth is proving to be disastrous.<sup>26</sup> By using lessons learned from adoptive parenting, a church can change that reality. Students first need to know they belong to the family. This lesson must be learned in the heart not the head. Students need to feel connected and safe in all facets of church life and not just within the student ministry. Ministries and efforts must make this apparent. Words and lessons need to start with the goal of forming deeper connections. Adoptive parenting teaches that behavioral change and core beliefs are internalized when children have healthy attachments. Within the church, such healthy attachments take shape as adults model their faith, social capital for adolescents is increased, life-experiences are shared,

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<sup>26</sup> For details, see the discussion in the Introduction of this project, which contains cited studies of the vast number of students who leave the church after graduation; see also Angie Chui, "6 Reasons Young Adults Are Leaving the Church," *Christianity Today*, April 13, 2015, accessed February 27, 2019, <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/6.reasons.young.adults.are.leaving.church/51955.htm>; Rachel Held Evans, "Why Millennials Are Leaving the Church," *CNN* (blog), July 27, 2013, accessed February 27, 2019, <http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2013/07/27/why-millennials-are-leaving-the-church>.

and students feel that they are valued and listened to, not just talked at and corrected. Without these connections, behavior modification is simply seen as a survival skill.

Adoptive parenting also recognizes that for those adopted attachment has not always been permanent. Children who have been adopted need countless repetitions of the attachment cycle to create strong bonds of connection. It is essential to clarify here that this does not mean students need to be taught “Back to the Basics” Bible studies over and over. Attachment is not a cerebral process (left-brained); rather, it is experiential (right-brained).

This may be one of the most difficult lessons for churches to internalize, as the emphasis on Christian Education classes often includes using Bible teachings as a metric to measure “success.” “How many did you have on Wednesday night?” “What curriculum are you using for seventh-grade Sunday School?” “How many kids got baptized after the new believers’ class?” These questions are focused on cerebral and behavioral responses from students. However, measuring belonging is a much more difficult task.

Equally as urgent to reinforce is that attachment needs to occur with the larger church and not just within the student ministry. As such, the question becomes this: “How does the church create attachment cycles that engage students (and adults) experientially while connecting with the larger church?” This is what will foster resiliency in students and promote healthy development. It is a key component to counteracting systemic abandonment.

#### True Identity: Understanding Who We Are and Who We Were

The work of proactive parenting that leads to repairing broken attachment cycles and creating healthy parent-child connections that build trust and belonging through

perceived attunement and restored resiliency is a worthy task for adoptive parents. This approach helps create a healthy system, focuses on what is best for the child, and directs the actions and attitudes necessary for growth. However, Cogen points out that there is still more to the process:

Many years of intensive research on the developing brain has shown that healthy childhood development is the result of three interrelated areas of development. The first area is the *connection* between the parent and the child, including any changes that affect that connection. The second area, *resiliency*, is the child's ability to remain emotionally balanced and her ability to regain control when faced with any sort of change or stress. The third area is *identity*, or how the child answers the question "Who am I, and who are you, and where do I fit in this world?" Not surprisingly, these three areas developed together do not have separate pieces.<sup>27</sup>

Healthy identity formation is the goal of adolescent development for all children but can be especially tricky for children who have experienced loss or trauma prior to being adopted. In order for healthy identity formation to best occur, adoptive parents must be willing to understand how abandonment, loss, and trauma have impacted their child's self-perception. Donovan uses the imagery of a "brittle voice" to illustrate this point:

Deep inside our children, hidden beneath the rage and the anxiety, the scabs and the scars, is a brittle voice which has been silenced by fear and shame. If we learn how to listen, the brittle voice tells of how the world is to our child. Many aspects of their behavior are fueled by the brittle voice as their behavior is the only way they know of communicating with us. As they get older, feel a little safer and start to make sense of their past experiences you may hear their little voice in a form you are more familiar with. And then you will be hit with what they have carried with them all along: I am bad, I am worthless, I am unlovable, sooner or later I will be rejected again, everything bad that has happened to me was my fault. You may get to hear their deepest fears: I worry every day that I will be snatched off the street, I worry someone will take me from my bed, I worry I will lose you and never see you again. These are not passing fears and beliefs—the brittle voice is like a motor which drives how our children perceive themselves, how they think others perceive them, how they react under stress, how they react to sudden noise, to kindness, to discipline.

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<sup>27</sup> Cogen, *Parenting Your Internationally Adopted Child*, 16.

No amount of willpower on our part is going to change the narrative of the brittle voice. Only when we accept that the brittle voice represents reality for our children can we start to gain their deep trust and attach with them at a more meaningful level. Then we can gently challenge the little voice and help our children to see themselves as good and lovable and worthy of a happy future. That's when the really hard work begins.<sup>28</sup>

Donovan's words prove important for adoptive parenting and adoptive ministry. Only by accepting that loss is a part of adoption (both physical and spiritual) can parents or pastors start to gain trust and begin to build lasting connections with kids on a meaningful level.

As an adoptive parent, I know my children are my family; but I have to accept that in order for them to come to understand that, I must acknowledge that there was a time when they were not. I also need to be open in addressing the difficulties and strengths that part of my children's story has created in their lives. Addressing this means repeatedly demonstrating that they belong, regardless of their past or their present behavior. This is a lifelong commitment of love that bends behavior and belief to reflect and accept their belonging. Cogen's description of survival skills versus family skills is a powerful tool that can help adoptive parents better understand their child's reality. It also offers insights for the church. Family skills are based on building interdependence over time by consistently reinforcing belonging in order to foster safety and promote confidence in the child.

Cogen describes the coping skills that a child adopted internationally often engages in as a response to the neglect and loss they have experienced as survival skills. When the child's basic needs are often unmet and the attachment cycle is repeatedly broken, the child will instinctually seek to survive by taking control in whatever way possible. Cogen explains:

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<sup>28</sup> Donovan, *The Unofficial Guide to Adoptive Parenting*, 26-27.

In the absence of consistent nurturing, the child's survival skills begin to develop right after birth. Every infant starts with the ability to cry, to move about, to eliminate, to sleep, and to suck. These abilities can become survival skills if they are unmediated by nurturing interactions with an adult. Children who develop survival skills become tough, smart, strong, and persistent, starting in just a few months of age.<sup>29</sup>

Learning to expect neglect, the child determines that connections are dangerous, so independence is sought and seen as a favorable protective shell. Adults are engaged only when the child's basic necessities are demanded or temporary nurturance is needed. These patterns can produce chronically low levels of oxytocin hormones, which are necessary for healthy socialization. Such children can develop an indiscriminate friendliness that sees adults, including adoptive parents, as interchangeable resources to provide for their basic needs.

Survival skills by their very nature must be developed rapidly or the child could perish. As such, children who default to such skills experience their first understanding of identity as a boss, one who must control the situation. Cogen points out the dangers this creates. She writes:

This boss-like identity is not built on strengths, knowledge, and capability, for a child is essentially weak. Instead, it is an identity that forces the child to create a semblance of those traits, a false maturity. Because the child is really not fully mature, she must rely on manipulation, charm, or even threats and hostility to survive. This pseudo-mature identity may fool some adults, including parents, into thinking that the child is secure and competent. In fact, such a child feels lost, alone, weak, and afraid, as well as fraudulent.<sup>30</sup>

This reality brings a fullness to Donovan's idea of the brittle voice. As an adoptive parent, it provided a baseline assumption of where to begin when seeking to create connection.

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<sup>29</sup> Cogen, *Parenting Your Internationally Adopted Child*, 37.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

In a ministry context, it is hard to listen to Cogen’s description of survival skills and not think of Clark’s observations of how adolescents see the adult world as unsafe and therefore revert back to the world beneath, an unhealthy substitute which they control, in order to survive. Clark observes, “Beneath the superficial and all-too-often cosmetic layer of high school life, there are dark, lonely corners where the neon light of sanitized conformity seldom penetrates. Just below the sheen of coerced normality are the stress and strain of personal survival in a hostile world.”<sup>31</sup> In the same way, Cogen’s ideas regarding indiscriminate friendliness and the inability to create healthy social ties is reminiscent of Patricia Hersch’s observations regarding tribes as opposed to cliques. Cliques are a result of attachment, whereas tribes are a form of self-preservation. The main shift that Hersch has viewed is that loyalty was no longer to an individual but to a system.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, in both life and ministry, survival skills can create admired traits in children that are unwittingly reinforced by adults for the wrong reasons. Adults might mistake a child’s persistence, strength, or independence as a sign of maturity when instead they need to recognize that those traits actually mask a lack of real connection. By recognizing that many students who appear to be thriving are really hurting, the church can respond by taking the needed steps to acknowledge this hurt and work toward creating more lasting connections.

By understanding why and how survival skills are formed and how they can lead to a destructive perception of identity, adoptive parents (and adoptive ministry) must work towards taking the strengths created by such skills and refocusing them to build a

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<sup>31</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 1.

<sup>32</sup> Hersch, *A Tribe Apart*, 399.



new identity. Cogen cultivates the use of family skills to accomplish this task. She notes: “Children who have come to depend on survival skills need direct instruction in how to live in a family and how to acquire the family skills of communication, cooperation, and sharing. If parents begin this education by acknowledging the child’s survival skills and their origins, the child will be more willing to learn the new family’s behaviors.”<sup>33</sup>

Family skills are based on building interdependence, not independence. These skills are learned gradually (through positive repetitions of the attachment cycle) from parents who offer consistent connection and reassurance belonging, which leads the child to feel safe and confident. Cogen describes the work adoptive parents must do in order to teach family skills as a three-part process. She states:

First, your child must learn to believe that you are there to offer nurturance and support and are a partner in this life-game. Second, your child must learn to stop using survival skills. Stopping is hard because it requires a great degree of self-control, something internationally adopted children tend to lack. Third, your child must learn new family skills by mirroring the behaviors that you model.<sup>34</sup>

Changing behavior begins with building trust by demonstrating belonging. Once children believe they belong, the parent must work to show how their survival skill set can actually be harmful and help them to stop reverting to the well-worn patterns of self-preservation. This is accomplished by learning from the parent’s actions. For this reason, parents must be willing to be vulnerable, trust the child, and demonstrate cooperation and interdependence. This is how identity is reshaped.

For the church, this approach reinforces the fact that ministry efforts first must be focused on creating secure bonds of belonging. Student ministry must help students

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<sup>33</sup> Cogen, *Parenting Your Internationally Adopted Child*, 37-38.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

understand that when the church family wins, they win, and vice versa. Students have to know that they are valued as individuals. Christian Education needs to shift from belief-driven rules to value-driven identity formation. This means students knowing and understanding the values behind the beliefs that a church family professes and actually see those values in action as an evidentiary core to their identity in the community of faith. This motivation leads to the ability to embrace family skills over survival skills.

Additionally, both congregation and student ministries must do a better job of demonstrating and modeling interdependence. Students need to know and feel that they have something to offer to the broader church family. They need to see how the family is not whole without them. This is why the Assimilation Model of ministry is problematic. Family does not sacrifice the individual for the system; rather, the family embraces the individual to bring transformation to the system. This is where the idea of church as parent and Christ-followers as siblings comes into full effect. Together, church members realize they are a part of the greater family. Individually, each recognizes the unique value and shared commonality in all those who call God Father. It is beautiful, messy, joyful, complex, difficult, and assuring—just like family.

### **Some Conclusions on How to Run the Right Race and Avoid Becoming the *Titanic***

The lessons of adoptive parenting offer valuable insights for student ministry. They also expose difficult shortcomings in current ministry practices as a result of systemic abandonment. Donovan shares a story about her experience in becoming an adoptive parent that captures the Church's struggle in dealing with systemic abandonment and the failure of youth ministry that Yaconelli described:

The change in perspective from wishful to realistic thinking has for me been an important part of becoming competent. We start off, perhaps believing we have entered the flat 5km race, we didn't put on our best trainers, we didn't carb-load the day before, we didn't download the playlist entitled "Motivational" onto our MP3 players and we didn't do much training. Part way through the road gets steep, there are no drink stations and the streets are silent and empty of supporters. Then the cold realization creeps through us: we've unwittingly entered a marathon and were in the high Pyrenees and it's winter. The moment when I could no longer deny that I had inadvertently entered myself for a marathon was crushing. "I can't do it. I don't want to do it. This is going to finish me. Why me? This is not my life" were my thoughts. I was a combination of distraught, angry and grief stricken.<sup>35</sup>

Similarly, many student ministers and church leaders did not realize the race they were running. They had no idea of the true landscape. They ran their ministries as if they were in a sprint. As a result, many have run out of steam. These leaders have invested so much time and energy in building the world of "Youth Ministry" that the idea of having to change the system is crushing. They feel there is so much to lose, and they are not sure their congregations would support such a change. The emotion Donovan describes, "a combination of distraught, angry and grief stricken," seems utterly accurate (except for those who are still clinging to denial). However, neither church nor student ministry can quit. They must find a way to keep running, if they are to survive.

The beginning of Part Two of this project stated that as a result of the effects of systemic abandonment and the current context of student ministry, the Church needed to find a new praxis and focus on repairing and reinforcing an adolescent's identity in Christ. This process begins by helping students internalize their belonging to God's family based on their adoption as full sons and daughters of God. This is done by strategically helping them connect to God and to God's family through the church in various and lasting ways. These connections reinforce the value of the person first, not a

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<sup>35</sup> Donovan, *The Unofficial Guide to Adoptive Parenting*, 32-33.

value based on beliefs and behavior but rather a value that is strengthened by interdependent relationships within the congregation. By applying the work of practical theology, the Lens of Theological Reflection and the Lens of Secular Discipline have proven that the concept of adoption (both spiritually and physically) can provide a strong foundation, helpful framework, and compelling argument to accomplish this task.

When Paul teaches that believers have been adopted into the family of God, he is not simply making a change in who they identify with but emphasizes how there is a transformation in their core identity. Christians become full children of God and co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:4-6). Understanding and embracing this identity is the transformative goal of ministry. The Lens of Secular Discipline helps to understand how to accomplish this. It begins with changing how the church “parents” and how it can change its approach to demonstrate the value and love God has for God’s children. A church also must recognize that even though believers are adopted into the family of God, there was a time when they were not a part of the family.<sup>36</sup> This time apart from the Creator has stifled spiritual development and created false understandings of identity and belonging. By examining the work of adoption experts, a church can learn how to rebuild trust and attachment with young people in a way that builds on their value and creates interdependence. By demonstrating belonging, modeling desired behaviors, and teaching the values of the beliefs and systems above the rules or behaviors expected, the church can turn the tide of systemic abandonment and find a better way to be a family of faith.

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<sup>36</sup> This time can be our life before coming to faith or the broader effects of understanding that before Christ’s redemption we were, in essence, not fully part of the family of Christ.

As this project transitions into Part Three, the work of building a new praxis of ministry needs to be grounded in reality and context. Student ministry no longer can afford to set sail like the *Titanic*, ignoring the warnings and assuming it is too large to fail. Churches no longer can ignore connectional lifeboats and relational safety nets for the sake of appearances. The work of adoption is hard, as the requirements necessary to effect change can be overwhelming for a congregation—much in the same way that parenting a child who has suffered abandonment and loss can be overwhelming. However, the church can take heart again from these wise words of Donovan: “Our children don’t get to choose which race to run. We must run alongside them through the sunshine and rain, down the slippery slopes and up the rocky climbs. I’m not yet sure how I’ll get to the summit but I’m confident I will, and when I do I’ll see you there and the views will be amazing.”<sup>37</sup> With that, the project turns toward the final work of practical theology to explore a new praxis that is mindful of the context of its race as it journeys to the summit.

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<sup>37</sup> Donovan, *The Unofficial Guide to Adoptive Parenting*, 33.

PART THREE

KINGDOM TRAJECTORY, FAITHFUL PRACTICE, AND THE  
ADOPTION OF A NEW PRAXIS OF MINISTRY

## CHAPTER 6

### MINISTRY GOALS AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES: FORMING A NEW PRAXIS

Through the work of practical theology, this project has identified the issue at hand, thoroughly explored the context surrounding the issue, and applied both the Lens of Theological Reflection and the Lens of Secular Discipline to create a full, multi-dimensional understanding of how to address the problem of systemic abandonment of adolescents. The project now turns back to praxis in order to draw out conclusions and explain the implications for new ministry within an existing context. The goal is to find the best possible responses that will align with a Kingdom trajectory to lead to a more faithful action where God's Kingdom is more fully experienced.

Consequently, this chapter lays the groundwork needed to accomplish a new praxis. It summarizes key conclusions reached by this project through the work of practical theology and discusses their implications for congregational youth ministry. This chapter also establishes goals and guidelines needed to evaluate ministry change and describes the preferred future envisioned as a result of a ministry focused on belonging to the family of God. From this, an implementation plan to develop a new youth ministry strategy in order create this future of belonging will be proposed. The chapter concludes

with a general timeline for the plan of raising congregational awareness about systemic abandonment and creating a new praxis and then identifies the target populations intended in each step.

### **Key Practical Theological Conclusions to Guide New Ministry**

The work of this project attests that the systemic abandonment of adolescents is real and has had a detrimental effect on adolescent development and their connection to the Church. This factor, combined with others mentioned in Part One, has resulted in students who have lost trust in adults, who feel alone and used, who shrink from the adult world, and who use their survival skills to mask their true feelings. Part Two has demonstrated that lessons can be learned and applied from a theological understanding of adoption into the family of God as well as from social science's insights into adoptive parenting. Together these lessons offer a solid foundation on which to build a ministry framework to repair the damage that has been done by systemic abandonment. Now, all of this extrapolated information is integrated to form conclusions that can guide the Kingdom trajectory for a local church to embrace faithful practice and adopt a new praxis of ministry.

The first key to counteracting the damage of abandonment, both theologically and psychologically, is a proper understanding of identity. Theologically, believers must realize that in Christ, it is not only who they identify with that changes; their essential identity itself is transformed. As such, believers are full children of God and co-heirs with Christ. They are God's family. Family status and belonging are rooted in Christ and not in behaviors or right beliefs. Drawing from the identity-building work of adoption, it becomes



the church's job to model this belonging while helping to replace self-serving survival skills with life-giving family skills that build trust and connection. This modeling requires an increase in the number of healthy adults investing in the lives of adolescents in order to rebuild social capital<sup>1</sup> and provide opportunities for learned behaviors. Through this gentle and supportive process, students can live into their new identity in Christ through the loving affirmation of the Church.

As such, a church's ministry efforts need to start with belonging. Galatians declares that adoption into God's family began with a promise. God promised God's people a family and a place to belong. This is not to say that belief and behavior are not important, but rather true change in behavior and internalization of beliefs are best grown and developed from a proper sense of belonging. A child who is adopted is not required to demonstrate that he or she understands the beliefs of the family or that he or she can behave according to family expectations before being allowed to assume the family name. At the moment of adoption, the child is family. It is through life in the family that the child comes to understand how to behave and believe. The same approach should be true for the Church, which functions as both family and Body of Christ.

Another necessary key element to understand is that in order to create a new praxis, local churches need to have a new and robust approach to "parenting." Theologically, it is important to understand that the church functions as parent and that the individuals within the church live as siblings. Contrary to the lessons of systemic abandonment, as parent, the church must be the one to work proactively towards the welfare of the child. The parent

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<sup>1</sup> According to Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 18-28, social capital refers to social networks (connections among individuals) and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. Putnam espouses that social networks have value and affect the productivity of individuals and groups.

cannot afford to ignore hurt and suffering but must realistically create expectations and provide care that meets needs and reinforces attachment. Essential to this is the reality that the entire church acts as parent—and not just the student ministry. With adoption, it is not the child’s responsibility to attach to the parent but rather the parent who assumes the mantle of building (or rebuilding) relationship.<sup>2</sup>

Church leadership must do a better job of building authentic connections of deep affection between students and the church as a whole. This is accomplished by educating the larger body on the need for good “parenting” skills and on understanding that those skills must be applied long term—and not just during youth ministry. This is the essence of adoptive ministry in action with the local body of believers in Christ. Adoptive ministry begins in infancy and continues into adulthood. Student ministry must expand its reach in order to create stronger bonds of attachment and curb the effects of abandonment. As a tangent of this, the church also should invest heavily in teaching healthy parenting skills for actual parents and future parents within their congregation. The more the church can do to create healthy families within the congregation and equip parents to be leaders in their kids’ faith development, the more students can see and understand the love and care God intended for them. This is a win-win approach and becomes a natural crossover when the church as family is a core value.

An additional element to understand is that in adoptive ministry attachment is the goal and not conversion or assimilation. Just like with the adoption of a child who has experienced broken cycles of attachment and has learned to depend on self rather than

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to remember that the church is not a single parent. The belonging demonstrated within the local body of believers is a reflection of the connection that God desires for his children (Matthew 4:18-20).

family, the church must parent in a way that repeatedly reinforces the felt sense of belonging, which is needed to reestablish connection. The shift here comes in understanding that attachment is predominantly a right-brained, experiential activity. This means ministry activities need to be designed to connect to the hearts of participants, so they can connect with one another. Ministries need to be intentionally crafted in a way that engage the participant and elicit a positive and natural emotional response. Instead of hammering rules and beliefs through Christian Education designed to address behavior and attitude, the church needs to look at the values that make those beliefs important to its family of faith and work towards demonstrating what those values look like when lived out. It is through healthy bonds of attachment that identity (as a child of God) can be reformed.

In this, the church has some natural strengths into which it can lean. To build authentic and heartfelt connection requires repetition of attachment cycles. Intentional use of church traditions can be a positive way to accomplish this. Specifically, the seasons of the church year are a tool that can be utilized. The richness and imagery of Advent and the reflection and reverence of Lent are two easy cycles that offer deep heart connection and occur every year. A church can think of these as family traditions that provide yearly stability as well as uniqueness and warmth to the season, much like Christmas and Easter. On top of this, the church is a natural place to celebrate milestone accomplishments and rites of passage. Churches need to make space for these activities and develop ritual and meaning to surround them.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> These ideas have been adapted from St. Philip's Episcopal Church, *The Journey to Adulthood (J2A)* (Durham, NC: LeaderResources, 2016).

Finally, ministries need to become more holistic. Adoption focuses on the entire well-being of the child and not just one aspect of development. Unfortunately, in certain cases, a church has relegated itself to offering input only for spiritual development. This singularity plays into a youth's ability to assign different "selves" to various tribes, in effect keeping their religious identity isolated.<sup>4</sup> By taking the approach of an adoptive parent, concerned with the full development of the child, a church can reclaim its authority to breathe life and provide guidance to multiple aspects of development—including spirituality, sexuality, social connections, understanding self, and societal expectations. By doing this, a student's identity in Christ will begin to cross over and apply to all areas of identity. This is essential in creating a unified self that is needed to become an interdependent member of society and the family of God.<sup>5</sup> Drawing from these conclusions, this project can determine clear goals and guidelines to use when evaluating and reshaping current ministry praxis. The next task is to answer this question: "How does the church create attachment cycles that engage students (and adults) experientially while connecting with the larger church?"

This evaluation should guide ministry practice and result in goals as to what should be held as prime. One guideline is to stress students' identity in Christ and their belonging to the family of God, the Church (when a child is adopted, they are family, period). Another focuses on recognizing the church's responsibility as "parent." This involves the local body being proactive in creating opportunities for attachment (since the work of attachment is the responsibility of the parent). A third guideline is seeking to be

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<sup>4</sup> Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 50-51.

<sup>5</sup> Cogen, *Parenting Your Internationally Adopted Child*, 36-46.

more holistic in speaking into the spiritual, emotional, relational, and physical lives and development of students (e.g., parents are concerned with all areas of a child's development). As a fourth guideline, churches can strive to connect with and explain the values of the faith family that drive belief and behavior (attachment is right-brained, experiential, and seeks to connect to the family, not rules). A fifth guideline involves the goal of working to build social capital by increasing healthy adult involvement and modeling family skills through adult interdependence. This means adults recognize they are also co-heirs with Christ and relate as siblings to adolescent believers. Finally, it is necessary to recognize the need for repeated attachment opportunities to rebuild broken attachment cycles caused by systemic abandonment. This involves how the church's work of attachment cycles for adolescents begins in their infancy and continues through into their adulthood. The overall objective of these guidelines is to create attachment to the larger church family and to God and not just foster allegiance and happy memories within a segment of ministry. Together these goals and guidelines collectively function to help guide ministry praxis towards a Kingdom trajectory of faithful action with and for the tender souls of adolescents.

### **A Preferred Future of Faithful Action**

The Kingdom trajectory needed to create a new praxis that leads to a preferred future of faithful action ultimately is summarized by the objective of creating a ministry of belonging. To do this requires an end to siloed ministry efforts.<sup>6</sup> Preschool, children,

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<sup>6</sup> As well as the end of "siloing" the gifts of ministers designated only to specific areas; those serving as church staff need to function together as a team of parents working towards connection for the body. According to Ron Hunter, "The D6 View of Youth Ministry," in *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*:

youth, college, young adult, adult, senior adult pastors and ministry-focused laity need to work to see beyond their affinity group and promote the church as family. Church leadership must realize the effects of systemic abandonment and value the role adoptive ministry offers to promote healing and change the narrative. The church must understand its role as parent and the need to promote the identity of family and family care throughout the congregation. Ministry efforts need to be person-based, not program-based.<sup>7</sup> The church must walk with parents, equipping them to raise their kids in a holistic way. Church student ministries need to celebrate a member's identity in Christ and consistently reinforce connection to that identity. This should be a lifelong process that is celebrated and understood by the entire church.

### **How a New Praxis is Formed: The Steps to Implementing a New Ministry Strategy**

To accomplish this preferred future of addressing the systemic abandonment of adolescents within the context of ministry at First Baptist Church of Columbia, Missouri, this project broke the process down into specific components to address the new ministry strategy in light of the theological and secular analysis of adoption and abandonment. The project categorized these components into three functional areas or phases that the church needed to move through in order to reach its objective of creating adolescent attachment to the larger church family and to God. Each phase has specific steps, each with specific

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*Five Views*, ed. Chap Clark (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 147, ministry “silos” are segregated departments of ministry within a church that create barriers to communication and purpose.

<sup>7</sup> Admittedly, this one will be hugely challenging, especially because of the size of some student ministries. However, perhaps understanding my personal dream lends perspective: I imagine a day when I am asked how many kids are in my student ministry and that my response would be to begin naming each kid and talking specifically about him or her, instead of giving a single number. Even better would be if this were the answer being sought by those asking the question.

goals. Phase One creates anxiety in order to raise awareness of the need for change in church leadership and the church family. This happens through careful preparation and education. Phase Two guides the congregation to work within the tension created to examine and evaluate current praxis, looking for better ways to form intentional attachment cycles that promote belonging among the whole church to form new praxis. Finally, Phase Three expands the resource and scope of the new praxis to grow healthy adult involvement in order to create social capital and expand ministry work to be more comprehensive. All phases, and the multiple steps comprising them, are engaged in order to create a more faithful action for ministry. The success of each step within each phase depends on the effectiveness of the work that comes before it.

The raising of awareness in Phase One draws deeply from the work done in Part One of this project. This phase consists of two steps. Step #1 is a strategy for educating those who serve in a leadership or “church parent” role (e.g., youth leadership, pastoral staff, youth parents, and church lay leadership). Step #2 focuses on the best way to address and educate the local church family. Included overall in this phase are careful preparation and evaluation to accomplish these tasks.

Phase Two draws from the anxiety and felt need for change created in the first phase to apply the identified conclusions (or Kingdom trajectory) to the current praxis of ministry. The goal of this phase is to counteract the effects of systemic abandonment by creating a new ministry praxis that uses intentional attachment cycles to promote adolescents’ sense of belonging within the church. This phase uses the guidelines and goals noted in the “Key Theological Conclusions” section of this discussion to evaluate and shape ministry efforts to create authentic connection and belonging. Phase Two

consists of three steps of evaluation for implementation. Step #1 of this phase evaluates what is taught (curriculum) and how it is communicated to students. Step #2 examines the calendar of youth events and activities. Finally, Step #3 looks for better ways to promote belonging and attachment within larger church traditions and activities.

Reshaping these three steps in light of the Kingdom trajectory guidelines and goals will better align the new ministry praxis in order to create a more faithful action.

Phase Three addresses the current context of ministry by acknowledging the need to broaden the resource of adult participation and to expand the scope of spiritual and emotional development necessary to form healthy identity in adolescents. The application of this phase can be included in the evaluation of the process in Phase Two, but Phase Three is required to form the understanding and value these actions necessitate in order for a new praxis to align with the desired Kingdom trajectory. Phase Three has two steps. The first examines how to rebuild social capital and better offer attachment through modeled behavior and interdependent relationships with healthy adults. The second addresses the holistic need to better shape the emotional and spiritual needs of adolescents by better equipping parents to understand and address those needs. These steps combine to help repair the “safety net” of the adolescent journey.<sup>8</sup>

Together these three phases form the implementation plan for this project. Each phase and its steps require ongoing evaluation. Phase One must be accomplished first with a high degree of success, if Phases Two and Three are to be successful. The last two

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<sup>8</sup> Clark and Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World*, 199. This is a concept proposed by Clark and Powell to compensate for the expansion of adolescence. The authors call on parents, extended family, educators, mentors, small groups, and youth professionals to create a relational safety net and network of social capital to support adolescents as they move towards adulthood. The parents serve as the first line of support, while all others serve to supplement and encourage wherever else is needed. Clark and Powell see this safety net stretching all the way from childhood to adulthood.



phases can be implemented simultaneously and often rely on each other to be fully realized. The results of these two phases should be evaluated as a whole annually to ensure broader connection to desired goals and guidelines. Phase One should be reengaged if there is significant turnover in pastoral leadership or as a refresher to the congregation every few years. With the implementation plan created, this discussion will continue by exploring how the plan can be strategically implemented within the local church, using First Baptist Church as a reference, before moving on to how the project was field tested at First Baptist in Chapter 7.

#### Phase One: The Need for Change

Normally in church life, it is not a good idea for ministers to create anxiety in their congregation. However, when addressing the work involved with combating systemic abandonment and changing a decades' old approach to student ministry to form a new praxis of ministry, it becomes necessary to escalate the felt need for change. This is best done through responsible education, solid research, respect for church leadership, and sensitivity to the difficulty of the topic. Ministers who know the damage caused by systemic abandonment must work to bring others to that same level of awareness and understanding. To accomplish this, a strategic process is needed to build the crucial support required to effect system-wide transformation.

Phase One can be viewed as an effort to change the way the church parents. To do this, one must recognize those who effectively influence that role. At First Baptist, that would be the pastor and ministerial staff, the church council (lay leadership), the student ministry leadership, and the parents of youth and children themselves. All of these

“parents” will need to recognize the dire reality of a student’s departure from the church, understand why it happens, and be open to consider the concept of systemic abandonment. Additionally, realizing the need for change involves comprehending how the church has contributed to the distrust of adolescents, grasping the strengths of adoptive ministry and the focus on belonging in ministry as a way of rebuilding attachment, and becoming willing to help create an effective course of action.

To accomplish Phase One, it is recommended that a team be created to oversee the components involved. Talking points and curriculum are developed to help communicate ideas, and facilitators and communicators are identified to effectively promote these ideas. The team can be the student leadership team to facilitate implementation. If not, it should be a team of people who are most open to wanting to see the students in the church succeed.

After forming a team, initial engagement of Phase One’s first step should begin with the leadership of the student ministry. If this group responds positively (they are concerned about the information shared and feel like something needs to be done), the next step is to talk with the pastor. This order is recommended because if the student ministry leadership is not ready to tackle this issue, it is a good indicator that the process is not ready to proceed and needs to continue with further education and discussion.

When engaging pastoral leadership, the chosen facilitator should understand the potential breadth of their request. To effectively respond to the damage of systemic abandonment using the implementation plan offered in this project means that many areas within the church may face potential challenges or changes. Rethinking such concepts as the church’s approach to student ministry, the church’s values or identity, meaningful

congregational traditions and events, staff relationships and responsibilities, longstanding concepts of evangelism as prime importance, parent and church responsibilities for discipleship and formation, and more could be necessary. It is important to understand that this process is not to be entered into lightly. Adoptive ministry is not a new curriculum or ministry program that is meant to be the focus of a single semester. This is a core praxis that shapes all other aspects of student ministry and many aspects of broader church ministry. Adoption of a new ministry praxis requires the pastor to understand all that is involved and to be supportive of the need for change. This was an important part of the project's success at First Baptist Church.

Once the facilitator and the pastor are in agreement about the current context of systemic abandonment and the need to work towards creating a better ministry praxis at the church, the next step is to educate parents of students to understand this same reality. This step can be accomplished through a variety of methods (a retreat, an annual parent meeting, or a small group series), but it needs to be well designed, publicized, and prepared fully. Again, having ample material to help navigate this topic is essential.<sup>9</sup> The goal is to raise awareness through education and generate energy to increase the leadership's desire for change and not just come up with a few action steps to try to tackle the issue.

Awareness involves both the mind and the heart, before sustainable transformation can occur. Action steps can be used as a tool to build understanding but should not be the goal of the process. Evaluation of the parents' level of commitment should be done before proceeding further. If parents are not willing to help take on changing the current praxis,

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<sup>9</sup> Chapters 1 through 3 of this project offer substantial information to engage this topic.

the facilitator needs to pull back and work on further education. If parents of students are receptive, the next step is to work with the pastor to find the best way to raise this topic with the rest of the church's lay leadership. In the context of First Baptist, this was done at a church council meeting with youth parents present. A facilitator made a presentation of the material and what had been done to that point, and the pastor shared her thoughts and support. A time for questions was offered afterwards.

With the first comprehensive step of Phase One complete, (educating and aligning all of the "parent" figures), the second comprehensive step is to engage the entire church. This needs to be planned out well and in collaboration with pastoral leadership. The church needs to understand the current state of affairs for adolescents and hear about the effects of systemic abandonment. While this sounds like a daunting task, in most small to moderately sized churches if the first phase of the implementation plan is done well (gaining the acceptance of youth leadership, staff, youth parents, and lay leadership), bringing along the rest of the congregation will not be as monumental as it seems. Likely there already will be general conversation about the work being done and the topics being discussed. At this time, the task is to focus that attention on the issue of systemic abandonment and widen the circle of understanding. It is crucial to the future of this plan that this step is done thoroughly and effectively, as it will lead to the larger church understanding the role it needs to play in the healthy identity development of students. In this project, the task was approached in multiple ways. Sermons, Sunday morning small groups, newsletter articles, website information, social media posts, and promotional pieces all helped communicate the need for change.

Once the reality of systemic abandonment and the need to rethink ministry praxis towards students has been understood by the larger congregation, Phase Two of the implementation plan, working within the tension to create intentional attachment cycles that promote belonging among the whole church, can begin. It is important to remember that once the level of anxiety in the church has been raised through proper education and discussion, it is important to communicate how that anxiety is being addressed and how the congregation can further engage the issue. In this way, both avenues of communication are needed and prove helpful.

### Phase Two: The Work of Shaping Belonging

Creating anxiety in the church is designed to promote the willingness to change. Drawing from the Kingdom trajectory goals and guidelines, Phase Two examines what to change in order to better create belonging and attachment within the church to repair the damage done by systemic abandonment. The work of Phase Two may require broadening the project team. Most likely, during the first phase certain areas of the church's current praxis have come to mind as needing re-evaluation. Drawing from the responses and thoughts that surfaced, Phase Two should engage the three evaluative steps: what is taught and how, events and activities specific to student ministry, and church traditions that are (or could be) better used to reinforce students' feelings of attachment to the church. With the goals in mind and the guidelines for evaluation identified, Phase Two can begin.

Step #1 focuses on evaluating what is taught and how curriculum is communicated by instructors and experienced by students. This step seeks to balance the

important work of biblical and theological education with the need to connect these concepts to the values and motivations that inspire them. Ideally, the lessons will include ways in which these values shape development of not just spirituality but also understanding of self, social connections, sexuality, and societal expectations. This is done to provide a more holistic approach to faith and life and should include examples, and live testimonies, of how adults live out these lessons.

Step #2 concentrates on aligning the events and activities within the student ministry calendar with the goals and guidelines of the project, taking care to intentionally look for ways to apply attachment cycles in the process. Inclusion of action steps that will lead to positive experiences and lasting memories can be as beneficial as event scheduling and developing teaching themes. Opportunities for healthy adult involvement should be multiplied. Creating space for students to experience trust and vulnerability in a constructive way is desired. It is important to ensure attachment cycles are being directed to the whole church family and not just the student ministry. It is crucial to remain mindful that this evaluation process could expose the need to challenge or change some events that are considered almost sacred in a particular church setting. Acknowledging that this could take time and patience involves recognizing that just because parents understand the need to reshape ministry efforts to respond to the effects of systemic abandonment does not mean that students necessarily will. Proceeding cautiously and realizing that some changes will need to be implemented gradually will lead to the best results over time. This component also should look at the possibility of adding activities that celebrate rites of passage and life accomplishments for students as a way of reinforcing the church's connection to all aspects of life. For example, some rites of

passage in today's culture are finishing elementary school and entering junior high, turning thirteen, getting a driver's license, graduating from high school, and entering the workforce (e.g., a teen's first part-time job).

Step #3 will apply the same goals and guidelines as in the previous step to the church traditions celebrated throughout the year. This begins by looking for places that can provide experiential opportunities to promote belonging and by working with the leaders who shepherd those areas. Gaining their partnership is worth the time it might take. This part of the process should include close work with and feedback from the pastoral staff.

As mentioned, in the context of First Baptist, the liturgical calendar offered some natural space for attachment. By celebrating church seasons and intentionally finding ways to draw students into the larger context, First Baptist leadership found ways to create a felt sense of connection.<sup>10</sup> Special attention should be given to weekly worship gatherings as well. By using the goals and guidelines stated in this project to create space for attachment cycles to reinforce belonging within the church, the task of identity development in Christ is strengthened.

### Phase Three: Mending the Safety Nets

With a plan to create new and better cycles of attachment in student ministry through what is taught and how it is communicated, along with activities and events designed to connect students with one another and the larger church, the implementation

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<sup>10</sup> The power of this approach was made evident by a student who showed up for the first Sunday of Advent after being absent all semester. When asked about his unexpected return he commented, "I had to come, you can't have Christmas without Advent!" This was a fantastic example of how attachment created a bond of connection that went beyond head knowledge and understanding.

plan moves into the next phase. Phase Three addresses the current context of ministry by acknowledging the need to broaden the resource of adult participation and recognizes the need to expand the scope of spiritual and emotional development necessary to form healthy identity in adolescents. In Step #1, the project team should look for ways to increase healthy adult participation within student ministry. This work should have been started during the previous phase, when reshaping youth events and activities. The goal of this step is to make sure that adult involvement is working to rebuild social capital and that adults understand how to demonstrate vulnerability and interdependency in order to promote family skills and model desired behavior. This can be done through further communication with adults about the goals and objectives that the student ministry is working towards as well as reminders about how their actions and interactions help achieve those goals.

Step #2 focuses on expanding the church's understanding of when student ministry begins and ends and recognizing the need to better shape the emotional and spiritual development of adolescents. To address the damage done by systemic abandonment, the church cannot wait until students enter student ministry to begin repairing attachment. The more work that can be done to establish healthy bonds of connection at younger ages proves essential to the work that occurs in adolescent ministry. To do this, the church must understand its dual responsibility both to work towards healthy parenting skills and to equip parents in the congregation with healthy parenting skills as well. This should be a holistic approach addressing all aspects of child development and not just spiritual needs. By investing in building a healthy home life with strong parenting skills, the church gives the best foundation possible to ensure



students will understand and embrace the values and lessons of belonging and attachment within their church family.

The work of Phase Three offers valuable assets to a new ministry praxis by repairing and reestablishing what Clark describes as the “safety net” that undergirds the adolescent journey. In essence, this is a system of support designed to catch students when they fall, reducing possible trauma and helping them to develop spiritual and emotional resiliency as they learn to continually regain footing on the journey to adulthood.<sup>11</sup> Adoptive ministry has recognized the need for such support, due to the damage systemic abandonment has done to attachment. This makes the work of Phase Three essential to the long-term success of a new student ministry praxis.

As the implementation phases take place, the new praxis takes shape when changes are incorporated into the life of the student ministry and church. It should be noted that the evaluation process is continuous within the phases and steps, not dependent upon the completion of the process. For example, buy-in and commitment in the first phase must be monitored before moving forward with changing praxis. Likewise, creating anxiety should be tempered with hope and action, not left to spiral towards despair. Also, changes to events and activities should be evaluated to make sure the outcomes align with the intended Kingdom trajectory. It is important to remember that ministry practices should always be evaluated by the effectiveness of their efforts based on the needs of the students. As suggested, annual comprehensive evaluations of ministry efforts are

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<sup>11</sup> Clark and Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World*, 199.

recommended on an ongoing basis. As with adoptive parenting, setbacks are expected and anticipated as learning opportunities and should not be dismissed as failure.

### **Timeline and Target Populations**

With a plan for the new ministry strategy in place, the target population needs to be identified and a timeline for specific ministry implementation should be established. This new ministry strategy recognizes several target populations within the steps of the process yet understands the ultimate target population of focus consists of students in middle and high school ministries. Recognizing that the time frame for differing contexts will vary, below is a recommended timeline as well as the pace of how the project was implemented at First Baptist Church.

Phase One was scheduled to occur from August 2015 to September 2016. During that time frame, Step #1 was envisioned as engaging those who serve in a leadership or “church parent” role (e.g., youth leadership, pastoral staff, youth parents, and church lay leadership) to help them to recognize the dire reality of a student’s departure from the church, to understand why it happens, and to be open to consider the concept of systemic abandonment and the need for change. About fourteen months were allowed to complete this step. This time frame was allotted due to the planning and time needed to create leadership buy-in, to elevate the anxiety level of the congregation, and to receive feedback. Step #2 was envisioned as engaging the local church with the effects of systemic abandonment in order to raise the anxiety of the congregation regarding the need for change. About two months were allowed for this, in order to permit the

following: a sermon on the topic to be preached and an eight-week course to be taught during the Sunday morning small group hour.

Phase Two was scheduled to occur from July 2016 to September 2017. During that time frame, Step #1 was envisioned as a time to evaluate and reshape what was taught to students and how curriculum was communicated by instructors and experienced by students. Again, fourteen months were allotted. This time frame was expected, because it allowed for two semesters of teaching periods to be implemented and gave a month after each for evaluation and refinement. Step #2 was designed to align the events and activities within the student ministry calendar with Kingdom trajectory goals and guidelines, while taking care to intentionally look for ways to apply attachment cycles in the process. About fourteen months were allotted for this to cycle through a full year of the youth calendar and to allow for evaluation and revision. Step #3 sought to apply the same goals and guidelines as in the previous step to the church traditions celebrated throughout the year. This step provided another fourteen-month time period to cycle through the church year and allow for evaluation and revision.

Phase Three was scheduled to occur from September 2016 to September 2017. During that time frame, Step #1 sought to rebuild social capital within the church and better offer attachment through modeled behavior and interdependent relationships between students and healthy adults. A full year was allowed for it. This time frame was expected, due to the need to educate adults on the value of the intended goals and to create new opportunities to foster connection. Step #2 was envisioned as expanding the church's understanding of when student ministry begins and ends and by recognizing the need to better shape the emotional and spiritual development (both prior to and after)

adolescence. Twelve months were dedicated to this step. This time frame was allotted in order to allow for churchwide education about the need to expand ministry efforts to establish healthy bonds of connection at younger ages and to engage in ways to better equip parents in the congregation with healthy parenting skills.

The effects of systemic abandonment on adolescents have damaged the relationship of students with the church. Through lessons learned in this project from adoptive ministry and adoptive parenting about how to engage abandonment and loss, First Baptist believed it could create a new praxis of ministry to repair this damage. By focusing on God's promise of belonging to the family of God and working towards the goal of ongoing attachment to the church, the above timeline was designed to offer a new ministry praxis that would create a more faithful action for churches with respect to student ministry.

## CHAPTER 7

### IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION

The primary purpose of this doctoral project was to lead the congregation of First Baptist Church to understand the effects of systemic abandonment of adolescents by today's culture and the Church and then confront these effects by applying what could be learned about identity, belonging, and attachment from a biblical and cultural (secular) understanding of adoption in order to reshape ministry praxis to more faithfully align with the work of God's Kingdom. The goal has been to create a new praxis that repairs and reinforces identity in Christ by internalizing belonging to God's family based on adoption as full sons and daughters of God. In light of the groundwork laid by Chapter 6 to accomplish this task, Chapter 7 will report on the application of the implementation plan within the specific context of First Baptist Church and discuss the results.

This chapter highlights the preparation and education component for the church that was essential in raising the anxiety of the congregation in order to create space for change. It also illustrates how the process of working towards creating intentional attachment cycles transformed the approach to curriculum and calendar, presenting three key youth events that were redesigned to grow connection to the larger church.

Additionally, the chapter shows how the liturgical calendar helped connect students to the broader Body of Christ beyond First Baptist and explains the exponential rewards of ministering to parents. The results of this plan were encouraging, and First Baptist has continued to develop further practices to support this endeavor.

### **Phase One: First Baptist's Response to Understanding Systemic Abandonment**

Following the implementation process and timeline discussed in Chapter 6, Phase One involved creating anxiety and the need for change through careful preparation and education. The target audiences were identified first as those in leadership, the parents, and then the congregation. The actual timeline for this process varied based on how quickly each group of people adopted the philosophy. This phase drew heavily from the contextual research presented in the first part of this paper.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Step #1: Bringing Church Leadership Onboard**

This step encompassed the formal preparation and education component. It consisted of two mini-steps designed to educate the church leadership or “parents” and the congregation of First Baptist as a whole. The first mini-step began in August 2015 with a four-month study with the Youth Leadership Team at First Baptist Church. The study focused on the changes to adolescence, the effects of systemic abandonment, and the response of the church. This was an affirming group of like-hearted leaders who helped engage in honest discussion and created what would become the talking points and training material for this project. Several members of this team were also able to

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<sup>1</sup> For further details, see Chapters 1 through 3 of this discussion.

attend Youth Specialties in Fall 2015 for an intensive time of learning and the chance to hear from other sources regarding these topics.<sup>2</sup> By December, this group was committed to helping change the mindset of the church and finding better ways to connect students to their faith and the First Baptist family. This group would continue to serve as the project team guiding the implementation process.

Everyone on the Youth Leadership Team had young children. This was an important factor. As they began to understand the effects of systemic abandonment and wrestle with the church's response, I began asking them questions like this one: "In the blink of an eye your kid is going to be in sixth grade, what can we do now to make sure that when this day comes First Baptist will be an important part of your child's life as well as the life of your family?" It was not a question meant to manipulate. I also am the parent of young children and have a vested interest beyond my job to answer the same question. It served as a rally point for all team members.

With the Youth Leadership Team agreeing to serve as the project team, the project moved ahead to the next component, engaging the pastor. The pastor at First Baptist, who happens to be my wife, was already aware of the effects of systemic abandonment on adolescence and was supportive of the project. As such, plans were made to discuss the project with the rest of the ministerial staff. The staff was given the talking points, and resources were created from the study with the Youth Leadership Team to ensure their ability to address future questions.

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<sup>2</sup> It is only fair to note that these topics were not new to my leaders or church staff. I began my service here at First Baptist of Columbia a few years into my Doctor of Ministry program. After building trust and getting to know the context of this new ministry, I began moving towards this concept for my project. My church leadership was well aware of my work and was very supportive. The main task was moving the needle of anxiety into the broader church from wanting to help me with a doctoral project to realizing the need to do something different for our students.

In December 2015, the project was formally introduced to the Personnel Committee with the pastor present during an annual review intended to discuss goals for the following year. The Personnel Committee and the pastor affirmed moving forward with the project. The process of educating parents began early in 2016. This culminated in a parent event, an intensive day course on systemic abandonment and how the church needed to respond. The parent event resulted in an affirmation of the project. As such, and in consultation with the pastor, a plan was made to inform the lay leadership about the work of the project. Meetings were set with the staff and project team to evaluate feedback and concerns that had surfaced in Step #1, in preparation for Step #2: engaging the congregation.

#### Step #2: Raising the Anxiety of the Church

In looking for the best way to raise awareness of the whole congregation about the effects of systemic abandonment, the church leadership at First Baptist chose to combine all of the adult small groups that met on Sunday mornings for an eight-week series from June 19, 2016 to August 31, 2016. The project team worked to develop a curriculum for the series entitled “Looking for a Village: A Conversation about Reshaping the Church’s Response to the Faith Journey of Young People.” The series was led mainly by me as the associate pastor for youth, college, and young adults but also included facilitation by the chair of the Teaching Team and the pastor. I was asked to preach a sermon by the same title in both morning services the Sunday before the series began.<sup>3</sup> The series was publicized for six weeks prior to the start date to build anticipation.

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<sup>3</sup> With the encouragement of the pastor, we decided to play up the idea that this was tied to my doctoral work. The pastor had done a doctoral project with the church the previous summer and had good response. Living in a college town, our congregation was very inclined to help with the idea of furthering



The series covered issues such as the broad context of social and cultural development that have shaped Western society's ideas of adolescence, understanding how adolescence has changed in its relatively short existence, exploring what is meant by adolescence (how it is defined, when it begins and ends, what comes after it) and how this period of life has expanded, the extreme expectations put on children and the lack of expectations from late adolescents, the concept of systemic abandonment and how the developmental tasks of adolescence have been effected by this reality, and the Church's response to adolescents over the past century. The series format was lecture based with audience participation and discussion, combined with two sessions of small group work designed to highlight personal experience and the local church's history. The pastor led the seventh session as a way to have her voice heard and to lend support to the project among the broader congregation. The classes were well attended, and the participants engaged the subject matter with sincerity. To promote continuity, summaries of each week's class were posted online as well as having printouts available in the class.<sup>4</sup>

These classes were essential to the success of this project. The series allowed the facilitator to engage church members who otherwise would have been outside the scope of normal interaction with the student ministry. The stories shared in response to the information personalized the problem and helped create a felt need for change. Having eight weeks to discuss, digest, and respond to the issues was a healthy amount of time. This series validated the deep dive into context done in Chapters 1 through 3 of the project, as this research was used to craft the discussion of several classes and

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our education. We drew on this willingness to encourage more people to take part in the series. It turned out to be an effective strategy.

<sup>4</sup> See sample in Appendix 1.

demonstrated the broader system of abandonment well. In particular, the discussion of Elkind's concept of "Nuclear to Permeable Family" with the group was fascinating.<sup>5</sup> The class appreciated learning about how their lives and families had been shaped by this shift. It was also a great way to recognize weaknesses in our family systems, making that a main focus. Outside resources and videos also were used to facilitate conversation.<sup>6</sup> The pastor's input added weight and credibility with the congregation. The project team recorded ideas and suggestions that arose in the series for application in Phase Two of the implementation process.

At the conclusion of the series, details of the project team's continued plans to reshape ministry efforts were given, and adults were specifically asked if they would like to offer their direct assistance in working towards solutions. Many adults who had not previously volunteered to work with students signed up. General follow-up with the church happened through the church newsletter and annual report, while individual follow-up was done with those indicating they would like to continue to help. This turned out to be an excellent way to create healthy anxiety, expose the need for change within the church, and begin mobilizing people for ministry as the First Baptist "safety net." It also set the stage to start the work of reshaping the current youth ministry praxis in the church.

### **Phase Two: Creating a New Praxis at First Baptist**

Ongoing evaluation four weeks into the summer series determined the congregation was supportive of the concepts being introduced and was open to seeing

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<sup>5</sup> Elkind, *Ties that Stress*, 49-59.

<sup>6</sup> See sample in Appendix 1.

change occur. In July 2016, the project team met to begin Phase Two. This involved examining the existing ministry practices to try and incorporate intentional attachment cycles that better promoted belonging.

### Step #1: Evaluating What and How Teaching Occurs

Step #1 of this phase focused on evaluating what was being taught (curriculum) and how it was communicated. This step balanced the important work of biblical and theological education with the need to attach these concepts to the values and motivations that inspired them. It also included the evaluation of teaching topics to better include a holistic application to a student's understanding of self, social connections, sexuality, and societal expectations—and not just spirituality. The mid-summer meeting on July 2016 was an annual occurrence to plan and calendar student ministry events and curriculum for the following school year. As such, it was a natural place to begin this step.

To keep the goals and guidelines at the forefront of everyone's minds during the implementation plan, the project team summarized the key theological conclusions in Chapter 6 into a single, in-depth question:

How does this (ministry/ activity/ event/ lesson/ time of teaching) communicate belonging and promote proper identity on a head and heart level, proactively seek to connect the student to the broader family of the church, apply to the full life of the student, reveal the values important to the family of faith, provide positive adult involvement that demonstrates how these values are lived out, and create space to reaffirm belonging after setbacks and failures?

This question was then applied at each phase of evaluation. In this way, using the identified guidelines and goals for evaluation, analysis of the current curriculum revealed that Sunday morning efforts, while well intentioned, were focused overwhelmingly on head knowledge and lacking in transformative connection. While the strength of Sunday morning adult

involvement created potential for modeling interdependence, the material lacked a holistic approach that could be applied outside a faith setting.<sup>7</sup> It was a comprehensive approach to Christian Education, but it did not connect with students' lives beyond their religious selves. Looking deeply at the material, the team realized that many of the behaviors that were highlighted and right beliefs that were espoused were presented as absolutes, with no real connection to the values behind these instructions as the desired motivator for spiritual development. The team felt strongly that it was important to incorporate a curriculum that would reinforce identity across multiple developmental areas, while promoting and understanding the values that expressed and guided that identity.

For example, in the lesson sets on giving, this curriculum talked about helping the poor, tithing 10 percent, being cheerful givers, and not being greedy. While the lessons were theologically sound, they did not connect to the believer's motivation to give nor to the value of generosity. Overall, the team felt this was an important component to include to better promote identity and belonging.

The process of searching for a curriculum that would better facilitate the identified concepts for students led the project team to an older Episcopalian curriculum called *Journey to Adulthood (J2A)*.<sup>8</sup> This material offered many attractive characteristics: consideration of developmental stages in comprehension; important use of right-brained

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<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that this was a bad resource. Initially when the Youth Leadership Team chose the curriculum for student ministry prior to this project, they were excited by its claim to be a holistic approach to spiritual education. One of the selling points was that as a cumulative five-year curriculum, this material would cover everything students needed to know about faith by the time they graduated. Viewed from a standpoint of beliefs and behaviors, this material was well written, offered multiple teaching aids and resources for leaders, and was theologically sound. However, when we considered that the Sunday morning small group hour was our most consistent chance to invest in the lives of FBC students and reinforce attachment cycles, the approach fell short.

<sup>8</sup> St. Philip's Episcopal Church, *The Journey to Adulthood (J2A)*.

and left-brained activities; development of ritual and rites of passage; and encouragement for teens to explore the four areas of self, spirituality, sexuality, and society and to learn how to connect their faith to all areas of life. The material itself was a bit dated, and for use in a Baptist context it requires that some lessons be reworked in light of slight doctrinal differences; but overall, the structure was encouraging.

Upon engaging the material, the project team quickly realized the scope of this task would require more time than the summer planning session allowed. As such, the team decided to create a separate timeline for this particular component. The project team enlisted the help of the Teaching Team, and the two teams decided to form a small group of adults who enjoy lesson planning and writing to help work through the material and rewrite it for use at First Baptist. The goal is to have a first edition ready to test in August 2020. The necessity to rewrite this curriculum has created the unexpected benefit of drawing more adults into the life of student ministry who are thinking deeply about the needs of students.

To address immediate concerns identified for the teaching times, the Youth Leadership Team reshaped the experiences offered to create a balance of education and connection. To accomplish this, Sunday morning youth small groups were redesigned with a topical approach to be more experiential, connecting different aspects of life to the larger church. Mid-week gathering continued to be theologically driven with a strong dose of peer community-building activities to create shared memories. The Youth Leadership Team was intentional to stress the need for youth leaders to work to connect the beliefs and behaviors desired of students to the values of faith that should motivate those responses. The underlying goal is to use teaching times to better identify and address how

students can repurpose survival skills to become healthy family skills by engaging adults who model this behavior and teach in light of the values important to the family of faith.

## Step #2: Evaluating Youth Events and Activities

Having strengthened times of teaching through a focus on belonging and intentionally creating space to strengthen attachment, the Youth Leadership Team continued the work of the project by applying these goals to the examination of youth events and activities. Working to capitalize on the desire of the congregation to assist and due to the successful work in Phase One, the Youth Leadership Team looked at the 2016-2017 youth calendar in light of the desired Kingdom trajectory guidelines and goals to better determine ways to include more healthy adults into scheduled activities. This was done to meet the objective of creating more social capital for the students at First Baptist Church.

To accomplish this, the team first evaluated going through the Fuller Youth Institute's "Growing Young" cohort,<sup>9</sup> but realistic examination of the current resources and commitment level within the church body made it apparent that this commitment was premature. The project team kept it as a future goal and encouraged parents privately to work towards looking for five adults who could model faith and spend time with the parents' kids in their own friend circles. As an alternative, the team chose to address the issue by creating more opportunities for adults to become involved in the lives of students

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<sup>9</sup> The Fuller Youth Institute, "Growing Young / Join a Cohort," accessed March 21, 2019, <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/growingyoung/cohort>, describes the Growing Young cohort as a year-long experience that churches pay tuition to join; it includes attendance for up to four key leaders to a bi-annual summit, monthly online training, personalized coaching, diagnostic assessment and planning for next steps, and access to the cohort community.

through the church.<sup>10</sup> This was not an attempt to enlist more leaders into the student ministry but to tap into the adult gifts and resources of the congregation and connect those to the needs of students within the ministry.

Some practical ways the team recognized how to begin this process included asking people in the church who were willing to cook to help provide a meal for an event. However, instead of just preparing and dropping off the food, the adults would be asked to stay for the event. They would be introduced to the students and asked to share a few words about who they were, their college experience, what brought them to First Baptist, and what keeps them at First Baptist. Then time would be given for students to ask questions of the adults and vice versa.

Additional entry points were created. One involved asking different professionals in the church to be part of a discussion panel when the Sunday morning youth small group covered a topic on which those adults could offer input. Students and adults were given further time to connect and share over snacks afterwards. The Student Ministry Team also chose to pilot combining adult and student small groups for a set period of time. This was done in the summer of 2017 for a churchwide study of the Enneagram.<sup>11</sup> This effort created opportunity for attachment and provided a chance for the church to be

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<sup>10</sup> It needs to be mentioned that while creating more adult investment in the lives of students is essential, being smart and responsible about which adults are asked to help with this task is important. Adults should understand the ideas of systemic abandonment and the goal of supporting students without expecting anything in return. These adults also need to follow the church's policies and procedures for working with minors and at the least be willing to submit to a background check.

<sup>11</sup> The Enneagram Institute, "About The Enneagram Institute," accessed March 18, 2019, <https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/about>, defines the Enneagram as "one of the most powerful and insightful tools for understanding ourselves and others." The Enneagram is a nine-pointed symbolic model of the psyche, with each point representing a distinct personality.

more holistic in its teaching by helping students to better understand themselves and how they related to others.

One last way in which the student ministry worked to foster the growth of social capital and increase opportunities for attachment was by drastically increasing the number of adult chaperones who attended student trips and activities. For example, in July 2018 First Baptist took thirteen participants to camp: seven students and six adults. This approach required the reallocation of funds in the youth budget, but this event offered various opportunities for modeling interdependent relationships and has been worth the investment. These shared experiences also helped create the kind of attunement needed to know how to best focus ministry efforts in order to meet the needs of students.

Beyond the desire to rebuild social capital in the student ministry at First Baptist Church, the Student Leadership Team wanted to evaluate the youth calendar of events and find ways to create more opportunities for deeper attachment within the scheduled activities. This prompted a formative conversation about what attachment looks like and what makes connections work in the context of student ministry at First Baptist. The team looked at the calendar for the year and asked key questions: “What events do students anticipate?” “When students talk about these events, what sticks in their minds about them?” and “What do these things have in common?” The team discovered that often these were areas where students felt comfortable enough to be vulnerable, whether that meant being silly, being brave, or taking a risk.

The team also identified three events that seemed to bring these qualities out in First Baptist students more than others: youth camp, youth missions, and the youth ski trip. In identifying these three events, the team quickly realized that it was limiting the



connection available to students in the “youth” qualifier given to each event. This effectively was self-siloing in declaring that these events were only for students. That made the event the focus of the students’ attention and not deepening the attachment to the church, which the event could provide. The team decided to address the issue by widening the scope of these events, adding attachment cycles as a main goal, and opening participation in these events up to the broader church family.

Of the three events selected, the easiest to change was the ski trip. The ski trip already had many youth parents who volunteered to “help” with the trip. By opening this trip up to become a family ski trip (the team intentionally used the term “family” to mean churchwide as a way to promote conversation about the church as a family), space was created for students (and adults) to have the chance to share their vulnerability in a larger context. Consideration was given for the trip as to how to provide as many chances for connection as possible within the event. This resulted in intentionally choosing to all travel together, on an overnight train, to reach the ski slopes.<sup>12</sup> Plans also were made to stay in one large cabin instead of multiple condos. The idea was to make use of the common meeting space to encourage conversation and activities (while allowing parents with young children to be able to put their kids to bed yet stay close enough to their rooms to still join the larger group activities). The lodging turned out to be an incredibly important piece of the shared experience and lasting memory of the trip. Attention was given to choosing a location for skiing that closed each day at 4:00 p.m. By cutting out night skiing, the group was given more opportunity to make time for one another at night.

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<sup>12</sup> It turns out one can really get to know other people on a twelve-hour train ride.

All of these small changes to create opportunity for attachment and vulnerability shifted the event focus from a good time skiing to a good time together and fostered several great and lasting relationships between students and church members. An added benefit was the strengthening of interpersonal connections among adults as well.

The second event the team reworked was the youth mission trip. The First Baptist student ministry had started a relationship with a Lakota community in 2016 through a partnership with another church in Missouri. This church had been building ties with the First Nations community for sixteen years and had offered to let First Baptist students join their team. The Lakota experience was a profoundly spiritual encounter for the students and leaders that went. A follow-up trip was planned for the next year. When looking for ways to deepen attachment for students, the Youth Leadership Team thought it would be helpful to have the broader church share in this experience with the students. Working through the previously mentioned partnership, the project team, in coordination with the Serving Team (the leadership team at First Baptist that oversees missions work), was able to put together a family trip in 2017 for both churches.

The two churches took a group consisting of preschoolers, teenagers, young parents, older parents, adults, and senior adults to the reservation for a week to live life with their Lakota brothers and sisters. Prior to the trip, First Baptist required participants to go through training. This group met to learn about Lakota culture and history. They studied the pain that had been inflicted upon this community by the United States government and churches. The team talked about broader issues of racism, oppression, and what role faith played in demanding a response. The training stressed that the purpose of the trip was to get to know these Native American brothers and sisters who

were also co-heirs with Christ. Spending time with the Lakota people was not a “project” for the team to accomplish.

This time of preparation was important for the trip, but it was also important because of the vulnerability it created in the group and the trust participants had to place in one another. The trip itself was transformative. As a result, First Baptist has stopped referring to this trip as a mission trip (due to the connotations that the sending church has something that the other group is lacking). Instead, the Lakota trip is discussed as a pilgrimage: a chance to be with other brothers and sisters in Christ, in a sacred space, in God’s presence. An important part of this trip was the time to debrief afterwards. Once the team returned home, they continued to meet for a few weeks to talk about how they were processing the trip and to prepare an opportunity to share about their experience with the church family. The Youth Leadership Team recognized the success of their efforts in listening to the students who had participated in the trip share how important it was to them to demonstrate to their new Lakota friends that they belonged to God’s family. This trip continues to offer powerful lessons of attachment to the First Baptist church family.

The last event that the project team focused on, youth camp, was a little trickier to re-envision. Youth camp is often a sacred cow in many churches. This is a protected youth tradition that tolerates adults but does not normally celebrate their inclusion. Creating a family camp experience has been a goal at First Baptist for a while, but the reality of the logistics are daunting. For one, a large team of adult volunteers or workers are needed to do the work required to make a camp happen. Unfortunately, the people who would be willing to volunteer their time to serve are usually the ones a student ministry would want to come as participants. Second, it has proven to be a hard concept

to which adults can actually commit. When asked to go as participants, rather than volunteers or workers, many adults are not quite sure how to react. Additionally, many adults do not have much vacation time to spare, so even if they are willing to come as a camper, there needs to be a strong appeal to feel that it is restful and worth their time.

For many years the students at First Baptist had attended larger, multi-church, multi-denomination youth camps around the country. These camps were usually high energy, high activity, and worship driven. In 2016, at the end of the summer, in the middle of the small group series at the church, First Baptist students and leaders went to a camp at Green Lake, Wisconsin. This camp was a bit smaller than the ones the students had visited in recent years, but the church had a historical connection to the camp and some of the seniors had requested to return.

The camp was fairly standard in its experience: morning celebration, Bible study time, over-the-top afternoon activities, and passionate evening worship. The location itself was breathtakingly beautiful and serene. Throughout the week the student minister from First Baptist got to know the camp director and her husband. One night, in a conversation with them, the student minister began talking about the work of this project in the church and the desire of the Youth Leadership Team to create a family camp experience. The director's husband asked what was stopping the church from following this idea. The student minister responded with the reasons above as to why it was too difficult to create. The director's response was stunning. She asked, "If I gave you my staff and this location for a week next summer, could you do it?" After a pregnant pause the student minister said, "Yes." To which the director responded, "Great, let's make it happen."

This part of the project is important, because it underscores the reminder that the work of practical theology begins with the prompting of the Holy Spirit. This is not something that should have happened or that the project team could have imagined happening, but it did happen. It turned out the camp had one week in the summer that historically was a family (parents and children attend together) camp. That experience was in decline and the camp was looking for new approaches to revive it. In 2017, First Baptist took twenty-four family members from the church to Family Camp. The camp was organized with a children's track, a youth track, and an adult track that happened simultaneously during the day. The schedule built in afternoon free time to enjoy the facility and organized activities designed to create memories. Everyone shared meal time and evening worship together. There were lots of fun extras as well: a day on the lake, a date night for parents, a late-night bonfire for youth, Fourth of July fireworks, hikes in the afternoon, and a chance for a golf outing for adults who were interested.

Overall, it was a great concept and offered rich times of connection and community for kids and adults alike. Unfortunately, it was a rough experience for the students who went. The project team's evaluation revealed that for the multi-track approach to be viable, more people were needed, specifically more students, to make a family camp meaningful. The evaluation also determined that the commitment level and financial investment required of the church could not support this experience as an annual occurrence. The team concluded that the idea of a family camp was worth pursuing but did not see a way to generate enough interest to make it possible to reproduce.

Later that fall the student minister was at a gathering of sister churches in Missouri through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.<sup>13</sup> The coordinator for the region was asking about the summer, so the student minister told him about the church's family camp experiment. The coordinator was intrigued and asked if the church would do it again. The student minister responded that he did not think the church could get enough people to participate to make it viable. The coordinator said, "What if I sponsor it as a Heartland activity (the regional name) and we can get 10 or 12 of these churches to come, would you do it then?" After a pregnant pause, the student minister said, "Yes." Again, practical theology begins with the Holy Spirit's prompting. Faithful action believes not only that praxis moves towards the work of the Kingdom but that the Kingdom actively moves towards the praxis. In terms of future planning, currently eleven churches are interested and working on the Family Camp experience with First Baptist at Green Lake in 2020.

### Step #3: Evaluating Church Traditions and Worship

The family ski trip, family mission trip, and family camp were not the only events on the youth calendar that the project team worked on to create more space for connection to the larger church and to build trust, but they are the three that took the most intentional planning and work to reshape and captured the heart of the work for Step #2. Beyond the youth calendar, Step #3 engaged First Baptist's church staff to examine how the times of worship, church traditions, and seasonal events could be used better to reinforce belonging and make space for attachment within the larger church. The project team determined that

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<sup>13</sup> Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, "About CBF Heartland," accessed March 18, 2019, <http://www.cbfheartland.org/wp/about-us/>, is "a network of Baptist Christians and churches who share a passion for the Great Commission of Jesus Christ and a commitment to Baptist principles of faith and practice."

staff already had done a good job of including youth and children in the Sunday morning worship activities. Students were regularly asked to read Scripture or Responsive Readings. Often students who played an instrument or sang were given the opportunity to express their talents in the services. Students also were encouraged to serve as ushers, greeters, and in other roles on Sunday morning.

When looking for ways to offer deeper connection in worship, the project team and staff have started small and are continuing to grow. In an effort to tap into students' right-brain creativity, church leaders have asked students to help with artwork and decoration for the alter table when a specific theme in worship has lent itself to the task. For example, on Easter morning the youth helped paint a giant mural used for worship. The student ministry also spent one semester responding to the pastor's request for students to help create a series of videos to be used as illustrations for a sermon series. The pastor shared her theme and ideas for the series at the beginning of the semester and students spent the next few months studying the theme and developing short videos to use during her sermons. For World Communion Sunday, students used their small group time to prepare the communion meal for the service. To promote right-brained connection with a familiar tradition, students were asked to imagine church members taking the elements they had prepared. Leaders taught about the words spoken during the Eucharist and asked them to imagine how different congregants heard these words. These are all examples of simple ideas that when done with intentionality and forethought can help connect students into the deeper acts of worship experienced in the church each week.

Another place the project team and staff acknowledged that the church already was creating connection was in many of First Baptist's traditions. This makes sense as

these events are often unique to the community of worship (or at least the minutiae of how these traditions are carried out is unique), and they occur every year. These included high holy moments like the Christmas Eve Service and Ash Wednesday and the simple familiar classics like the Annual Church Picnic, Afternoon at the Farm, and the Fall Kickoff. As the team and staff began to think about these events, the question was asked, “What can be done to enrich the already present feelings of belonging and connection in these moments?” At the same time, both the project team and the staff recognized that these events serve as anchors in a way, keeping youth and adults connected to the larger body around events that carry a sense of importance.

As has already been mentioned, the staff also felt it was important to help students connect to the broader Body of Christ beyond First Baptist by celebrating the seasons of the liturgical calendar. Creating sacred space for seasons like Lent and Advent tie the faith of the First Baptist family to the Universal Christian faith. It gives students commonality with many other brothers and sisters in Christ across different denominations. It builds on a sense of belonging but in a larger, more Kingdom-centered way. Celebrating days like Pentecost, Epiphany, Palm Sunday, and others place the First Baptist family into the greater Church, which is the collective Family of Christ. It is another to intentionally work towards creating attachment cycles that connect students to their faith.

### **Phase Three: Continuing to Create a New Praxis at First Baptist**

With a plan to create new and better cycles of attachment in student ministry through what is taught and how it is communicated, together with activities and events designed for students (and student connection to the larger church), the project team and



staff moved to the next step of the plan. Phase Three addressed the current context of ministry at First Baptist by acknowledging the need to broaden the resource of adult participation and began recognizing the need to expand the scope of spiritual and emotional development necessary to form healthy identity in adolescents. This phase is essential to repairing the systems of support for adolescents, the “safety net,” within the church by rebuilding social capital and trust.

#### Step #1: Rebuilding Social Capital

In Step #1 of this phase, the project team evaluated efforts to increase healthy adult participation within the student ministry. This chapter already has mentioned many ways First Baptist expanded its resources by seeking to involve more healthy adults in the lives of its students. The efforts of these participating adults have created more social capital, increased models of desired behavior, and have deepened trust and attachment.

A wonderful result has been how these adults also have grown in their faith, as they allowed themselves to learn from the interdependent relationships that were being formed with students. This step required consistent evaluation of adult participation to ensure healthy relationships were being formed and that core concepts were being lived out by the adults.

#### Step #2: Expanding the Scope of Ministry

The final piece of the work entailed in this project involved expanding the scope of student ministry. Essentially, the church needed to realize and accept that student ministry covers a vast range, from infancy to adulthood, and that healthier families ultimately lead to healthier youth. Student ministries need to work with preschool and

children's ministries to stem the tide of systemic abandonment early and often. They also need to stay connected to college and young adult ministries to assure students that just because young people have graduated does not mean they no longer have a place to belong. Beyond the system of church ministries, student ministry (and the church) needs to take seriously the reality that the best investment it can make in the lives of its students is investing in the lives of those students' parents as soon as their children are born. It also means that the church needs to do a better job of helping to care for single parents raising kids or struggling to navigate divorce. If the church claims to understand the spiritual effects of systemic abandonment on adolescence, then surely it can understand the emotional and developmental toll that broken attachments in the physical family life can bring. This goes back to needing a more holistic approach in care and ministry for the church family.

This is a growing area of ministry for First Baptist but one that has been rewarding to see. First Baptist Church works hard not just to minister with parents but to minister to parents as well. The church has started small groups; hosted parenting seminars; expanded ministry events, with young families in mind; helped to educate parents on best practices with children; and worked to equip parents with tools to talk about difficult subjects like faith, sex, and consent. The church has seen friendships and support groups grow out of these efforts and has seen the number of young families in the church increase.

This new life brings energy and excitement to senior adults who have invested so much in the church and want to see it grow. As the kids of these young families grow up, the student ministry hopes to continue to find ways to create stronger and better

attachment cycles in ministry that connect with them and shape their identity in such a way that they know that they belong to the Church and to the family of God. Through the example of the adults in church involved in the lives of students, First Baptist believes that these students now are more deeply learning the values and beliefs of what it means to be family and that this knowledge will guide the decisions that can help them lead a life that honors God and others. This is the faithful action this new ministry praxis seeks to live into. This is the future of adoptive ministry.

## CONCLUSION

This project was created out of a felt need that the approach to student ministry at First Baptist was missing something vital. Despite all the resources, training, tradition, and programming, the efforts of First Baptist student ministry seemed to be missing the mark when it came to connecting students long term to their faith and to the family of God. Through the work of practical theology, the student leadership at the church came to realize that the ministry's Kingdom trajectory had lost its focus and that its actions needed to be rethought in ways to make them more faithful. On the surface this appeared to be a call to reevaluate programming or rethink the philosophy of ministry, but on a spiritual level it revealed something deeper.

In Scripture the idea of “missing the mark” carries with it a specific meaning. The Greek word *hamartia* was originally a term used in archery to describe an arrow missing its target. In the New Testament, this word is the same one that is translated as “sin.”<sup>1</sup> Romans 3:23 states, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Missing the mark is a common problem for humanity and for ministry. Scripture both comforts and confronts us on this issue. It comforts because it tells us that God recognizes our tendency to fail and, despite our shortcomings, God still chose to make a way for us to be full members of the family (Romans 5:8). It confronts us by helping us to see that if we continue on a path that is not aimed at our target, our work will not produce life (Romans 6:23). Scripture says that when we recognize that our aim is no longer true, it is important that we admit it, ask forgiveness where necessary, and work towards adjusting our

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<sup>1</sup> *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary*, 1996 ed., s.v. “sin.”

trajectory back to the target. When we do this, we make room for healing and allow the Kingdom of God to draw near (Proverbs 28:13; Matthew 3:3; 4:17; Acts 3:19).

I believe this project has shown that student ministry is missing the mark. This is not to say that student ministry is bad or that it willfully tries to lead students astray. Rather, I think it reminds us that student ministry is a human effort to convey a divine message and, as such, prone to the temptations and trappings common to humanity. The work of this project has brought comfort in light of this fact by reminding me that my identity, and the identity of my students, does not depend on always getting it right. It has reassured me of my belonging and my place in God's family, and it is out of that assurance that I am motivated to do better.

This project also has confronted me by exposing many ways that the student ministry I shepherd and lead (as well as the wider ecosystem of ministry to students) has missed the mark and is not being as fruitful as it could be—and in some cases, has become life-taking instead of life-giving. This project has taken great pains to show how the Church and student ministry have contributed to the damaging effects of systemic abandonment. Many of the systems that were once designed to nurture individual students in faith have been overridden with adult goals of assimilation, numerical growth, sustaining the system, and pursuing professional validation. This discussion also has demonstrated how the driving focus on confessions of right belief and expected behavior have decreased students' felt reality of belonging, resulting in broken attachment and loss of trust. In this process, by continuing to focus only on spiritual aspects of development, the Church has lost its voice in communicating how faith is vital in all aspects of life.

Without a more holistic approach, students' survival skills allow them to keep their faith identity from applying to the multiple selves they develop to function in a world of systemic abandonment, masking their loneliness and distrust. Exploring the church's role as parent has uncovered the responsibility that the Church has to meet students where they are, rather than expecting them to conform to its needs. In the role of parent, those in the local church have the opportunity to feel the gravity for understanding the damage that loss and abandonment have created and the work it must do in order to repair this damage. To do this work, we must move past our competing models of siloed ministries and labor together as one body to build connection and attachment to God and to the Body of Christ.

Through the prompting of the Holy Spirit and the work of practical theology, this project has exposed several ways that First Baptist's student ministry has missed the mark. Recognizing that our praxis and actions were less than faithful has been painful, but necessary. Only when we see our shortcomings and admit our failures can we seek the healing and guidance that restores our trajectory and brings the work of the Kingdom near. This was our moment of confession.

We confessed that in our efforts to reach more students we have often overlooked the needs of the ones entrusted to us by God. We confessed that our current ministry practices in many ways promoted systemic abandonment. We confessed that we have sacrificed the heartfelt message and beauty of belonging for the convenience and conformity of behavior and right belief. And we have confessed that, as parents, we (the church) have ignored the hurt of our kids and the work needed to bring healing.

Now, as we sit with those words of confession, we allow the power of God's Spirit to pour out forgiveness and bring restoration. We look for new ways to breathe life

and truth into the lives of our students through the power of adoptive ministry and the tools of attachment to promote belonging and restore proper identity. We commit to educating our congregations and leadership to the sins we have confessed and the new life being brought about by the work of the Spirit. In the spirit of Proverbs 3:6, we submit our ways to God and ask God to straighten our paths. This means we must accept the responsibility to thoroughly engage our ministry efforts and events and reevaluate them, based on our new understanding of our Kingdom trajectory guided by the truths of adoptive ministry. Finally, we seek to expand the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God here on earth by taking a more holistic approach as to how that Kingdom brings life to all areas of our lives.

At First Baptist, we have experienced the promptings of the Holy Spirit to recognize our shortcomings and confess our sins through the work of practical theology and this project. I believe God has been faithful and just to forgive and bring new life to our ministry praxis (1 John 1:9). As a result of this project and the guidance of the lessons learned from adoptive ministry, we stress the need to promote belonging and create attachment in our student ministry and congregation. We have made the work of reflection, evaluation, and implementation a normal focus in our yearly planning process. Following our initial project timeline, we are continuing to work on the development of a more holistic curriculum for students to be implemented in 2020. We are also continuing our focus on understanding how to best serve the parents of children in our congregation and to equip them to better meet the developmental needs of their kids. We are currently planning another family ski trip for 2019 and are continuing a collaborative plan with eleven other churches to create a family camp experience in 2020. Our family camp

efforts have allowed us to share the ideas of adoptive ministry and the lessons learned from this project with these partner churches, as we work together to shape this experience. As these events and focuses take root, my goal is to see this move from a concept identified with my doctoral work to one that is identified with what it means to be a part of our First Baptist family.

Family can be a powerful metaphor to counteract the damage done by systemic abandonment. By understanding the beauty and intentionality of our adoption into the family of God and the strength and permanence of that connection, we can help students (and adults) understand their true identity. By adapting and engaging the tools we have learned through studying the attachment needs of children who have been adopted and the important parenting skills used to meet these needs, the church can more effectively create bonds of attachment between students, their Heavenly Father, and the Church. These connections will help reinforce the value of the person first versus a value based on the beliefs and behaviors they demonstrate. As students understand what it means to be a part of the family, through the consistent modeling of their brothers and sisters in Christ, their actions and values will begin to reflect that of the family. This is the Good News. This is faithful action. This is our new praxis of ministry.



## APPENDIX

### SAMPLE OF ADULT CURRICULUM COVERED IN EIGHT-WEEK SERIES

*Below is an overview of what was covered in the eight-week summer series in 2016 along with a sample of the session from Week #4.*

#### ***Looking for a Village: A Conversation about Reshaping the Church's Response to the Faith Journey of Young People***

*Week #1 – Social & Cultural Development Shaping Western Society's Ideas of Adolescence*

*Week #2 – Understanding How Adolescence Has Changed*

*Week #3 – Defining & Exploring Adolescence*

*Week #4 – Examining How Adolescence Has Expanded*

*Week #5 – Extreme Expectations vs. Lack of Expectations*

*Week #6 – Systemic Abandonment and Its Effect on Adolescents*

*Week #7 – The Church's Response to Adolescents*

*Week #8 – How Should We Respond Here at First Baptist Church*

#### **WEEK #4 – EXAMINING HOW ADOLESCENCE HAS EXPANDED**

Review Session 4 (July 10, 2016)

So far in our series we have looked at the context of childhood and adolescence as a way to better understand our current culture. We began, if you will, with a 30,000 ft. view that recognized the effects of the Protestant Reformation and the Industrial revolution as two major influencers shaping our Western culture and ultimately our understanding of family.

Coming down to a 10,000 ft. perspective, we saw that as a stage of life, adolescence as we understand it is fairly new. Yet within its 100+ year lifespan, the changes that have occurred in the development process have been substantial. We've noted that as a period of time, adolescence is expanding, both beginning earlier and extending later into the mid to late twenties. We discussed varying traditional approaches to child-rearing and how consumerism has changed the landscape of expectations for kids and youth.

Last week we hovered at 1,000 ft. above to see how all of this is actually affecting life in recent history and today. We looked at the pressures and expectations that surround childhood and adolescence and the growing resistance to handing over "adult" responsibilities, leaving young people in a place of stagnation and distress. We closed with a concept introduced by Dr. Chap Clark that connects all of these pieces into what he describes as the systemic abandonment of adolescence. This can be a difficult phrase for us to hear and understand, so in this session we will hear 3 different clips of Dr. Clark as he explains the findings from his research entitled "the Hurt Project":

*Played a clip of Dr. Chap Clark on the Effects of Systemic Abandonment*

When it comes to youth ministry, I'm not sure that the lessons I (Michael) have learned and the tools I have been given are really all that effective. I have been working with young people now for over half of my life, professionally for over 16 years. My seminary experience taught me to create great youth ministry programs and engage students in their spiritual journeys. I chose to follow that calling in the Church and have served in some incredible congregations. Over the years I have been able to maintain and grow the models of ministry I inherited, but I have come to realize through this experience that the model of ministry that I have learned from the churches I have served in is, by and large, a sanctified set of boxes and hoops that youth have to conform to

in order to be accepted. That was never my intention. But in retrospect, I feel like it is an honest observation, especially given Chap Clark's thoughts on abandonment.

We as a church have the opportunity to change this, to lead in a new direction. To do this, we need to really understand the needs and challenges facing our students. Listen as Chap Clark talks about what he learned about the world of adolescence through his study:

*Played Clip of Dr. Chap Clark from his lecture, "Inside the World of Teenagers"*

It can be easy to think, "That isn't any different from when I was a teenager. I acted different in church than I did around my friends and I felt like my parents didn't know me. So why is this any different?" It is a fair question and one that you need to understand. The first book I ever read that helped me to look at this differently was Patricia Hersch's *A Tribe Apart*. It was originally published in 1998. In it she observed that the social structures in high schools were changing. No longer was the pyramid of popularity in place. By this she meant no longer was there a small group of "popular" students at the top with the rest of the school trying to ascend to the upper echelons of cool.

Gone are the days when the vast majority of the school secretly longs to be the star football player, head cheerleader, or the Prom king or queen. Instead, these power dichotomies now exist in multiple smaller clusters. In essence, if a child is part of the soccer team, participates in the band, does well in math, and is part of a youth group at a church, each of these areas will have its own set of rules and structures that unofficially govern it. The leader of the soccer team may not enjoy the same position in youth group or may not be welcomed in band. The main shift that Hersch observed is that loyalty was no longer to an individual but to a system. As long as you were following the rules of the system, you were affirmed.

When I was in high school, if my friend went out partying on Friday night and led in Sunday School on Sunday morning, that friend knew there was a disconnect. There was something inauthentic about it. We might even call it hypocritical. Today, if the same scenario occurred, the student is much less likely to see any issue with the behavior because that student is being authentic to each group or tribe. They are following the social rules that are expected within each cluster, and this weighs heavier than any consistent sense of morality.

Clark's example of students locking arms is a brilliant illustration of this to me. In previous generations, adolescence looked like a group of people in a circle facing each other. The people we locked arms with growing up became important to our community. There was a sense of mutuality and belonging. Hell or high water, we had each other. Clark suggests that today, adolescents still gather and lock arms. But instead of facing each other, they lock arms back to back. There is a connection to the tribe, but the purpose is self-preservation. We need these people to survive.

This is what Clark means when he says students have lost a sense of their CORE self. Instead, now we see students creating multiple selves or identities for different situations. This is incredibly destructive to the process of individuation and the path to adulthood, because it delays the work of real identity formation and creates multiple shells of what we think we need to be in order to get by. If that wasn't bad enough, I see this model merging or giving way to a new playing field that has become even more complex and destructive: the advent of social media.

In CNN's news report, "Being 13," students talk about the enormous pressure to create the right persona online. They will often try out several different "characters" of themselves, if you will, to see which one gets the most likes. The downside is that many times the negative critiques can be the best way to gain popularity. This can be seen in the surge of cyberbullying and social media aggression. No longer do teens have to wonder how they are being perceived. Each post is quantified, rated, and judged multiple times per day. The stress is incredible.

*\*\* This is an area that would take much more time than we have to discuss for this series. CNN's news report is eye-opening and can be seen in full on YouTube. I would encourage you to check it out, but be ready to be heartbroken.*

The model of youth ministry where we try and take kids from the fringes to being committed or core leaders no longer works. In the world described above, there is no such thing as core kids and fringe kids. You cannot assume, "These kids are doing well and these kids over here are the ones we need to be concerned about." EVERY KID IS A FRINGE KID. We see this as our best and brightest youth group superstars head off to college and, within weeks, set their faith on a shelf to adapt to a new system of expectations. Clark talks about why this happens when he identifies ways that the Church has contributed to systemic abandonment.

*Played third clip from Dr. Clark's lecture on Systemic Abandonment*

#### **Books helpful to this discussion**

Clark, Chap. *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011.

Elkind, David. *The Hurried Child: Growing up Too Fast Too Soon*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1981.

Elkind, David. *Ties That Stress: The New Family Imbalance*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.

Hersch, Patricia. *A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence*. New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1998

#### **Videos helpful to this discussion**

Chap Clark, "The Effects of Systemic Abandonment," [https://youtu.be/D2cYz\\_-oPzY](https://youtu.be/D2cYz_-oPzY)

Chap Clark, "Signs of Systemic Abandonment within the Church," <https://youtu.be/zNdRwH3u5jl>

Chap Clark, *Inside the World of Teenagers*, <https://youtu.be/biaXzksHhI4>

CNN, "#Being13: Inside the Secret World of Teens," <https://www.cnn.com/specials/us/being13>

#### **Small Group Work**

In the time remaining I want you to break up into small groups and work on this a bit.

First, I want you in your groups to talk about what has stood out to you the most from this morning's thoughts. It can be something you liked, disliked, didn't know, still don't know about, etc. What is worthy of more time? If you would, jot these down on your note sheet for me.

With these things in mind, if we were to try and reimagine ministry in light of what we have heard and discussed to be less about boxes and hoops and more about formation and faith, what could it look like?

- What would be our goals?
- What do we need to be aware of?
- How might we structure our ministries differently to be more effective?
- How do we develop true identity in kids and not become another set of rules to play by?
- How do we encourage adults to grant the blessing of presence and touch as Clark suggested?

In what ways can we create a church where our adults don't carry hammers? In other words, how do we show kids that we see them as family and not as projects?

I encourage you to think big and system-wide on this. I look forward to seeing what you come up with.

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