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The Impact of Discipleship on Wellbeing in Intergenerational Congregations

Joe Azzopardi

BEd (Union College), MA (Andrews University)

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Arts, Theology & Nursing

in conjunction with

the Faculty of Education, Business & Science

Avondale College of Higher Education

Submitted, September 2019

STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted previously for a degree or diploma at this institution, an Australian or overseas university or any other institution of higher education. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joel Zappardi". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent loop at the end.

Date

December 1, 2019

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The greatest thanks is to the Lord Jesus Christ of whom I owe everything and who has done everything to make a place for us in His kingdom. It is my hope that this dissertation will bring Him glory and that those who read it will see that He both desires and is able to provide an abundant life.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation, and indeed everything that went with it to my very supportive wife Jodine. She has stood beside me for seventeen years as my wife, spent the past eleven years taking care of our three children at home, and has cheered me on in my teaching career, ministry career, and now in my academic career. She has been a constant inspiration to me as a Christian and has provoked continual thoughts on the topics of connectedness, emotional wellness, discipleship and passing on the faith from one generation to the next. This research project would not have taken place if it were not for her by my side.

ABSTRACT

People in the world are suffering from poor levels of wellbeing ("Beyond Blue," 2016; "Depression and Other Common Mental Disorders: Global Health Estimates," 2017). A contributing factor is the decrease in social and spiritual connectedness currently experienced by many people. As intergenerational relationships are also in decline, this study explored how intergenerational Christian congregations could provide a potential avenue for connectedness. A mixed-method research approach was adopted to answer the question, *how is a person's wellbeing impacted by their level of social and spiritual connectedness as they are disciplined in an intergenerational congregation?*

The sample for the quantitative data set comprised of 545 participants from five generations from 11 New South Wales Christian congregations. Ten of the congregations were of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination and one was of the Church of Christ denomination.

A questionnaire comprising of 117 items was used to gather the quantitative data. The scales used included an Intergenerationality Index that was created for the study, and a Discipleship assessment tool. Semi-structured interviews with 14 participants from four of the congregations were also undertaken, which lead to the compilation of 496 minutes of discussion.

The study found that intergenerationality positively influenced both wellbeing and discipleship and further discipleship also positively impacted wellbeing. The findings of the study add weight to the argument that intergenerational Christian congregations can act as a positive contributor to a person's wellbeing, as well as an ideal context for social and spiritual connectedness through discipleship.

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CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

Introduction to The Research Problem

People in the world are suffering from poor levels of wellbeing. Mental illness is notably on the rise as around one million adults suffer with depression every year in Australia alone ("Beyond Blue," 2016; "Depression and Other Common Mental Disorders: Global Health Estimates," 2017). Other diseases aside, depression directly contributes close to 800,000 suicides worldwide per year ("Depression and Other Common Mental Disorders: Global Health Estimates," 2017, p. 5).

Considering that the World Health Organization recognises depression as, "*the single largest contributor to global disability*," it seems that many both within Australia and across the globe are struggling under the weight of despair ("Beyond Blue," 2016; "Depression and Other Common Mental Disorders: Global Health Estimates," 2017, p. 5). The implication of this statement is that what ails an individual mentally impacts the rest of the individual's wellbeing, through the increase of disease prevalence, symptoms, and severity. This is alarming not only on a global or national level, but important at a familial and personal level as well.

One place where many historically have sought for peace and wellbeing over the ages has been through the Christian Church. However, in the past few centuries there has been a trend of decreased expectation and trust from the institution and the belief system as a whole (Grossman, 2015). While an invitation is given by Jesus of Nazareth to follow him to have an abundant life, Australia is becoming an increasingly secular country where more and more people are leaving the Christian faith often due to a sense of irrelevancy (Hughes, Fraser, Bentley, & Christian Research, 2014; McCrindle, Renton, Phillips, & Miles, 2017). Considering that Christianity has historically and theologically been an avid endorser of spiritual and social connectedness (Hull, 2006), which is an important contributor to wellbeing (Eryilmaz, 2015), this too speaks of a challenging issue both for the Church and also for a society which is seeking a greater purpose (Stearns, 2010).

Finally, society in its fast pace of change for the past century seems to have erected walls of segregation between every generation (Steinbach, 2012). While more generations exist contemporarily than in the past, more separation exists between the various age groups

in terms of space, resources, and daily routine (Sabater, Graham, & Finney, 2017). This is resulting in the monopolising of resources within generations and a division of society as a whole, which may result in dire consequences for present and future generations.

Rationale to The Study

While there are few who would dispute the need to change the current trajectory of global depression, different means of remedy have emerged in the past by various promoters of health and wellbeing. Of the many voices speaking in the health and wellbeing sphere, positive psychology proponents promote the perspective that it is the quality of *flourishing* that contributes to the success and wellbeing of individuals (Cavalletti & Corsi, 2018; Seligman, 2013). Flourishing is not merely surviving nor avoiding dysfunction but a means to thrive, to increase positively, and to live life to the full. Studies have been reported which identify connectedness as an essential aspect of flourishing, in that being positively connected to others satisfies not only psychological needs, but helps satisfy basic needs and even lay the foundation for self-actualisation (Haslam, Cruwys, Haslam, Dingle, & Chang, 2016; Marcus, Illescas, Hohl, & Llanos, 2017; Russo-Netzer & Moran, 2018).

As Christianity promotes both social and spiritual connectedness, the association of a local Christian congregation may be considered as one of several vehicles to enrich connectedness (Gallet, 2016; Morrison, 2016). Social connectedness has been found to provide belonging, identity, engagement, and purpose (Stavrova & Luhmann, 2015), whereas spiritual connectedness provides transcendence, hope, and further meaning and purpose for individuals (Rego & Nunes, 2019). In this way, connectedness may be enhanced through the process of discipleship within a context of Christian fellowship, where an individual seeks to imitate the connection Jesus of Nazareth had with God and with humans; and through helping others to have the same such connectedness (Himes, 2011). This takes place through active participation in spiritual activities associated with Christianity.

Given that being a disciple of Jesus involves being committed to the teachings of the Bible (Maddix & Thompson, 2012), seeking personal growth (Chandler, 2015), and being compassionate (Elliott, 2012), an intergenerational community is explored as an optimal context for discipleship as diverse relationships are pivotal for both learning and need satisfaction (Holzman, 2009; Mychajluk, 2017). Specifically, intergenerational Christian congregations have been chosen as potential providers of connectedness through discipleship,

and therefore wellbeing considering that they promote both social and spiritual connectedness in a diverse environment. This seems logical as a growing field of research reports a number of benefits for those who engage in intergenerational relations (Cortellesi & Kernan, 2016; Tian, 2016; Whitehouse & George, 2018).

The rationale for this study then is to examine how a person's wellbeing is impacted by their level of social and spiritual connectedness as they are discipled in an intergenerational congregation. Since Christianity promotes the concept of having an abundant life (John 10:10), it is hypothesised that following Jesus through the active participation of Christian-based spiritual activities motivated by a Christian belief-system will lead to high levels of wellbeing. As discipleship is based on a more experienced follower of Jesus mentoring one or more others with less experience, it is expected that since experience often accompanies age, an environment that is intergenerational could be an ideal context for discipleship. Therefore, it is also hypothesised that intergenerationality is a promoter of both discipleship and wellbeing.

The Lacuna

The study of intergenerationality within a ministry context only truly began in earnest by James White in 1988 with *Intergenerational Religious Education*; at least in terms of direct research. Since then the literature has been growing slowly but steadily. However, over thirty years later there are still noticeable gaps. With very few exceptions, the vast majority of studies that have been pursued concerning intergenerational ministry are qualitative in nature (Allen, H. C. & Ross, 2012). To press the point, Holly Allen and Christine Ross's comprehensive text *Intergenerational Christian Formation* (2012, pp. 172, 174) states that, "*Evaluative research on intergenerationality is still quite limited... There is still a need for further rigorous quantitative and qualitative research that explores intergenerational principles, practices and benefits in faith communities.*" Indeed, many studies that have been conducted discuss the importance of intergenerationality in relation to discipleship and spiritual health, however most of these are philosophical in nature (such as discussing theological and cultural underpinnings of Biblical and contemporary Christianity), based on case studies, or are not specifically focused on the relationship between discipleship and wellbeing.

Further to this, after several reviews, there seems to be very little literature that discusses the connection between discipleship and wellbeing. Although there is a dissertation by Linda Warren entitled, “*Men’s discipleship using the Gospel of John and the effect on spiritual well-being*”, it is specific to a particular book of the Bible using a specific curriculum concerning adult males (L. Warren, 2015). In addition to this, the wellbeing focused upon by this present project concerns the individual and their connection to God, but not their connection to others.

Larry Linderman (2016) has written his dissertation on “*The relationship between intergenerational ministry practices and church health.*” Linderman synthesised the historical, theological, developmental, and ministerial literature concepts surrounding intergenerational ministry and sought to determine whether intergenerational ministry contributed to church health. His analysis of the literature found a clear basis for establishing intergenerationality as a necessity for discipleship.

The key findings in his data analysis found that there was not a strong correlation between intergenerational ministry and church health. However, the assumptions and research design seem to be the main impediment for a lack of correlation. Numerical church growth seemed to be equated with church health as Linderman used the Day formula, a formula that takes into account membership growth, baptisms and conversions to determine church growth (Linderman, 2016). Although the Day formula is a valid instrument for numerical growth, it does not take into account the spiritual and personal growth that evidences true discipleship as was discussed in the *Church Health Literature* section of his dissertation (Linderman, 2016, pp. 57-66). An instrument that measured spiritual growth or maturity in addition to Day’s formula may have led to quite different results.

Furthermore, the spiritual growth of individuals could not be assessed in such a study, as church ministers were assessed rather than their church attendees. This prevented the spiritual assessment of the individual attendees represented in the churches, which could have determined if attendees and members were actually growing in Christ. Further to this, using individual ministers to assess their congregation is healthy can expose data to unforeseen bias since the ministers who participated may not have favoured an intergenerational approach and/or may also have had perceptions that were different to what their congregants would have expressed.

The current project seeks to address the lacuna in the literature regarding the topic of intergenerational discipleship and its impact on wellbeing. The study will build upon the literature that has been discovered in intergenerational studies, discipleship, and wellbeing with the aim of finding what can be learned when all three fields intersect.

The Structure of The Study

Chapter 1 introduced the study by presenting the problem and background to the study, the rationale of the study, and the lacuna in the research.

Chapter 2, the first half of the literature review, examines wellbeing as a construct and considers social and spiritual connectedness as encouraged through Christian discipleship as a means of flourishing.

Chapter 3, the second half of the literature review, examines an intergenerational congregation as a context for wellbeing and Christian discipleship. The research question is also presented at the end of the chapter.

In light of the scope of research, the two literature chapters seeks to be representative rather than exhaustive and creates the theoretical foundation for the investigation. In addition to this, it provides the core understanding from which a causal model of relationships is proposed.

Chapter 4 seeks to understand the overall conceptual framework for the study through the model for analysis. Constructs within the model are defined, and the expectations of the investigation are laid out.

Chapter 5 provides the methodology of the research. In addition to this, the development of the quantitative and qualitative instruments is detailed, as is the analysis procedure.

Chapter 6 examines the findings of the research study. This includes the descriptive results of the variables, the structural equation modelling, and inferential findings of both the quantitative and qualitative data. A framework of the findings is also presented as is a discussion considering the causal model as well as a comparison with current literature. The answer to the research question is provided.

Chapter 7 is a conclusion and summary of the study, which outlines the implications and recommendations of the study. It includes the limitations of the study, as well as

suggestions for further research in the areas of wellbeing, discipleship, and intergenerational studies.

CHAPTER 2 : CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP AS A MEANS OF WELLBEING

Christianity As a Potential Provider of Wellbeing

Wellbeing as a Construct

In order to understand what impacts wellbeing, the conceptual construct must be firstly understood. The term wellbeing has a vast array of definitions, beliefs, and conceptualisations (Jayawickreme, Forgeard, & Seligman, 2012). In fact, Linton, Dieppe, and Medina-Lara (2016) reviewed ninety-nine different instruments that measured wellbeing that included a total of one hundred and ninety-six dimensions of wellbeing identified among them, which shows that wellbeing can be perceived and assessed in many different ways. In the field of psychology three main concepts exist: subjective wellbeing, psychological wellbeing, and composite theories.

Regarding Subjective Wellbeing (SWB) the term ‘subjective’ used in the name is largely based on how an individual ‘feels’, as it is an assessment of emotions and contentment rather than an objective measurement indicator (Diener, 1984). SWB has often been interchanged with the term, “happiness” as the three major assessment areas have traditionally been life satisfaction, positive affect (referring to positive emotions), and low negative affect (negative emotions) (Diener, 1984; Jayawickreme et al., 2012).

In noting an absence of positive functioning assessment in SWB, Psychological Wellbeing (PWB) was put forward as a means of understanding wellbeing from a cognitive rather than an affective approach, including (but not limited to) aspects of purpose and social relationships (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). PWB has been noted by many as a valid and reliable means of assessing eudaimonic (positive functioning) wellbeing (Lambert, Passmore, & Holder, 2015). However, notable inadequacies of relying solely on hedonistic or eudemonic assessments of wellbeing made way for what is commonly called, Composite Wellbeing theories (CWB).

The concept of wellbeing as a composite or an umbrella concept rather than a siloed dimensional concept is often attributed to Ed Diener who wrote that regarding subjective wellbeing, “... *is an umbrella term for the different valuations people make regarding their lives, the events happening to them, their bodies and minds, and the circumstances in which*

they live” (Diener, 2006, p. 400). Since then authors such as Corey Keyes, Martin Seligman and Roger Walsh contributed with composite models of wellbeing which largely explain the components of wellbeing, including both hedonistic and eudaimonic characteristics, and even physical and spiritual components (C. L. M. Keyes, 2002; Lambert et al., 2015; Seligman, 2011; Walsh, 2011).

Wellbeing itself, however, is *not* merely the sum of its composite parts, but rather the quality of life an individual has as a whole (Skevington & Böhnke, 2018). Although various dimensions of wellbeing such as happiness, subjective wellbeing, psychological wellbeing, and quality of life were endorsed seemingly as unrelated segments of an individual’s welfare in the past, current research has found evidence to suggest that a holistic construct of wellbeing gives a more accurate perspective (Medvedev & Landhuis, 2018). It therefore is no longer adequate for some theorists to simply acknowledge different components or dimensions of wellbeing, but rather to find a means of synthesising all of them into an interconnecting system – much like how the various organs and systems of the human body are not independent of each other but are each important as interdependent aspects of the individual (Bloch-Jorgensen, Cilione, Yeung, & Gatt, 2018).

One recent theory put forward which speaks to this is the Centeredness Theory (CT) of Bloch-Jorgensen et al. (2018), which is a system approach towards self-actualisation using the blended constructs of SWB, PWB, and other wellbeing models. This wellbeing concept considers the five domains of self, family, relationship, community, and work as interconnected aspects all of which influence each other as essential components of an individual’s life. It regards an individual’s ability to reframe stress, achieve meaningful goals, and mindfulness as the means towards flourishing and having an abundant life overall. With this understanding, each domain and construct impact other domains and constructs yielding a more interconnected and holistic interpretation of wellbeing.

Christian proponents of wellbeing hold the view that an abundant life comes from following the teachings of the Bible modelled after Jesus of Nazareth as stated in the gospel of John 10:10 (Keener, 2003). Spirituality does positively contribute to wellbeing; at least when a positive and secure attachment with God is formed (Aan, Ristina, & Anastasia, 2018; Malinakova et al., 2017; Sharma & Singh, 2018; Van Cappellen, Toth-Gauthier, Saroglou, & Fredrickson, 2016). For the purpose of this study, therefore, wellbeing will be defined as

having a thriving and abundant life through the positive functioning of the psychological, social and spiritual aspects of an individual (Skevington & Böhnke, 2018; Weber, 2010).

The Importance of Connectedness

An individual's wellbeing can be improved and maintained for the better in numerous ways (Nezlek, Newman, & Thrash, 2017; Paterson, Reynolds, & Dawson, 2018; Russo-Netzer & Moran, 2018; Sharma & Singh, 2018; Van den Broeck, Ferris, Chang, & Rosen, 2016; Zhang, Luo, & Sun, 2017). Wellbeing is positively impacted by having a positive outlook, being able to achieve autonomy, acquiring competence, and having engagement; these contribute greatly to wellbeing as they increase life satisfaction (Coffey, Wray-Lake, Mashek, & Branand, 2016; Morton, 2018; Paterson et al., 2018; Wakefield et al., 2017; Walker & Kono, 2018). These aspects fall in line with Seligman's PERMA model as contributions to wellbeing, Walsh's Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes, and Bloch-Jorgensen et al.'s Five Domain Model (Bloch-Jorgensen et al., 2018; Seligman, 2013; Walsh, 2014). Interestingly a common thread that runs through many, if not all, of the wellbeing theories is the necessity of positive relationships that connect an individual with those around them.

In a study by Hayles, Xu, and Edwards (2018), children who were living with both parents had significantly higher life satisfaction due to an increased sense of connectedness than those living in the care of only one parent, while those living in foster care had even lower levels. In addition to this, Koni et al. (2019) report that resiliency in adolescents is related to their sense of belonging. Further, social isolation, in general, has also been found to be a growing epidemic for all age groups and this has been tied to lower rates of wellbeing (Haslam et al., 2016). In fact, the connection that exists between individuals has been found to greatly influence not only the behaviour of the individual, but even influence the emotions and satisfaction with the life of individuals (Coviello et al., 2014; Wakefield et al., 2017). Considering these findings, it is acceptable to say that connectedness is an essential aspect of wellbeing regardless of what stage of life an individual is in.

With all of this in mind, one of the main foci of this study concerns the importance of connectedness in relation to wellbeing. The Oxford Dictionary defines connectedness as, *the state of being joined or linked, or a feeling of belonging to or having affinity with a particular person or group* (Connectedness, 2019). Such a characteristic can have a range of levels depending on the depth of connection, as being joined with someone and feeling like you

belong to a particular group can mean different things. For example, a sense of connectedness can be as shallow as sitting with a stranger on a bus going in the same direction in comparison to the depth of connectedness of being married to a partner for fifty years. Therefore, it must be considered what constitutes quality connectedness in order to validate the relationship between connectedness and wellbeing.

It is worth noting that in this chapter, the term *connectedness* will be discussed generally, whereas in Chapter 3, the term will be referenced as an integral component of intergenerationality; specifically, intergenerational connectedness.

Environments for quality connectedness

Schools are one kind of environment where quality connectedness is often a pursued goal. Consequently, a range of research on the theory of school connectedness has taken place. The reason why such data is valuable in this study is that considering that schools are communities in themselves, what has been learned about school connectedness may be generalised for greater application; perhaps even to congregational connectedness. Further, given that the theoretical underpinnings of school connectedness (SC) are often linked to the psychological concepts of wellbeing, it could be assumed that SC theory could likewise be used in application to non-school communities as well (Hodges, Reinie, Joosten, Bourke-Taylor, & Speyer, 2018).

School Connectedness has been defined as, “*the belief held by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals*” (2018). A higher degree of school connectedness has been associated with positive student outcomes such as higher academic results, higher measures of wellbeing, and resiliency while lower scores of school connectedness have been associated with negative student outcomes, such as delinquent or violent behaviour, lower self-esteem, and more angst (Hodges et al., 2018; Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018; Watson, 2017). School connectedness has been found to take place through positive and respectful relationships with both fellow students and adults in the school community, as well as being given unique and challenging opportunities to succeed in various aspects of their life (Gowing & Jackson, 2016).

Positive affective, cognitive, and behaviour engagement of the students towards their community is what largely impacts school connectedness as it is principally a belief held by

students (Hodges et al., 2018). For such a positive perspective to take place in a school context, Robinson, Leeb, Merrick, and Forbes (2016) suggest that the three core principles of safety, stability, and nurture must be established in the school environment. These three principles were taken from the *Essentials for Childhood* framework of the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) ("Essential for Childhood: Steps to create safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments," 2013). Such suggested principles seem to reflect the principles of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, as aspects of basic needs and psychological needs can be clearly seen (Maslow, 1943). While the CDC originally had children in mind when they put together the principles of safety, stability, and nurture, again a generalisation could be made that for *any* kind of community to be a place of connectedness, such principles need to be in place.

Quality connectedness takes place therefore when an individual believes that those in their community care about them as individuals. Such quality connectedness increases the probability for success in an individual's life, as support will be available for the individual through an environment that meets their needs as it is safe, stable, and nurturing. Therefore, for wellbeing to be increased in a community whether it be a school community, a church community, or a professional community, care and compassion should be evident in order to meet the needs of its members (Andreychik, 2019; Mychajluk, 2017; Watson, 2017).

Having considered how an environment can promote quality connectedness, it is worth noting that there are several means for being connected. Thinking back to the definition of connectedness of being joined to a person or group denotes that there are a variety of entities of which one can be connected to. A holistic construct of connectedness, however, should not only include connection to the non-spiritual, but also to the spiritual; being God (Freeze & DiTommaso, 2014; Root, 2016). It is with this understanding that an exploration of both social and spiritual connectedness will take place.

Social connectedness

Social connectedness is defined by Ang (2016, pp. 1174-1175) as, "... *the degree to which a person is socially close, interrelate, or share resources with other persons in a number of social ecologies such as families, schools, neighborhoods, cultural groups, and society.*" While it is true that few individuals desire to be lonely, the reality of loneliness impacts far more than a mere desire for companionship (Hadi, 2017). Just as physical

wellbeing is impacted by mental health, social wellbeing is likewise influenced and influences other aspects of wellbeing (Thompson, Morton, & Kent, 2017). One piece of evidence to this end is that it has been found that the socially connected have a higher life expectancy (Haslam et al., 2016). This is evidenced through the Blue Zone research of Dan Buettner who investigated the world's longest living communities. It was found that the members of these communities share a highly cohesive social bond with each other (Frates, Buettner, & Skemp, 2016).

To add even more to the argument Marcus et al. (2017, p. 2) have stated that, "*Social isolation (defined as a lack of participation in social relationships and/or a complete or near-complete lack of interaction with others and/or with society at large) is a well-established determinant of all-cause mortality.*" In fact, loneliness has even been found to impact mortality more than marriage, fitness level, or obesity (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2012). The conclusion of an earlier comprehensive study by Holt-Lunstad et al. concluded that, "*Data across 308,849 individuals, followed for an average of 7.5 years, indicate that individuals with adequate social relationships have a 50% greater likelihood of survival compared to those with poor or insufficient social relationships*" (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010, p. 14).

Pursuing connectedness merely in order to prevent premature death is short-sighted, however, as it has been suggested that social relationships provide a great deal towards the quality of life as it adds compassion, intimacy, and guidance among other things (Goswami, 2012, p. 576). One aspect of how social connectedness influences quality of life concerns socioeconomic status, in that those who have strong social connections are less impacted by financial stress than those who have weak connections (Richards, 2016). In addition to these findings, social connectedness provides meaning and purpose in life; and in turn, meaning provides social connectedness (Stavrova & Luhmann, 2015).

Social identity research has highlighted evidence that the greater the number of social groups one is a member of the less likely an individual will become depressed, and if they do there will be fewer symptoms and less intensity of the symptoms (Cruwys et al., 2013; Koni et al., 2019; Seymour-Smith, Cruwys, Haslam, & Brodribb, 2017). However, it is imperative to understand that it is not merely the number of groups one is a part of which positively impacts depression, but belonging to groups where one identifies as an accepted member as attendance does not equate to belonging (Cruwys et al., 2014, p. 145). Consequently, it is not

just how often an individual spends time with others, but who they spend time with and how time is spent that directly effects their health. Similarly, Haslam et al. (2016) found that the social identifications of individuals through social connectedness reduced depression symptoms. An example highlighting the impact of mental wellbeing is that of an Australian study by Griffiths et al. (2015) which found that depression symptoms were reduced through personal resiliency strategies, which included drawing on relationships.

While those who are socially isolated are greatly impacted, it is also worth noting that those who have social networks in place can also be affected by the disconnection. Individuals who experience a deep loss in their social network, such as through the death of a loved one, have been found to experience an increase in stress and suppression to immune function among other physical difficulties (Cornwell & Laumann, 2015). Therefore, whether it is a chronic absence of connection or a sudden loss of it, a loss of connectedness has been shown to be a detriment to wellbeing. In light of these findings, it could be stated that connectedness is a need of all individuals that when deprived, may result in premature death.

Although studies have shown that connectedness improves wellbeing, the situation faced as a society is worsening due to a steady decrease in connectedness. For the past century solitary living has been on the rise, which seems to correlate with the steady increase of loneliness; this trend has been reported in the UK, Europe, and the United States, and is expected to be occurring on a global scale (Clark, D. M. T., Loxton, & Tobin, 2015; Snell, 2017). Given that social connectedness is correlated with wellbeing, it is problematic that such a trend in loneliness is taking place.

With all of this in mind, the case for why it is important to be connected to others seems clear. Being socially connected to other people in a positive manner not only extends life expectancy but provides a means of flourishing so that the quality of life is also improved. This can mean the difference between living a life with little hope for the future, or one with peace and purpose regardless of one's circumstances.

Spiritual connectedness

Connectedness between one individual and another in societal constraints is not the only kind of connectedness that contributes to wellbeing. Connectedness between an individual and the Divine has also been found to influence wellbeing (Sharma & Singh, 2018). Spirituality, like wellbeing, is a term that has many meanings and constructs.

Although originally interchanged with the term religiosity, which concerns adherence to religious tradition, orientation, and practice, spirituality also includes beliefs, meaning and purpose, and connection to the Divine and/or the unseen world (Malinakova et al., 2017). For the purpose of this study, spiritual connectedness is defined as the degree to which an individual is spiritually attached to God and others through spiritual practices, beliefs, purpose, and communication.

Spiritual connectedness is beneficial on several levels. Spirituality has been found to increase prosocial behaviour and positive psychological outcomes, such as positive affect among others (Lau, Hui, Lam, Lau, & Cheung, 2015; Van Cappellen et al., 2016). Studies have also found that individuals who are spiritual report higher life satisfaction and health than those who are not (Anand, Jones, & Gill, 2015; Luciano Magalhães, Lucchetti, Frederico Camelo, Vallada, & Prieto Peres, 2018). Etzioni stipulates that people have a desire to follow what they believe is right regardless of the pleasure principle, which is why spirituality feeds wellbeing (Etzioni, 2016). Etzioni goes on to report that faithfulness through religion correlates with life satisfaction, and adherents are, “*healthier, live longer, and have lower rates of divorce, crime, and suicide*” (Etzioni, 2016, p. 249). The conclusion of this research was that the life satisfaction level of those who are religious is higher than those who are not. Van Cappellen et al. (2016, p. 486) concur with Etzioni’s findings regarding higher rates of life satisfaction for those who are part of a religious group, as such can result in optimism, a greater sense of self-worth, perceived meaning in life and hope. Spiritual wellbeing has also been found to be negatively correlated to anxiety and depression in a study using Cardiac Heart Disease patients, showing that spiritual connectedness contributes to both physical and mental health (Aan et al., 2018).

One of the other arguments in addition to why spirituality is good for wellbeing is that spiritual connectedness is said to provide social connectedness through religious communities, as well as positive psychological functioning (Sharma & Singh, 2018). This conclusion is not shared by everyone however, as some researchers such as Schuurmans-Stekhoven (2017) dispute this as their research did not support spirituality’s link with social support, but rather accounted personality traits (such as agreeableness) as a stronger causal agent. While in agreement that a spiritual community can provide social support, Schuurmans-Stekhoven claims that any kind of community (religious or even atheistic) can

provide the same kind of support and therefore spirituality is not truly associated with social connectedness.

While some would disagree with the claims of Schuurmans-Stekhoven (for example; (Sharma & Singh, 2018)), if spirituality is indeed something more than flesh and blood, then social support is not likely to be the only consideration as to why spiritual connectedness is an important aspect of wellbeing. It is important to understand that mere group membership is not what makes the difference; which differentiates merely being a member of a Christian congregation rather than being a follower of Jesus. This is in a similar vein to what was discussed on pages 11 – 12 in terms of being connected to social groups from the study of Cruwys et al. (2014). As Van Cappellen et al. (2016, p. 486) state:

Endorsing a religious faith or spiritual beliefs often provides a sense of coherence and meaning that may in turn promote greater well-being. Religion/spirituality is a meaning making system and serves as a way to understand the world, the self, other living beings, and their interactions.

This is not to say that everyone who is religious flourishes or promotes the wellbeing of others. It is worth noting that an external appearance of spirituality does not necessarily equate to wellbeing contribution just as the external appearance of physical fitness does not mean an individual is healthy (Aghababaei et al., 2016). Some may believe that they are connected to God, but in part through extrinsic religiosity become anxious, judgemental, and isolated, and therefore have poorer wellbeing. The association of such negative traits and characteristics has been found to be linked to those who have an extrinsic religious orientation, as they have a tendency to show higher neuroticism (Cook, McDaniel, & Doyle-Portillo, 2018). The contribution of spirituality to wellbeing is also dependent on an individual's attachment to God, as those who have a fearful and aggressive picture of God and develop an insecure attachment to him reflect lowered wellbeing; however those who show secure attachments to God and to their church family scored higher in the same study (Freeze & DiTommaso, 2015).

There are several aspects of spiritual connectedness that may act as mechanisms as to why spirituality matters regarding wellbeing. Before moving further in the investigation, relevancy and hope will be briefly explored as possible mechanisms for greater wellbeing.

Individuals who are on a spiritual journey often reflect on the purpose and meaning of life that is acquired through their journey. There are several reasons for this, which we will

now discuss. Belief in God leads individuals to seek understanding of things related to God; such as who God is, what is he like, and what are his expectations (Sire, 2009). Those who embark on such a journey of spirituality will often use sacred writings, guides and/or practices in order to gain both an understanding and a connection to God (Hartney & Noble, 2011). Having a connection through mediums such as the Scriptures and practices will lead to guidance on how one should live as well and ultimately build a foundation for one's worldview (Morrissey et al., 2010). Having a foundational explanation for some of the broad philosophical life questions gives an individual a sense of peace, thereby creating significance and meaningfulness, which are beneficial to positive cognitive functioning (Seligman, 2013; Sharma & Singh, 2018).

A worldview helps individuals establish a direction in life which often leads to a sense of purpose (Sire, 2009). Behavioural expectations set by individuals for themselves is an example of how people manage their lives to achieve purpose and goals (Hartney & Noble, 2011). If these behaviours include activities like acts of service (as encouraged by a Christian worldview) then this often leads to increases in eudaimonic wellbeing which in turn brings meaning to their lives (Anand, Jones, & Gill, 2015; Seligman, 2013; Smith, 2017). Meaning is achieved through a sense of using their talents in service to something bigger than themselves (Seligman, 2013). This increase in wellbeing through meaning encourages those who are spiritually connected to continue following their spiritual way of life and remain connected to God. In this way acts of service and following a code of conduct in order to live a moral and fulfilling life has been shown to contribute to wellbeing (Burrow & Spreng, 2016).

People who are spiritually connected and experience meaning through acts of service, either in the workplace or in the home, can have a holistic sense that spirituality can impact many aspects of life (Iwasaki, Messina, & Hopper, 2018; Peregoy, 2016). When life is seen as meaningful, wellbeing is increased and life seems worthwhile (Coffey, Wray-Lake, Mashek, & Branand, 2016).

A Christian worldview can influence individuals to be moral and law-abiding citizens, therefore tending to impact the wellbeing of both the individual and their neighbours as these behaviours tend to be prosocial in nature (Aghababaei et al., 2016). Spirituality has the potential to influence adherents to be of service to others, and have a sense of altruism, which has been found to correlate with wellbeing; particularly positive affect, life satisfaction, and

purpose (Sharma & Singh, 2018). In Christianity, individuals are not only encouraged to obey the moral and civil law but to go beyond merely following the law and improve themselves as individuals and the community they live in (Matt. 25:14-30, 2 Pet. 3:18, Gal. 5:22-23) (Camp, 2008). Such growth on a spiritual and personal level may result in a feeling of accomplishment which in turn may result in feelings of satisfaction (Chandler, 2015; Jayawickreme, Forgeard, & Seligman, 2012). It is also worth mentioning that spirituality has been found to promote several character-based actions that have been shown to directly impact wellbeing (Shourie & Kaur, 2016).

Along with acts of service, another example of such a character-based action is that of forgiveness. Forgiving and seeking forgiveness has been found to promote both psychological health and physical health; as depression, anxiety, blood pressure, fatigue, and even the need for medication have been found to decrease from either side of forgiveness (Bassett et al., 2016). Bassett et al. (2016, p. 38) found in their study on self-forgiveness that, *“increased self-forgiveness was consistently associated with greater physical health, less psychological distress, and fewer physical symptoms.”* The character-based action of gratitude is also a contributor to wellbeing; although there is division as to its consideration as a positive emotion or a virtue (Armenta, Fritz, & Lyubomirsky, 2017). Similarly to forgiveness, gratitude has been linked to both psychological and physical health and seems to not only contribute to wellbeing, but is also a product of wellbeing (Nezlek, Newman, & Thrash, 2017). Both forgiveness and gratitude are considered to be virtues that are expectations of Christianity and many other religions.

Another example relating specifically to Christianity is that being influenced in believing that humans have been created in the image of God gives individuals a sense of value, and a sense that someone much greater than themselves is looking out for their wellbeing; this is an aspect of transcendence (Chandler, 2015). Seeing such significance in having a connection to God and being engaged in something greater than oneself gives meaning and purpose, which leads to positive emotions and enhanced wellbeing (Walsh, 2011).

Spiritual connectedness leads to a greater likelihood of experiencing transcendence, which in turn gives an individual hope (Krause & Pargament, 2018). Hope is important due to its links to resilience (Polson, Gillespie, & Myers, 2018). Experiencing transcendence means experiencing something greater than what is considered normal (“Transcend,” 2019).

Johnstone and Cohen (2019) note that transcendence involves a loss of self, which gives way to having a sense of being connected to the Divine. It provides a sense of being a part of something much larger than oneself.

Closely tied to transcendence is the concept of hope. Experiencing transcendence is often a source of hope (Krause & Pargament, 2018). Hope is a cognitive-affective characteristic of positive expectation that an individual can have concerning a situation involving a goal being attained; hope has been linked as a contributor of wellbeing as it has been found to increase resilience (Polson et al., 2018). Hope has even been loosely defined as a life force on its own as it promotes and maintains life regardless of the situation (Hirono & Blake, 2017). As hope can rest upon achieving a goal through faith despite a higher probability for failure, spiritual hope is based on the belief that God will help individuals achieve their goals; such hopeful individuals have been found more likely to engage in successful goal-setting behaviour (Cheavens, Heiy, Feldman, Benitez, & Rand, 2018).

In Christian and other religious circles hope is not merely a feeling or thought as several scholars may express, but is itself a virtue (Elliot, 2016). Although it may be intimated that an individual can potentially live happily in this world, there will always be disappointments that continue to take place even though one may have joy and great success, as this world is not perfect. As Elliot (2016, p. 302) on writing about living a happy, successful life writes,

Nevertheless, in this life we cannot be fully, securely and permanently happy. Our share in the good life is limited by bad fortune and moral evils: by sickness, suffering, injustice, broken relationships, failures, tragedy, sin and death. Since these frustrate not just idle whims but important and good priorities, the result is that we cannot be as happy in this life as we reasonably wish. I call this melancholy consequence the 'eudaimonia gap'. Hope appeals to the restless heart with the promise of future beatitude in which we will cross this gap and attain perfect happiness through loving union with God in the heavenly city.

Having such hope may bring about peace when circumstances look dire, as the believer understands that no matter what happens, all will turn out good in the end. In this sense, hope is a primary means of coping with difficult situations; therefore, hope is a contributor to wellbeing as it encourages positive functioning (Yaghoobzadeh, Soleimani, Allen, Chan, & Herth, 2017).

Consequently, hope and transcendence have a strong relationship with wellbeing (Sharpe, McElheran, & Whelton). They have been found to decrease stress and fatigue in studies concerning chronically ill individuals (Hirsch & Sirois, 2014; Howell & Buro, 2015; Yaghoobzadeh et al., 2017). They have also been found to be helpful for victims who are experiencing a crisis as restoring and maintaining hope is of the utmost importance; such as with natural disaster victims (Hirono & Blake, 2017). Accordingly, self-transcendence has also been found to be associated with eudaimonic wellbeing (Howell & Buro, 2015).

Having considered the aspects of purpose, meaning, transcendence, and hope as contributors to wellbeing, it may be argued that spirituality may positively impact wellbeing. In summary, social connectedness and spiritual connectedness may be worthwhile candidates that increase wellbeing. However, attention must also turn towards finding an appropriate context where both social and spiritual connectedness can be established, maintained, and grown.

Christianity as a Means of Wellbeing Through Connectedness

The world is in need of wellbeing distributors using social and spiritual connectedness as vehicles. Through the preceding discussion, it was argued that one of the primary means of increasing wellbeing is through connectedness; specifically, the dimensions of social and spiritual connectedness. It is this connectedness that this study is interested in, and therefore it would be logical to seek communities where both social and spiritual connectedness are being promoted to further inquire whether such communities could be a possible means for wellbeing. One of the communities in Western society where such an emphasis of social and spiritual connectedness exists is that of the local Christian congregation, as such communities overtly promote the importance of spiritual connection to God and other community members (Gallet, 2016).

The Greek term *koinonia* (English translation of the Greek κοινωνία) found in various places in the New Testament is used to express a sense of “fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, and intercourse.” (“Thayer’s Greek Lexicon,” 2011). Interestingly, *koinonia* (we will use the English term ‘fellowship’) is also used both concerning community with others as well as community with God. As Mahohoma (2017, p. 365) states,

Koinonia means that the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. Members were treated with dignity and their rights were observed. This idea of *koinonia* spreads through Judea and Samaria to Antioch, through Asia Minor and Greece, through Cyprus and Crete to Rome. The Pauline letters to the Corinthians show a concern for unity and maintaining *koinonia*. The Corinthians would experience *koinonia* because of their participation in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit. Community is also a place where communion is first experienced and lived. This is why Church as a community is a place where people have fellowship and union.

While most contemporary conceptualisations do not include the idea of common wealth and material ((Ang, 2016) does however), much of the rest of the Biblical concept expressed could be said to align with much of the heart of connectedness. Therefore, it is prudent to seek to understand what Christianity has to do with both social and spiritual connectedness (or fellowship).

Social Connectedness as Fellowship with Other People

The early Christian church believed that as a fellowship of believers, they should have everything in common (Mahohoma, 2017). This entailed not so much the idea that everyone had the same opinions, but rather that everyone was united by a common understanding, faith, and mission. To be a Christian was to have connection with other Christians, a connection which bound them as a united community (Hull, 2006). Equally important was the understanding of trying to have connection with those who were not part of their community as well (Bonhoeffer, 1959; Mahohoma, 2017). This fellowship was often expressed as love, both for those within the church community and those outside of it.

The theme of love is profuse throughout the Scriptures, and particularly within a context of fellowship, it is especially discussed in the New Testament (Elliott, 2012). Jesus said that people would know his disciples by their love for one another, as his disciples are to model how Jesus loved throughout his life (Morrison, 2016). Those who consider themselves to be disciples of Jesus must strive towards taking on the characteristics of Christ just as a child has the traits of their father; as they see themselves as God's children. This involves teaching others to live as Jesus did, in walking as he walked, pursuing a life of peacemaking and forgiveness, choosing to show compassion in truth and in action, and taking up a lifestyle of holiness, which includes morality (Morrison, 2016).

Before any more discussion can take place regarding love, an understanding of love must be defined within context. Considering the complex and subjective nature of the term 'love', the term 'compassion' will be used for the sake of the intended meaning in this study. Compassion has an original meaning of, 'to suffer with' and is defined as, "*sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it.*" (Compassion, 2019).

In Christian thinking, one cannot love God without having compassion on others since to treat others adversely would be bringing displeasure to God as he wants his followers to embrace other people as fellow children of God (Himes, 2011). Elliott (2012) expresses that such compassion is not merely an emotion, nor is it just a conceptual choice, but rather it is both emotion and choice that will result in compassionate sympathetic action. Consequently, to actively connect and have compassion on other people is the result of such sympathetic action. Accordingly, Christians are to show compassion for others by forming and maintaining positive relationships with others through solidarity and service for the sake of the welfare of others (Lowe & Lowe, 2010).

Interestingly, there are several benefits that have been found in having compassion on others as Christ has directed. Studies have shown that morality through having compassion on other people in a religious sense creates benefits to those surrounding the spiritually endeavouring individuals, in that,

People who live their religion internalize the religion's values of compassion, humanity, and love of neighbour, and perhaps because of the "teaching of equality and brotherhood, of compassion and human heartedness ..." (Allport and Ross 1967, p. 433) ...[they] tend to be more helpful and prosocial. (Aghababaei et al., 2016, p. 425).

This has implications for communities, as well as for those who surround such communities. The moral guidance that is encouraged by having compassion on others through faithfulness to the principles given in scripture results in the individuals seeking...

...to live in a spirit of supportive but critical dialogue and discussion. This includes provision of space to develop relationships of mutuality and dialogue and conversation, offering a sense of personal involvement, fulfilment and pleasure in what is being learnt. (Saines, 2015, p. 306)

As evidence of such compassion through Christianity, a British study has found that religious people are more likely to volunteer, participate as community leaders, and donate to charity than those who are not religious (Birdwell & Littler, 2013). Therefore, it can may be

said that living a moral and spiritual life tends to increase the connectedness with others due to a lack of selfishness and conflict, and a perception of helpfulness (Aghababaei et al., 2016).

Socially connecting (fellowship) with others through Christianity has also been found to create a sense of belonging. On this Gallet (2016, p. 2) writes, “*Churches and parishes have had a traditional role in building a sense of belonging where people feel valued and can develop trusting relationships, often referred to as social capital.*” Having compassion on others then could be regarded as not only a means for individual wellbeing, but also the social wellbeing of whole communities through social connectedness.

It is worthy to consider, however, that the profession of an individual or group concerning an action does not equate to the certainty that it will take place. Whilst many people may express agreement and loyalty to the teachings of Jesus, some of the actions of those who are called Christians are often pointed out as opposite to Christ’s philosophy and sentiment by both fellow Christians and those who do not profess to be Christians (Kimball, 2012; Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2011; Porter, Hall, & Wang, 2017).

Christian fellowship, therefore, could be seen through the mutual compassionate action between two or more Christian believers. Having considered the Christian understanding of spiritual connectedness in relation to others through compassion and the benefits of Christianity on both the individual believer as well as those around them, the discussion will now turn towards an examination of what it means to be spiritually connected in relation to God.

Spiritual Connectedness as Fellowship with God

Koinonia is understood in Christian terms to be a sense of belonging through the fellowship with other people and also understood to mean having unity and connectedness with God (Mahohoma, 2017). Connection with Christ takes place through several conceptual realities, one of which is spoken of in the gospel of John 15, where Jesus speaks of being ‘connected to the vine’ and ‘abiding in him.’ Being connected to God involves *abiding* in him in that, having such an intimate connection to the Lord results in an individual having a deep sense of both who God is and what God desires (Keener, 2003; Morrison, 2016). This is akin to being so acquainted with a fellow human, one would be able to not only know superficial information about them but being able to speak on their behalf knowing what they would

want. It is in this sense that the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament knew God and spoke on his behalf, and why Jesus pressed the importance of ‘abiding in me’ in John 15 (Elowsky & Oden, 2007; House, 1998). However, it is more than just knowing who God is and what God wants but also being so connected that one shares the same desires as God (Keener, 2003).

Considering the benefits of being connected to God, it is important to note that spiritual connectedness is not simply an individual giving themselves to God without receiving something in return. Spiritual connectedness has often been associated with eudaimonic wellbeing, as individuals who have a positive picture of God experience a sense of purpose, acceptance, and being understood by an empathetic parental figure much greater than themselves (Freeze & DiTommaso, 2015; Sharma & Singh, 2018; Skevington & Böhnke, 2018). Having a belief that God not only is aware of one’s plight, but understands it, desires good for his ‘children’, and does intervene for good on an individual level has a positive impact in terms of eudaimonic wellbeing (Zahra & Farhad, 2017). The transcendence that takes place has the potential to give hope and relevance for individuals who have a healthy attachment to God; though if God is viewed as a distant, apathetic and/or angry deity such belief has a negative impact on wellbeing (Freeze & DiTommaso, 2015).

As with any relationship, for connection with God to take place (especially such ‘oneness’ as described above), there must be a means of communication between an individual and God. Such communication for the Christian is done through spiritual disciplines (Ryan, T., 2015). Spiritual disciplines can be defined as any human means undertaken in order to align oneself closer with God (Willard & Johnson, 2006). This is not pertaining to perfection, but relational nearness, which would naturally lead to becoming more Christ-like. Curiously enough, participation in the spiritual disciplines is a means of not only connecting with God, but also connecting with other individuals since God expects that individuals should have compassion for their neighbour (Vos, 2012).

Robert Bolst (2012) categorises the spiritual disciplines into four quadrants, each with a specific intention: inward abstinence, inward engagement, outward abstinence, and outward engagement. Some of these activities are a means of intimacy through service to other human beings, while others are a means of intimacy by spending time and affection on God; both with the goal of being transformed into a person of closer likeness in character to Christ (Vos, 2012).

It is worth noting that there are a multitude of ways to connect with God. How an individual connects is often a reflection of their personality, their interests, and other aspects of individuality (Thomas, 2010). Thomas (2010) contests that there are at least nine ‘sacred pathways’ of how different individuals may prefer to worship and connect with God. Considering the various spiritual disciplines as well as the varied ways that people may feel pulled towards spirituality, it cannot be said that there is only one way of building a relationship with the Divine (Schwarz, C. A., 2009).

Two of the most practised spiritual disciplines are prayer and the study of Scripture; both are also widely understood as a means of communication with God (Bolst, 2012; Hull, 2006). Prayer is typically done through direct communication through speech, writing, or unspoken thought towards God; reciprocal direct communication from God to humans through prayer, however, is still quite the mystery to believers and academics alike. Prayer is beneficial in that it is a way of directly communicating with God, connecting individuals to the Almighty (Fairbrother, 2016).

Scripture study is also believed to be a direct means by which God communicates with humans in order to communicate a variety of messages including how one ought to live and the extent of what Jesus has done to reconcile individuals with God the Father (Hamilton, Moore, Johnson, & Koenig, 2013). Through understanding the Bible, Christians may also be transformed by scripture by becoming more like Christ (Maddix & Thompson, 2012). This transformational growth through the connection with God is evidenced via an active compassion of not only knowing what the scriptures state, but by following the principles found in them with action (Himes, 2011). This transformation through communicating with God is evidence of abiding in Christ.

In the preceding discussion, a brief examination of how social and spiritual connectedness through the use of the term ‘fellowship’ or ‘koinonia’ is provided through the Christian faith on pages 19 – 20. Christianity has been suggested as a means for social connectedness through the endorsement and practice of having compassion for others through the imitation of Christ, resulting in prosocial behaviour and a sense of belonging. Likewise, spiritual connectedness was also discussed as a product of Christianity as believers are encouraged to abide in Christ through spiritual disciplines and submission. However, a mechanism for such connectedness has yet to be further established in consideration of this study. It is for this reason that the conversation will now examine the Christian concept of

discipleship in order to understand how connectedness is established in a Christian community.

Discipleship as a Means of Connectedness

The literature thus far has noted that Christianity is one of several vehicles that serve as a possible way of enhancing wellbeing. As wellbeing is impacted by the levels of connectedness and individual experiences, Christianity has been discussed as a positive influencer of social connectedness and spiritual connectedness through the concept of *koinonia*, which translates into being in fellowship and community with other people and God himself (Mahohoma, 2017). What has yet to be discussed is how this takes place within the Christian experience. Connectedness takes place through a process known as discipleship.

Aside from providing social and spiritual connectedness, and consequently purpose, meaning, and hope as previously discussed regarding Christianity, the process of discipleship is a means for giving such concepts and experiences to others as well (De Waal, 2017; Donaldson, 1996; Finley, 2013; Logan & Ridley, 2015; Saines, 2015). Selflessly sharing something that will have a positive impact on others brings meaningfulness to the giver resulting in positive emotions; aspects of both eudaimonic and hedonic wellbeing (Etzioni, 2016; Lambert et al., 2015). Further to this, discipleship offers not only a ‘why’ but a ‘how’, in that it is a way of living an authentic Christian life which serves to further connect to God and others both spiritually and socially (Bonhoeffer, 1959; Campbell, 2009; De Waal, 2017; Ogden, 2007; Taylor, 2013).

After reviewing the literature, specifically for Christianity and connectedness, the Christian concept of discipleship is put forth as the mechanism of how Christianity has the ability to bring positive social and spiritual connectedness. The reason is that to be a disciple is to follow Christ, and in order to follow Christ one must be in fellowship with him. Further to this, following Christ means to endeavour to do what Jesus would do, which involves connecting meaningfully with other people. In order to expand on this argument, discipleship will be discussed in more depth in this section.

Discipleship as a concept

To understand discipleship is to understand what authentic Christianity actually looks like in practice (Bonhoeffer, 1959). As the original followers of Jesus were themselves called

disciples, and they were commanded to make disciples who followed Christ's teachings (Matthew 28:19), the process of becoming an authentic Christian (disciple) will be referred as discipleship (Talbert, 2010). There is an abundance of literature on the topic of discipleship and therefore a great many ways to define discipleship (Burrill, 2009; De Waal, 2017; Logan & Ridley, 2015; Putman, Harrington, & Coleman, 2013a; Roennfeldt, 2017; Taylor, 2013). Perhaps this is due to the overwhelming number of dimensions and perspectives that come when studying the many acts and teachings of Jesus through not just one, but four gospels.

Some writers focus on the sacrifice of discipleship, often using texts such as Luke 9:23 (NASB) in which Jesus states, "*If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.*" This is evident in the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who in speaking of the cost of discipleship states,

For acquired knowledge cannot be divorced from the existence in which it is acquired. The only man who has a right to say that he is justified by grace alone is the man who has left all to follow Christ. Such a man knows that the call to discipleship is a gift of grace, and that the call is inseparable from the grace. But those who try to use this grace as a dispensation from following Christ are simply deceiving themselves. (Bonhoeffer, 1959, p. 43)

Bonhoeffer wrote this text while being imprisoned in Germany as a war criminal during World War II for following through on his conscience as a disciple to stand up for the oppressed. Similarly, Donald Bloesch writes concerning true spirituality the similar heart of discipleship that Bonhoeffer espouses,

True spirituality entails the sacrifice of the self for the good of our neighbour and for the glory of God. It means serving the despised and forsaken of the world for the sake of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and rose again so that all might live. It entails letting the light of God's glory as we see this Jesus Christ shine in every aspect of our existence... It implies not flight from the world but instead bringing the world into submission to Jesus Christ... True spirituality involves living in the midst of the world's afflictions for the greater glory of God. It means taking up the cross and following Christ into the darkness of the world as a sign of the dawning of the new eon. (Bloesch, 2007, pp. 29-30)

This concept of discipleship revolves around the understanding that being a disciple of Jesus results in self-denial, where sacrificing one's pride, desires, and even life may take place so that one can be faithful to Christ no matter what the cost. This understanding is highlighted by the culminating final instruction: *follow me* (Luke 9:23). Camp (2008, p. 29) uses the term, 'radical discipleship' in that it is, "...*not a call to burdensome moral*

perfectionism, but a call to leave the old ways of death and darkness, to walk in the new way of abundant life and glorious light with the Christ who is Light and Life.” It’s interesting to note that ‘follow’ in the original Greek (ἀκολουθεῖω) means ‘a roadway’ that one travels on. Understanding the submission to the Father and the sacrifice Jesus made on behalf of those who would accept him as their saviour, a disciple is being one who will follow Christ’s example no matter what the cost; as their master did (Just, 1996).

It is worth noting that submitting to God in this sense is not so much a lower or even middle level of moral reasoning, but rather of that described by Kohlberg as a higher level (Kohlberg, 1958). This notion is mentioned in the book of Jeremiah 31:33b, where it is expressed that God states that, “*I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*” (NASB)(House, 1998). In this way, submission to God takes place when a person chooses to do what they believe to be the right thing to do even though they would personally rather choose a more selfish path. Aside from the Bible, this is echoed in the writings of Aristotle and Plato where there is an eternal understanding of what is righteous; some may refer to this as ‘one’s conscious’ (Celano, 2013). It is with this understanding then that following God is not a blind obedience to a set of rules where there is no personal contemplation, but rather adhering to an eternal understanding of what is right and wrong, and choosing to do what is morally and ethically right come what may.

Yet there are other aspects to discipleship that are often evident in definitions. Growth and progression of self, along with the idea that discipleship has the expectation of bringing about growth in others with the result of a multiplication of disciples is a theme that is often spoken of in the literature (Burrill, 2009; De Waal, 2017). The growth aspect is often in relation to the concepts of texts such as Ephesians 4:15 and 2 Peter 3:18. It is interesting to note that in writing on true spiritual and religious conversion, James Fowler (2000, p. 115) discusses a transformative process denoting mature followers of Christ:

Rather, by conversion I mean an ongoing process – with, of course, a series of important moments of perspective-altering convictions and illuminations – through which people (or a group) gradually bring the lived story of their lives into congruence with the core story of the Christian faith.

Concerning the teaching and multiplication aspect in defining discipleship, it is often based on the *Great Commission* in Matthew 28:19-20, emphasising that discipleship involves

growing and making disciples, and that making disciples involves not only baptizing individuals but teaching them both what Jesus asked them as disciples to do as well as showing them how to follow him (Talbert, 2010). An example of this is found in the writings of Greg Ogden, where he highlights:

Discipling is an intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. This includes equipping the disciple to teach others as well... A disciple is one who responds in faith and obedience to the gracious call to follow Jesus Christ. Being a disciple is a lifelong process of dying to self while allowing Jesus Christ to come alive in us. (Ogden, 2007, pp. 17, 24)

Multiplication is an integral aspect of discipleship as it is intertwined with the concept of social connectedness; or having compassion for others. It is compassionate as making disciples is understood as bringing a sense of meaning and purpose to other people lives, as well as a place in Heaven.

The common thread in all of the authors cited is that at the centre of Christ's call to discipleship is fellowship, in that his followers are to be intimately connected to God (which includes Jesus) and connected to others. To be connected to God is to share God's principles and understand that he is the creator and the individual is his creation, thereby in submission to God. To be connected with others is to empathise with other people through compassion and seeking their wellbeing in all matters; including helping them to connect with God. Such connectedness is expressed in how people treat others and God; in that individuals are to first love God, and second have compassion on others as one would have compassion on oneself (Bloesch, 2007; Bonhoeffer, 1959; Ogden, 2007).

To emphasise the importance of connectedness, Jesus declared in John 13:34 – 35 NASB, *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”* The context of this text is that Jesus is preparing his disciples at the Last Supper for his act of the ultimate glorification of God the Father through his sacrifice (Keener, 2003). At this time Jesus gives them a command of compassion and unity, which will mark them as his disciples (Elowsky & Oden, 2007). Disciples of Jesus show compassion for others by forming and maintaining positive relationships with others through communion and service (Lowe & Lowe, 2010).

Longenecker (1996, p. 75) summarised the aspects of what it means to be a disciple with ten points, in that discipleship...

i) is based on what Christ has effected for the redemption of humanity, ii) must always be rooted in and shaped by the apostolic tradition, iii) needs always to be dependent on God and submissive to his will, hence the importance of prayer, iv) must always recognise the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, v) is to be involved in prophetic proclamation, with that proclamation focused on the work of Jesus, vi) is to cherish, both in thought and in action, the understanding of God's grace and the gospel as being universal, vii) is to be committed to a lifestyle that allows no allegiance to take the place of allegiance to Jesus, viii) is to be concerned for the poor, the imprisoned, the blind, and the oppressed, ix) is to follow the examples of Jesus and the apostles, particularly Paul, in matters of service, prayer, and cross-bearing, and x) is to be a life of development in both one's faith and one's practice.

In other words, "*[Discipleship] is a radical commitment of the whole life to the radical Jesus.*" (Burrill, 2009, p. 102). Considering the various definitions above, the following points can be surmised concerning being a disciple of Jesus

A disciple is to pursue a life of selflessness

A disciple is to submit to God, no matter what the cost

A disciple is to represent Jesus through unconditional compassion for others

A disciple is to actively encourage others to become disciples

A disciple shows their commitment to Jesus through baptism

A disciple is to live their life as Christ would

A disciple is continually growing in their pursuit of becoming who Jesus wants them to become.

Therefore, it can be said that discipleship is the process of an individual becoming who God wants him or her to become as an individual while helping others to become who God wants them to be. This consists of being a faithful servant to God through the observation of his principles, continually growing in the pursuit of being a disciple, and representing Jesus through a spirit of unconditional compassion. This involves the expectation that a disciple will be spiritually connected with God through the expression of their love for Christ in abiding in God through faithfulness and continued growth towards becoming God's child in a fuller sense, and through such faithfulness be socially connected by showing compassion to others; which contributes to wellbeing (Donaldson, 1996).

Therefore, in understanding discipleship as the mechanism for Christian social and spiritual connectedness, the following can be said: discipleship is the instrument for creating spiritual connectedness as to be a disciple means to follow Jesus and his teachings, which requires intimacy with God. In addition to this, discipleship is also the instrument for creating social connectedness, as following Jesus requires treating others with compassion and seeking to understand their perspective. When a disciple treats other people in this way, it brings a sense of value and connection to the receiving individual, potentially resulting in a mutually positive bond between both; this may be fostered through gratitude and forgiveness (Armenta et al., 2017; Lowe & Lowe, 2010).

Having discussed what it means to be a disciple can render a sense of being overwhelmed unless direction is given in how to proceed. For this reason, the methodology of discipleship must be discussed in order to put ‘flesh on the bones’ and have a sense of what it looks like in action. An investigation on how discipleship can take place will now be discussed.

Discipleship as a method

Being a disciple concerns following the way of Jesus, therefore logically disciples should also follow Christ’s method of discipleship if they truly are his disciples. There are two aspects that need to be addressed; being a disciple and making disciples. The first aspect (being a disciple) has been discussed at length throughout this chapter and therefore will only be briefly touched upon in this section to highlight some of the specifics of practise, whereas the latter will be discussed in more depth.

As mentioned above, being a disciple involves faithfulness to God, ongoing personal growth as a disciple, and showing compassion to others (Azzopardi, 2018). Aside from the theological and philosophical concepts that should take place on a cognitive and affective level, there are behavioural components that maintain and strengthen the mental aspects of discipleship (Himes, 2011).

It is through such connectedness to both God and human that the ‘fruit’ of discipleship is produced, which is good character and good works (John 15:4); this good fruit is the evidence of abiding in Christ (Camp, 2008). Considering that the spiritual disciplines influence disciples to treat others well and improve one’s own character, in this sense, the spiritual disciplines are also tools of social connectedness and self-efficacy.

Paramount to all of this, however, is that a disciple makes choices based on what they believe Jesus would want (Bonhoeffer, 1959). It is important to keep in mind that at times such godly desires may go against what the majority of individuals in society are accustomed to and sometimes may even be against (Donaldson, 1996). People such as Stephen (one of the first appointed deacons and the first Christian martyr), Justin Martyr, Martin Luther, John Bunyan, David Lipscomb, Corrie ten Boom, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Rachel Joy Scott are examples of true Christian disciples who stood for what Christ represented even in the face of death (Camp, 2008; Chadwick & Foxe, 2001; Anonymous, 1999). This, living as Christ lived in the face of persecution, beckons back to the discussion on sacrifice on pages 26 – 27, and is necessary to abide in Christ as a child of God in order to be spiritually connected to the vine (John 15:4).

To end the process of discipleship with self, regardless of the sacrifice and intentions made as an individual does not result in the product that Jesus had in mind for his own disciples. Whilst it is true that self must die and is integral to the discipleship progress, the death of self is largely for the purpose of increasing the future harvest just as a single dead seed is planted so that many new plants can grow (John 12:24). With this in mind, the conversation will turn towards examining the method of being a discipler.

Becoming a disciple is neither an isolated practise, nor an end for selfish gain (B. Roberts, 2010). While discipleship entails abiding in Christ and therefore should have a positive impact on those around the disciple due to the individual making positive choices, the influence of the disciple should not be limited to simply being a good citizen for the community but rather ensuring that their life as a disciple inspires others to become disciples of Jesus as well; therefore being a ‘contagious Christian’ (Roennfeldt, 2017).

Considering that discipleship is a mechanism for spiritual and social connectedness which in turn may lead to one’s own wellbeing, a disciple also seeks the wellbeing of others by helping others to have what they as a Christian have. In this sense, the Christian process of discipleship can be said to be eudaimonic in its foundation as one who is a disciple desires to extend the benefits of being a disciple to others (Hull, 2006; Logan & Ridley, 2015). Therefore, discipling others is driven by a deep compassion to save people from both a present life that is absent of true purpose and meaning, as well as giving them a future life with Christ upon his return (Ahn, 2006).

Considering the methodology of Jesus in terms of discipleship, there are several aspects that need to take place in order to make other disciples. The final instruction given by Jesus to his disciples known as the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18 – 20) was so named as it was the final instruction given by Jesus to his disciples as he ascended into Heaven. Concerning this text two main concepts need to guide the reader, which are: i) the understanding that verse 18 justifies the directive as being a binding principle, as Jesus expresses his authority as ruler of both heavenly and earthly jurisdictions, and ii) the subject of this objective concerned the imperative to evangelise and multiply as disciples (Bloesch, 2007; Hurtado, 1996; Talbert, 2010). As previously mentioned above, given that a disciple is to have compassion on others and help them to become a better person this directive given by Jesus emphasises that a disciple should share the means of their wellbeing with others in order for them to experience wellbeing as well.

As you go, make disciples... (Matthew 28: 19).

The first aspect of the Great Commission is an instruction of activity not passivity; to make disciples, indicates the overall action of a disciple is to spiritually reproduce. This is not merely teaching and encouraging a concept, but instilling in others a desire to become a disciple of Jesus ultimately resulting in saving other people from sin, and thus giving them hope and meaning through a life of service to God and others (Taylor, 2013). As such, being a disciple is not just centred on developing oneself but it involves the imperative of spiritually reproducing through multiplying the discipleship process in others as well (Cole, 2010); as the words of Robert Logan describes it is, “Making disciples while growing as disciples” (Logan & Ridley, 2015). However, it is of interest that the way the imperative to ‘go’ is understood to the original disciples of Jesus’ day is, ‘as you go, make disciples’ in that discipleship takes place as one goes about their everyday life (Talbert, 2010).

Ironically, many Christians and the Church itself, has focused much evangelism into specific events which take place at specific venues rather than a process that is to take place over meals, in the town square, or on the road as exhibited by Jesus and his original disciples (De Waal, 2017; Finley, 2013). However, upon examining the life of Jesus and the early disciples evangelism took place incidentally and often through the establishment of friendship (Cole, 2010). This is akin to the sowing of the seed parable in Matthew 13, where the farmer was very generous and gracious with how and where he threw the seed.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus is constantly mixing and talking to people, and was known for befriending people regardless of their background (Byrd, 2009). He masterly brought people under his wing through discussing the everyday and regular happenings of life (Stier, 2008). It has been evidenced through various studies that the best means of evangelism is through a friend or a relative; between 70-95% come to Christ through friends or family (Burrill, 2009; Kidder, 2011). A large part of the reason for this is that, in a world with so many voices and opinions to choose from, friendship offers trust in knowing that the friend has both experienced Jesus and is not trying to deceive for ill-gain; hence the power of Christian witnessing (T. E. Johnson, 2002; R. Warren, 2008). Therefore, the first step of discipleship is often (if not always) through socially connecting with others.

Baptising them... (Matthew 28: 19).

After a relationship with God has been established with a new seeker through connecting with a disciple, it is a matter of the Holy Spirit working towards convicting the potential new believer to embrace Jesus as their Saviour (Finley, 2013). Until such a decision takes place and the individual publicly commits themselves to Christ (through baptism or profession of faith in some cases), they are not truly considered a disciple (De Waal, 2017; Hull, 2006). Baptism then is not the product of discipleship but akin to starting a marathon rather than finishing a sprint. Therefore, in continuing in the understanding of connectedness, baptism is the beginning of the discipleship process where an individual chooses to publicly acknowledge being spiritually connected to God and opens themselves up for accountability as a child of God.

Baptize (βαπτίζοντες in the Greek) refers to dipping and sinking completely, or to submerge. This act of submersion, though debated in some circles, signifies death to the old sinful self while being born (upon the re-emergence) as a new person in Christ. Talbert (2010, p. 18) writes:

Matthew 28:19-20 indicates that evangelization involves baptizing new disciples into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit... To be baptized into the triune name, therefore, is to enter into a bonded relationship that will provide one with the divine resources to enable following the guidance of what comes next (all that I have commanded you).

As discussed in this paper on pages 26 – 27, to become a disciple then involves denying oneself. It is symbolised through immersion which signifies dying to oneself, and

reemerging as a new individual who is in submission to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Talbert, 2010).

Further to this, being baptised is a public acknowledgement of choosing to follow Jesus, just as a wedding is a public acknowledgement of being married (Hull, 2006). There is no such thing as being a private Christian; though living in an area of great persecution (i.e. Iran) may make publicity of the fact quite dangerous and should be considered far more complex. With such an understanding of baptism, disciples are to actively baptise new disciples into the faith and helping them understand the expectations of a disciple both before baptism and afterwards; which is the next part of the Great Commission's directive.

Teaching them... (Matthew 28: 20).

Continuing to explain the third aspect of the discipleship process in Matthew 28:19 – 20 is that making disciples involves not only baptizing individuals but teaching them both what Jesus instructed them as disciples as well as showing them how to follow him (Finley, 2013). It is worth noting that this part of the passage proceeds the previous section on baptism, which lends itself to the notion that learning to observe the principles of Jesus does not end with baptism, but flows on from it for the rest of a disciple's lifetime (Donaldson, 1996). In light of the fact that humans are sinful and imperfect beings, and incapable of attaining perfection and sinlessness until Jesus returns, it is with the understanding that a disciple then is in a state of continual growth through the pursuit of becoming like Christ: which is the process of sanctification (Weima, 1996). Therefore, a disciple is not defined by mere baptism but by continual growth in the observation of Christ's ways.

However, Jesus did not only ask the disciples to be like him in terms of moral behaviour but also in teaching others to be disciples (Ogden, 2007; Roennfeldt, 2017). This continuing multiplication of disciples appears consistently in Christ's parables (Talbert, 2010). As such, some of the specific methods that Jesus used when it came to equipping the disciples will now be unpacked.

When one examines the method of discipleship that Jesus employed in multiplying disciples, several things stand out. First is that Jesus chose a small select group of people to focus on, rather than focusing on the innumerable crowds who flocked to him at times (Finley, 2013). In this manner, coaching and mentoring can take place either one-on-one or in a small group which has been found to be an effective means of education (Campbell, 2009;

Creswell, J., 2006; Mathis, 2017). Interestingly, while choosing twelve disciples, Jesus further chose a more intimate group of three of the twelve of whom he could pour even more guidance concerning understanding his ministry and mission; that is, Matthew 17 (Campbell & Chancy, 2009). It is in such a manner that discipleship should take place through a select few rather than a packed church.

The second major aspect of Jesus' method of discipleship was of shaping the disciples through teaching; which through the use of the Greek word διδάσκω, means to cause to learn, to direct, and admonish (France, 2002). The gospels are replete with examples of Jesus' encouraging both his twelve disciples, the crowds, and even the religious leaders to do what is right and warn them through rebuke when they are doing something unwise. Aspects of his teaching included the use of the word, 'to show' (δεικνύειν), and 'to rebuke' (ἐπιτιμάω), indicating that guidance towards what is right and away from what is wrong is part of discipling others, as is pointing out what the Scriptures say (Henry, 1998). This method does not only include verbal teaching of morals, but it also concerns the practical application of ministry as well as empowering disciples with authority; that is, Jesus sends out the disciples to minister with his own power and authority in Mark 6:7-12 (France, 2002). Therefore, discipling others involves teaching, edifying and equipping to be both disciples and disciplers; which ties into to the third aspect of Jesus' method.

Finally, the product of Christ's ministry of discipleship was not merely to pass on valuable information but to ensure that his ministry and his method would continue infinitely. As mentioned on pages 31 – 34 concerning the Great Commission, the disciples were to make disciples; which renews the commission for every new disciple made (Talbert, 2010). This can be seen in Jesus' frustration of his disciples being unable to cast out the demon from the epileptic boy when he was away from them whilst being transfigured, in that Jesus desired his disciples to be able to function without his human form present with them (France, 2002; Talbert, 2010).

Interestingly, the result of Jesus' efforts in pouring into the disciples so that they would disciple others is not seen until Pentecost once he had ascended and the Holy Spirit arrived on Earth as his omnipresent replacement (Bock & Köstenberger, 2011). This highlights the importance of being baptised and immersed in the Holy Spirit, since human effort alone does not result in Christian discipleship. Such methods went on to increase the

size of the Christian community from one hundred and twenty people praying in an upper room to hundreds of thousands decades later (Winter, 2009).

In the discussion examining discipleship as the means of social and spiritual connectedness, discipleship was proposed as a mechanism of wellbeing. Considering discipleship is following Christ, it was argued that discipleship is an instrument of spiritual connectedness between an individual and God. Further to this, since following Christ demands taking care of other people, it was also argued that discipleship is an instrument of social connectedness. A description of what a disciple looks like in thought and action was expressed through the literature, along with a methodology of becoming a disciple and a discipler.

However, while contemporary literature as well as the Bible are able to create a reasonable theory of discipleship, the current picture of Christianity as view by both Christians and non-Christians does not match the conceptualisation discussed. This discrepancy between theory and perception is problematic and leaves many Christian adherers with a challenge. Our next section will examine this discrepancy.

The current picture of Christianity

Although 61% of Australians consider themselves Christian only 7% of those who claim to be Christian are in church attendance on the weekend, 15% attend at least once a month, while the rest rarely or never attend (Hughes et al., 2014). McCrindle Research, adopting a mixed-method study through a national survey of 1,024 Australians and several focus groups, found that 26% of non-Christians surveyed had a negative view towards Christianity; with some of the top negative influences in their view being church abuse, judgement towards others, and religious wars (McCrindle et al., 2017, pp. 10, 32). Further to this, McCrindle et al. (2017, p. 32) also found that 65% of Australians see hypocrisy as, “*a negative (massive/significant) influence on their perceptions of Christians and Christianity.*” It was found that only 3% of Australians have complete confidence in the church and just 19% have much confidence (Hughes et al., 2014), which informs the observer that the compassionate and accepting Jesus that is professed to be followed in Christian churches is not validated by the actions of their members.

Although the theory of discipleship discussed previously holds the viewpoint that discipleship is a mechanism for spiritual and social connectedness, the public perspective

denies this being the case. Part of the issue may be that many Christians practice Christianity as though it were a checklist to be attained (Kimball, 2012; Tozer & Snyder, 2009). This can have a negative impact on social connectedness as the further from the accepted checklist another person is; the more change is required for that individual to become accepted (Bonhoeffer, 1959; Harper & Metzger, 2009; Kimball, 2012). Some professed Christians may practice their faith as if it were an event (Cole, 2010). In this case, the individual may see themselves as Christian solely by baptism or when accepting that Jesus died on the cross while never abiding in Christ through following his moral principles or taking the time to have a spiritual relationship with him (Hull, 2006; Kidder, 2011). Still, others may practice Christianity as merely a concept where radical discussions and interesting points of view are raised by the individual however, the individual themselves is passive and inactive (Bonhoeffer, 1959; Harper & Metzger, 2009; Hull, 2006; Tozer & Snyder, 2009).

Interestingly, research has found that, “*the greatest attraction to investigating spirituality and religion is seeing people who live out a genuine faith.*” (McCrindle et al., 2017, p. 26). This aligns with the previous discussion on pages 21 – 22, in that what distinguishes the children of God from everyone else is that they abide in Christ. That is, true Christians live an authentic and intimate walk with God in that they love God and have compassion for other people, not merely in words but in action (Taylor, 2013).

Considering the above research as well as the literature regarding the understanding of many who consider themselves Christians, it would seem that many who call themselves Christian do not actually grasp what it means to be a disciple; perhaps many may not even see themselves as disciples (Bonhoeffer, 1959; Himes, 2011; Hull, 2006; Taylor, 2013). Would the public have a different perspective of Christianity if all who claim to be Christian had a Biblical perspective of discipleship? If having a genuine Christian faith is indeed the greatest attractor to Christianity for non-Christians, and hypocrisy is seen as one of Christianity’s the biggest detractors as McCrindle’s (2017) research has found, then it could be argued that the answer to the above question is yes. If Christians were true disciples of Jesus in accordance with the Bible, then Christianity would likely enjoy much greater reputation from a public perspective than what it current has; and therefore, be far more attractive and relevant to those within and without Christianity.

A solution to the current image of Christianity is needed, one which points Christianity towards its root foundation of discipleship. An ideal context must be sought

where discipleship can take place in a local congregation in order to enhance the wellbeing of individuals through social and spiritual connectedness. An exploration of what kind of context could be pursued is what will be discussed in the next section.

The Ideal Discipleship Context

The contemporary picture of Christianity is such that few have confidence in the Christian church and consequently in the life-altering power of Christ; as discussed on pages 36 – 37 (Hughes et al., 2014; McCrindle et al., 2017). This is a very different picture than the movement started by Jesus of Nazareth that increased seemingly exponentially in the first few centuries after his death (Winter, 2009). In light of the discussion in this study concerning what being a disciple is and the methods utilised by Jesus, a major shift in the expectations and practice of Christianity between the days of the apostle Paul and the current time has taken place (Camp, 2008). However, this is not surprising given the political, cultural, historical, and technological changes that have transpired in the past 2000 years; it is indeed a complicated transition from the time of Christ to today.

In speaking directly to the present situation regarding Christian discipleship while briefly putting aside the complexities of history, several questions are worth considering: Could the root of the decline in Christianity simply be due to focusing on the wrong target on the part of the Church? Have Christians in general been focusing on belief-based membership rather than active discipleship? If membership rather than discipleship is the focus, then is there any wonder that an exclusive mentality, which includes hypocrisy, inefficiency, closed-mindedness, and frigidity, all relational and systemic issues rather than theological, are the primary reasons why people leave the church (Grossman, 2015; Jones, 2016; Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2011)?

The current situation seems to be highlighted by Bonhoeffer (1959, p. 50), *“Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.”* Ironically, the research of McCrindle et al. (2017) show that those who are non-believers are far more comfortable with the personality of Jesus who died almost two thousand years ago than they are with the contemporary Christian church or with whom they can currently associate. Clearly then, there must be some differentiation between the Church institutions, members, and pastors, and Jesus himself if such a difference of general respect and perspective exists.

Given the societal perspective on Jesus and the Church, for discipleship to take place, Christian communities must rethink their focus and the purpose of their ministries away from a membership mindset towards one where discipleship influences all that takes place, and indeed who Christians ought to be. Having examined the reason why discipleship influences connectedness and therefore wellbeing, as well as its theological underpinnings, it is of interest to consider what the ideal context of discipleship could look like within a Christian congregation.

Perhaps one of the most revolutionary and anti-cultural aspects of the Christian movement in the first century was an open acceptance of all people. While there was a certain code of conduct and beliefs that were expected of members of the early Christian communities, anyone who was willing to accept the teachings and way of Jesus was readily accepted with open arms; this was regardless of their cultural background, their gender, their age, or even their past choices (Van Engen, 2009). While this went against the norm of the day for Jews, it fast became one of the most attractive aspects of Christianity for both Hellenised Jews and God-fearing pagans (Stark, 2011). With this in mind, the characteristic of diversity will be examined as an aspect of focus in this study.

After a brief analysis of current data, it appears however that although many Australians consider themselves Christian very few are active in their faith thus creating an unfavourable and hypocritical perception of Christians in Australian society. However, whilst hypocrisy does seem to run rampant it is worth examining authentic Christian faith which is pursued by disciples to assess authentic Christianity impacts wellbeing through spiritual and social connectedness.

A diverse community

One of the characteristics that seemed to shape the communities of the early Christians as a discipleship movement was that of diversity (Jacobus, 2012). While originally based in Jerusalem as a Jewish movement, it fast became much more diverse as Hellenistic Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles were embraced into the discipleship community of Jesus (Bock & Köstenberger, 2011). This was very different from the traditional religious system of the day, and although it was a divisive topic amongst the Jewish Christians, it became a foundational pillar of Christianity in that anyone, no matter what their cultural, behaviour, or educational background was, who accepted Jesus as their Saviour and Lord and was willing

to follow his teachings was accepted not only into Christ's kingdom but also as a disciple (Bock & Köstenberger, 2011; Henry, 1998; Oliver, 2015). Specifically, there are three theological concepts which all point to diversity as an essential characteristic of a discipleship-focused community.

1. The Priesthood of All Believers

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” ~ 1 Peter 2:9 NASB

Considering that everyone who is a disciple is part of ‘the Royal Priesthood’, Krentz (2008) suggests that regardless of one's past, as part of a united people with a new identity in Christ, Christian believers are God's special priests. Being consecrated then, everyone with this identity is given authority (Long, 2011). Considering then that discipleship empowers individuals through the Holy Spirit in order to become more Christ-like espouses a viewpoint that everyone is equal in the eyes of God (Camp, 2008). This is regardless of age, ethnicity, gender, education, or past history.

2. The Body of Christ

“For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” ~ Romans 12:4 – 5 NASB

“For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, “Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, “Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body.” ~ 1 Corinthians 12:14 – 16 NASB

In discussing the theology and ecclesiology of the Church according to the apostle Paul, it is of necessity to establish a community of believers where the acceptance and integration of diverse members takes place as it promotes the concept and practice of the body of Christ; in that everyone has something unique yet important to offer to the service of Christ (Middendorf, 2007). The ideal discipleship context intentionally creates a diverse community of believers, which exemplify the body of Christ expressed by Paul in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians, and Colossians (Harkness, 2012). By diversity established it is expressed that all generations, cultures, and personalities have equal value, all are equally needed, and therefore the local church as a whole loses if one of these is missing (Amidei, Merhaut, & Roberto, 2014). Just as every part of the body has a specific function, and

amputation is to be avoided unless it is required to save the whole body, so is every individual in a congregation integral and has a specific role to be carried out.

3. The Gifts of the Spirit

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. ~ 1 Corinthians 12:4 – 11 NASB

This passage not only establishes that every individual has been given authority (1 Peter 2:9) and that every disciple has a special work within the community (1 Corinthians 12:14 – 16), but that every disciple has also been given specific gifts from the Holy Spirit (Schwarz, 2006). These gifts are not allocated according to culture, education level, or age, but are determined solely by the Holy Spirit; and therefore are expressions of diversity both as gifts and also as receivers of the gifts (Harkness, 2012).

As previously discussed, disciples are to live a life of selflessness and growth as opposed to mere spectatorship. Further to this, a diverse community is needed as diversity in experience is a requirement for learning to take place (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotskiĭ, Rieber, & Carton, 1987). Therefore, the ideal context of discipleship could be argued to be within a community of individuals who are both active in their faith and diverse in their backgrounds. One such type of diverse Christian community is that of intergenerational congregations.

Intergenerational congregations

A means of diversity considered that is found in every culture and socioeconomic grouping, and yet a means of diversity that is relatable to everyone is that of age. Every age group comes with their own growing experience and perspective, and therefore through their diversity, they have unique contributions to be made to those in other age brackets (French, Unser, & Australia, 2015). In terms of discipleship, it is through age and experience that teaching and mentoring often take place; and the richer the diversity of age, the healthier

congregations tend to become (Powell, K. E., Mulder, J., & Griffin, B., 2016). This being the case, this study will seek to understand how a person's wellbeing is impacted by their level of social and spiritual connectedness as they are discipled in an intergenerational congregation. Could intergenerational congregations be an ideal context for discipleship, and therefore the context for finding psychological, social, and spiritual wellbeing? In Chapter 3 the available literature will be investigated to find an answer to this question.

CHAPTER 3 : INTERGENERATIONALITY AS A CONTEXT OF DISCIPLESHIP

In the previous chapter, the need for social and spiritual connectedness as a potential means for achieving positive wellbeing through discipleship was discussed. Through the discussion, it was concluded that a local Christian congregation has the potential to offer adequate social and spiritual connectedness providing its members not only promoted the teachings of Jesus but engaged as authentic disciples (Gallet, 2016). While many who identify as Christian do not live such a lifestyle as prescribed by Jesus, those who authentically live as disciples of Jesus not only have healthy social and spiritual connectedness but have the capacity to influence others to also become disciples themselves if the methods of Jesus are utilised (Cherry, 2016; Taylor, 2013). Finally, in light of three major theological concepts found in the New Testament, being the priesthood of believers, the body of Christ, and the gifts of the Spirit, it is argued that one of the characteristics that shape a discipleship context is that of diversity, and that one kind of diversity that is relatable and available in every society is that of generational diversity (Bock & Köstenberger, 2011; Jacobus, 2012).

This chapter will investigate the question of what intergenerationality has to do with wellbeing, and if it lends itself as an ideal context for discipleship to take place. As a diverse context, intergenerationality may be a potential solution that encourages active participation of spiritual activities associated with Christianity, spiritual growth, and compassion.

Intergenerationality as a Context for Discipleship

There was a point in time when birth rates were high, marriages were enduring, siblings were many, and lifespans were much shorter, however, many societal changes which have taken place in the past century have caused a massive change in demographics (Clark, C. M. H., 2006; Park, 2014; Pazmino & Kang, 2011; Steinbach, 2012). Specifically, there has been an increase of generational diversity in society. However, of prime concern in this study is that although such circumstances could have increased the awareness of the reliance of intergenerational relations, a decline in intergenerational connectedness has taken place instead (Szydlik, 2012).

Given that intergenerationality is a type of social connectedness and that its decline in the past century seems congruent with the general decline of connectedness, perhaps its

absence also plays a role in the decline of wellbeing. In consideration of the discussions of the previous chapter concerning the potential role discipleship can play in increasing wellbeing through spiritual and social connectedness, intergenerational congregations will now be discussed as a potential context for discipleship, and consequently wellbeing. Before an investigation into the role of intergenerationality in discipleship can take place, intergenerationality must be defined and a determination of the factors of intergenerationality need to be established.

Defining Intergenerationality

Intergenerationality (noun) is the characteristic of being intergenerational (adjective), which means relating to, involving, or affecting several generations. An intergenerational community is one that is composed of representatives of several generations who engage in positive interactions with each other resulting in interdependency and mutual beneficence (Allen, H. C. & Ross, 2012; Harkness, 2012). For the sake of differentiating terminology, it is also relevant to compare and contrast the terms monogenerational, multigenerational, and intergenerational. *Monogenerational* means *within* a generation, therefore, an monogenerational church community is one that is primarily composed of only one generation; the term unigenerational can also be used in this sense. *Multigenerational* church communities are composed of several generations but are not necessarily intergenerational in nature. The difference between a multigenerational congregation and an intergenerational congregation is that the represented generations in an *intergenerational* congregation engage in positive interactions with each other to the point of interdependency and mutuality whereas, this does not necessarily take place in a multigenerational congregation. For example, in a multigenerational church all the generations may be present, and there may be activities in place that pertain to each generation, however, if the generations are not interacting positively with each other and have no need for each other as a whole, then the group is not intergenerational but merely multigenerational; therefore, presence does not equate community. In sum, an intergenerational community must be multigenerational, but there are many multigenerational communities that are not intergenerational.

However, to further pursue the conversation on intergenerational congregations, it must be first understood what a generation is, and who the current generations are. This needs to take place in order to understand the dynamics that exist between the real people who make up each generation so that a context of discussion can be established.

Defining the generations

Generational theory is the study of the development of values, beliefs, interests, and behaviour of a group of people whose shared existence is during the same time and culture period; a generation (McQueen, 2010). Concerning the need to investigate the different generations, Glassford and Barger-Elliot (2011, p. 11) write,

Researching generational theory will help understand the perspectives that each generation has, their differences from others, and their similarities. If such an understanding can take place then it can lend itself to finding a means of connecting different generations and developing positive relationships between them.

The time period that separates consecutive generations is roughly around twenty years, though the boundaries between one generation and those around it often vary due to important cultural events; and specific timelines and labels vary depending on the theorist. McCrindle and Wolfinger (2011, pp. 2-3) state that, “... *We define a generation as a group of people born in the same era, shaped by the same times and influenced by the same social markers...*” For example, the birth of the “Buster” or “X” generation has been cited by: Strauss and Howe (1997) as being born from 1961 to 1981; McIntosh (2002) as being born from 1965 to 1983; McCrindle and Wolfinger (2011) from 1965 to 1980; and Shaw (2015) from the years are 1965 to 1980. Others like McQueen (2010) generalise the birth as sometime in the mid-1960s to the early 1980s. Figure 3.1 compares some of the mentioned generational timelines with the current study.

	1901	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Strauss & Howe (1997)	GIs		Silents		Baby Boomers		Gen X		Gen Y		Gen Z		
McIntosh (2002)	GIs		Silents		War Babies	Boomers		Busters		Bridgers			
McCrindle & Wolfinger (2011)	Federation		Builders		Baby Boomers		Gen X		Gen Y		Gen Z		Gen Alpha
Shaw (2015)	Traditionalists				Baby Boomers		Gen X		Millennials				
Azzopardi	Traditionalists				Baby Boomers		Gen X		Millennials		Digitals		

Figure 3.1
Generational Timeline Comparison

As to the culture, it is extremely important to understand that the profile of someone who is an Australian Baby Boomer born in the 1950s may be quite different than from those of the same time period who was born and raised in Moscow. It is with this understanding

that it is relevant to note that most generational theorists analyse the generations from an American point of view (as most theorists are from the USA), and although they will be used considerably in this next section a limitation in this review is that this is an Australian dissertation and thus the cultural aspect may be somewhat different. Currently, there are approximately five to six generations co-existing contemporarily with each other depending on the literature. Again, it is stressed to the reader that these groupings are based on trends and that there are no grounds for absolute generational groupings to be established.

Theorists Strauss and Howe (1997) delegate those born between 1901 and 1924 as the GI Generation and those born between 1925 and 1943 as the Silent generation. However several other authors unite both generations as one due to their extremely similar characteristics and values, giving them names such as Builders and/or Traditionalists (McIntosh, 2002; McQueen, 2010; Shaw, H., 2015); McCrindle, an Australian author names the GI Generation, the “Federation Generation” as it was a time when Australia became a nation in its own right (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2011). A combination of both generations for the same aforementioned reasons using the term ‘Traditionalists’ for those with birth dates between 1901 and 1942 will be used in this study.

The next generation to be discussed will be the ‘Baby Boomers’ born approximately from 1943 to 1960. The group of individuals born from 1961 to 1981 has been given several names by various authors, such as ‘Generation X’, ‘Busters’ and ‘Survivors’; the term ‘Generation X’ will be used in this study. The next group concern those who were born from 1982 to 2003, often designated as ‘Generation Y’ or ‘Millennial’; the term ‘Millennial’ will be used in this study. The youngest generation is currently still being born but has the demarcation line beginning at the year 2004 and have often been called ‘Generation Z’, however the name ‘Digital Generation’ has been chosen to designate them in this study due to their being born and bred in a culture of digitised society. It should be noted that authors such as McCrindle have ‘Generation Z’ born between 1995 to 2010, resulting in his use of ‘Generation Alpha’ for those born after 2010.

It must also be mentioned that each generation’s characteristics have a tendency to be formed in reflection of their reaction to their culture during their formative years; being their childhood and adolescence (McIntosh, 2002). This makes sense socioculturally, understanding that each generation is finding a means to understand and thrive within their environment and culture during their principal years of development and learning (Daniels,

2008). However, it should be noted that West and Aarons (2016) found a weak correlation concerning the historical significance of wartime events and adolescent experience. This goes against the prominent belief of most generational theorists, which implies that there is still a great deal of research that can go into this fairly nascent field of study. With all of this in mind, each of the five generations will now be examined.

The Traditionalists

Born between 1901 and 1944, and having their formative years take place during the 1920s – 1950s, the Traditionalists lived during a time of global rising and falling (McQueen, 2010). Although much of the world at that point in time was in the midst of the industrial revolution and the majority of people lived in rural localities. It was a time when massive societal, economic, and political changes were taking place; although the Traditionalists themselves may not have realised how much these global crises would impact them, as they tried to cling on to the values and ideals of their parents (Shaw, H., 2015).

Having established their Federation in 1901, Australia at the time of the Traditionalist generation was seeking its place as a sovereign nation. Traditionalists were doing their best to show the world that they could not only succeed without anyone else's help but thrive; not only in reference to other nations, but also other cultures, as Australia sought to be a purely Anglo-Saxon based country (Clark, C. M. H., 2006). The isolationist notions were turned on their head as 'the Great War', now known as World War One shook the globe, decimating millions as modern warfare changed the face of war (Clarke, 2003). Following the world war came the roaring twenties, a time of prosperity, culminating in the Great Depression; which brought much of the world to their knees financially (Clark, C. M. H., 2006). Finally, the era of the birthing and formative years of the traditionalists ended with the horrors of World War Two and its victorious though bloody ending (Clarke, 2003).

Technological advances changed the world of the Traditionalists and their parents forever leading to massive improvements in many areas of life. From the advances in modern medicine such as antibiotics and vaccines to the mechanisation of war machines and civilian travel, scientific advances transformed their world (McQueen, 2010). Entertainment had changed dramatically as well, as live theatre made way for film, and families began to listen to recorded music and the radio. Mass communication had also come about through the invention and proliferation of the telephone.

Growing up in the time that the Traditionalists did led to characteristics found in the majority of their generation; although these characteristics are generalisations, they are backed by much research (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2011; McIntosh, 2002; McQueen, 2010; Shaw, H., 2015; Strauss & Howe, 1997). Some of the main characteristics will be presently discussed, beginning with the reason the study will use 'Traditionalist' as their namesake.

Perhaps due to experiencing a tremendous amount of change whilst admiring their parent's generation, Traditionalists value tradition and hold dearly on to the past; often lamenting how the world has changed (Shaw, H., 2015). Their experience of having strong leaders who helped them get through wars and hard times has probably contributed to many Traditionalists having unwavering loyalty to authority, rarely questioning the process and why decisions are made; although Australians may not have this as much as the extent of those in other cultures (Clark, K. R., 2017).

Traditionalists are hard workers, dependable, and team players. They are generous and sacrificially give to any cause they believe in and consequently make up the majority of donors for charities, they are (Shaw, H., 2015). This being said, having seen the hardship of the Depression, they are very frugal (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2011). Given that they grew up in a society that had clear boundaries, outright enemies, us versus them mentality, and strict morality, a century later Traditionalists often come into conflict with other generations over areas that the rest may deem as 'grey' areas. Thus, they are often seen as judgemental and at times prejudice; and do not shy away from letting others know what they think (Menconi, 2010). Finally, Traditionalists are also famous for their stoicism and sometimes impenetrable personal feelings as they often believe it is not proper to divulge their emotions (McQueen, 2010). Responding to their crisis experiences, the Traditionalists are also known as the 'Builders' as they built many government and non-government institutions to deal with the problems they faced (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2011).

The Baby Boomers

After the Second World War, soldiers came home wanting a life of marriage and family (something quite opposite to their experience in war) and a baby boom ensued creating the generation almost unanimously named, the 'Baby Boomers' (Nesbit Sbanotto & Blomberg, 2016). Born between 1944 and 1961, their formative years were the 1960s and 1970s. This was a time of social upheaval as the world changed dramatically after the war.

Being born into a world that was experiencing prosperity, the Baby Boomers were given the luxuries their Traditionalist parents worked hard for yet often never received themselves as children. This made their generation the first consumer generation; also known as 'Generation Me' (McCrinkle & Wolfinger, 2011). Wartime in foreign countries overwhelmingly warmed the hearts of Australians as the gates of immigration opened up to many nations of both western and eastern backgrounds (Clark, C. M. H., 2006). However, conflicts in Korea and Vietnam, as well as a seemingly unending Cold War painted a less than idealised view of the world; not to mention the assassinations in America (Clark, C. M. H., 2006; Menconi, 2010). From the Civil Rights movement in the United States to the political debacles in Australia and many other countries, many Baby Boomers challenged the legitimacy of the expectation of unquestioning loyalty of authority (Clarke, 2003; Nesbit Sbanotto & Blomberg, 2016). Baby Boomers still make up an enormous chunk of the population, especially in Western nations, to the point where anxiety is mounting concerning the cost of looking after their aging population (Lavigne, 2017).

Technological changes continued. Commercial flight became faster and aircraft could travel further. The Space Race between the United States and the USSR led to space rockets, satellites, and finally a man on the moon in 1969 (Clark, C. M. H., 2006; Shaw, H., 2015). The television became a popular home commodity and the average family was able to own a car. Music changed dramatically as Jazz was replaced with Rock-n-Roll, Soul and Disco.

In reaction to the often unquestionably loyal stance towards institutions, an attitude of judgement, and a seemingly unemotional and unempathetic outlook, Baby Boomers outwardly put a great deal of effort into being the opposite of their parents as they grew up; which was ironic as many of their ideas were due to the intellectuals and artists of the Traditionalist era (Shaw, H., 2015). Although the eldest Baby Boomers were known as being optimistic, many in their formative years saw the corruption of both institutions and leaders as well as a refusal to embrace progress if it meant breaking tradition; even if it was not functional or moral (Nesbit Sbanotto & Blomberg, 2016). This led to a desire for functionality and honesty, cause-orientation, and outright questioning of authority; the most outright of this occurred in the USA (McIntosh, 2002). Baby Boomers are known for being individualistic, and often put the rights of the individual above the community; which led to many abandoning careers, marriages, and children in order to do what they wanted to do (Strauss & Howe, 1997). Similarly, Baby Boomers differed from their parent's politeness in

waiting for the right time and the right words and are often known for their assertiveness (McQueen, 2010). In their adult years Baby Boomers are known for working hard in their careers, climbing the corporate ladder, and accumulating wealth, believing that a life of hard work and savings will result in having an ideal, self-indulging retirement (McCrinkle & Wolfinger, 2011).

Generation X

Born between 1961-1981, Generation X had their formative years from the mid-1970s through to the end of the 1990s. At the beginning of the next era, write Strauss and Howe (1997, p. 194) from an American perspective, it is stated that:

...by mid-1965 the U.S. fertility rate was entering its steep post-Boom decline. A national fertility study confirmed that a third of all mothers now admitted having at least one unwanted child. Stay-at-home moms began wearing buttons that read “Stop At One,” “None Is Fun,” and “Jesus Was An Only Child.” The reasons for this sudden turn included birth control pills, nascent feminism, and a new society wide hostility toward children.

Many Generation Xers (Xers for short) was born into such a worldview due to the pursuit of individual happiness. During their formative years, many couples seeking greater wealth chose to have mothers leave their children to fend for themselves at home or in the hands of carers. In addition to this, divorce increased by 300% (compared to the 1940s) leaving many Generation X children to almost raise themselves (McQueen, 2010); hence their nickname, ‘the Survivors’. The world at this time seemingly darkened by petty wars, continual disasters, along with corruption at almost every level made the claims of changing and saving the world by the Baby Boomers seem naïve and hypocritical to the Generation Xers (Shaw, H., 2015). With all these issues and events in mind, it is understandable that Generation X grew up with rampant self-esteem issues, a greater affection for friends than family, and a cynical nature (McIntosh, 2002; Shaw, H., 2015).

The Generation Xers are the first generation to have used computers in school and the home, and therefore, the first to use interactive technology as a means of entertainment; such as video games. Television became a staple pastime and a stable babysitter of Generation X (Menconi, 2010). The advent of video tapes and stores brought movies into the home on demand. 8-Tracks, cassette players, and eventually compact disk players replaced records; though music videos became extremely popular through channels such as MTV (Menconi,

2010). Music tastes diversified further as Hip Hop, Rap, Heavy Metal, and Alternative styles segregated youth into even more sub-cultures.

Due to a large majority of Xers having to raise themselves as children, most surveyed viewed themselves as being independent, resourceful, and pragmatic; they are also used to being unrestricted and therefore come across as freedom-minded (McIntosh, 2002; McQueen, 2010). Being influenced in their education by Traditionalist and Baby Boomer philosophers, Xers are the first truly postmodern generation (Menconi, 2010). The feelings of neglect and intolerance that many experienced combined with disappointment of their elders breaking promises, resulted in many having a great deal of cynicism. However, it has also created a longing for community and a deep desire for a loving family and a strong marriage; which caused many Xers to put off marriage much longer than previous generations to be sure they married the right person (Shaw, H., 2015). Having reaped the benefits of greater tolerance and cultural diversity due to the Baby Boomers' push in civil liberties, Xers are considerably more cosmopolitan than earlier generations (Menconi, 2010). To the utter shock and disgust of the passionate Baby Boomers and the accomplished Traditionalists, Generation X became known for being apathetic and indifferent; likely due to their childhood feelings of being less important than what adults prioritised (Nesbit Sbanotto & Blomberg, 2016).

The Millennials

The youngest members of the current workforce were born between 1981 and 2002, began their formative years in the 1990s with the last few predicted to finish their formative years in this (2010s) decade. Seeing the issues relating to a lack of parenting being given to Generation X, society pushed towards becoming a much more child friendly world which put the young Millennials at the centre of importance; interestingly abortion, corporal punishment, and divorce rates dropped during their formative years (McQueen, 2010). In almost a complete turnaround from the previous generation (likely due to younger Boomers who regretted past parenting practices and Xers being a large portion of their parents), the parents of Millennials have consistently been accused of continuous meddling by teachers, sport coaches, and even university lecturers as they have sought to protect their children from all manner of difficulties resulting from what was previously denoted as natural consequences (Menconi, 2010). Events such as the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the Bali bombings, and American school shootings impacted the Millennials tremendously, making them feel that despite immense security measures no place was truly safe (Menconi, 2010).

Increasingly, the world has become more tolerant in some ways to those who would have been labelled ‘abnormal’ in the past, as ‘truth’ is recognised by many as relative, which has led to a large swing to the political left by the Millennials (Fisher, 2018). This new reality has impacted society’s definition of marriage, spirituality, and family; and therefore it has impacted Millennials, along with older generations though perhaps the latter to a lesser degree (Menconi, 2010). The fact that Millennials make up the current entirety of young adults along with the last few who are in their last years of secondary school means that much of their history has yet to be written.

No generation has grown up with such large technological proliferation occurring thus far as the Millennials; though the Digitals who are now children will see even more (McQueen, 2010). Although the internet was created while the Xers were growing up, it was popularised and utilised by the general population during the formative years of the Millennials; and they have been connected to it ever since. They were the first generation to grow up with mobile phones and the first to perceive such devices as a necessity (McCrinkle & Wolfinger, 2011). As children, Millennials saw the inception of Instant Messaging and free video telecommunication programs such as Skype, bringing distant relatives and foreign strangers into lounge rooms, bedrooms, and practically anywhere that wireless signals could penetrate. Social media has become a way of life for most generations, but through the constant use of Millennials, it has also become one of their greatest addictions (Balakrishnan & Griffiths, 2017). The advent of functional electric powered vehicles, from public transport to private electric luxury cars has also taken place during the formative years of the Millennials (J. E. White, 2017). The rise of individual production in creative fields such as music, writing, drama, news reporting, and presentation through social media and publicly accessible internet sites such as You-Tube and Amazon. This in part has led to a neo-industrial revolution, where individuals are replacing corporations as manufacturers, publishers, and sales agents helped in part by inventions such as 3D printers and self-managing business sites; such as PayPal (Kapetaniou, Rieple, Pilkington, Frandsen, & Pisano, 2018).

Growing up with the likes of reality TV shenanigans, online pornography, and scandalous celebrities and politicians created a desensitised generation, and yet in other ways a moral-minded one (McQueen, 2010). As children watching the personal failures and half-

truths emerging from world leaders, intriguingly they expressed distaste and criticism towards those who cross moral lines (Nesbit Sbanotto & Blomberg, 2016).

Through their childhood years, Millennials had been told how important, special, intelligent and favoured they were, and had their parents protect them from failure at almost every front which has resulted in a tendency for entitlement, pride, and an expectation for success and instant gratification (Mooney, 2017). Their parents also gave them a great deal of opportunities both tangible and intangible (such as extra-curricular activities), which has led to many feeling pressured and having high expectations of themselves and others (Shaw, H., 2016).

However, Millennials are driven by purpose and meaning, and while they come across as being materialistic many have shown contentment in being without almost anything (possibly with the exception of a portable electronic device) if they are doing something they believe in (Shaw, H., 2015). Millennials hunger for authenticity, relationships, and relevancy (McQueen, 2010; Menconi, 2010; Shaw, H., 2015). They tend to respect the law more than the previous two generations and believe that knowledge is something to display not cover up; unlike previous generations, they believe that being smart is 'cool' (Menconi, 2010). They are also very tolerant of those with different views of their own and enjoy the company of other generations, making them quite different to the Baby Boomers and Generation X; many Millennials see their parents as their friends (Nesbit Sbanotto & Blomberg, 2016). Finally, it can be said that Millennials are team-players and are highly social not only in their downtime but in the workplace as well (Shaw, H., 2015).

The Digitals

The Digitals, who are also known as Generation Z by some, are at the time of this writing currently children approximately under the age of 17 and still being born (Nesbit Sbanotto & Blomberg, 2016; Shaw, H., 2015). It should be noted that there is a great dispute concerning the time period of this generation and the Millennials, with some declaring their birth was between the mid-nineties and mid-twenty-tens (McCrinkle & Wolfinger, 2011; J. E. White, 2017). As this generation has not matured as yet and has several more years before all members are born, little can be said in comparison to previous generations. Their history is concurrently taking place with the younger Millennials. However, there have been some aspects of their character that can be stated.

McQueen (2010) has noted that they are addicted to technology (even more so than the Millennials), they are prematurely mature, and they are risk averse. J. E. White (2017) adds to this list being multiracial, post-Christian, and sexually fluid; the latter referring to not being content with being expected to follow traditional gender roles, expectations, and values. They have also been noted as being entrepreneurial and hardworking, along with having many shared characteristics with the Millennials (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2011).

Concluding thoughts on the generations

It is worth briefly discussing one of the main contributions of Generational Theory by Strauss & Howe, which is that of the cyclical nature of generations. Strauss and Howe (1997) theorise that human history is a sequential series of four cycles that occur based on four archetypes of generations; prophets, nomads, heroes, and artists. It is explained that these generations follow each other in the same order, are characterised by the social environment created by their predecessors, share similar characteristics of previous and future generation archetypes, and continue creating a similar cycle in the future (Howe, 2017).

A brief example would be of the aforementioned Traditionalists, who can be divided into two generations; the GI / Federation generation and the Silent generation. The GI generation, Strauss and Howe (1997) label as a 'Hero' generation (who come of age during a time of crisis; i.e. the Great Depression & WWII) share certain characteristics and outlooks such as confidence, team-orientation, and moralistic attitudes with the next 'Hero' generation, the Millennials; who are coming of age during a time of economic recession and perhaps a time of crisis (i.e. fundamental extremism). The same goes for the other archetypes, with the Silents sharing similar societal circumstances and group characteristics with the upcoming Digitals. This concept is not without criticism, as several authors find the interpretation of past events and the future predictions based on four twenty-year timelines somewhat deterministic and generalising (Etling, 1998; Hines, 1997).

An understanding of the different generations allows the creation of an overall picture. In order to understand the bigger societal picture however it is important to understand how they get along. This is relevant as well in terms of understanding how individuals from various generations socially and spiritually connect with each other. It is with this thought that a discussion about how the generations interact will take place so that

the benefits of having every generation, not merely co-existing but forming interdependent relationships with each other can be examined.

Generational differences: Relationships in practice

Although each generation has characteristics and gifts that are beneficial to other generations, it may be perceived that each generation is at odds with other generations. One need only look at some of the common spaces of daily life. In the workplace, the individualistic Xers whose scepticism of authority and policy put them at odds with the elder Baby Boomers who patiently paid their dues in organisations in order to take them to the top. Meanwhile the Millennials search for greener pastures in other workplaces after only six months of arriving in their current one (Ferri-Reed, 2013). In households, the elderly Traditionalist Generation feel abandoned by their families in nursing homes, while Xers and Millennials struggle to make ends meet as they watch their inheritance being spent by their retired Baby Boomer parents on cruises and luxury condos (Biggs, Haapala, & Lowenstein, 2011). As all of this unfolds, the Digital generation (often called Generation Z) currently comprised of children are risk-averse due to the overprotected and litigated world they are growing up in, and yet are growing up faster than any previous generation due to the unfiltered world of communication (McQueen, 2010). The conflict between the need for solidarity among the generations and the differences that exist between them finds many an individual grasping for a way to navigate to more stable and prosperous waters (Bengtson, V., Giarrusso, R., Mabry, J. B., & Silverstein, M. 2002).

Traditionalists (particularly the Federation Generation) have often had most conflicts with the Baby Boomers; although as they have been out of leadership for a while it has lessened quite a bit (McIntosh, 2002). In their history as their elders, Traditionalists have tended to see Baby Boomers as self-centred, disruptive, and disrespectful often due to the perceived lack of trust for experts and having an assertive nature. While often at odds with the music and technology of the Xers and Millennials (and now the Digitals), they usually have much more time and affection for the younger generations (Menconi, 2010; Shaw, H., 2015; Whitesel & Hunter, 2000).

Interestingly enough, Baby Boomers seem to attract the most ire of all the generations; though they have also been said to have the most potential to bring them all together (Nesbit Sbanotto & Blomberg, 2016). Apart from what has been already said

regarding their frustration with the Traditionalists, they struggle with the unwillingness of their elders to try new ideas and let go of the past (Menconi, 2010). Although Baby Boomers are often inspired by the young, they tend to see the younger generations as unaccountable, unreliable, and irresponsible (Nesbit Sbanotto & Blomberg, 2016). They especially tend to clash with Generation X who tend to see Baby Boomers as self-absorbed and superficial among other things (Allen, H. C. & Ross, 2012).

Referred to as the ‘middle-child’ sandwiched between the Baby Boomers and Millennials for their similar attitude and perspective, Generation X is often suspicious of the attitudes and views of other generations (Nesbit Sbanotto & Blomberg, 2016). While they often get along with the Traditionalists on a variety of topics, they struggle with the formality and rigidity of traditional worship and music styles of the eldest members of society and are sceptical of the institutions created by them (Menconi, 2010; Whitesel & Hunter, 2000). Xers have the biggest issues with Baby Boomers their immediate predecessors, and tend to regard them with resentment, perceiving them as self-centred, untrustworthy, unfair, and irresponsible (Menconi, 2010; Shaw, H., 2015). While they respect and appreciate the efforts and accomplishments made by the Baby Boomers concerning social justice, they at times feel that the Baby Boomers impose their values and methods on them and the younger generations (Nesbit Sbanotto & Blomberg, 2016). Concerning the Millennials, Generation X regard them with more optimism and see them as full of potential. However, akin to the older generations, Xers tend to see Millennials as entitled, selfish and sheltered (Nesbit Sbanotto & Blomberg, 2016).

Millennials are known as peacemakers and seem to get along with every generation, at least regarding most topics (Shaw, H., 2015). Overall Millennials may perceive all the generations above them as lacking passion and benevolence. However, the biggest point of frustration felt by Millennials tends to be the intolerant and close-mindedness of the Traditionalists and the Baby Boomers; especially the Traditionalists (Nesbit Sbanotto & Blomberg, 2016). That being said, Millennials seem to feel loved by the Traditionalists and greatly respect what they have accomplished in the past, however they struggle with the rigidity and ceremony of life events, as well as the lectures that they are sometimes given by the elders of society (Menconi, 2010; Shaw, H., 2015). Millennials struggle with the drivenness and perceived imbalance of the Baby Boomers, and at times share the Xer’s feeling of being manipulated by them (Nesbit Sbanotto & Blomberg, 2016). Regarding

Generation X, Millennials see them as hardworking and appreciate them as mentors though they do get tired of the angst that tends to pervade the Generation X mindset (Menconi, 2010).

Cross-generational conflict often stems from different perceptions of how the world should work and different prioritising of values (Bengtson et al., 2002; Shaw, H., 2015). Such disagreements are often due to a value of one generation being neglected by another. When members from different generations can see things from the other's point of view, steps can be taken to bring about peace and stronger relationships between both groups. Understanding that values (such as authenticity) are actually shared just not always in the level of priority, can help enable communities to work towards goals that see both values and perspectives brought to the table (Cole, 2010; Shaw, H., 2015).

Intergenerationality: What does it look like?

After an investigation of the current literature, certain components are present in intergenerational communities, all of which revolve around creating deep and meaningful relationships between the generations. The following are specific references in regard to intergenerational communities:

“Two or more different age groups of people in a religious community together learning/growing/living in faith through in-common experiences, parallel learning, contributive-occasions (sic), and interactive sharing.” ~ James White (1988, p. 18)

“Intentional intergenerational strategies are those in which an integral part of the process of faith communities encourages interpersonal interactions across generational boundaries, and in which a sense of mutuality and equality is encouraged between participants.” ~ Allan Harkness (2000, p. 52)

“Self-centredness is the enemy of intergenerational community.” ~ Brenda Snailum (2012, p. 168)

“...where generations would bump up against each other and communicate in meaningful ways.” ~ Christine Ross (2006, p. 87)

“These churches make it a priority to foster intergenerational relationships...; to incorporate all generations in worship; to develop service projects that involve all ages; and to engage all generations in learning together.” ~ John Roberto (2012, p. 105)

“To convey our understanding of intergenerationality we will unpack three phrases: intergenerational outlook, intergenerational ministry and intergenerational experiences. An intergenerational outlook acknowledges that the gifts every

generation brings to the spiritual formation of the other generations strengthen the whole church. A faith community that practices intergenerational ministry will use these gifts, creating frequent opportunities for various generations to communicate in meaningful ways, to interact on a regular basis, and to minister, worship and serve together regularly. And intergenerational experiences are experiences in which multiple representatives of two or more generations are present, and those present are engaged in mutual activities.” ~ Holly Allen & Christine Ross (2012, p. 20-21)

In addition to these references, Holly Allen and Christine Ross cite Vygotsky’s socio-cultural learning theory and Lave and Wenger’s situated learning theory as the mechanism for intergenerational beneficence itself which incorporates concepts such as mutualism and authorisation; this will be discussed in depth on pages 69 through 73.

Considering the statements given above, five conceptual factors may be understood as being a necessary aspect of intergenerationality. These factors are Positive Interaction, Connectedness, Interdependence, Accommodation and Empowerment.

The following section will explore each factor and explain the relevance of each beginning with *Positive Interactions*.

1. Positive Interactions

Intergenerational communities experience positive interactions not only among their members of the same age group but from other generations (Allen, H. C. & Ross, 2012). The reason being is that positive relationships cannot be established unless positive interactions take place. Such interactions need first of all to be of regular frequency, as the formation of positive relationships between one generation and another is reliant on regular interaction between both generations (Massi, dos Santos, Berberian, & de Biagi Ziesemer, 2016).

Intentionality is also essential. Although some of the interactions may be due to simple probability to begin with, members of intergenerational communities intentionally interact with those of other generations through individual or group planning of mutual activities (Snailum, 2012a). As with all relationships, for them to become substantial they must have intentionality to propel them (Powell & Clark, 2011).

The interactions between different generations must also elicit meaning and purpose. Upon describing what an intergenerational congregation looked like, one participant in Ross’ study (2006, p. 87) expressed that it was “*where generations would bump up against each*

other and communicate in meaningful ways.” There should be a reason for the interactions to take place, or else the frequency and intentionality will not have a purpose.

Finally, such interactions must also be generally positive in nature; this is not to say that challenging conversations have no place, but that they are founded on good relationships. Negative interactions are toxic to intimacy and have the opposite effect of bringing people together (Goswami, 2012). Intergenerational communities have positive relationships between different generations, and therefore, the interactions between them tend to be positive in order to maintain and enhance their relationship (Shaw, H., 2015).

The impact of frequent and meaningful positive interactions is that connectedness will take place between members of different generations. Intergenerational connectedness will now be discussed.

2. Connectedness

Having talked about connectedness in Chapter 2, the focus in this section is not only declaring that connectedness is important in generalised terms but specifically in relation to being connected with those outside one’s own generation. A group of people can only be defined as a community in a relational sense if there exists a sense of unity among the group members (“Connectedness,” 2019). Connectedness is a necessary factor of intergenerationality as the very nature and definition of intergenerationality involves all generations being in contact with one another, and developing relationships (Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2017).

As evidence, it has been reported in a qualitative study by Christine Ross on the characteristics of intergenerational churches (2006) that words such as ‘we’, ‘us’, ‘together’, and ‘family’ were some of the words that those interviewed consistently used in relating what their intergenerational congregations were like. Endeavours to increase intergenerational relationships in the literature have consistently used increased positive interaction as a means to develop a sense of connectedness between different generational groups. This lends to a conclusion that connectedness is indeed a requirement of intergenerationality (Cortellesi & Kernan, 2016; DeMichelis, Ferrari, Rozin, & Stern, 2015; Massi et al., 2016).

Groups that are connected usually maintain their cohesion through having mutual beneficence of every member of the group. Consequently, interdependence takes place which is the third component of intergenerationality.

3. Interdependence

Another aspect of intergenerationality is that it is mutually beneficial for all generations involved (Menconi, 2010). Younger generations have been found to benefit from intergenerational relationships in many forms, such as the passing on of skills, knowledge and wisdom, as well as tangible resources (Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2017; DeMichelis et al., 2015). Whilst it is commonly believed that it is mainly the young who are benefitted from intergenerational relationships such as mentoring, studies have shown that noteworthy benefits are also bestowed upon the elder generations involved; some examples being increased generativity, meaningfulness, and manageability (Andreoletti & Howard, 2016; Murayama et al., 2014). In fact, such mutualism has been cited as one of the main attractions of intergenerational connectedness and solidarity (Cortellesi & Kernan, 2016).

Without interdependency between two generations, there is no relationship, and therefore it is not intergenerational. When an intergenerational community loses members of a certain generation either temporarily or indefinitely, the community experiences a noticeable loss due to the benefits received from those individuals; affective benefits or otherwise (Roberto, 2012).

Groups whose members are interdependent recognise the value of every member and are therefore equity minded. Such being the case, empowerment of every generation is the fourth component of being intergenerational.

4. Empowerment

Empowerment is characterised by the bestowal of power and authority upon an individual or group ("Empowerment," 2017). For this empowerment to take place an individual or entity that currently has authority must act as a provider; for example, a ship captain who has authority on a ship can promote someone as an officer, and therefore grant the individual more authority. For an authority to empower others they must recognise and acknowledge the value that lies in empowering an individual as well acknowledging that the individual either is or deserves to be respected as an authority (Voegtlin, Boehm, & Bruch, 2015). In Voegtlin et al. (2015)'s review of empowerment literature, they found that there were four components that make up perceived empowerment; potency, impact, meaningfulness, and autonomy.

For connectedness to take place with an intergenerational community, equity is expressed intergenerationally (Allen, H. C. & Ross, 2012). For equity to be thus expressed, every generation must be given confidence to be able to contribute in the community, an endorsement as a valued member of the community, and the actual ability to contribute to the community (Voegtlin et al., 2015). Therefore, egalitarianism must be expressed in the form of distributing power and authority representationally for each generation through democratic means. In an intergenerational community, every generation is empowered, and consequently, empowerment is a factor of intergenerationality (Snailum, 2012b).

Being an empowering community requires selflessness to take place. Therefore, the fifth aspect of intergenerationality to be discussed is that of accommodation.

5. Accommodation

According to intergenerational ministry expert Brenda Snailum (2012a, p. 168), “*Self-centeredness is the enemy of intergenerational community.*” This is due to the realisation that intergenerationality cannot take place if one or more generations are not willing to stray in any capacity from their preferences in order to satisfy the need or desire of another generation (Crispin, 2017). As such being the case, the term accommodation has been identified as a suitable factor for intergenerationality since it is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2017) as, “*something supplied for convenience or to satisfy a need...[Or] the act of accommodating someone or something.*” There are three characteristics that embody what accommodation is within an intergenerational mindset: empathy, sacrifice, and surrender.

To accommodate another individual or generation with their best interest in mind (and therefore without self-centeredness), a certain degree of empathy needs to be expressed; that is, an ability to understand and share another person’s point of view (Shaw, H., 2015). If one does not have the capacity to understand someone else’s plight or to psychologically put themselves in someone else’s shoes it makes it quite difficult to adjust one’s predisposition. Upon reflection, in this way accommodation is associated with the factor of connectedness as it is through empathy that one can truly connect with another individual or group (Menconi, 2010).

Accommodation also requires the one who is giving accommodation to sacrifice something that they have for another person or party. In order to accommodate the desires or needs of another generation, an individual may need to give up having what their preference

is, at least temporarily, so that another generation can have their preference met (Wade-Benzoni & Tost, 2009). An example of this would be finding better ways to use current non-renewable resources so that future generations will have more to use.

Although surrender is not a pleasing term for many people, it is a necessity for accommodation to take place. To accommodate another generation's needs, one may be required to submit to the decision of another (Snailum, 2012a). An example of this in an intergenerational context is for individuals in one generation to incorporate the values and interests of another generation to be expressed in a project as well as their own. This requires a great deal of humility, which itself is an aspect of servant leadership from which the factor of empowerment can take place (Mittal & Dorfman, 2012).

In summary, intergenerationality is the characteristic of three or more generations functioning as a unified community through mutually beneficial interdependent relationships. The five intergenerational factors of positive interaction, connectedness, interdependence, empowerment, and accommodation have a tendency to promote intergenerationality as they provide the potential to bind such a diverse community together. This can be particularly challenging given the different characteristics and perspectives of the six current generations, however though challenging, being united each generation has much to offer and much to gain in an intergenerational community; such as a Christian congregation. While some benefits of intergenerationality have already been mentioned, it is worthwhile to investigate them in greater detail. Therefore, the benefits of intergenerationality will be investigated next in our discussion.

The Benefits of an Intergenerational Congregation

There are a number of benefits available to congregations that have an intergenerational nature. In the previous discussion, intergenerationality as a concept was explored as well as what was needed for it to be established amongst so many different age groups and perspectives. Turning the discussion toward examining why an intergenerational community should be pursued, it is interesting to note that intergenerationality is of vital importance as it enables an exchange of both tangible and intangible resources between generations (Whitehouse & George, 2018). In terms of tangible resources, Szydlik (2012) reports that especially in the current economic climate, adult children are financially crippled when monetary wealth accumulated from their elderly parents is not passed on to them. Of

more interest to this study, however, is the intangible resources that are notably missing when there are few intergenerational connections.

Generational segregation leads to an absence of opportunities of many worthwhile interactions between generations, such as those concerning learning and understanding (Cortellesi & Kernan, 2016). A lack of experienced mentors inhibits the opportunity for the inexperienced to not only learn valuable lessons from mentors but to realise that they have someone they can identify with who has walked the path they are currently treading (French et al., 2015). On the other end of the generational spectrum, studies have found that the elderly are losing their sense of self-worth due to their isolation from younger generations in retirement villages and nursing homes, and their mental health is also deteriorating from a lack of stimulation from the young (Hsu, Rong, Lin, & Liu, 2014; Murayama et al., 2014).

Considering that the lack of learning and relationships from deteriorating intergenerationality in society has resulted in poorer wellbeing, it must be considered that intergenerationality may lead to flourishing. Therefore, if this is the case will now be investigated.

Increased wellbeing through intergenerational connectedness

Several studies have documented the benefits when different generations get together for educational, recreational, and vocational purposes. Agmon, Zlotnick, and Finkelstein (2015) in their study on Israeli elders mentoring youth in boarding academies, found that mentors can be a major influence on school performance. However, it was determined that the mentors who provided the biggest impact on youth were those who had a relationship with their mentee for longer than one year; therefore, giving evidence that long-term intergenerational relationships are worthwhile. In a similar study, Massi et al. (2016) report that intergenerational discussions between children and youth with elderly adults result not only in the young learning from the old. The respect and value the elderly have on young people was also found to increase, while it also reduces discrimination the young have towards the elderly, increases the life experience of both generations, and is also a means for creating and maintaining positive relationships between both. In another study, when young adults were paired with the elderly, generativity was also found to increase between both groups (Andreoletti & Howard, 2016).

In the European study done by Grignoli et al. (2015) concerning the Generations Using Training for Social Inclusion (GUTS) scheme it was found that,

First the youth develop healthy attitudes towards aging through a more informed understanding and strengthen their sense of community and social responsibility. Second, older adults remain involved in their community, improve life satisfaction, develop skills and the feeling of continued usefulness in the community, get an opportunity to engage in lifelong learning and the chance to share their life experiences and knowledge. (Grignoli et al., 2015, p. 112)

The overall result of these benefits is increased social inclusion of both age groups. Clearly, these studies have shown that there are ample benefits for cross generational relationships between the elderly and the young.

In regard to the benefits between those of lesser generational gaps, Raven (2015) found that young adults mentoring adolescents gained psychosocial benefits, sociocultural benefits, economic benefits, and vocational benefits as well as the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and generativity. This shows that mentoring is not only a benefit for those being mentored but those who are doing the mentoring. Benefits have also been found for vulnerable adults who are struggling to raise their young families being paired up with older more experienced adults. This was seen in the case with Ayton and Joss's (2015) Australian study which found that mentoring that takes place between the vulnerable and the experienced resulted in, "*improvements in housing, employment, health and wellbeing of vulnerable families.*" (Ayton & Joss, 2015, p. 321). These studies illustrate that there are benefits to be had even when mentoring is between less diverse age groups.

In summary, the previous studies have shown that intergenerationality generates a multitude of benefits, such as generativity, education, value, respect, psychosocial, and others that have been cited in the above studies. In considering these benefits, it would seem that increasing intergenerationality in society would move society towards a healthier mode of being – but how does this impact individuals on a discipleship level or even a societal level? In examining the literature, this study will present an answer to this question.

Improved discipleship through intergenerational connectedness

While creating an intergenerational congregation can be a challenging task, there are several benefits that outlast the short-term difficulties (Roberto, 2012). Congregations that are likely to survive and thrive regardless of how segregated society tends to become are those

who have intergenerational characteristics. According to the literature, there are four main reasons why such churches are successful despite a changing environment.

First, intergenerational congregations create an encouraging climate of interaction between adults of varying generations and children (Amidei et al., 2014). In turn, such positive interactions can turn into intergenerational friendships (Cortellesi & Kernan, 2016; Grignoli et al., 2015). These friendships can become especially meaningful to teenagers who are in need of surrogate family or attend church without their parents; not only with teenagers, however, but with anyone who is seeking an extended family (Ross, 2012). In turn, these friendships may provide role models and mentors for the young, which can foster essential life skills and leadership (Cortellesi & Kernan, 2016). Interestingly, contact with non-related adults from church has been found to continue to affect young adults three years after they have been at college, which suggests that the positive impact of these relationships is long term (Powell & Clark, 2011).

The second reason for the success of these communities is due to the amount of support that flows from intergenerational relationships (Roberto, 2012). Such relationships encourage compassion for others, regardless of the diversity of generations, and therefore cultivates support on both personal and group levels (Andreoletti & Howard, 2016). Through the diversity of gifts and strengths, interdependence can ensure that the needs of some can be fulfilled through the abilities of others (Andreoletti & Howard, 2016; DeMichelis et al., 2015). Such diversity of abilities is increased with a diversity of life experiences which goes with an intergenerational community. This, in turn, impacts not only those within the congregation but those outside of it through service to the greater community (Grignoli et al., 2015).

Such support builds upon the third aspect, which is value and identity. Intergenerational congregations affirm each person's value regardless of age (Roberto, 2012). These communities teach the younger to value the older, and vice-versa through developing empathy and understanding concerning the treasured values of each generation (Biggs et al., 2011; Massi et al., 2016). This solidifies the diverse community with a united identity, enhancing the relationships even further (Grignoli et al., 2015; Joiner, 2009).

Finally, and most importantly, being in an intergenerational congregation establishes enduring faith as it "*reclaims God's intent for faith to be shared in community and across generations.*" (Roberto, 2012, p. 106). The diversity of experience provides a means for faith

formation not only for the young, but for all ages; as every age has something to learn and teach concerning faith. This is done through living life together as Christians, praying for each other, and speaking words of encouragement and life over each other (Harkness, 2012). Intergenerational congregations allow the torch of tradition to not merely be passed on to the next generation, but to be reformed and renewed in the identity of those who see it through new eyes (Powell et al., 2016). Intergenerational congregations enable a greater involvement of adults in the lives of the young, which will result in a higher likelihood they will keep their Christian faith (Powell & Clark, 2011).

Discipleship, as discussed is not solely an individual profit scheme but creates benefits that flow throughout the community that is touched by disciples. In addition to this, as many of the studies shared were not specifically of a religious nature, it can be seen that intergenerationality is quite beneficial to society; Christianity aside. Therefore, aside from intergenerationality being useful in terms of discipleship it is prudent to examine it from a purely secular point of view.

Intergenerational congregations provide intergenerational venues in society

Although the saying, ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ is generally agreed upon in society, communities as a whole do not seem to raise children anymore and neither do they appear to function as a united community as they once did (Joiner, 2009). There are many reasons as to why society has moved from intergenerational to age-segregated communities, such as individualism, developmental theory, and target marketing (Koops, 2012; Pazmino & Kang, 2011; Rasmussen & David, 2015). This shift from a community focus to an individual focus has greatly dismantled the intergenerationality of both religious and secular aspects of society that held the fabric of society together in the past (Harkness, 2012; Linderman, 2016; J. W. White, 1988).

Further, the way society is divided both in terms of space and time also creates a barrier to intergenerationality. Winkler’s (2013, p. 725) American research has found that on average older and younger adults in the USA are “*moderately segregated at the microlevel.*” In a more recent study, Moorman, Stokes, and Robbins (2016, p. 375) report that, “*Approximately two-thirds of neighbourhoods had age distributions that differed from the age composition of the U.S.*” In other words, neighbourhoods are polarising according to life stage leaving certain adult age groups sparse in some areas and abundant in others. In a study

conducted by Sabater et al. (2017) concerning England and Wales, the lack of generational diversity is becoming an epidemic. Increased segregation in England and Wales by age is evident between 1991 and 2011, particularly in rural areas but also in urban areas to an increasing degree (Sabater et al., 2017). Concerning time, busy work schedules of both parents combined with time spent by children in paid care or school hours creates limited time in the home between parents and children (Genadek & Hill, 2017). Studies have also found that when children have siblings, they have a tendency to spend less time with their parents and more time with their siblings; thus reducing intergenerational time with parents (Dunifon, Fomby, & Musick, 2017).

In light of society's circumstances, it would be beneficial to have a venue where intergenerationality can take place. Interestingly, religious communities have managed to withstand, at least to a certain degree, the barrage of generational fragmentation within the industrialised world, making them useful not only in terms of religion but for society at large (Glassford & Barger-Elliot, 2011). According to Holly Catterton Allen and Ross (2012, p. 30), "*Faith communities are perhaps the only places where families, singles, couples, children, teen, grandparents – all generations – come together on a regular basis.*" While the extent of intergenerationality differs from congregation to congregation, at the very least religious communities are multigenerational in nature (Roberto, 2012). This being said, Christian congregations have the potential to be a means for providing intergenerationality in society, and in so doing also provide both social and spiritual connectedness.

With benefits such as a greater provision of social and psychological needs, as well as offering potentially an ideal context for spiritual development, there is ample motivation for individuals to engage with intergenerational congregation and for congregational leaders to accommodate spaces to establish them.

In consideration of the potential benefits that intergenerational congregations can extend to wellbeing and discipleship as being a much-needed venue to dispense these needs in society, it would be negligent to miss the opportunity to examine one of the specific agencies that are used in intergenerational affairs. As many of the benefits concern an elder passing on wisdom, skills, or tangible items down to a junior, one of the evidences and agencies of intergenerationality is mentoring and modelling.

Mentoring and modelling: The evidence of intergenerationality

Having considered the benefits of intergenerationality, it is important to note that all of the benefits mentioned in the previous section are either directly or indirectly impacted by mentoring and modelling. That being the case, it can be concluded that the benefits of intergenerationality are maximised when mentoring and modelling is taking place; as mentoring is when a more experienced (and often older) individual provides guidance and reflective perspective to a less experienced (and often younger) individual (French et al., 2015; Stoddard & Tamasy, 2003). This can further be concluded in terms of discipleship, as discipleship is often carried out through the guidance of someone who is themselves a disciple further on the path than the one guided in order to help the less experienced follower of Christ growth in their faith journey with Christ (Campbell, 2009). Modelling is taking place as well in intergenerational environments, though it may be unintentional or intentional in nature. Therefore, mentoring and modelling can be seen as not only the greatest overarching benefit of both intergenerationality and discipleship, but the evidence of both and therefore a main contributor to wellbeing itself.

With all of these benefits in mind, it would seem that intergenerationality is a worthwhile endeavour not only for Christianity but for society in general. Whether it is resources of a tangible or intangible nature, intergenerationality is a boon for any congregation that seeks to incorporate it into their identity. As the end of this review approaches, it would be prudent to consider why intergenerationality provides such benefits. Therefore, the mechanism of intergenerational beneficence will be the last discussion before closing the review of the literature.

Understanding the Mechanism for Intergenerational Beneficence

An intergenerational community has been defined as one that is composed of representatives of several generations who engage in positive interactions with each other resulting in interdependency and mutual beneficence. In light of this, it has been considered that for a community to be intergenerational it should have the characteristics of positive interactions, connectedness, empowerment, interdependence, and accommodation. Communities that have such characteristics reap a multitude of benefits in terms of both discipleship as well as wellbeing; specifically, as they address the need for connecting both socially and spiritually. In light of what has been learned, it would be of considerable benefit

to understand the reasons why such benefits take place in intergenerational communities, such as intergenerational congregations. With this in mind, the discussion will now turn to three theories which underpin the mechanism for intergenerational beneficence.

Sociocultural Learning Theory

Les Vygotsky (1896 - 1932) was a leading Russian psychologist who, rejecting the extremes of the behaviourist and cognitive approaches, expressed that while development, genetics, and environment contribute to an individual's learning process, an individual is an active participant in the learning process and not merely a passive subject without the ability of self-control (Daniels, 2008). Vygotsky believed that learning proceeds from being immersed in a culture involving social interactions and relationships, and through the social experience, individuals learn and continually create themselves as individuals (Daniels, 2008).

In particular, Vygotsky noted that learning often takes place most effectively through a social agent such as a teacher, coach or mentor, as someone who is further along the learning journey who can guide an individual (Clapper & Cornell, 2015). It is in this understanding that Vygotsky presented the theory of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978), where in order for an individual to progress, they must be given an appropriate task. If a task is too challenging for an individual, not only will they not succeed but they may not understand or have the capacity to progress towards future tasks. On the other hand, a task that is too simple will result in no new learning taking place, as they are already a master of it. Learning consequently takes place somewhere in between these two areas and has been labelled as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by Vygotsky (Daniels, 2008). Someone acting as an agent of learning (the teacher) helps an individual by guiding him or her towards experiences within the ZPD; this is often expressed as the scaffolding approach since the teacher will build a conceptual scaffold through previous learning experiences and learning tools around a student in order for them to proceed onwards and upwards towards new learning endeavours (Clapper & Cornell, 2015). Other social learning experiences can also take place without scaffolding, such as through imitation; although once again the actual learning takes place when an individual is within the ZPD (Clapper & Cornell, 2015).

It is through such an understanding that one explanation for how intergenerationality provides benefits to an individual, since those who are further along the learning experience

journey are usually a different age or generation than the learner (not necessarily older). Therefore, a social environment that is intergenerational can provide a greater diversity of experienced people and consequently offer greater learning opportunities; either through scaffolding or as a model.

Situated Learning Theory

In 1991, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger published a book entitled, “*Situated Learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*” in which they proposed that one of the best methods of learning was through being an apprentice in a community of practice. The concept meaning that a learner is taking on the role of an apprentice in any area of expertise (professionally or otherwise) under not only one expert but within a community of experienced and practicing masters. Thus, they will learn much more effectively than if they learned without a team of practicing experts or even under merely one (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The authors built this learning concept from their research on apprenticeship settings, which included studies on midwives, tailors, naval quartermasters, butchers, and members of Alcoholics Anonymous (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Lave and Wenger defined a ‘Community of Practice’, as those who were members of the community whether newcomers or otherwise who were practitioners of specific knowledge and skills. The term ‘Situative Learning’ refers to being put into a situation where one has access to a practice being learned and participation in all aspects of a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). It is argued by Lave and Wenger that learning is not restricted to being mere knowledge or information but as a way of life. Neither is the place of learning a sterile classroom environment, but rather, learning takes place in social environments and in everyday application through connection (Mychajluk, 2017).

Concerning the process, Lave and Wenger (1991) describe a newcomer to a community of practice as someone who begins as participating on the peripheral, someone who goes from observing and being instructed towards becoming actively and intensely involved in the activities of the community; and therefore becoming a fully mature member of the community of practice. As learning takes place in a social environment, the apprentice becomes more empowered and independent as the teacher becomes more of an advisor, and an eventual colleague. This builds upon Vygotsky’s theory of Proximal Development (1978), where the teacher continually puts the apprentice into the ZPD at every level until the

apprentice can take on an apprentice themselves. It must be stressed, however, that the product of Situated Learning is not to only become an expert in knowledge or practice, but for an individual to identify themselves as a member of the community of practice and contribute to the community in full participation. This involves learning and accepting practices, values, and roles within the community (Mychajluk, 2017).

With this construct in mind, Situated Learning is also the manner in which intergenerationality works in favour of both individuals and a community. Younger generations can be born or brought into communities of practice in that they are apprentices to their elders. This can be evidenced not only in professional and supportive communities as discussed by Lave and Wenger, but also in children at home who come to identify with their parents and older siblings as evidenced through their shared values, practices, habits, and an increase in responsibilities in the household. Intergenerationality is beneficial not only as a means for learning as expressed in Vygotsky's Sociocultural aspect, but also as a means of belonging and meaningfulness through Situated Learning underpinnings (Allen, H. C. & Ross, 2012). It is with this foundation that the mechanism of beneficence for intergenerationality is understood.

The Situative-Sociocultural Learning Theory

To explain the mechanism as to why intergenerationality provides such a wealth of benefits, Holly Allen proposed the Situative-Sociocultural Learning theory (H. C. Allen, 2005). This theory takes the Sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (Vygotskiĭ et al., 1987) and further develops it using the Situated Learning approach of Lave and Wenger (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Allen explains that intergenerationality's rationale as an effective approach flows from three premises. The first premise is that, "*individuals learn best in authentic, complex environments.*" (Allen, H. C., & Ross, 2012, p. 104). Studies have shown that one of the best means of learning is in collaborative environments where real problems are resolved through a social group (Yeen-Ju & Mai, 2016). An example of this is the aggregate of thinking individuals within a community of practice (Pyrko, Dörfler, & Eden, 2017). Such collaboration is a necessity in life as such a community approach solves challenges as they happen in real time often by social means (Kuhn, 2015). In an intergenerational community,

individuals have the opportunity to work and relate with people of various ages and experiences as they meet the challenges that life throws at them (Ross, 2012).

The second premise is, “the assertion that the best learning happens when persons participate with more experienced members of the culture (Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development).” (Allen, H. C., & Ross, 2012, p. 104). This can take place by means of mentorship and modelling, whether incidentally or through a directed learning activity. In a mentoring relationship, someone with greater experience directly guides an individual through a challenge they are facing (French et al., 2015). Mentoring has been identified as a highly beneficial activity in educational learning (Baran, 2016), life skills programs (Ayton & Joss, 2015), and spiritual guidance (French et al., 2015). Similarly, modelling is a means for guiding individuals with less experience through observational learning (Loes & Warren, 2016; Tenenberg, 2014). The great advantage with an intergenerational community is that there are various generations that can supply individuals who can both mentor and model to less experienced individuals; which may concern younger or older generations depending on the situation (Roberto, 2012).

The final premise using Lave and Wenger’s Communities of Practice theory which explains that individuals become a part of a community of practice through participation in that community’s activities, and through such participation they learn (Lave & Wenger, 1991). When solidarity exists within a diverse community, individuals are more likely to learn as identifying with others begets trust and empathy (Cortellesi & Kernan, 2016). Such trust and empathy encourages intimacy, which can deliver empowerment through tangible resources such as finances, property, or equipment (Szydlik, 2012; Wade-Benzoni & Tost, 2009), and intangible resources such as education, respect, and authority (Day, Kelloway, & Hurrell, 2014; Pyrko et al., 2017; Salanova, 2014). Once again, an intergenerational community enables a generationally diverse group of people to become a community of practice where corporate identity instils a sense of security and solidarity amongst the diversity (Ross, 2012). Again, this extends not only to information, knowledge or practices, but also to values, principles, roles, beliefs, and many other vital aspects of life (Mychajluk, 2017).

In summary, the Situative-Sociocultural Learning theory suggests that intergenerationality works as it does due to the opportunity for individuals to work within an authentic setting, which enables mentoring and modelling prospects through communities of

practice (Whitehouse & George, 2018). This mechanism of intergenerationality leads to extensive psychosocial benefits, which have the potential to bring about greater wellbeing in individuals.

A Summary of the Literature Review

In the discussion in Chapter 2, the words given by Jesus of Nazareth of being given an ‘abundant life’ found in John 10:10 as a promise of being given a ‘flourishing’ life was considered as a possible pathway toward healthy wellbeing (Keener, 2003). In pursuing the current literature, evidence was also found asserting that both social and spiritual connectedness appears to greatly influence the wellbeing of individuals, which led to an exploration of whether Christianity has the potential to increase wellbeing in individuals; since local churches have an impetus to promote both types of connectedness (Azzopardi, 2018; Frazee & Lucado, 2013; Gallet, 2016). Reflecting on the discrepancy between those who identify as Christians and those who actively pursue a life of discipleship, it has been suggested that such connectedness between fellow humans and the Divine can only take place if a wholehearted approach to the teachings and ways of Jesus is pursued by individuals resulting in following the path of discipleship (Ogden, 2007).

Flowing on from this discussion to Chapter 3, an intergenerational context was explored as a potentially ideal environment for discipleship in consideration of the diversity established both in theology and practice in the early church (Jacobus, 2012; Stark, 2011). Intergenerationality was defined, and the history and characteristics of the current generations were analysed in order to discover what factors usually allowed intergenerationality to succeed (Allen, H. C. & Ross, 2012; Crispin, 2017; Harkness, 2012; Nesbit Sbanotto & Blomberg, 2016; Snailum, 2013). A large amount of benefits are produced in intergenerational communities according to the literature, all of which strengthened connectedness due to the mechanism of the Situative-Sociocultural theory in that individuals learn best in complex and authentic environments with members who have more experience than themselves (Allen, H. C. & Ross, 2012; Cortellesi & Kernan, 2016; Massi et al., 2016).

With this discussion in mind, the study has concluded through the literature that a potential solution to the wellbeing crisis through enabling flourishing in individuals can take place by following the teachings of Jesus as a disciple within an intergenerational Christian congregation.

The Research Question

This study will be seeking to investigate one main research question based on the problem and possible solution as informed by the literature and absent in the lacuna. It focuses on the intersection between wellbeing, discipleship, and intergenerationality:

How is a person's wellbeing impacted by their level of social and spiritual connectedness as they are discipled in an intergenerational congregation?

Having established the intention of this dissertation along with the questions to be addressed, the following chapter will be integrating the current understanding of literature into a causal model that can be used to test the hypothesis of the study.

CHAPTER 4 : TOWARDS A PROPOSED MODEL

Introduction

In reflection of the literature reviewed in chapters 2 and 3, numerous factors have been noted that influence the constructs of wellbeing, discipleship, and intergenerationality. Consequently, in order to understand the relationships between these three intersecting constructs, a conceptual model of the relationships between the factors discussed in the previous two chapters must be formulated. As the research question pertains to discovering how intergenerationality impacts discipleship and wellbeing, a proposed model will be created in order to facilitate answering the research question.

The aim of this chapter is to develop such a model in order to assess what impact active participation within intergenerational congregations has on wellbeing. Once the variables are established, appropriate instruments of assessment can be used, modified, and created in order to test the model.

The Proposed Model

Through causal modelling, hypothesised theoretical relationships can be expressed in a conceptual framework so that a confirmatory research approach can take place (Heise, 2001; O'Leary, 2010). This is a common method within the social sciences, as it examines if hypothetical subject A could possibly influence subject B (M. Allen, 2017). Such confirmatory research is necessary in order to put theoretical assumptions to the test, and therefore so-called 'causal models' are conceptual and theoretical in nature (Asher, 1983).

In light of a review of the literature (see Chapters 2 and 3) a number of variables could be included in the proposed model. These variables can be categorized as; background variables, which include intergenerational factors, discipleship variables which include active participation in spiritual activities associated with Christianity, spiritual growth and compassion, and finally outcome variables which include psychological, social and spiritual wellbeing. The model was created to assess the relationships between these variables (M. Allen, 2017). The General Model in Figure 4.1 identifies the potential structure of the causality of the model moving from left to right.

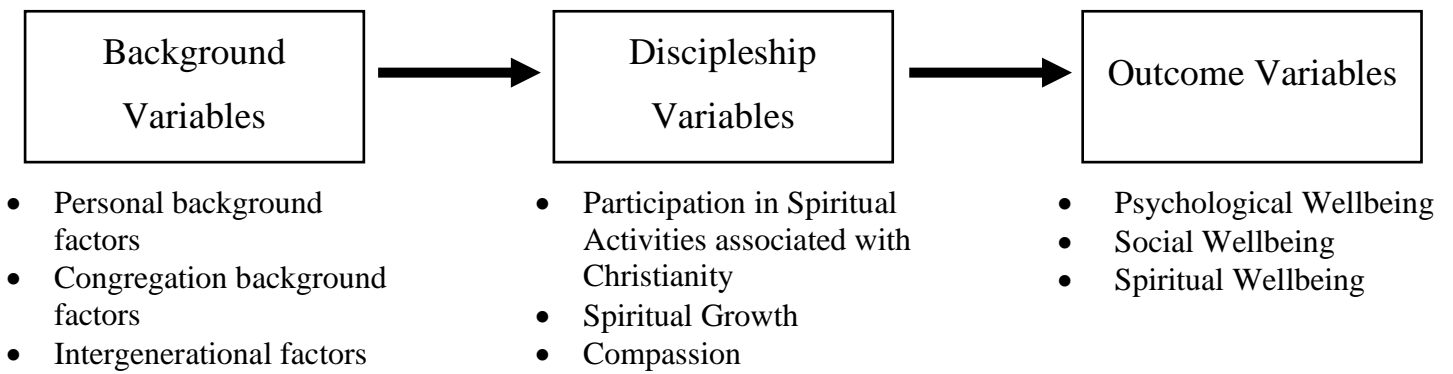


Figure 4.1

The General Model

This model proposes that intergenerationality can influence discipleship factors, which in turn impact wellbeing. While there may potentially be several model variations that could serve the purposes of this study, this particular model seems to be the best way to represent the relationships explained in the literature. This general model forms the basis for the proposed model that includes eighteen background variables (eleven personal background variables, one congregational background variable, and six intergenerational variables), three discipleship variables, and three outcome variables (wellbeing) have been identified, yielding a total of twenty-four variables. These variables are listed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1
Proposed Variables in the Causal Model

Background Variables	Discipleship Variables	Outcome Variables
Gender	Participation in Spiritual Activities	Psychological Wellbeing
Generation	Spiritual Growth	Social Wellbeing
Marital Status	Compassion	Spiritual Wellbeing
Number of Children		
Age of Children		
Attendance History		
Attendance Frequency		
Ministry Involvement		
Participation		
Mood		
Bible Study		
Prayer		
Inclusive Climate		
Interaction		
Connectedness		
Interdependence		
Accommodation		
Empowerment		
Mentoring & Modelling		

Background variables, which in this study are composed of both latent and construct variables, give specific information related to the individual and the congregation. In this investigation, the intergenerational variables are of particular interest due to their prominence

in the literature review. The discipleship variables are construct variables which will aid in assessing the discipleship aspects of individuals. In this study, there are three separate outcome variables that are each constructs of wellbeing.

Several other variables (such as marital status, number/age of children, church attendance, and mood) though included in the questionnaire were assessed in this study for the sake of interest, however they are not seen as integral aspects of the study and therefore have not been included in the following discussion or analysis. These items may be useful after the initial study for future research depending on if they are seen to have any influence on other aspects of the study. The Proposed Causal Model can be seen in Figure 4.2.

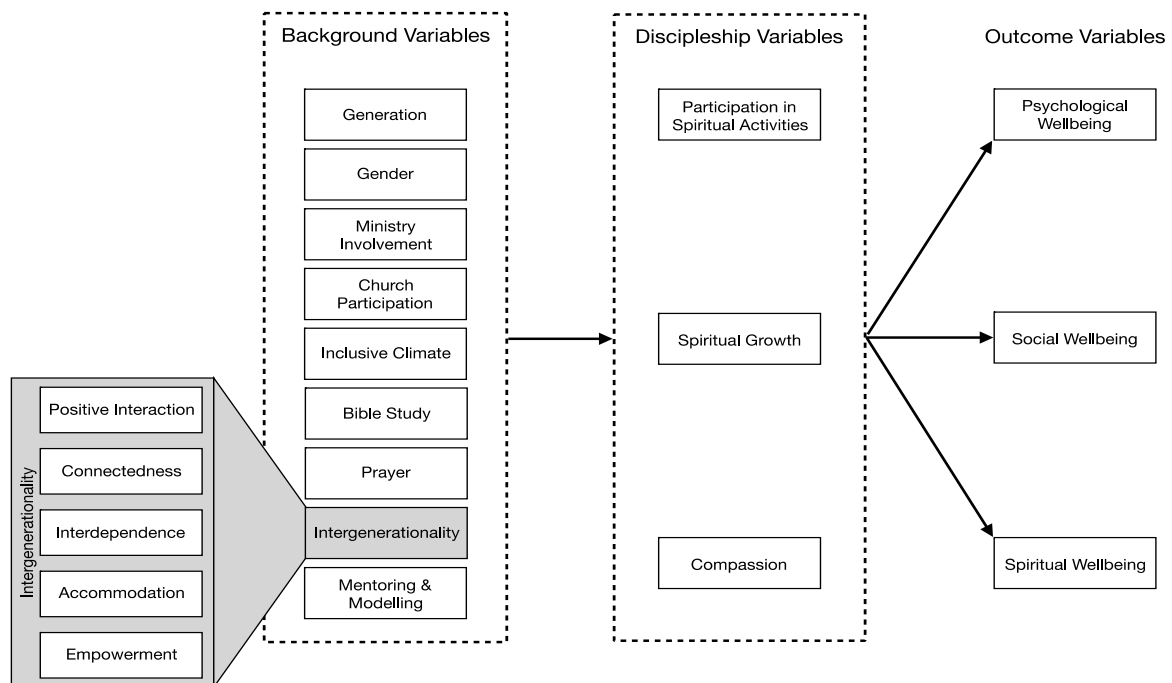


Figure 4.2

Proposed Causal Model

Defining the Constructs

The following background variables have been included in the study as they have been deemed as important factors that influence discipleship and wellbeing.

Background Variables

Generation

One of the most relevant personal background variables to this study is generational grouping, as intergenerationality is a major theme in the study. Studies have found that religiosity is strongest in times of stability, which is why adolescence (approximately ages 13 – 19) and emerging adulthood (18 – 29) is often recorded as a period of religious decline; as adolescence is an unstable period for most individuals (K. A. Roberts & Yamane, 2012). It would be of interest in this study to assess whether the intermediate variables of discipleship and that of spiritual wellbeing support such a finding.

In addition to this, generational studies have shown variance in values and characteristics between the different generations (Nesbit Sbanotto & Blomberg, 2016). Characteristics for example, like prioritising a value such as traditionalism, functionality, relevance, or authenticity can influence both intergenerational factors as well as discipleship variables (Cole, 2010; Menconi, 2010; Shaw, H., 2015).

It is expected that the variable ‘Generation’ will directly impact ‘Participation in Spiritual Activities’, as loyalty to such activities is a value of Traditionalists, and the Boomers saw it put into practice by their own parents, as opposed to many of the younger generations (McIntosh, 2002; Nesbit Sbanotto & Blomberg, 2016). The variables of Bible Study and Prayer are also expected to be impacted since these spiritual disciplines tend to be stronger with the older generations, again tied to tradition and parental modelling.

Gender

Gender impacts human beings both biologically and socially, and therefore it is an important factor to be included on this basis alone (Whedon, 2010). Interestingly, according to K. A. Roberts and Yamane (2012, p. 262), “*Religion is historically connected to sexism and gender inequality, and yet in most cases women exhibit higher levels of religiosity than men.*” As the Bible describes the Semitic culture at a time when women had little to no authority, it often focuses on the male rather than the female. In response, many in contemporary society expect Biblical reinterpretation and even reform in order for equality of the genders to take place (Christiano, Swatos, & Kivisto, 2016; Kurtz, 2012; Whedon, 2010). However, while such opinions exist and are worth considering, surprisingly it is reported that

the average gender composition in Evangelical Protestants in the United States is composed of 53% women compared to 47% of men (K. A. Roberts & Yamane, 2012, p. 263).

Concurring with this unbalance of the sexes using the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an example, according to Hughes, Fraser, Reid, and Christian Research (2012), “*women were much more likely to attend than men...*”

One of the theories as to why women seem to be more attracted to church is that it is due to the feminisation of religion within Christian denominations; which has a negative effect on men (K. A. Roberts & Yamane, 2012). Considering the issues of inequality and feminisation of religion that have been cited above, there is no doubt of additional influences taking place concerning whether to involve oneself in a church, and thus as to assess discipleship (and much more to analyse for gender bias), *Gender* needs to be a background variable in this study.

It is expected that Gender will influence compassion, as studies have shown women are much more likely to show sympathy and express positive emotion than men (Graca, Calheiros, Oliveira, & Milfont, 2018). Participation in Spiritual Activities is also expected to be influenced, as discussed (K. A. Roberts & Yamane, 2012).

Ministry involvement

When Jesus calls disciples to follow him, it means to uncompromisingly and unreservedly follow him in all aspects (Taylor, 2013). When Jesus sent his disciples out, he gave them instructions to serve others as he had (Mark 6:7, Matthew 10:1). Therefore, as exemplified in the story of the Good Samaritan, being a disciple involves not a consumerist or nominal mentality but being active in ministry.

It is expected that Ministry Involvement will positively influence Participation in Spiritual Activities as involvement in ministry is a Biblical expectation of disciples (Bock & Köstenberger, 2011). Similarly it is anticipated that Ministry Involvement will positively impact Spiritual Growth, as with any other kind of growth, activity and a degree of stress must take place for it to occur (Harkness, 2012). Compassion is also likely to be impacted positively, since service is a product of compassion; however, this is not to say that service cannot be done without compassion (Elliott, 2012).

Church participation

On a lesser level than actual involvement as a minister, is to simply participate in the activities of the local congregation. Given that Christianity is not merely scheduling a few hours once a week, but a holistic lifestyle done within a community context, those who are a part of some service or activity outside of the typical worship service are taking discipleship to heart (Camp, 2008; Walton, 2011).

It is expected that Church Participation will positively impact Participation in Spiritual Activities since faithfulness is not a mindset but rather an action in respect to discipleship (Bonhoeffer, 1959). It is also expected that Spiritual Growth will be influenced, since it is through conviction expressed through action that individuals grow (Himes, 2011). Compassion is anticipated to be influenced by Church Participation as well as it is itself not merely an emotion but an action driven emotion (Elliot, 2012).

Inclusive climate

As discipleship is the original and hopefully the current mission of Christian congregations, the context of the local congregation itself is an essential aspect of this study (Putman, Harrington, & Coleman, 2013b). The overall atmosphere of a congregation has a great deal of impact on every social aspect of a church community (Brekke, 2005; Cole, 2010). This includes the acceptance, friendliness, and warmth of the people who make up the congregation, for both those who regularly attend and those who do not.

Inclusive Climate is anticipated to influence Participation in Spiritual Activities considering that individuals will likely be more open to being led to follow the principles of the Bible if they can see it exemplified in others (Bandura, 1977). Inclusive Climate is expected to impact Compassion, as inclusion and acceptance are characteristics that are aspects of compassion (Lowe & Lowe, 2010). Inclusive Climate is also hypothesised to influence Spiritual Growth as positive learning and development ideally take place in climates of warmth and friendliness (Kilgour, 2006)

Bible study

In order for a Christian disciple to have a relationship with God, time spent understanding God should take place (Bolst, 2012; Fairbrother, 2016). Therefore, the spiritual discipline of Bible study has been included in this study as a variable composed of an item

that measures whether the participant reads the Bible on a daily basis and one which assesses the amount of time spent reading the Bible.

It is anticipated that Bible Study will directly impact Participation in Spiritual Activities, as Bible study is an act of faithfulness (Maddix & Thompson, 2012). Bible Study is also expected to influence Spiritual Growth as the material found within the Bible encourages individuals to grow in a variety of ways (Hull, 2006). Compassion is also anticipated to be effected by Bible Study as the content of the Bible endorses being compassionate (Bonhoeffer, 1959). Bible Study is also expected to influence Spiritual Wellbeing for the same reasons given for the three discipleship variables. Psychological Wellbeing is expected to be influenced by Bible study as reading it guides the reader to contemplate their meaning and purpose in life (Maddix & Thompson, 2012). It is not expected however that Bible study will impact Social Wellbeing, as reading is usually a solitary activity (Bolst, 2012).

Prayer

While there is a variety of ways to communicate and worship God, the literature expresses the importance of spiritual disciplines, in particular prayer (Fairbrother, 2016; Vos, 2012). Therefore, two items measuring prayer has been included in this study. One item measures whether the participant prays each day, while the other assesses the amount of prayer the participant prays each week.

An expectation in this study is that Prayer will impact Participation in Spiritual Activities, since prayer itself is a spiritual activity (Vos, 2012). In addition to this, it is expected that Prayer will influence Spiritual Growth and Compassion, as communication with God increases the capacity of disciples causing them to become more like Christ and therefore become more compassionate (Bolst, 2012; Maddix & Thompson, 2012; Vos, 2012). Prayer is anticipated to impact Spiritual Wellbeing for the same reasons given for the three discipleship variables. Psychological Wellbeing is expected to be benefitted by Prayer as it often helps individuals reflect on what they need to improve on as individuals (Vos, 2012). It is not expected however that Prayer will impact Social Wellbeing, it is usually introspective in nature (Bolst, 2012).

Intergenerationality

In order to assess if an intergenerational context is an ideal setting for discipleship one must assess intergenerationality itself. Through an exploration of the literature it was determined that no assessment existed to appraise intergenerationality, and therefore it was a task in this study to create such an index. The Index of Intergenerationality will be composed of five factors as discussed in the literature review.

1. Positive Interaction

In this study, positive interaction is the characteristic of having several representatives of different generations in direct communication with each other; presence alone does not suffice (Allen, H. C. & Barnett, 2018). This aspect of intergenerationality is essential in order for intergenerational interdependence to occur as it the basic communication required for intergenerational relationships to form (Joiner, 2009). However, interaction can be negative if the interaction consists mainly of conflicts, criticism or comments of intolerance (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2011). As discipleship is based on healthy relationships, positive interaction needs to be an essential part of this study (Powell et al., 2016).

It is expected that positive interaction will impact all three discipleship variables. Participation in Spiritual Activities will be impacted, as such activities influences ministry to others in order to help meet their needs (Amidei et al., 2014). It is also expected that Spiritual Growth will be affected, since it takes effort and perseverance to mix with other generations (Conway, 2018). Finally, Compassion will be positively impacted as an individual often must put self-interest aside in order to interact with those outside of their own generation (Glassford, 2018).

2. Connectedness

Connectedness is the quality of being joined, linked, or united as a group, which as a topic is extensive concerning wellbeing, discipleship, and intergenerationality (Azzopardi, 2018; Shaw, H., 2015). It is an individual's sense of being a recognised and accepted part of a group, which is involved in the discipleship process as a disciple knows their purpose, their value, and their constraints because of who they are in Christ (Belzen, 2010). Therefore, Connectedness is a key factor as intergenerationality creates a community where its members see each other as family due to the interdependent connection that is established (Ross, 2012).

It is anticipated that Connectedness will influence Participation in Spiritual Activities, Spiritual Growth, Compassion, and Social Wellbeing. Participation in Spiritual Activities will likely be influenced by Connectedness as having a sense of belongingness often results in adopting the behavioural code of the group (Smith, L., & Walker, L., 2013). Spiritual Growth is expected to be impacted as connection has been found to promote learning, especially in a diverse context such as an intergenerational one (Grignoli et al., 2015). Connectedness is anticipated to also impact Compassion, as belonging within a group typically involves reciprocal benefits for those within the group (Lowe & Lowe, 2010). This said, considering that the Compassion variable is measuring kindness to strangers it is possible that those who are not part of the group may not receive compassion from those within it for the same reason. As to influencing Social Wellbeing, social wellbeing is an assessment based on connection with others and should therefore reflect such a link.

3. Accommodation

To accommodate is to give up something of value, be it tangible or intangible, in order for others to gain a benefit. Accommodation is a requirement for intergenerationality and also has a tremendous impact on the discipleship process (Himes, 2011; Snailum, 2012b). Taylor (2013) puts being 'humbly submitted' (an aspect of accommodation) at the core of the discipleship process, making it of relevance to this study.

Accommodation was anticipated to impact the three process variables of Participation in Spiritual Activities, Spiritual Growth, and Compassion. Participation in Spiritual Activities was expected to be impacted as meeting the needs of others through selfless acts is an expectation of a faithful disciple (Costello, 2013). Given that accommodating others can be a trying ordeal, it is also a learning experience of self-control and therefore Spiritual Growth is likely to be impacted (Conway, 2018). Finally, to be selfless and accommodate others is itself an act of compassion which means it is expected that Compassion would also be impacted (Elliott, 2012; Glassford, 2018).

4. Interdependence

In this study, Interdependence is the characteristic of several different generations having reciprocity with each other and therefore forming a mutually beneficial relationship, which binds them together. This factor is a key characteristic in determining intergenerationality (Allen, H. C. & Ross, 2012; Snailum, 2012a). Interdependence also

influences discipleship, as it creates a diverse and encouraging community (Powell & Clark, 2011).

It is hypothesised that Interdependence would influence Social Wellbeing, as interdependence is itself evidence of strong social relationships (Hsu et al., 2014). It is also anticipated that Interdependence would impact Compassion, as mutuality can be evidence of reciprocal compassion for one another (Lowe & Lowe, 2010; Stearns, 2010). In relation to reciprocal compassion, Participation in Spiritual Activities may also be impacted since it aligns with Jesus' directive to love one another. In reflection of Lave and Wenger's Communities of Practice and Situated Learning theories, individuals within a diverse community learn from each other and are therefore interdependent upon each other meaning that Spiritual Growth will likely be influenced by Interdependence (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

5. Empowerment

A potential point of contention or amicability takes place during interaction concerning the distribution of power. Empowerment could be defined as a fair and impartial distribution of authority to every member of a population that is predicated on functionality and representation. This is a key characteristic to determine intergenerationality, as intergenerational communities enable every generation to be involved and empowered in every ministry and at every level of leadership where possible (Powell & Clark, 2011; Snailum, 2012a). Empowerment also influences discipleship, as responsibility is taught and given as an individual finds their place in the fellowship of Christ (Schwarz, 2012).

It is projected that Empowerment will influence all three outcome variables of wellbeing. The reason being is that empowerment concerns competence and accomplishment, which are aspects of the self-determination and flourishing theories (Church, Katighak, Locke, Shang, Shen, de Jesus Vafgas-Flores & Ching, 2013; R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2000; Seligman, 2013).

Regarding the intergenerational factors, it is worth noting Bengtson and Mangen's (1988) work on intergenerational solidarity within the family used six factors in understanding how to strengthen the bonds of cohesion within multigenerational families. While the factors discussed in this model concern a non-familial context, two of Bengtson's factors were somewhat similar. Specifically, Bengtson's factor named 'associational

solidarity’ has some alignment with ‘Positive Interactions’, while his factor of ‘functional solidarity’ has some resemblances to ‘Interdependence.’

Mentoring and modelling

Mentoring and Modelling is an aspect of both intergenerationality and discipleship, in that it is evidence of both taking place (Campbell & Chancy, 2009; French et al., 2015). Mentoring and Modelling was deliberated as an intergenerational factor several times as part of the Intergenerationality Index. However, it was decided after much thought that Mentoring and Modelling is a product of intergenerationality rather than a component of it. In other words, it is a process that likely takes place in intergenerational communities rather than an essential component that, if missing, would disqualify a community as an intergenerational one. For example, while intergenerational communities are more likely to have intentional mentoring taking place than those which are not, a community can still be intergenerational without such intentional mentoring. Therefore, as such, while *it is not* part of the Intergenerationality Index it should yield a good indication of how intergenerational a congregation is (Stollings, 2018).

Mentoring and Modelling is expected to influence the three discipleship variables of Participation in Spiritual Activities, Spiritual Growth and Compassion. Participation in Spiritual Activities is expected to be impacted as modelling has been found to be one of the best means to learn habits and actions (Bandura, 1977). Spiritual Growth is affected due to the learning that takes place between the mentor and the mentee (Agmon et al., 2015; Raven, 2015). Considering that mentoring involves empathy since the mentor and mentee should put themselves in the other’s shoes, and mentoring someone is a selfless act, Compassion is expected to be impacted. Modelling tends to take place when the observer has a positive regard for some aspect of the person they are observing, to which Compassion should aid (Conway, 2018; French et al., 2015).

Discipleship Variables

Participation in spiritual activities

According to Hebrews 11:1, “*Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things seen.*” Concerning this study, Participation in Spiritual Activities concerns active involvement in spiritual activities associated with Christianity and is an indication of being

faithful to God through the teachings of the Bible (Camp, 2008; Himes, 2011; Taylor, 2013). It should be noted that Participation in Spiritual Activities will be used as an indicator of the faithfulness of the participants to God, as disciples are expected to follow the teachings of Jesus as found in the Bible and seek to imitate Jesus as their example (Cherry, 2016; Himes, 2011; Vos, 2012). This being understood, those who are very faithful to the tenets of the Christian religion should have higher scores than those who are less faithful.

While Bible Study and Prayer could conceptually be argued to be an aspect of Participation in Spiritual Activities, they have been separated as two background variables in order to assess if reading the Bible and praying will impact other activities that are value-based actions, such as forgiveness, giving to charity, and witnessing.

Concerning Participation in Spiritual Activities, it is hypothesised that it will positively impact Spiritual Wellbeing most of all as Spiritual Wellbeing assesses connectedness to God which is usually a result of being faithful to God through actively participating in the spiritual activities as encouraged in the Bible (Malinakova et al., 2017). Participation in Spiritual Activities is also expected to positively impact Psychological Wellbeing, as studies have shown a positive relationship between religiosity and spirituality with general wellbeing (Aan et al., 2018; Sharma & Singh, 2018). Finally, it is expected that the variable of Bible Study and Prayer will greatly impact Participation in Spiritual Activities as discussed above (Bolst, 2012; Hamilton et al., 2013; Vos, 2012). Participation in Spiritual Activities is not expected to impact Social Wellbeing as the introspective spiritual activities may cancel out those which are social in nature (Bolst, 2012).

Spiritual growth

It is the expectation of a disciple to be continually learning, adapting, and growing in their walk with Christ and their treatment of others (Cherry, 2016; Logan & Ridley, 2015). With this understanding, Spiritual Growth is an essential aspect of the discipleship process, and therefore an important assessment in this study.

Spiritual Growth is expected to influence all three outcome variables, as wellbeing in general is increased when an individual is improving themselves (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). This is evident through the extensive studies done using the Self-Determination Theory of R. M. Ryan and Deci (2000). Increasing competence positively impacts not only self-perception, but aids in how other see us; which influences Social Wellbeing (Church et

al., 2013). Further, as a discipleship factor Spiritual Growth should also positively increase Spiritual Wellbeing (Himes, 2011; Vos, 2012).

Compassion

Compassion is not just an emotion, neither is just a conceptual choice, but rather it is both which will result in compassionate action (Elliott, 2012). According to scripture all of the commandments hang on love, and it is through compassion that Jesus states how people should identify his disciples (Bonhoeffer, 1959; Elowsky & Oden, 2007). Given the focus of compassion as an identifying mark of a disciple, it has been chosen as a variable in this study. Considering that the specificity of compassion in scripture usually has been particularly chosen; as compassion can be defined as several characteristics depending on the context which result in sympathetic action (Elliott, 2012; Henry, 1998).

It is projected that Compassion will positively impact all three wellbeing outcome variables. Positive social interaction has been shown to reduce anxiety and depression, increasing wellbeing on several levels (Cruwys et al., 2014). Given that acts of compassion are positive and selfless social interactions, Compassion is expected to positively impact Psychological, Social and Spiritual Wellbeing; particularly Spiritual Wellbeing since it is also an act of faithfulness to God (Lowe & Lowe, 2010; Van Cappellen et al., 2016).

Outcome Variables

As this study is seeking to investigate what impact active participation within an intergenerational congregation has on wellbeing, wellbeing is the outcome variable of the study. As wellbeing has been defined in this study as having a thriving and abundant life through the positive functioning of the psychological, social and spiritual aspects of an individual, the outcome variable in the causal model to be considered are three variants of wellbeing: Psychological, Social, and Spiritual. These will be studied each as its own outcome variable in the findings and discussion.

Summary

This chapter has presented a conceptual framework for wellbeing, discipleship, and intergenerationality through the development of a causal model which includes background, discipleship, and outcome variables. Such a model endeavours to express the hypothetical relationships between theoretical constructs (M. Allen, 2017). The causal model was

informed through a review of literature, which has provided the basis for the theoretical framework. The hypothetical influences between all of the relationships is shown in the proposed model for the analysis in Figure 4.3.

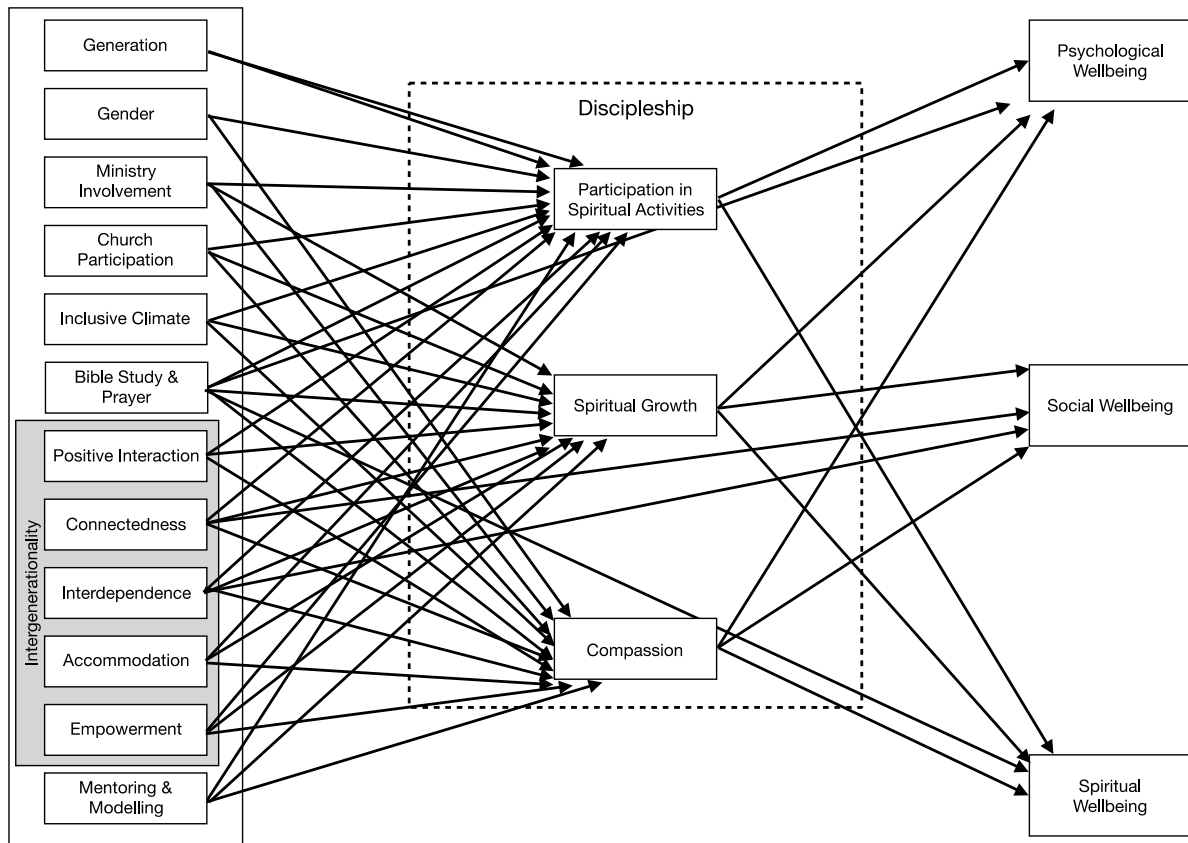


Figure 4.3

Proposed Model for the Analysis

CHAPTER 5 : METHODOLOGY

Introduction

With three conceptual fields in which to study, each with multiple factors to assess, as well as a need in discovering how each concept relates to individuals, a mixed-method study has been chosen in order to assess the research questions both quantitatively and qualitatively. In order to find the answers to the research questions in an appropriate mixed method that reflects the purpose of the study, a concurrent transformative strategy has been chosen. In a concurrent transformative strategy, both quantitative and qualitative assessments are undertaken simultaneously in order to converge the understanding of the data from each method into a holistic understanding of the inquiry (Creswell, J. W., 2009).

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the methodology that will be pursued in this study, which includes finding appropriate assessment instruments and formulating a means of obtaining reliable and valid data.

Developing the Instrument

In order to test the causal model a quantitative assessment instrument in the form of a self-reporting questionnaire was developed for use among the congregations (see the Appendices A1 to A4 for the consent forms and Appendix B for the questionnaire). Further to this, in order to explore the relationships on a deeper and more individual level, the quantitative assessment will be followed by semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C for the Key Questions). In such a method, both broad and in-depth perspectives will help to yield a strong outcome, and therefore give both valid and reliable results (O'Leary, 2010).

The results of this study will not only provide insight concerning this study, but it is hoped that it will also provide valuable information to the congregations involved in the study, and extended benefits for both practitioner and academics in the fields of wellbeing, discipleship, and intergenerationality. In addition to this, as several factors within the study lack specific and even general assessments from previous research studies, modified and original scales will be created for the purposes of this study and for future research in the field.

As several instruments needed to be either modified or created, a pilot study was undertaken in order to validate the instruments. A large church was chosen for the first trial of the questionnaire, which led to modifications to the instruments in the main study.

The Sample

A two-stage stratified sample of church attendees in local congregations from as far south as Wollongong, NSW to the Hunter Valley region of NSW was included in the study. The two stages consist of congregations and attendees. As the sample concerns randomised groups, it is a clustered sample and therefore a calculation must take place to determine the clustering effect in order to find the overall sample size (Eldridge, Ashby, & Kerry, 2006). If it is assumed that the size of each cluster is the same then the true Design Effect method would be used, which is:

$$DE = 1 + (\bar{m} - 1) p$$

Using this method, a minimum of 510 participants is needed in the sample. However, since the clusters are not the same but vary in size the Maximum possible Inflation in sample Size (MIS) is recommended (Eldridge et al., 2006). The MIS equation is:

$$MIS = \frac{1 + [(1 + cv^2)\bar{m} - 1] p}{1 + (\bar{m} - 1) p}$$

Using MIS only 384 participants are required. Given that the number of participants in the study was 545, the size was adequate using either the DE or MIS method. Table 5.1 shows a list of the congregations along with the number of participants who partook of the study. The congregations have been given the simple initial 'C' along with the nominal order of when they were surveyed.

Table 5.1

Questionnaire Participation

Congregation	Participants
C1	91
C2	64
C3*	20
C4	45
C5	42
C6	60
C7	39
C8	61
C9**	34
C10	22
C11	67
Total	545

* Denotes the Church of Christ Congregation, whereas the rest are Seventh-day Adventists

** C9 was actually two congregations who met together for a combined worship service.

The attendees in the sample were individuals age sixteen years and above selected from congregations, which were selected based on probability proportional to size and if the congregation had several generations worshipping corporately together on their day of worship. Most of the congregations in the study are from congregations in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, while one intentionally intergenerational Church of Christ congregation was also included in the sample for the sake of variation; which was C3. It is also worth noting that C9 was a combination of two distinct Seventh-day Adventist congregations who had met together for a combined worship service. The pastor was

supposed to distinguish both groups so that two congregations could be sampled at the same time, but had failed to do so; consequently, both congregations have been assessed as one.

The attending participants were chosen by consenting to fill out the questionnaire after the study was presented to their congregation either during or after the worship service. Those who were between the ages of 16 and 18 were invited to participate if their guardian consented in writing on the consent form (see Appendix A). Those who were 18 years or older gave their consent by filling out the survey as explained on the information page which served as the front page of the questionnaire.

The Questionnaire

In discussing the methodology of the main study, each variable will be discussed that is of interest in the *Wellbeing, Intergenerationality & Discipleship Assessment (WIDA)* questionnaire (see Appendix B). All of the items included in the *Proposed Variables in the Causal Model* (see Table 4.1) together added up to a 117-item questionnaire. In discussing these variables, the importance of each factor to be assessed will be presented along with the items and scales used to represent them; only including variables from Figure 4.2. Each variable will be concluded with discussing what the overall means were in the study as well as the performance of the scales themselves.

Background Variables

A range of background data was collected through the questionnaire. The first five questions collected information pertaining to the participant including gender, generation, and family data. Question six through to nine concerned information regarding participation in their congregation, while question ten asked what the participant's past week was like in order to assess their current mood.

These ten questions were latent variables and while only four of them were used in the causal model, they may be useful in future research. The rest of the background questions used in this study were construct variables and as such were scales of assessment. Each of these scales will be briefly discussed.

Inclusive climate

The five items that made up the Inclusive Climate Scale were derived from two instruments. Three items are modified questions from "Faith Assets: Assessment tool for the

congregation and youth ministry”; question 12, 15 & 34 ("Faith Assets: Assessment tool for the congregation and youth ministry," pp. 4, 8). While the two last items are modified questions from the ValueGenesis Study (Section F, #3 & #7) of Gane (2012). The scale format was that of a four option Likert scale with the options set as, ‘Strongly Disagree’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Agree’ and ‘Strongly Agree.’

Bible study

For the assessment of Bible Study, two items were supplied in the questionnaire; although only one was used in the model. Question 63 concerned if a participant read the Bible everyday using a four option Likert scale with options of, ‘Definitely False, ‘Mostly False, ‘Mostly True and ‘Definitely True.’ Question 76 measured the amount of time a participant spent reading the Bible each day, and had the options of, ‘10 minutes or less’, ‘10 – 30 minutes’, ‘30 – 60 minutes’, and ‘over an hour.’

Considering that each of these items were different scales of measurement, they were not combined as one scale in the model. Instead, question 76 will be used as the variable ‘Bible Study.’

Prayer

For the assessment of Prayer, two items were supplied in the questionnaire; although only one was used in the model. Question 64 concerned if a participant prayed and/or meditated everyday using a four option Likert scale with options of, ‘Definitely False, ‘Mostly False, ‘Mostly True and ‘Definitely True.’ Question 77 measured the amount of time a participant spent praying each week, with options of, ‘10 minutes or less’, ‘10 – 30 minutes’, ‘30 – 60 minutes’, and ‘over an hour.’

Considering that each of these items were different scales of measurement, they were not combined as one scale in the model. Instead, question 77 will be used as the variable ‘Prayer.’

Intergenerationality index

As discussed in Chapter 3 on pages 57 – 61, there are five factors that make up intergenerational communities; positive interactions, connectedness, interdependence, accommodation and empowerment. Consequently, scales for each of these characteristics were needed to create the Intergenerational Index.

1. Positive Interaction

To assess the positive interactions that take place between members of different generations, two sub-scales were used to make one interaction scale called the Intergenerational Interaction Scale; the two sub-scales being the Intergenerational Frequency of Interaction Scale and the Intergenerational Depth of Interaction Scale.

The first sub-scale was a simple Likert scale that assessed the frequency of interaction that the participant had with the five age groups found in a congregation. The participants were asked, “I talk to [age group] in my congregation...”; with the five age groups being children, youth, young adults, middle-aged adults, and seniors. There were four options to choose from as answers: rarely, monthly, fortnightly, and weekly.

The second sub-scale measured the depth of intergenerational interactions. It was a modified version of the Workplace Intergenerational Climate Scale (WICS) by King and Bryant (2017). In addition to this scale, an extra question was added in order to find out if such interactions were organised regularly by the congregation, which is due to the relevancy of such a question from the literature (Allen, H. C. & Ross, 2012). The reliability of the modified WICS assessment was within the acceptable levels. The scale format was that of a four option Likert scale with the options set as, ‘Strongly Disagree’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Agree’ and ‘Strongly Agree.’

In order to measure overall positive interaction, the scores of both sub-scales were added together and divided to give a score out of 4, to become the Intergenerational Interaction Scale.

2. Connectedness

Being at the heart of intergenerationality, connectedness is an essential aspect to be assessed. However, in this study two aspects of connectedness were assessed in order to ensure both general and intergenerational connectedness were evaluated. The family sub-scale of Carroll, Bower, and Muspratt’s Self in a Social Context—Social Connectedness Scale (2017) was modified to reflect a sense of belonging within a congregation. The first five questions were directed at the connection between the participant and their congregation in general, whereas the last five questions were worded specifically to assess their connection with members of other generations within their congregation. The scale format was that of a

four option Likert scale with the options set as, 'Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree.'

3. Accommodation

The accommodation scale took some time to develop as there were very few pre-validated scales on the topic in the literature. Initially a modified version of the Satisfaction with Sacrifice sub-scale by (Stanley & Markham, 1992) was created, however after the pilot study it was determined that a completely new scale needed to be created to better suit the purposes of this study. After a few trials, the Intergeneration Accommodation Scale was created with six questions revolving around sacrifice, submission and empathy. The scale format was that of a four option Likert scale with the options set as, 'Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree.'

4. Interdependence

The Cooperative Interdependence sub-scale of D. W. Johnson and Norem-Hebeisen (1979)'s Social Interdependent Scale was modified for intergenerational assessment as the Intergeneration Interdependence Scale. Originally created to assess the interdependence of students, the 'liking to cooperate' and 'valuing cooperative learning' was altered replacing the word 'students' with 'people outside of my own generation' or 'people of different generations'. The question, 'I can learn important things from...' was duplicated so that it could be asked concerning learning from both younger and older people. The scale format was that of a four option Likert scale with the options set as, 'Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree.'

5. Empowerment

The assessment for intergenerational empowerment was taken from the van Dierendonck and Nuijten (2011) Servant Leadership Survey's empowerment sub-scale and modified to appropriately assess empowerment in an intergenerational congregation as the Intergenerational Empowerment Scale. Considering it was initially created for a workplace, the questions were not only modified concerning the congregation, but some questions were also worded differently so that it reflects the tasks and roles of a member in a congregation. The scale format was that of a four option Likert scale with the options set as, 'Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Agree' and 'Strongly Agree.'

The five intergenerational scales were averaged together to result in a score out of four for the Intergenerational Index. All five scales as well as the index performed satisfactorily as assessment instruments.

Mentoring and modelling

As no measure of basic mentoring and modelling was found in the literature, a Mentoring and Modelling Scale (MMS) was devised which gave six statements to which a respondent could answer; there were scales found that assessed mentors who were part of a mentoring program, however none measured if a participant was being mentored or was mentoring someone else. Of the six items in the MMS, two statements concerned the participant being mentored, two concerned the participant mentoring someone else, one concerned having a role model and the last concerned being a role model to others. The scale format was that of a four option Likert scale with the options set as, ‘Strongly Disagree’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Agree’ and ‘Strongly Agree.’

Discipleship Variables

This study considers discipleship as a process rather than as a product since discipleship continues for the rest of a disciple’s life (Bonhoeffer, 1959; Camp, 2008; De Waal, 2017; Himes, 2011; Logan & Ridley, 2015). Therefore, while there are pre-validated instruments which assess discipleship as an outcome variable, this study instead will measure discipleship as a process with the factors discussed in the literature in mind; Participation in Spiritual Activities, Spiritual Growth, and Compassion (p. 83 – 84).

Participation in spiritual activities

Faithfulness as a disciple entails adherence and submission to the teachings and principles of God through the active participation of spiritual activities (Azzopardi, 2018). As an adequate measure of faithfulness that measured the current level of faithfulness of participants could not be found, the Participation in Spiritual Activities Scale was created which asked a variety of questions revolving around if the participant was following spiritual practices as taught in the Bible. The Participation in Spiritual Activities Scale format was that of a four option Likert scale with the options set as, ‘Definitely False’, ‘Mostly False’, ‘Mostly True’ and ‘Definitely True.’

Spiritual growth

As Spiritual Growth was to be assessed as an intermediate variable, an instrument needed to be developed which could assess if a participant was currently growing as an individual on both a spiritual and personal level. A six-statement scale called the Spiritual Growth Scale was developed using a four-option Likert scale, with the options of, 'Definitely False,' 'Mostly False,' 'Mostly True' and 'Definitely True.' The six items were composed of three types of statements in order to reflect a well-rounded assessment of current growth. The initial scale that was developed was found to be somewhat ambiguous concerning a few of the questions on the first congregation that was assessed, and therefore those statements were altered for the rest of the participating congregations in order to collect more accurate results.

Regarding the statements, two questions assessed if the participants felt their growth was generally progressing both in the present and when compared to the past. The second set of statements was regarding assessing if there was noticeable growth since becoming a Christian, for the individual and if the individual thought that others had noticed a change as well. The third set of statements assesses whether the participant sees spiritual growth taking place in their life and considers if they are heading in a direction reflective of where Jesus would want them to go.

Compassion

In finding a means to assess Compassion as a variable, the Santa Clara Brief Compassionate Scale by Hwang, Plante, and Lackey (2008) was used which was pre-validated scale with a Cronbach's alpha of .90. It was designed as a brief version of the Compassionate Love Scale by Sprecher and Fehr (2005) which was 21 items in length. It is a Likert scale composed of five statements mostly relating to rendering aid to strangers in need. Six options were available to participants to choose from: Definitely False, Mostly False, Somewhat False, Somewhat True, Mostly True, and Definitely True.

Outcome Variables

Three types of wellbeing have been assessed in the study in conjunction with the discussion in the literature review; Psychological Wellbeing, Social Wellbeing and Spiritual Wellbeing. All three types of wellbeing will be assessed as individual products in this study, as opposed to a combined scale as with intergenerationality.

Psychological wellbeing

Unlike many of the other scales in the study, there is an enormous variety of wellbeing assessments (Linton et al., 2016). With this in mind, isolating the best scale for the purposes of this study was somewhat formidable. Initially, Diener's Flourishing Scale to assess Psychological Wellbeing (PWB) was used; which was an eight item Likert scale (Diener, Wirtz, Tov, Kim-Prieto, Choi, Oishi & Biswas-Diener, 2010). Rather than eight options, six options were given to choose from to answer each of the eight statements: 'Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Somewhat Disagree', 'Somewhat Agree', 'Agree', and 'Strongly Agree.' However, when analysing the results from the first congregation it was realised that Diener's scale was not narrow enough, as it didn't specifically assess PWB but rather Seligman's concept of flourishing which includes other aspects of wellbeing (Seligman, 2013). Therefore, for the rest of the congregations a modified version of the Shortened Psychological General Well-Being Index (PGWB-S) by the Grossi team (Grossi, Groth, Mosconi, Cerutti, Pace, Compare & Apolone, 2006) was used.

The PGWB-S is a Likert scale composed of eight questions that measure anxiety, vitality, depressed mood, self-control, and positive wellbeing. While all eight questions were used in the study (with a slight modification of the first question), it was determined that it was also necessary to include the assessment of stress, positive affect, and life satisfaction. Therefore, three additional questions were included in this scale being: i) I felt stressed and under pressure during the past month, ii) I have experienced positive emotions during the past month, and iii) I have been satisfied with my life during the past month. This Likert scale had six options available for a participant to choose from: 'Never', 'Rarely', 'Sometimes', 'Often', 'Most of the time', and 'All of the time.'

Social wellbeing

For assessing social wellbeing, the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley (1988) was used. The instrument has shown good reliability and validity in research and is composed of twelve items (Canty-Mitchell & Zimet, 2000). It was formatted as a Likert scale with six options; 'Strongly Disagree', 'Disagree', 'Somewhat Disagree', 'Somewhat Agree', 'Agree', and 'Strongly Agree.'

Spiritual wellbeing

The shortened version of the Czech Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SpWB-S) by Malinakova et al. (2017) was used to assess spiritual wellbeing in the study. It is based on the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS) by Paloutzian and Ellison (1982). This version of the SWBS is presented in a Likert scale format using seven positively formulated items. However, six choices were offered in this study; ‘Strongly Disagree’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Somewhat Disagree’, ‘Somewhat Agree’, ‘Agree’, and ‘Strongly Agree.’

Life satisfaction

The last item on the WIDA instrument was a single question asking the participant, “On a scale of 1 – 10 how satisfied are you with your life?” The participant had the option of choosing one of ten circles ranging from 1, being ‘not at all satisfied’ to ‘very satisfied’ at number 10. While this question was not part of the causal model, it is worth noting that the overall mean was 8.03 (SD = 1.6) which means that the majority of participants felt that they had good satisfaction with their life. There was somewhat of a trend of increasing life satisfaction based on age, as the mean increased as the age of the participants increased; the range was 7.73 (SD = 1.8) for Millennials to 8.45 (SD = 1.4) for Traditionalists.

Quantitative Data Collection

Once permission from the participating congregations were obtained, questionnaire data was collected between December 2017 and June 2018. As congregations only come together corporately once a week, collections could only be taken on Saturdays for the Seventh-day Adventist congregations and Sundays for the Church of Christ congregation (C3). With the exception of congregation 1 (from now on individual congregations will be labelled ‘C’ and their identifying number, in this case C1) and C3, the congregations chose to fill out the surveys after the main service was completed. C1 chose to hand the questionnaire out to the congregation before the sermon so participants could choose to fill it out during the sermon or after it. C3 only has a traditional worship service once a month and chooses to do alternative worship activities during the other three Sundays. Consequently, they had chosen to fill out their questionnaires on a Sunday when they provided a community service; participants came and took the survey one at a time on the day so that there would be no obstruction to providing their ministry to the community, which took participants on average twelve minutes to complete.

The general procedure for the congregations was that the purpose of the study was explained to the congregation during their church announcement time; with the exception of C3 to which each participant was told individually. The purpose and instructions for C9 was explained by the local pastor as they undertook the questionnaire while the data was collecting from C8. Brief instructions concerning filling out the questionnaire were given just prior to when the questionnaires were being handed out. The questionnaires and writing instruments were given out by the researcher often with the aid of volunteers and were collected directly by the researcher; with the exception of C9 as the local pastor collected the questionnaires.

It took approximately twelve minutes for the average participant to fill out the questionnaire; with a range of six to forty minutes.

Quantitative Analysis

Once the questionnaires were collected, the data was scanned and coded with Remark software and formatted so that it was compatible with the SPSS 25 application software ("SPSS version 25," 2017). Descriptive analysis of the items was undertaken, and a correlation matrix of each scale was used to assess the relationships. The unmodified pre-validated scales were the SCCS, the PGWB-S, the MSPSS, and the SWBS scales. The scales that needed to be tested were the Inclusive Climate Scale, the Intergenerational Interaction Scale, the Intergenerational Connectedness Scale, the Intergenerational Interdependence Scale, the Intergenerational Accommodation Scale, the Intergenerational Empowerment Scale, the Mentoring and Modelling Scale, the Participation in Spiritual Activities Scale, and the Spiritual Growth Scale. The unmodified pre-validated scales were simply verified, whereas the modified and new scales underwent more thorough scrutiny using factor analysis and reliability testing.

Principal component factor analysis using SPSS was applied to each scale with a forced loading of a single factor. Items which loaded with a score of less than 0.3 were discarded, with factors scoring negatively being recoded. The reliability of each scale was then checked to make sure they scored 0.7 or higher using Cronbach's Alpha.

Every participant doing the questionnaire received a score for each scale out of four for all but the last four scales, as there were four options using the Likert Scale. The Intergenerationality Index (IGI) was also a score out of four, and is a composition of the

Intergenerational Interaction Scale, the Intergenerational Connectedness Scale, the Intergenerational Interdependence Scale, the Intergenerational Accommodation Scale, and the Intergenerational Empowerment Scale; where the score is the mean of the five factor scores. The last four scales (SCCS, the PGWB-S, the MSPSS, and the SWBS scales) were scored out of six as they were based on six option Likert Scales.

Multiple linear regression was used to determine if the causal relationships hypothesised in the Proposed Model for Analysis (see Figure 4.3). In order to assess the model, standardised beta coefficients were calculated. These beta coefficients have been utilised to estimate the influence of causality of both direct and indirect relationships in the Model of Analysis. In order to assess whether there are significant differences between the congregations on the outcome variables, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was done. The results of this is found in Chapter 6.

The IBM SPSS AMOS version 24 structural equation modelling program was utilised in order to not only calculate the regression, but also the co-variances in the model. Variables which did not show significance were removed from the model, and a model fit score was calculated for each of the three outcome variables.

The Interviews

The purpose of this study was to answer the research question through the analysis of the Proposed Causal Model in Figure 4.2. Conversely, considering the limitations of quantitative assessment the study sought to increase understanding by including qualitative assessment in the form of semi-structured interviews in this study. The responses given in the interviews by participants are to compliment and strengthen the quantitative analysis of the questionnaire and find a means to explain any inconsistencies between the analysis and review of the literature.

Interview Design

Of the eleven congregation who participated in the questionnaire, four congregations were chosen to provide participants in the qualitative assessment; specifically, the congregations were C3, C5, C7, and C8. Two of the four congregations supplied four participants to be interviewed, while the other two supplied three participants, yielding 14 interview participants in total. It was the intention of this study that each congregation would

provide a range of generations to be represented in their sample. Table 5.2 shows the representation given by the four congregations.

Table 5.2

Interview Representation

Age of Participants								
Congregation	18-19	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	70s	80s
C3	1 F			1 M		1M	1 F	
C5		1 M	1 M	1 F				
C7		1 F		1 M			1 F	
C8		1 M		1 F		1 F		1 M

F = female, M = male

As noted in in Table 5.2, fourteen people participated in the interviews; seven females and seven males. The interview length was between 20 – 40 minutes depending on how thoroughly the participant answered the questions. Each participant was interviewed once in the study and was recorded on a digital recording device. All participants gave consent to their interview, and their name and the name of their congregation has been anonymously transcribed.

Interview Questions

As the interviews were semi-structured, there was a set of 12 – 14 questions that was used in the study (See Appendix C). However, some set questions were pursued with further probing questions in order to delve deeper into the reasoning behind the participant's choice of words or simply to better understand why they responded as they did. These questions are largely open ended, giving the participant the opportunity to take the questions in the direction they feel impressed to answer them (Creswell, J. W., 2009).

Qualitative Analysis

The fourteen interviews yielded a total of 496 minutes of recorded audio. The digital recordings were then sent to be professionally transcribed by *Triple A Transcription*, an Australian transcribing business. The transcriptions were then checked and coded in order to find the themes that emerged from the data using the QSR NVivo software. After reading through the data, beginning with open coding the main themes that emanated from the data were categorised, followed by axial coding (positioning the categories within the theoretical model), and finally seeking how the themes interconnect through selective coding (Creswell, J. W., 2009; "The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods," 2008).

The open coding for the data was based on four themes which were founded on the topics of the 12-14 questions, being Wellbeing, Intergenerationality, Christianity, and Church. As the open coding continued, categories within the four themes emerged which helped to understand the various aspects of each theme; that is, under the intergenerationality code, four categories formed being, 'Challenges', 'Intergenerational Activities', 'Benefits', and 'Making it Work.' Each of these categories were broken down into further groupings which helped unpack what the smaller codes were composed of; that is, the 'Making it Work' code was initially broken down into, 'Accommodation', 'Available', 'Common Interests', 'Communication', 'Focus on Positive', and 'Intentional'; however later these smaller codes changed somewhat.

After this axial coding was undertaken in order to see how the codes and categories could be woven in with a theoretical construct. The categories were put into seven groups, being 'Making it Work', 'Flourishing', 'Relationships', 'Christ-Like', 'In the Mind', 'Growing', and 'Unwanted.' It was noted that categories from each of the open coding themes was in each of the seven groups. Word frequency queries were done first for the codes of all of the 176 codes, and then a complete uncategorised word frequency query to see what words were used most as a means of understanding the emergent themes. Consequently, four themes came out of the un-coded word queries that was somewhat similar yet different to the original four, being 'Discipleship', 'Needs', 'Intergenerational Community, and 'Growth.'

As the coding process transitioned from axial coding towards selective coding, the original 176 categories were consolidated into 17 groupings which fell within the four original (though slightly modified) themes of Wellbeing, Intergenerationality, Participation in

Spiritual Activities, and Discipleship that could be interconnected with four emerging themes based on the un-coded words. These emergent themes are, 'Needs', 'Inclusive Climate', 'Healthy Churches', and 'Disciples.' Appendix D shows how the codes and themes were *ultimately* organised into a matrix.

The full description of how the themes emerged from the data will be discussed in Chapter 6. The themes that have been produced from the interview data will then be compared with the questionnaire data along with the model of analysis. The results will be presented in the discussion taking place in Chapter 6. It is the expectation that through the use of both quantitative and qualitative assessment in a mixed method study using a concurrent transformative design that a robust confirmatory analysis of the research questions can be accomplished.

CHAPTER 6 : FINDINGS

Introduction

This study has sought to answer how a person's wellbeing is impacted by their level of social and spiritual connectedness as they are disciplined in an intergenerational congregation. This chapter seeks to analyse the variables in the study, their relationships with each other and how they fit as a model. It also seeks to determine the themes which have emerged through the interview data, and how the questionnaire and interview data can be consolidated to ascertain the answer to the research question. As discussed in Chapter 4, this study follows a concurrent transformative strategy where both quantitative and qualitative assessment takes place simultaneously in order to merge both sets of data into a comprehensive and holistic understanding (Creswell, J. W., 2009).

Some of the quantitative variables analysed in the first section of this chapter are single item variables while others are part of a construct. The construct variables will be first analysed to see if their items load together as a single factor and their results as a factor loading will be presented in a table. The construct variables will also be analysed for reliability using a Cronbach Alpha score. A mean score for both single item and construct variables will be presented along with an interpretation.

Background Variables

Participants: Gender

There were 295 females and 242 males who participated in the study. Interestingly, this is consistent with the ratio comparison found in Christian churches (Hughes et al., 2014; K. A. Roberts & Yamane, 2012). In this study, the sample worked out to 44.4% male versus 54.1% female; which is consistent with the ratios in other research.

Participants: Generation

Out of the 545 participants, there were two who were born before 1925 (being of the Federation generation) and 54 who were born from 1925 to 1942 (being the Silent generation). These two generations have therefore been combined to form the *Traditionalists*

due to the low numbers of those born prior to 1925 and the theoretical backing of the literature in combining them both. The Traditionalists made up 10.3% of the total number of participants. There were 126 participants who identified as *Baby Boomers*, being born from 1943 to 1960, which was 23.2% of the sample. *Generation X* accounted for 196 of the participants, being born from 1961 to 1981, which were 36.1% of the sample. Finally, 164 Millennials (born 1982 through 2002) participated in the study, forming 30.2% of the sample.

With one exception, the ratio of the generations was similar in each of the congregations with most of the participants being Millennials, Generation X, and Baby Boomers. Interestingly, when compared to the current Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2019) less Millennials are represented in the sample; around 38% would have been represented. This echoes the current crisis of Millennials leaving the church at higher rates than other adult age groups (Powell et al., 2016; Kinnaman, 2011).

Participants: Ministry involvement and church participation

In the analysis of the data, 32.1% of participants reported that they were not involved in ministry while 67.9% responded that they were. Considering that some have voiced a concern in the Christian church that many attendees are not involved in ministry, this is an encouraging result (Taylor, 2013; Cole, 2010). It is worth noting however that this is self-response and therefore may not be in agreement with what is actually observed by the leadership teams of each congregation.

Regarding the question, “Not including the worship service, I regularly participate in other activities and/or ministries with this congregation...”, the responses are summarised in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1

Church Participation Results

“Not including the worship service, I regularly participate in other activities and/or ministries with this congregation (such as small groups, recreational/social activities, etc.) ...”

Frequency	Percentage
Rarely	19.8
Every few months	15.1
Once a month	14.7
Once a fortnight	10.0
Once a week	26.9
More than once a week	13.6

Congregations: Inclusive climate

The Inclusive Climate Scale is described in Table 6.2. The scale has a Cronbach’s Alpha reliability score of 0.90 and it has performed well as a factor.

Table 6.2

Inclusive Climate Scale Factor Loading

Item	Factor Loading
11 The congregation values and welcomes all people.	.834
12 The congregation reflects high quality personal and group relationships.	.868
13 The congregation provides nurturing relationships and activities resulting in a welcoming atmosphere of respect, growth, and belonging.	.880
14 Strangers feel welcome in this congregation.	.797
15 In this congregation, members care about each other.	.836

The mean score for Inclusive Climate was 3.32 (SD = 0.54), which can be interpreted to mean that there was a moderately strong agreement from the average participant that their congregation had a warm and friendly atmosphere. As having a friendly and accepting atmosphere is essential for church health as well as for people of diverse backgrounds, this is encouraging for the congregations in this study (Schwarz, 2012).

Bible study and prayer

The mean score of the data for how much time was spent reading the Bible each day was 1.72 (SD = 0.79). This variable came from item 76 and is labelled, 'Bible Study' which is a Likert scale out of four. This score indicates that on average participants in the study read their Bible somewhere between ten to thirty minutes. The amount of time spent in prayer each week was found to have a mean score of 2.39 (SD = 1.03). This variable came from item 77 and is labelled, 'Prayer' which is a Likert scale out of four. The mean score indicates that on average participants pray somewhere between ten to thirty minutes each week. Table 6.3 shows the mean scores of these two items, as well as items 63 and 64 which are conceptually related.

Items 63 and 64, while not part of Model of Analysis, are worth considering. The mean score for reading the Bible everyday was 2.83 (SD = 0.92), which can be interpreted to mean that the average participant slightly agreed that they read the Bible every day. The mean score for praying and/or meditating everyday was 3.35 (SD = 0.80) indicating that there was a moderately strong agreement from the average participant. Overall these scores are surprising in reflection of the fact that communicating with God is the lifeblood of Christianity, and therefore it was expected that those attending Christian congregations would have scored higher given that it is considered relational time with God.

Table 6.3
Bible Study & Prayer Mean Scores

Item		Mean	Description
63	I read the Bible everyday	2.83	Slight agreement
64	I pray and/or meditate everyday	3.35	Moderately strong agreement
76	On average each day I read the Bible...	1.72	Around '10 – 30 minutes'
77	Each week I pray and/or meditate...	2.39	Around '10 – 30 minutes'

Intergenerationality Index

The Intergenerationality Index is a composite scale constructed by averaging the mean scores of Positive Interaction, Connectedness, Accommodation, Interdependence, and Empowerment. The Intergenerationality Index is labelled, 'Intergenerationality' in the regression models.

1. Positive Interaction

The Positive Interaction variable is comprised of two sub-scales: the Intergenerational Frequency of Interaction Scale, and the Intergenerational Depth of Interaction Scale. The Intergenerational Frequency of Interaction Scale is described on Table 6.4. It has acceptable factor loadings with a Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.79. The Intergenerational Depth of Interaction Scale is described on Table 6.6. It has a Cronbach Alpha score of 0.84 and good factor loadings.

Table 6.4
Intergenerational Frequency of Interaction Scale Factor Loading

Item	Factor Loading
16 I talk to children in this congregation...	.708
17 I talk to youth in this congregation...	.739
18 I talk to young adults in this congregation...	.788
19 I talk to middle-aged adults in this congregation...	.793
20 I talk to seniors in this congregation...	.678

Regarding the mean, the Intergenerational Frequency of Interaction Scale was 3.26 (SD = 0.80), which can be interpreted to mean that there was a moderately strong agreement from the average participant that they frequently interacted with other generations. However, in the interest of understanding who speaks to whom, Table 6.5 shows unsurprisingly that each generation converses with their own age group the most, as they likely have the most in common with their own peers. Overall, the lowest mean was talking with children and youth, to which most state they speak to them on a fortnightly basis; though Traditionalists tend to speak to them on more of a monthly basis. This can most likely be attributed to the reality that the younger generations are likely the ones who have their own children in their local congregation and would therefore also be more likely to speak to their children's friends. The highest mean was in talking to middle-aged adults, averaging usually a weekly basis overall by participants. Baby Boomers accrued the highest mean in talking to different generations, whereas Traditionalists were the least diverse.

Table 6.5
Intergenerational Depth of Interaction Mean Scores

Item	Millennials	Generation X	Baby Boomers	Traditionalists	Overall
16 I talk to children in this congregation...	2.9	3.3	3.1	2.3	3.0
17 I talk to youth in this congregation...	3.3	3.0	3.1	2.7	3.1
18 I talk to young adults in this congregation...	3.4	3.1	3.4	3.0	3.2
19 I talk to middle-aged adults in this congregation...	3.3	3.7	3.8	3.6	3.6
20 I talk to seniors in this congregation...	2.8	3.5	3.8	3.6	3.4
Overall	3.1	3.3	3.4	3.0	3.4

The Intergenerational Depth of Interaction Scale is described on Table 6.6. As previously mentioned, it has a Cronbach Alpha score of 0.84 and good factor loadings.

Table 6.6
Intergenerational Depth of Interaction Scale Factor Loading

Item	Factor Loading
21 In this congregation, I often have the opportunity to attend activities and/or events that involve all the generations	.684
22 In this congregation, I often have conversations with people	.740
23 In this congregation, I often talk to people outside my generation	.856
24 In this congregation, I often talk with people outside my generation about meaningful things	.829
25 In this congregation during social events, I often eat meals with people outside my generation	.785

A mean of 3.10 (SD = 0.58) was accrued for the Intergenerational Depth of Interaction Scale which can be interpreted to mean that there was a moderately strong agreement from the average participant that they had deep interactions with those of other generations.

The overall mean for the participants for Positive Interaction comes from the composite Intergenerational Interaction Scale made from the Intergenerational Frequency of Interaction Scale and the Intergenerational Depth of Interaction Scale, which was 3.19 (SD = 0.60). This shows that overall there was a moderately strong agreement from the average participant that they have positive interactions with other generations. Considering a similar agreement was found regarding the friendliness of the congregations previously, the congregations thus far seem to have a context which intergenerationality may exist in. Connectedness will now be analysed to see how much of a sense of belonging there is in the congregations.

2. Connectedness

The Intergenerational Connectedness Scale is described on Table 6.7. It showed a very good fit as a factor and had a high Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.93.

Table 6.7
Intergenerational Connectedness Scale Factor Loading

Item		Factor Loading
26	I feel like I belong in this congregation.	.831
27	I feel valued in this congregation.	.876
28	I feel that I am respected in this congregation.	.841
29	I feel pride when I think about being a part of this congregation.	.822
30	I can really be myself in this congregation.	.805
31	In this congregation, people outside of my own generation really listen to what I have to say.	.743
32	In this congregation, there are people outside of my own generation who care about my wellbeing.	.779
33	In this congregation, I have people outside of my own generation who I can confide in.	.671
34	This congregation spends time together irrespective of age.	.715
35	In this congregation I feel connected to those who are younger or older than myself.	.779

The overall mean for the Intergenerational Connectedness Scale is 3.21 (SD = 0.55), which can be interpreted to mean that there was a moderately strong agreement from the average participant that they were closely connected to other generations and that they feel as though they belong in their congregation. This score contributes to the notion that the congregations in the sample were intergenerational in nature. The Accommodation results will now be analysed to assess if a sense of selflessness describes the congregations.

3. Accommodation

The Intergenerational Accommodation Scale is described on Table 6.8. It originally included items 36 – 41, however as item 39 was scoring low as a factor and also reduced the Cronbach's Alpha score it has been eliminated from the scale. With this item eliminated, the items loaded well as a single factor and the Cronbach's Alpha was 0.84.

Table 6.8
Intergenerational Accommodation Scale Factor Loading

Item		Factor Loading
36	I often try to put myself in somebody else's shoes to better understand their opinion	.708
37	I am happy for other people's opinions to be considered even if I don't agree with them	.819
38	I am willing to put the needs of the less fortunate in front of my own	.788
40	Other people deserve consideration even when they have a different perspective to my own	.829
41	I am willing to give up something I want for the greater good	.780

The overall mean for the Intergenerational Accommodation Scale was 3.35 (SD = 0.42), which can be interpreted to mean that there was a moderately strong agreement from the average participant that they accommodate for other people. With three out of five intergenerational factors showing similar agreement, the trend is expected to continue as Interdependence is analysed.

4. Interdependence

The Intergenerational Interdependence Scale is described on Table 6.9. The Cronbach's Alpha for the scale was 0.90 and the items loaded well as a single factor.

Table 6.9
Intergenerational Interdependence Scale Factor Loading

Item		Factor Loading
42	I like to help people outside of my generation.	.790
43	I like to share my ideas and resources with people outside of my generation.	.766
44	I like to cooperate with people outside of my generation.	.819
45	I can learn important things from younger people.	.741
46	I can learn important things from older people.	.776
47	I try to share my ideas and materials with people of different generations to my own when I think it will help them.	.719
48	People of differing generations learn lots of important things from each other.	.770
49	It is a good idea for people from different generations to help each other.	.744

The Intergenerational Interdependence Scale had an overall mean of 3.45 (SD = 0.42), which can be interpreted to mean that there was a moderately strong agreement from the average participant that they function better as individuals when other generations are present. Given that every intergenerational factor has yielded a similar mean amongst the congregations, it is anticipated that Empowerment will follow suit making the way for the Intergenerational Index to perform well as a composite scale.

5. Empowerment

The Intergenerational Empowerment Scale is described on Table 6.10. It loaded well as a scale and had a Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.92.

Table 6.10

Intergenerational Empowerment Scale Factor Loading

Item		Factor Loading
50	This congregation gives me the power I need to make a contribution.	.806
51	This congregation encourages me to use my talents.	.847
52	This congregation helps me to further develop myself.	.874
53	This congregation encourages me to come up with new ideas.	.848
54	This congregation enables me to solve problems myself instead of just telling me what to do.	.727
55	This congregation gives me the opportunity to be a part of leadership decisions.	.778
56	This congregation offers me abundant opportunities to learn new skills.	.813

The overall mean for the Intergenerational Empowerment Scale was 3.05 (SD = 0.57), which can be interpreted to mean that there was a moderate agreement from the average participant that they are empowered in their local congregation.

The Intergenerationality Index described on Table 6.11 is composed of the five intergenerational variables of Positive Interaction, Connectedness, Interdependence, Accommodation and Empowerment. As a combined scale it loads as one factor and has a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.84. This is not surprising considering the individual analyses of each intergenerational factor.

Table 6.11
Intergenerationality Index Factor Loading

Item	Factor Loading
Interaction Freq & Level	.813
Connectedness	.768
Accommodation	.832
Interdependence	.815
Empowerment	.794

Overall, the mean score for intergenerationality was 3.25 (SD = 0.41) indicating that the average congregation participating has moderately strong intergenerationality. The congregations in this study have shown to be intergenerational in nature according to the questionnaire data. Looking forward, it would be interesting to compare less intergenerational congregations in order to gain a broader spectrum.

Closely related to both intergenerationality and discipleship is the concept of mentoring. The variable Mentoring and Modelling will now be analysed.

Mentoring and modelling

The Mentoring and Modelling Scale is described on Table 6.12. It loaded well as a factor and the Cronbach Alpha score was 0.85.

Table 6.12

Mentoring & Modelling Scale Factor Loading

Item		Factor Loading
57	There is someone outside of my family in this congregation who pours time and wisdom into my life.	.809
58	There is someone outside of my family in this congregation who regularly makes a positive difference to my life.	.820
59	There is someone outside of my family in this congregation who I take time to nurture every week	.811
60	There is someone outside of my family in this congregation who I try to mentor	.786
61	There are people in this congregation who I see as a role model for myself	.745
62	I do my best to be a good role model for others	.527

The questionnaire yielded an overall mean of 3.01 (SD = 0.57) for the Mentoring and Modelling Scale. This can be interpreted to mean that there was a moderate agreement from the average participant that they are mentored and also mentor others within their congregation. As previous research has expressed both the importance of mentoring in the process of faith formation and warned of a lack of mentors in congregations, the assessment is considered fairly positive (Powell & Clark, 2011; Joiner, 2009). It also strengthens the argument that intergenerational congregations are contexts where mentoring and modelling is found.

Having analysed and assessed the background variables with the data, it can be affirmed that the variables are reliable as assessment instruments. The analysis will now turn towards the Discipleship variables.

Discipleship Variables

Participation in spiritual activities

The Participation in Spiritual Activities Scale is described on Table 6.13. Not all of the items on loaded with acceptable scores. Due to having a factor loading score below 0.300,

item 68 was removed as part of the Participation in Spiritual Activities Scale. The rest of the items loaded within the acceptable parameters, and it had a Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.81.

Table 6.13

Participation in Spiritual Activities Scale Factor Loading

Item		Factor Loading
65	I ask for forgiveness everyday	.665
66	When I have done the wrong thing and cause hurt or disappointment to someone I love and/or respect I immediately ask for forgiveness	.513
67	When I have done the wrong thing and cause hurt or disappointment to someone I dislike and/or disrespect I immediately ask for forgiveness	.566
69	When speaking with others, I constantly talk about God	.692
70	I tithe on a regular basis	.492
71	I give money to charity on a regular basis	.395
72	The teachings and commandments of the Bible guide me in everything I do	.687
73	I consult God concerning my decisions...	.700
74	I actively disciple other Christians...	.742
75	I am actively involved in bringing people to Christ...	.731

The Participation in Spiritual Activities Scale yielded an overall mean of 3.01 (SD = 0.47). This can be interpreted to mean that there was a moderate agreement from the average participant that they participate in spiritual activities associated with Christianity. In reflection of the lower scores received by the average participant regarding Bible Study and Prayer, this is fascinating in that these spiritual activities scored higher in comparison. It is interesting to note that Millennials scored an overall mean of 2.79 (SD = 0.48), which was lower than the other three generations, which can be interpreted to mean that there was only slight agreement from the average Millennial participant in that they participate in spiritual activities. It is worth contemplating whether this is perhaps due to maturity, meaning it will

rise when they are older or if rather this is a characteristic of their generation, which is concerning regarding their future spiritual journeys.

The variable of Spiritual Growth will be analysed next. Spiritual growth contributes to assessing whether individuals are growing or stagnant in their journey as Christians and is the second of three components of discipleship in this study.

Spiritual growth

The Spiritual Growth Scale is described on Table 6.14. It had a Cronbach Alpha score of 0.88 and it loaded well as a factor.

Table 6.14

Spiritual Growth Scale Factor Loading

Item		Factor Loading
78	I believe I am growing as a person	.768
79	As I have followed Jesus, I feel there has been positive changes in my life	.782
80	I have grown spiritually in the past year	.858
81	I am a better person than who I was five years ago	.814
82	Since I gave my life to Christ, others have noticed a positive difference in me.	.754
83	I feel as though I am heading in the direction Jesus wants me to go	.762

The overall mean for the Spiritual Growth Scale in the study was 3.39 (SD = 0.50), which can be interpreted to mean that there was a moderately strong agreement from the average participant that they have and are experiencing spiritual growth. As being a disciple involves continued growth in becoming the person God wants us to become, it is expected that a healthy congregation would have members who are growing spiritually regardless of their previous experience as Christians. This result is an encouraging assessment for the congregations.

Having analysed Participation in Spiritual Activities and Spiritual Growth, the last Discipleship variable to be analysed is Compassion.

Compassion

The Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale (Hwang et al., 2008) is described on Table 6.15. Unlike the previous scales, each item has six possible options varying from ‘Definitely False’ through to ‘Definitely True.’ This being the case, the scoring on this scale (and consequent scales) is out of 6; the previous scales up until this point were out of 4. The items loaded well as a factor and had a Cronbach Alpha score of 0.88.

Table 6.15

Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale Factor Loading

Item		Factor Loading
84	When I hear about someone (a stranger) going through a difficult time, I feel a great deal of compassion for him or her.	.815
85	I tend to feel compassion for people, even though I do not know them.	.861
86	One of the activities that provides me with the most meaning to my life is helping others in the world when they need help.	.822
87	I would rather engage in actions that help others, even though they are strangers, than engage in actions that would help me.	.779
88	I often have tender feelings toward people (strangers) when they seem to be in need.	.846

The overall mean for the Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale in this study was 5.14, (SD = 0.70), which can be interpreted to mean that there was a moderately strong agreement from the average participant that they are compassionate for those in need. Given that Jesus summed the law as loving God and loving others, it would be expected that Christian

congregations would be communities of compassion. This assessment is an affirmation of the core value of compassion found in the congregations.

Having quantitatively analysed and assessed both the variables and the dataset, it can be affirmed that the instruments are reliable measurement tools. It can also be said that the variables Participation in Spiritual Activities, Spiritual Growth, and Compassion indicate that the average participant is being disciplined in their congregation; though the lower score on Participation in Spiritual Activities for Millennial participants is concerning. It is now time to analyse the three outcome factors of wellbeing.

Outcome Factors

Psychological wellbeing

The modified Shortened Psychological General Well-Being Index (Grossi et al., 2006) is described on Table 6.16. The Cronbach Alpha was 0.89 and it loaded well as a factor.

Table 6.16

Shortened Psychological General Wellbeing Index Factor Loading

Item		Factor Loading
89	* Have you been bothered by nervousness or felt anxious during the past month?	.693
90	How much energy, pep, or vitality did you have or feel during the past month?	.684
91	* I felt downhearted and blue during the past month.	.757
92	I was emotionally stable and sure of myself during the past month.	.773
93	I felt cheerful, light-hearted during the past month.	.822
94	* I felt tired, worn out, used up, or exhausted during the past month.	.679
95	* I felt stressed and under pressure during the past month.	.694
96	I have experienced positive emotions during the past month.	.767
97	I have been satisfied with my life during the past month.	.775

The modified version of the Shortened Psychological General Well-Being Index had an overall mean of 4.07 (SD = 0.87), which can be interpreted to mean that there was a moderate agreement from the average participant that they feel as though their psychological wellbeing is good. While the score is positive, it is somewhat concerning that the average participant does not have a stronger agreement regarding their mental health; the score is equivalent to 68%. While studies have been conducted which have shown that there are aspects of religiousness that contribute to wellbeing, Christians are not immune to the mental illnesses that plague society as a whole (Van Cappellen et al., 2016).

An analysis of the second outcome variable, Social Wellbeing, will presently be conducted.

Social wellbeing

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988) is described on Table 6.17. The Cronbach's Alpha was 0.94, and the items loaded well as a factor.

Table 6.17
Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support Factor Loading

Item		Factor Loading
98	There is a special person who is around when I am in need.	.826
99	There is a special person with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.	.833
100	My family really tries to help me.	.746
101	I get the emotional help and support I need from my family.	.790
102	I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me.	.835
103	My friends really try to help me.	.727
104	I can count on my friends when things go wrong.	.706
105	I can talk about my problems with my family.	.767
106	I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.	.747
107	There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings.	.783
108	My family is willing to help me make decisions.	.772
109	I can talk about my problems with my friends.	.710

The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support gave an overall mean of 5.04 (SD = 0.84), which can be interpreted to mean that there was a moderately strong agreement from the average participant that they felt as though they had good social wellbeing. This is a much more positive score for the participants than Psychological Wellbeing, which indicates that the congregants feel they have a good social support network. This may or may not be a reflection of their church community, though it would be expected that their congregation would be an aspect of their social support system.

The final outcome variable, Spiritual Wellbeing, will now be analysed.

Spiritual wellbeing

The Short Spiritual Wellbeing Scale (Malinakova et al., 2017) is described on Table 6.18. The Cronbach Alpha was 0.89 and the items loaded well as factor.

Table 6.18

Short Spiritual Wellbeing Scale

Item		Factor Loading
110	I have a personally meaningful relationship with God	.764
111	I believe that God is concerned about my problems	.772
112	My relationship with God contributes to my sense of wellbeing	.837
113	I believe that God loves me and cares about me	.760
114	I feel good about my future	.824
115	I feel very fulfilled and satisfied with my life	.751
116	I believe there is some real purpose for my life	.821

The shortened version of the Short Spiritual Wellbeing Scale had an overall mean in this study of 5.37 (SD = 0.65). This can be interpreted to mean that there was a strong agreement from the average participant that they have good spiritual wellbeing. Considering that spirituality is often thought of as the primary and traditional role of Christian congregations, it is expected that those attending church would score a higher result. Nevertheless, it is a commendation to the congregations that such a high score has been received as the mean.

Relationship Between Variables

The relationships between the variables will now be considered. The quantitative results help us to understand the research question through a broad lens. As there are three distinct outcome variables in this study, each outcome will be examined in light of quantitative analysis. Three models have therefore been produced and will be discussed in order of the strength of each model; first spiritual wellbeing, second psychological wellbeing, and finally social wellbeing. The significant variables within each model will also be discussed.

It is worth noting that when discussing regression, only variables that have both a significance score of .05 or less as well as a standardised coefficient Beta score of greater than 0.100 or less than -0.100 will be discussed (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). The greater the beta score, the greater the influence is exerted on a receiving variable. This assists with comparing the relative significance of each variable in a model.

The model for analysis is grounded on the theoretical concepts found in the literature based on the aggregated sample ($n = 545$) was tested to see if it fits the data ("SPSS version 25," 2017), using the techniques developed by Jöreskog and Sörbom (1993). An iterative process of inspection between statistical significance of path coefficients and theoretical relevance of constructs in the model created an ideal model.

Spiritual Wellbeing

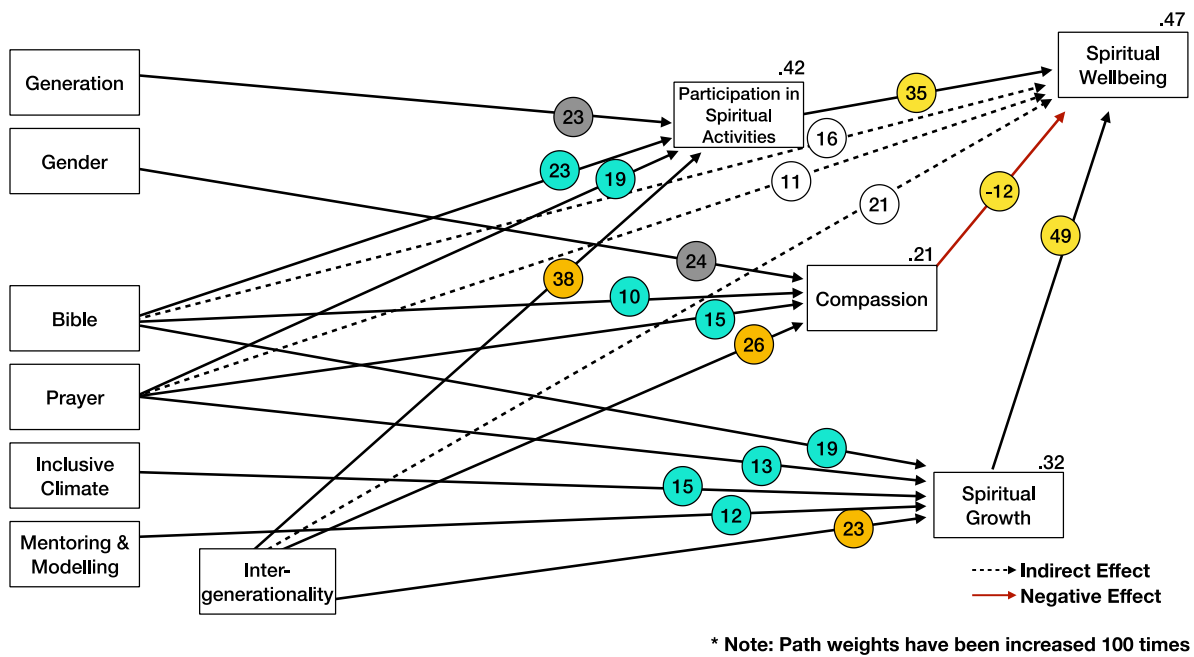


Figure 6.1

Model of Significant Relationships with Spiritual Wellbeing as Outcome Variable

Model fit

The model for analysis of Spiritual Wellbeing is described in Figure 6.1. 47% of the variance of Spiritual Wellbeing is explained by this model. A CMIN calculation of 19.0 [CMIN/DF = 1.476] was found with incremental fit indices above 0.9 showing a good model fit [NFI = 0.987, RFI = 0.942, IFI = 0.996, TLI = 0.981, and CFI = 0.996] (Coughlan, Hooper, & Mullen, 2008). In addition to this, the model showed a root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) measurement of 0.030 and a parsimonious normed fit index (PNFI) of 0.224 which indicates a very good fit between the data and the model (Coughlan et al., 2008).

Model interpretation

As described in Figure 6.1, three direct effects can be seen in the model, two of which are positive with path loadings of relatively strong magnitudes whereas one is negative with a small path loading. The strongest direct effect was from *Spiritual Growth* which had $\beta = 0.49$, meaning it had a moderate positive impact. This can be understood to mean that the more an individual grows spiritually, the higher their Spiritual Wellbeing is increased. *Participation in Spiritual Activities* yielded a lower moderate impact ($\beta = 0.35$). An unanticipated result was that *Compassion* scored a slightly negative impact ($\beta = -0.12$); meaning, the more compassion a participant experienced the lower their *Spiritual Wellbeing* became. It is of interest to this study that all three intermediate variables which represent factors of discipleship have shown a direct impact on *Spiritual Wellbeing*. This indicated that in this study discipleship does impact the Spiritual Wellbeing of an individual, however the negative impact of *Compassion* needs to be considered. Compassion is made of two parts, a feeling of empathy and a subsequent desire to help (Strauss, Lever Taylor, Gu, Kuyken, Baer, Jones, & Cavanagh, 2016). Empathising with someone else who is going through a hard time decreases the wellbeing of the empathiser. This in turn leads to a desire to assist others resulting in a contribution to wellbeing (Duarte, J., Pinto-Gouveia, J., & Cruz, B., 2016). This will be discussed in more detail towards the end of this chapter.

Three significant indirect effects on *Spiritual Wellbeing* were also produced in the model. The strongest indirect effect was that of *Intergenerationality* which was measured $\beta = 0.211$. Another significant direct effect was that of *Bible Study* ($\beta = 0.158$). *Prayer* also impacted *Spiritual Wellbeing* indirectly, with a score of $\beta = 0.111$.

Of relevance to this study are how the background variables impacted the mediate variables in that, the second research question seeks to confirm if an intergenerational congregation is a good environment for discipleship. It has been found that *Intergenerationality* has a moderately positive impact on all three variables of discipleship. *Intergenerationality* contributed to *Participation in Spiritual Activities* ($\beta = 0.38$), *Compassion* ($\beta = 0.26$), and *Spiritual Growth* ($\beta = 0.23$). Therefore, this assessment seems to add weight to the notion that *Intergenerationality* as an environmental factor does contribute to discipleship. Interestingly, the total effect of the variable *Intergenerationality* upon *Spiritual Wellbeing* was equivalent to a path loading of $\beta = 0.42$. This indicates that intergenerational interactions contribute to spiritual connectedness. The total effect for *Bible Study* was equivalent to a path loading of $\beta = 0.32$, while the total effect for *Prayer* was equivalent to a path loading of $\beta = 0.22$. This indicates that the spiritual disciplines of reading the Bible and praying also contribute to spiritual connectedness. This shows that these three background variables, particularly *Intergenerationality*, play an important role in the model.

Interestingly, the four variables of *Intergenerationality* ($\beta = 0.38$), *Bible Study* ($\beta = 0.23$), *Generation* ($\beta = 0.23$) and *Prayer* ($\beta = 0.19$), explain 42% of the variance of *Participation in Spiritual Activities* in this model. *Intergenerationality* ($\beta = 0.26$), *Gender* ($\beta = 0.24$), *Prayer* ($\beta = 0.15$), and *Bible Study* ($\beta = 0.10$) explain 21% of the variance of *Compassion*; in that females are more likely to have compassion for others than males. *Intergenerationality* ($\beta = 0.23$), *Bible Study* ($\beta = 0.19$), *Inclusive Climate* ($\beta = 0.15$), and *Prayer* ($\beta = 0.13$) explain 32% of the variance of *Spiritual Growth*.

Psychological Wellbeing

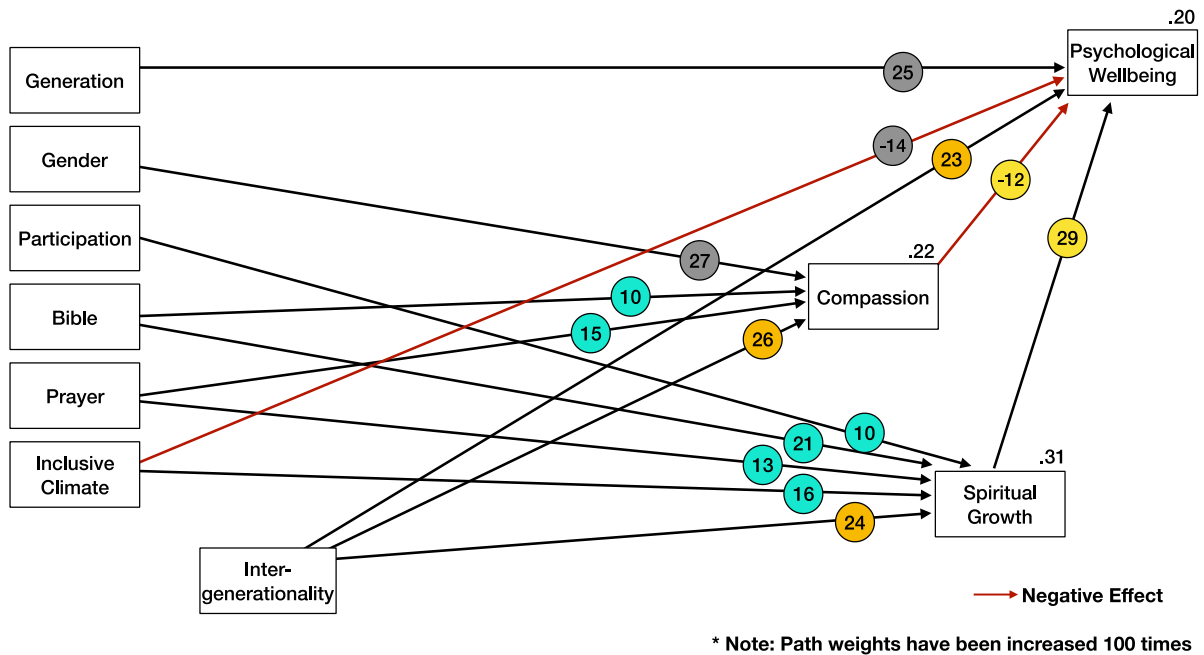


Figure 6.2

Model of Significant Relationships with Psychological Wellbeing as Outcome Variable

Model fit

The model for analysis of Psychological Wellbeing is described in Figure 6.2. It was tested to see if it fits the data and an ideal model was constructed. A 20% of variance of Psychological Wellbeing is explained by the model ($n = 545$). A CMIN calculation of 8.422 [CMIN/DF = 0.936] was found with incremental fit indices above 0.9 showing a good model fit [NFI = 0.990, RFI = 0.940, IFI = 1.001, TLI = 1.004, and CFI = 1.000] (Coughlan et al., 2008). Additionally, the model showed a root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) measurement of 0.000 and a parsimonious normed fit index (PNFI) of 0.162 which indicates a very good fit between the data and the model (Coughlan et al., 2008).

Model interpretation

Five direct effects can be seen in the model, three are positive with path loadings of moderate magnitudes whereas two are negative with small path loadings (see Figure 4.2). As with Spiritual Wellbeing, Psychological Wellbeing had *Spiritual Growth* as the strongest

direct effect ($\beta = 0.29$). After *Spiritual Growth*, *Generation* was found to impact *Psychological Wellbeing* ($\beta = 0.25$). This indicates that the older a participant was, the higher their score for *Psychological Wellbeing* became. *Intergenerationality* also had a moderate impact on *Psychological Wellbeing* ($\beta = 0.23$), which shows that those who score higher on *Intergenerationality* will benefit with higher *Psychological Wellbeing*; this does not take other variables into account.

As mentioned, there were two variables that measured slightly negative concerning *Psychological Wellbeing* in this study; *Inclusive Climate* and *Compassion*. *Inclusive Climate* was assessed with $\beta = -0.14$ indicating that the warmer and friendlier a participant rated their congregation the more negatively it would impact them as an individual. This is a peculiar result. However, it is interesting that the total effect of the variable *Inclusive Climate* upon *Psychological Wellbeing* was equivalent to a path loading of $\beta = -0.09$ which indicates a weak influence. As with *Spiritual Wellbeing*, *Compassion* again resulted in a small negative impact ($\beta = -0.12$). This implication of dissonance will be discussed later as previously mentioned. Only two out of three mediating variables were included in the model.

Gender ($\beta = 0.27$), *Intergenerationality* ($\beta = 0.26$), *Prayer* ($\beta = 0.15$) and *Bible Study* ($\beta = 0.10$) explained 22% of the variance of *Compassion* in the model. Of *Spiritual Growth* 31% of the variance was explained in the model from *Intergenerationality* ($\beta = 0.24$), *Bible Study* ($\beta = 0.21$), *Inclusive Climate* ($\beta = 0.16$), *Prayer* ($\beta = 0.13$), and *Church Participation* ($\beta = 0.10$). Interestingly, the total effect of the variable *Intergenerationality* upon *Psychological Wellbeing* was equivalent to a path loading of $\beta = 0.27$. This indicates that intergenerational interactions contribute to mental health.

Social Wellbeing

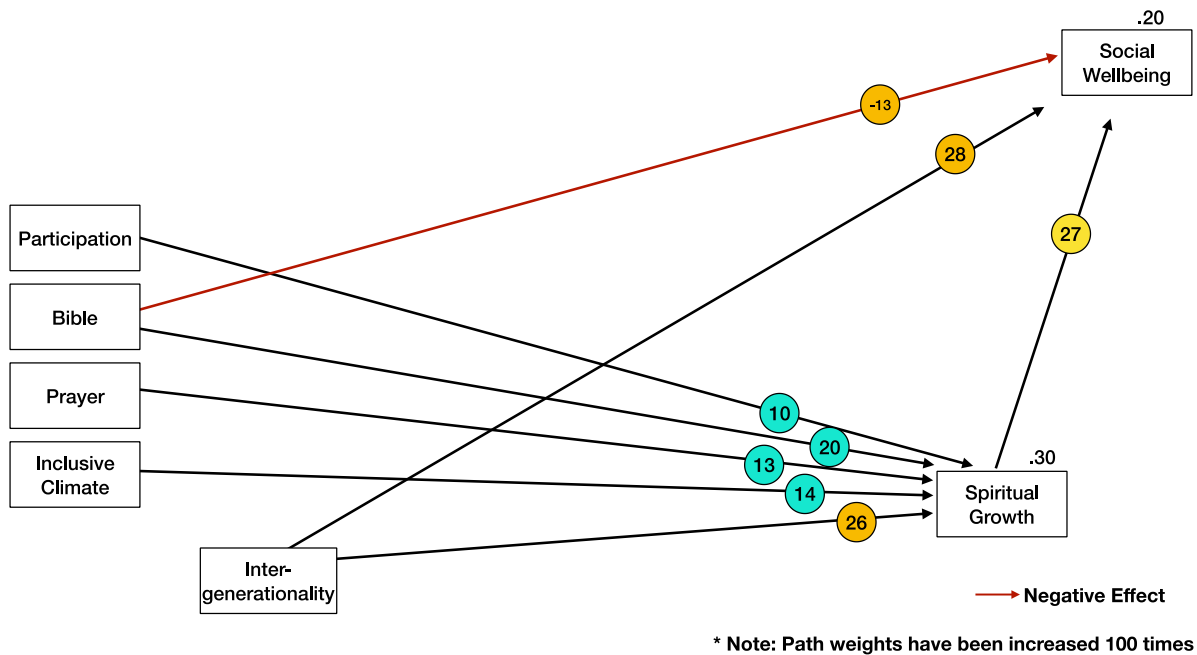


Figure 6.3

Model of Significant Relationships with Social Wellbeing as Outcome Variable

Model fit

The model of analysis of Social Wellbeing is described in Figure 6.3. A 20% of variance of Social Wellbeing is explained by the model according to statistical findings (Figure 4.3). Incremental fit indices showed a good model fit [NFI = 0.998, RFI = 0.982, IFI = 1.002, TLI = 1.022, and CFI = 1.000] as well as a CMIN calculation of 1.400 [CMIN/DF = 0.467] was found. The model has a root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) measurement of 0.000 and a parsimonious normed fit index (PNFI) of 0.107 indicating an acceptable fit between the data and the model (Coughlan et al., 2008).

Model interpretation

There were found to be three direct effects in the model, two are positive with path loadings of moderate magnitude whereas one is negative with a small path loading.

Intergenerationality yielded a moderately positive impact on *Social Wellbeing* ($\beta = 0.28$).

Spiritual Growth measured similarly with a score of $\beta = 0.27$. This was the only model of the

three presented where *Spiritual Growth* was not the strongest direct effect. *Bible Study* was found to have a small negative impact on *Social Wellbeing* of $\beta = -0.13$. However, it is interesting that the total effect of the variable *Bible Study* upon *Social Wellbeing* was equivalent to a path loading of $\beta = -0.08$ which indicates a weak influence.

The only intermediate variable that showed significant scores in the model was that of *Spiritual Growth*. A 30% variance of *Spiritual Growth* can be explained in the model through five background variables. *Intergenerationality* measured $\beta = 0.26$, *Bible Study* measured $\beta = 0.20$, *Inclusive Climate* measured $\beta = 0.14$, *Prayer* measured $\beta = 0.13$, and *Church Participation* $\beta = 0.10$ measured concerning *Spiritual Growth*. It is worth noting that *Intergenerationality* has been a variable in every model, two times of which were direct effects. Interestingly, the total effect of the variable *Intergenerationality* upon *Social Wellbeing* was equivalent to a path loading of $\beta = 0.33$. This indicates that intergenerational interactions contribute to social wellbeing.

Model Summary

Considering all three models of significant relationships (Figures 6.1, 6.2, & 6.3), Figure 6.4 describes a summation of the relationships regarding all three wellbeing outcomes. Most notable is that the variables Bible Study, Prayer, Inclusive Climate, and Intergenerationality were found to positively influence Spiritual Growth in all three models, and Church Participation (labelled as Participation, not to be confused with Participation in Spiritual Activities) positively influenced Spiritual Growth in two models. Intergenerationality was found to positively impact Psychological and Social Wellbeing; it indirectly impacted Spiritual Wellbeing. Gender, Bible Study, Prayer, and Intergenerationality positively influenced Compassion, while Compassion negatively influenced both Spiritual and Psychological Wellbeing. When Psychological Wellbeing was the outcome, Generation was a positive influence while Inclusive Climate was a negative influence. Social Wellbeing was found to be negatively impacted by Bible Study. Finally, Generation, Bible Study, Prayer, and Intergenerationality were positive influences for Participation in Spiritual Activities when Spiritual Wellbeing was the outcome, which was itself positively impacted by Participation in Spiritual Activities.

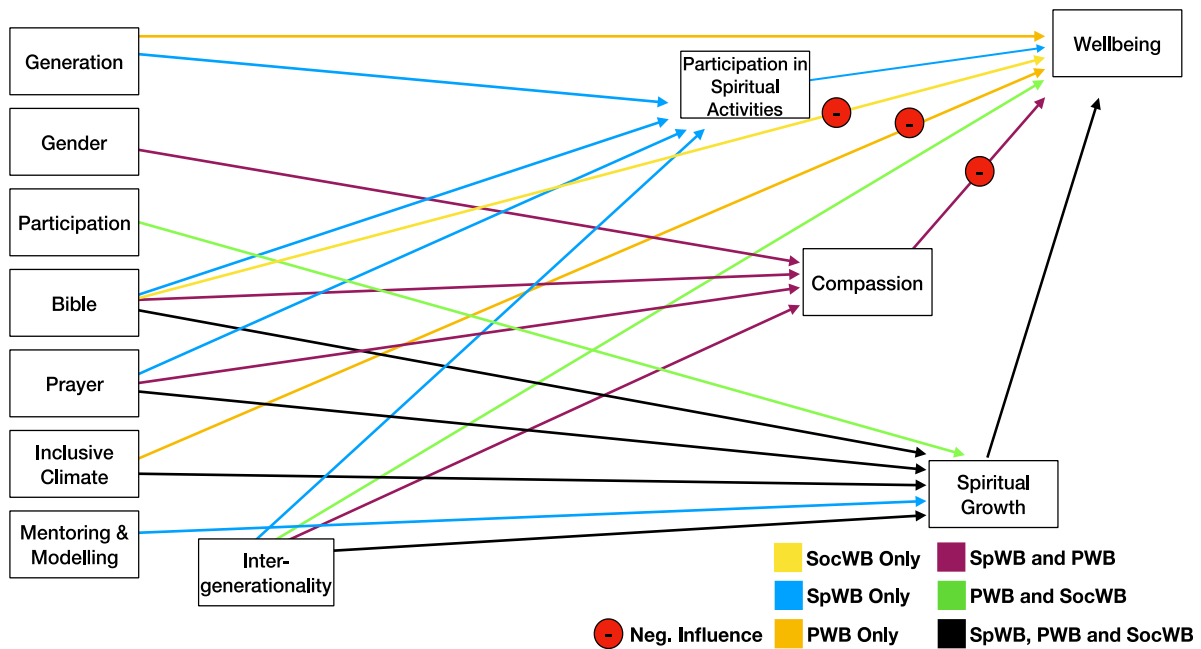


Figure 6.4

Summary Model of Significant Relationships

Given that the questionnaire's purpose is to gain a broad understanding of the interplay between the different variables, it is appropriate to seek a deeper understanding of the data. Consequently, the questions posed in the interviews will now be presented in order to strengthen and triangulate the data.

Qualitative Results

As the quantitative aspect to the study concerns accumulating a broad understanding of the data, the qualitative aspect seeks to add a depth of understanding (Creswell, J. W., 2009). In the concurrent transformative strategy that was undertaken, interviews were conducted in order to discover what individuals would disclose concerning wellbeing, discipleship and intergenerationality. This was done with fourteen participants representing four congregations and four generations through one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

When quotes from interviews are presented, each will be given a citation such as C5 BB. The label "C5" indicates the participant is from congregation 5; it should be noted that only four of the eleven congregations participated in the interviews (C3, C5, C7, and C8). The label "BB" indicates that the participant is a Baby Boomer. Consequently, the following

are labels for the other three generations: “ML” stands for Millennial, “GX” stands for Generation X, and “TR” stands for Traditionalist. A number after a generation label indicates there are more than one representative of that generation within that congregation; such is the case for C5 regarding two Millennials. Therefore, in the example above, C5 BB means the participant is a Baby Boomer in Congregation 5.

Themes

A total of three main themes emerged from the interviews with the fourteen participants who represented four generations across four different congregations. These themes were based on questions pertaining to answering the research question, and therefore revolved around the topics of wellbeing, discipleship and intergenerational congregations. Being a concurrent transformative study, the same themes are also seen through the questionnaire data. The three themes lent themselves to developing a ‘*Framework of Healthy Christian Communities.*’ The three themes were:

1. Wellbeing – The Goal of Healthy Christian Communities
2. Discipleship – The Means of Healthy Christian Communities
3. Intergenerationality – A Context for Healthy Christian Communities

Within the theme of discipleship, three sub-themes were also sighted based on the three discipleship variables. Therefore, the main themes and sub-themes are organised in the following manner:

1. Wellbeing – The Goal of Healthy Christian Communities
2. Discipleship – The Means of Healthy Christian Communities
 - a. Participation in Spiritual Activities
 - b. Compassion
 - c. Spiritual Growth
3. Intergenerationality – A Context for Healthy Christian Communities

We will now discuss how each layer and their contents operate within the framework in order to understand how Healthy Christian Communities relate to the research question.

Wellbeing – The goal of healthy Christian communities

Intergenerational congregations have been highlighted in this study as potential promoters of wellbeing through social and spiritual connectedness. This being the case, questions were posed to the participants in the interviews in relation to how Christianity and their local congregation impacted their wellbeing. A variety of responses were given by the participants which often concerned having a personal need filled. As discussed in the literature review, wellbeing is often measured as having fulfilled a need (Bloch-Jorgensen et al., 2018; Church et al., 2013; Skevington & Böhnke, 2018; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Specific responses to this question are presented in Table 6.19. The ‘mentions’ column reflects the amount of times the item was discussed overall, whereas the ‘# of Participants’ column shows how many of the fourteen participants made such a reference.

Table 6.19

Coding for "What Contributes to Your Wellbeing?"

Category	Description	Mentions	# Participants
Wellbeing Promoter	Relationships	33	13
	Spirituality	19	11
	Health	16	9
	Growth	3	3
	Nature	2	2

Interestingly, the most referenced contributor to the wellbeing of participants was that of Relationships; 13 out of 14 participants mentioned the importance of others in their life.

An example of this sentiment is below:

Interviewer: “And what do you see as the major factors that impact your wellbeing to where it is now?...”

Participant: “Relationships. I believe in God. Church involvement. Mostly that. Work is all right but as in it’s not a determining factor on my wellbeing. Good work too, but mostly about family and church.” ~ C8 GX

It is worth noting the fact that connectedness was one of the main discussion points of the literature review in Chapter 2 and the interview data has found correlation to previous

research. Also, worth noting is that for these participants, Spirituality is the second highest contributor with 11 of 14 participants expressing the importance of their relationship with God and their spiritual journey with other people. This is also another aspect discussed in this study, as it concerns spiritual connectedness. When asked the same question regarding wellbeing as above, a Traditionalist gave the following reply:

“...My basic relationship to Jesus Christ, my sense of God's Presence through the day, all day, always, I talk to God all day, off and on...” ~ C7 TR

The two contributions of social and spiritual connectedness were originally discussed in Chapter 2 as having a major impact on an individual's wellbeing.

The third highest contributor comes under the term Health, which includes physical fitness, lifestyle, and diet. While this was referred to in Chapter 2 and discussed as another main contributor, it was not discussed in depth as it was not the central topic of the dissertation. It is not surprising it was reported however as much evidence is available in literature to support it (Morton, 2018; Walsh, 2014; Zaragoza-Martí, Ferrer-Cascales, Hurtado-Sánchez, Laguna-Pérez, & Cabañero-Martínez, 2018). The two last contributors, Growing and Nature, while not discussed largely in this study are still worthy of thought. Spiritual Growth has also been discussed as an integral aspect in this study, especially concerning discipleship. Nature could arguably be grouped within the Health category as it could be considered an aspect of lifestyle (Morton, 2018).

It is also worth noting that indirect responses regarding the wellbeing theme were also mentioned by the participants at other times during the interviews.

It was therefore found through the interviews that participants reported that wellbeing was positively impacted through aspects of their discipleship journey as well as the intergenerational context of their congregation. Therefore, wellbeing was an integral aspect of the interviews and is considered as the goal of healthy Christian communities.

Having considered wellbeing as the goal of healthy Christian communities, an investigation regarding how wellbeing is impacted on both a personal and communal level through discipleship will now take place in order to find a means towards the goal.

Discipleship – The means of healthy Christian communities

As noted on the models of Significant Causal Relationship models shown on Figures 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3, the discipleship variables of Participation in Spiritual Activities, Compassion, and Spiritual Growth were found to significantly impact wellbeing; although Compassion showed a negative influence. Quantitatively speaking, while the model fit of Spiritual Wellbeing (Figure 6.1) had the highest variance score (47%) and was the only model which included all three discipleship variables as significant contributors, the data from the interviews suggests that all three forms of wellbeing benefit from discipleship.

Before looking at how each specific component of discipleship contributes to wellbeing, a general review of discipleship's influence of wellbeing in the interviews will take place. The first excerpt selected from the data is as follows:

Interviewer: “Do you believe that being a Christian makes your life better?”

Participant: “Yeah, I do.”

Interviewer: “How?”

Participant: “It’s my style of Christianity, like impacts my lifestyle, like the reason why I care so much about my physical health is because of my faith. The reason I care so much about my academics is because I want to do everything for the glory of God, like I would say that my faith is kind of like my main motivation or main drive because it's what, it’s the why behind everything I do, I try to do everything with purpose and intentionality and the faith is behind that. You know, granted some people can have a faith that does not impact their lives at all, but that’s not the faith I feel like, faith in my definition requires action.”

Interviewer: “So, you feel it impacts you mostly because it’s where it pushes you to do things, and the meaning behind why you do things, is that what you are saying?”

Participant: “That’s probably [...] kind of the main point.” ~ C5 ML1

Through the above conversation it may be noted that being a Christian, which is interpreted as being a disciple, is expressed to impact every aspect of the participant’s life; in the case of this participant, in a positive sense. Examples given by the participant is that of physical health and good marks in tertiary studies. The need of motivation in order to fulfil aspects of life, having purpose in these aspects, as well as success in them is articulated in the speech of this young Millennial. However, it is not only the young who have such a mindset towards being a disciple of Jesus as can be seen in the following example below:

Interviewer: “Thank you, do you believe that being a Christian makes your life better?”

Participant: “Oh, Yes.”

Interviewer: “How so?”

Participant: “A sense of purpose, a sense of God has got his hand over all, all things work together for good, that is my mantra. You know, I just trust God. I wasn’t always a Christian. I spent a lot of my early years, my teen years just searching through different churches. And then, I found the Adventist Church. Mainly through a girl that I sat next to in years 11 and 12, and she really brought me to Jesus Christ by just showing me so much love and kindness. It is just like, Damascus Road, wow, I found it at last. And [the] answers to prayer at times when it cannot just go being coincidences, you know, there is no doubt about it, you know God has his hand in our lives whether we want it or not, but particularly if we asked for it.”

Interviewer: So, it sounds like being a Christian really helps you, in that it helps bring answers and gives you peace. It really helped with contributing to other aspects of your life aside from just spiritual things?

Participant: Yes, totally... ~ C7 TR

In the above perspective, being a faithful Christian takes a great deal of trust. Having a trust in God seems to give this lady peace, which is a need felt by many. Also noted is that she was attracted to Christianity by someone who imitated Jesus (Participation in Spiritual Activities) through compassion and kindness. In seeking to understand how a disciple can have such a sense of peace, the following excerpt is useful:

“Think it means when you can’t see God’s hand in a situation that you are able to trust his heart still, it’s really easy to be blinded by the storms or the trials right before us and I don’t think it’s wrong to necessarily question God or to ask God, ‘how are you working in this situation?’ That’s not wrong, but I think to be faithful to God means to trust that He is able to work that situation for good and that He is faithful to His work. Our faithfulness is actually relying on God’s faithfulness. I mean God is faithful, God does not change, and so we hold on to the truth that we know and we kind of have this uncertainty about the rest of it, but because that truth is so powerful and that truth I believe it can get us through that situation, trusting that even when we can’t see how God is moving that, that he is moving, and that he will work this situation for good, because he promises in his word and he is faithful to his word.” ~ C5 ML1

In this exchange, being a disciple again brings a sense of peace. However more than peace is spoken of, as expressing that God himself is actually worth trusting which in itself gives a sense of hope to the participant; hope that things are going to work out for the best. This is not merely a ‘blind trust’ but a sense of knowing due to past circumstances and attaching

experience to future expectation. Therefore, discipleship generally could be said to fulfil a need in an individual.

In examining discipleship in the interviews, there are definite terms which indicate that the three sub-themes of 'Participation in Spiritual Activities', 'Compassion', and 'Spiritual Growth' lead to wellbeing. In the coding, an entire category named, 'Disciples Change' has emerged which has a total of 56 references showing that 'Spiritual Growth' is an important aspect of discipleship. Under the category, 'Disciples Are' the most cited references fall under, 'Loving/Compassionate' with 13 of 14 participants mentioning that disciples are compassionate. The second most cited code is that of, 'Christ-like/Christ-centred' where 11 of 14 participants expressed that disciples focused on being like Christ. In the 'Disciples Do' category, 11 of 14 participants expressed that disciples communicate with God regularly. These notations give evidence to the discipleship variables of Compassion and Participation in Spiritual Activities. Table 6.20 generally describes the responses.

Table 6.20

Categories and Codes of Discipleship

Category	Description	Mentions	# Part.	Category	Description	Mentions	# Part.
Disciples Are	Loving/Compassionate	45	13	Disciples Do	Communicate with God	37	11
	Christ-Like/Christ-centred	21	11		Help Needy	17	9
	Faithful/ Follower	19	10		Witness/Share/Praise	11	7
	Accepting/ Accepted	11	5		Loves/Cares	9	6
	Challenges Status	8	5		Challenges/is Challenged	9	5
	Trust/Peace/Supported	10	4		Encourages	5	5
	Authentic/Intentional	7	4		Obey God	6	4
	Transforming	4	4		Teach/Equip/Empower	3	3
	Reliable/ Serving	4	3		Stand up for oppressed	3	2
	Inspired	2	2		Use their gifts	2	2
United	2	1					
Disciples Have	Hope/Peace	25	11	Disciples Change	Change is Becoming Better	17	9
	Wellbeing/ Blessing	14	11		Change Happens	14	7
	Guidance &	11	8		Change is Hard	10	6
	Purpose/ Reason	10	7		Different Journeys	7	4
	Support/Acceptance	11	5		Change is Ongoing	4	3
	Transformation	5	4		Change Must	3	3
				Can only grow through God	1	1	
Disciples Aren't	Stagnant	5	5				
	Judgemental	4	2				
	Legalistic	3	2				
	Slander	2	2				
	Fake	2	1				
	Irrelevant	2	1				
	Don't Apologise	1	1				
	Selfish	1	1				
	Self-Sufficient	1	1				
UnChrist-Like	1	1					

In order to understand how each of the three components of discipleship specifically contribute to wellbeing, a brief review of the interview data will now be conducted beginning with Participation in Spiritual Activities.

Throughout the conversations, faithfulness and actively partaking in acts of faith came up continuously in relation to how one should live. It is worth noting that the root word 'Faith' came up 117 times during the conversations, and is the tenth most popular word overall, which is interesting in that Participation in Spiritual Activities is an indicator of being a faithful disciple. When a word query was done to find out what words were spoken the most in the interviews, aspects of Christianity and discipleship were the largest category of words collected numbering over 3000. Words such as 'Church' (471), 'God' (192), 'Christian' (132) and 'Jesus' (120) were often used throughout the interviews across several categories and themes. Some examples of conversations had which pointed towards following God as a disciple and being Christ-like were the following:

"I suppose to always go back to what does the Bible say and what does Jesus say and what does that look like?" ~ C3 GX

"...it's really about OK let's have a meal together, let's just talk about our lives, let's just bring Jesus into everything that we do." ~ C3 ML

"I guess I would say trying to do the things that Jesus did. Trying to live a life like ... You know Jesus has a lot of teachings in the New Testament where He taught His disciples and He said here's what you should do, and I guess trying to live up to that stuff. Trying to follow the teachings that He's given like the great commission at the end of Matthew, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations. Baptising them and teaching them to obey the commandments that I've given you." ~ C8 ML

"...to study and learn about what Jesus did and how he lived, and like there is that cliché, 'What would Jesus do?' you know, but if you think about that seriously, like if you are actually a Jesus follower, you actually want to think about how Jesus would respond in situations and then act accordingly to that. I think it's not a cliché to ask what would Jesus do, I think it's really important if you follow Jesus, and that probably one key thing for me is like, Jesus made disciples and so if I am going to be a follower of Jesus and do what Jesus did that then I have to make disciples as well, and so it's the only way to study how that was done effectively, is to study Jesus himself." ~ C5 ML1

What the participants are saying is that adopting the teachings of the Bible through the participation of spiritual activities as modelled by Jesus is a core philosophy of their lives. Being Christian in name only is insufficient according to the data from the interviewees, and therefore those who were interviewed seemed to align themselves unanimously with the ideas

expressed in Chapter 2 regarding discipleship, in that being authentically Christian through and through is an integral aspect of functioning as a disciple. Actively pursuing such a lifestyle of putting God at the centre of their lives is considered participating in spiritual activities to the highest degree.

Upon reflection that the participants were not professional ministers (one was in training however), Participation in Spiritual Activities is not relegated to only to professional ministers or ordained elders of a local congregation but is an expectation of anyone who considers themselves a follower of Jesus according to the participants surveyed. This is evidenced by the following elderly woman in speaking on how there is no age limit in ministering to others:

“Every person in our church even down to little [child’s name], I’d say is probably the youngest and she is now eight as far as... Everyone is a minister. And we minister to one another as well as ministering to our outside work mainly with the disadvantaged children with [organisation] kids, that is our big ministry.” ~ C3 TR

According to this short script from a Traditionalist woman, every member of the church has a job to do and every person is given the role of ‘minister.’ This role extends amongst each other and to those outside of the congregation who are being served by the church. Therefore, not only is participating in spiritual activities perceived as a core value as a disciple, but there is the fulfillment of empowerment and having a sense of responsibility that comes with participating in spiritual activities as a disciple. Participation in Spiritual Activities then seems to give the participants a sense of purpose and a compass by which their life is directed. As discussed on Chapter 2, having a sense of purpose and direction contributes considerable to one’s wellbeing (Seligman, 2011; Skevington et al., 2018).

Having considered then that the participants expressed that their faithfulness in God as enacted through their Participation in Spiritual Activities gives them a sense of purpose and direction, as well as sense of empowerment, it may be surmised that Participation in Spiritual Activities contributes to their wellbeing. Much of the fuel for the participants faith came from their compassion for God and for others, which leads to the second sub-theme in our study.

Compassion was also discussed considerably as a concept throughout the interviews. As mentioned, having needs met was profusely discussed through the interviews, with word queries mentioning needs-based words coming up over 1500 times. Words such as ‘Love’

(178), 'Relationship' (118), 'Community' (108), and 'Need' (84) were amongst the most used terms in this category; several of them being in the top 20 overall. Interestingly, many of the situations discussed having either one's own or someone else's need filled was considered an act of Compassion. Two examples of this case in point will be cited, beginning with an excerpt from a female Baby Boomer:

So, if something would go wrong in your house, somebody from your friendship circle would immediately go out and go online and say, "Listen, this person's in trouble at the moment, they need food for a week." And they would get onto the meal train and deliver food for that week..."this guy's gone out of work, let's all pray together for work and in the meantime, who's going to do groceries for this person?"...I mean, people get sick, die and the kids need taking around, they do school runs, they do pick up, they do caring and then also we've gone through a lot of things like the chook program, depression recovery, cooking classes that kind of thing which is really great, so that's yes for health, for health... Around [the] church is a lot of immigrants and lonely mothers sitting around there with their kids. So, the fathers go off to Sydney to work and they're alone. So, a lot of those people came to the playgroup, it was amazing. And from there they would be picked up for depression recovery or chook program which is good. They even had "want a basket" with people would bring in their second-hand clothes put it in the basket, and the people that would come, grab it from there, take it home. That was, that was pretty good. ~ C8 BB

In reading the above script, it seems that the church being spoken about is actively seeking to meet the needs of both those who are a part of the congregation as well as those in the community. This is directly contributing to the wellbeing of individuals. This participant mentions fulfilled needs such as food, finances, helping the sick, comforting the grieving, looking after children, and as well as others. The following conversation expresses the way a discipleship can help meet the needs of individuals through Compassion:

Interviewer: "So, what would you say your church offers that improves people's lives?"

Participant: "I feel like [my church] is pretty intentional in relationships just from the morning program, which is breakfast for people to just come in. It breaks down barriers if visitors come in and so, by doing that and getting people comfortable, you allow people to connect and once a connection is made, people come back and I think that is something that they have done really well and fellowship lunch that happens every week, so it is like no one is ever left out or left behind. There is someone for someone."

Interviewer: "And what about for the unchurched? Is there anything particular that your church offers that improves the life of someone who does not usually attend any church?"

Participant: “It is a good question. I feel like the relationships again would be something that is very prominent and also, we run a service thing which goes out to help people and we try reach the unchurched in that and so for someone who does not usually come to a church, but to know that the congregation, the family there is willing to help whenever they need help, something that if you did not have a church connection. It will be something that keeps you coming back because you have that relationship being built and then you know if you need a hand in anything there is a program set for that specifically.”

Interviewer: “So, when you mean help, is it with...?”

Participant: “Oh so, there is food if there is needed, sometimes financial help if people need to move houses or the house needs to be cleaned or [if] someone they fall ill, cannot do certain things, yeah, we meet their needs if we are able to and if not we guess we try find a way of, reach out to other people who will be able to assist in that specific area.”

Similar to the previous entry, the participant lists several ways in which their congregation provides the needs of individuals through compassion, whether they are a regular attendee at the church or a visiting guest. Needs such as food, relationships, financial aid, and help for those who are ill. In this way the Compassion component of discipleship seems to be contributing to the needs of individuals – and therefore wellbeing.

So far, the sub-themes of Participation in Spiritual Activities and Compassion have highlighted that wellbeing may be increased through faithfulness enacted through spiritual activities fuelled by compassion. However, both Participation in Spiritual Activities and Compassion need to be expanded over time to accommodate life’s challenges. It is with this in mind that the theme of Spiritual Growth in the interview data will now be explored in relation to being a means of wellbeing.

Direct and indirect referencing to Spiritual Growth has come up in the discussions with the participants. Words such as ‘Growing/Growth’ (137), ‘Mentor’ (96), ‘Learning’ (39) and ‘Become’ (35) were used throughout the conversations. Through the conversations with the participants, Spiritual Growth seemed to act as a catalytic agent serving to push the two other discipleship variables forward along with Intergenerationality, preventing them from decaying.

To illustrate this point, neither an individual nor a community is suddenly completely and infallibly Christian. Nor does one become a disciple to the point of no longer needing to continue to work towards satisfying the expectations of being a disciple; as discipleship is a life-long process (Fowler, 1995). Further to this, there is no end point in attaining Christian

perfection, and therefore spiritual growth needs to take place in order simply maintain or progress to a more advanced level. This can be said regarding Participation in Spiritual Activities, Compassion, intergenerational or other diverse contexts, and even wellbeing itself.

Several examples of this sentiment were expressed by participants, and some are listed below. It is worth noting words such as ‘journey’ and ‘becoming’ are used to describe growth by several of the participants:

“...growing as a Christian looks like following more and more closely, following Jesus more and more closely. So, like when you first become a Christian, following Jesus is a real aspirational thing I think. And then I guess growing as a Christian, things become less aspirational and more practical like instead of aspiring to be like Jesus in this way, I’m actually doing that in my life.” ~ C8 ML

“Yeah. It’s a journey. The decision is made when you accept Jesus right? But it’s a journey. It’s a lifetime.” ~ C8 GX

“Well their knowledge would increase of course but also their motivation for helping others and yes, their outreach generally, helps in different ways. I think with becoming more regular as far as church attendance goes and being willing to accept responsibilities if they’re given to them.” ~ C8 TR

“...growing as a Christian involves becoming more generous, less judgmental, less fundamentalist, more gracious in your life and learning to use your skills and your passions and your joy in ways that benefit you and benefit others, so it’s essential freeing you to be a positive force in the world.” ~ C7 GX

“I do not think we can ever say we have arrived. I know I have had high points in my life where you know just the growth is almost exponential and your mind is exploding with new ideas and God shaping you, which is often painful and all that and at other times where you are coasting a little bit and everything. I think that is just natural and that is a natural cycle, but I think growth should always be the goal and obviously, growth cannot happen without the Holy Spirit or if we get caught up trying to grow without the Holy Spirit, it is self-help and that is a very worldly thing to get caught up in - perfecting our behaviour and attitudes because it is the right thing to do rather than with the Holy Spirit’s guidance and help.” ~ C5 GX

Disciples appear to be individuals who are in a constant state of ‘becoming’, according to the above discussions. In addition to this understanding, the participants speak of change itself being inevitable, and therefore to ignore change is unhealthy and breeds irrelevancy. According to the participants, positive transformative change ought to be actively pursued in order to grow as a Christian community, and as disciples.

What does it look like to grow spiritually? A conversation with one participant addresses this question:

Interviewer: “What would you say looks like to grow as a Christian? If you could read someone's heart, I know that we can't, but what would you say needs to be there to show that someone is growing?”

Participant: “Victories over the struggles, some healing of the heart, some freedom from their addictions whether it be substance, eating, thinking, whatever that might be. A peace about them, a strength, more Christ-like, cross-like in those terms, more Christ-like, but I think it is an ongoing process and it's not a walk in the park... We're in a war. We live in a world at war. It's a spiritual reality. But I think as God reveals himself and as you become more aware of Him and as you become more aware of who you are, not so much in what you do, the relationship with God is it's more about who you are than what you do. He is more interested in who you are than what you do or don't do. They take care of themselves as you become more whole and more transformed and what have you. I think the do's and don'ts take care of themselves. He is more interested in our hearts, so I think it's a change of heart that is the process, its changing the heart.” ~ C3 BB

In the dialogue, the participant speaks of the evidence of growing through gaining victories over addictions and life struggles, and also speaks of healing that comes about through growing as a Christian. The notion of growing, not merely in capabilities, but as an individual in a holistic and spiritual sense is supported. In these words, growing seems to fulfil the need of achievement, meaning, and even in the healing of wounds of some capacity or another. This again echoes several wellbeing theorists, such as Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000) among others as achievement, autonomy, and mastery are acts of growth and has been argued to be a contributor of wellbeing and flourishing (Diener, 1984; Ryff, C., 1989; Seligman, 2011).

Considering the interview data, a case can be made suggesting that individual and communal wellbeing is positively and notably impacted by the three discipleship variables of Participation in Spiritual Activities, Compassion, and Spiritual Growth. This makes the discipleship variables a potential means of wellbeing. However, discipleship itself needs a context in which to develop and be sustained. For this reason, through the interviews a Context for Healthy Christian Communities has been sought and considerable evidence has shown that intergenerationality characterises one such viable context.

Intergenerationality – A context for healthy Christian communities

Wellbeing and discipleship rely on a healthy context. Intergenerational congregations seem to be one context for establishing a healthy Christian community. This is supported not only from the literature review in Chapter 3, but also through the data. A brief overview as to

what participants thought the context of a Healthy Christian Communities is or should be like will take place.

Considering that intergenerationality refers to the characteristic of several generations engaging in positive relationship with each other to the point of interdependency, inclusivity is an essential aspect of intergenerationality (Azzopardi, 2018). The interview data suggests that for a healthy Christian community to exist, it should be an inclusive one such as exists in an intergenerational community. As evidence for this, words such as ‘Relationship’ (118), ‘Generation’ (110), ‘Community’ (108), and ‘Family’ (105) were prominently placed throughout the data.

The following are some specific references to this concept given by participants:

“It is down to differences of opinion and things like that, yeah, if people are more accommodating and accepting of people in general, then I think that you can actually pass on that information of the experience on to the younger people.” ~ C5 ML2

“Because there’s just all generations, you know babies to old people and everyone works together, everyone. Every people in church are family and friends and they actually care for each other. It’s an amazing church, this one.” ~ C8 BB

“...so, I became a part ... a member of that church and it is a very welcoming church, very friendly church in Australian terms that is. It’s a happening church. People care. I mean you have a mixture of all [kinds of people].” ~ C8 GX

“...people chatting, caring, supporting, people coming in off the street and being welcomed and valued, smelly and druggy as they were, but being treated with kindness and a very, very loving church, I found it very good...I think that it is warm and welcoming and they try very, very hard to be friendly and include everyone, they really do...” ~ C7 TR

“I really like the atmosphere that we have at [...] Church and the people there, it is easy to connect with people older and younger and it is like a big family and so having that big family, it is comforting and after a busy week, you always just want to spend time with family and being away from home, being able to have this family here is kind of like a comfort safety net and I found that at [church], yeah.” ~ C7 ML

“The [...] church is very sort of open, very sort of accepting of people, and I found it a very friendly church and I feel that most of the time they are not going to judge people, they are not going to sort of say how you should be doing this or anything like this. They are very open and accepting of people, and I think that is not necessarily what I needed, but I think that is a good environment to actually have when you got people that need to be accepted on multiple different levels, so I am quite fortunate to end it up in some way or to be attending the church.” ~ C5 ML2

“...it just felt so warm and accepting... it felt really like they just opened their arms up literally to whoever comes in...” ~ C5 GX

It is through the understanding of these spoken thoughts that the context of discipleship is one which allows space for those on the outside to come in and become part of the family. Without the provision of such an inclusive atmosphere it would seem that the people of whom the participants are discussing would not have been in a place where their wellbeing could be benefitted.

Belonging, an aspect of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943) has been expressed to have been taking place through the inclusive nature of intergenerational congregations according to the participants interviewed. In this way, Intergenerationality has shown evidence of being a positive influencer of wellbeing. Here is yet another example highlighting how an intergenerational congregation accepted a young Millennial, therefore fulfilling her need of belonging:

Participant: “...they just welcomed me with open arms with no expectations and just let me fall, let me in, let me experiment, and let me do so many different things and they have just supported me through everything. So just that love, that unconditional love that they are having, that surrounding of everybody there each week, just being there and supporting me and going, “what’s next [name of participant]? what’s next on the journey,” and I am like, “ok I am ready” so it’s really cool.”

Interviewer: “So just helping you become who you are and accepting you and loving you?”

Participant: “Yeah and speaking in to me.” ~ C3 ML

Another concept to keep in mind regarding Intergenerationality is the benefits of mentoring and modelling that it brings. Aspects of mentoring and equipping were mentioned in relation to intergenerationality by nine out of fourteen participants. Mentoring could be defined as assisted growth, as it is an intimate form of learning (Raven, 2015). When asked if mentoring was taking place in their intergenerational congregation, a female Xer gave this answer:

“Yeah, informal mentoring is happening continually all the time everywhere you look you’re seeing it, because probably more than in any church I have ever been to, in that the older generations, and when I say older, it could even be a teenager who is older than a child, so older generations just stopping and helping whether it is offering a wise word, whether it is showing someone how to do something, whether it is just sitting on the bricks outside chatting about a week, whether it is allowing one of the

kids at church who probably has Asperger's, I do not know, to have a guitar that is not connected to anything and be up the front every week, week after week after week, during the singing, playing his guitar that is not connected and whoever is playing music on that day allowing him to, you know, read over the shoulder and of course, he is not he cannot read music, but just little things like that that is actually a public demonstration, week after week after week of what our church does and you can just scan your eyes around the church lunch or church social or after church, during Church and you will see people mentoring just getting alongside and I think it is powerful at [church].” ~ C5 GX

In her response, informal mentoring is a regular activity in her congregation, where the passing on of experience of older to younger is bringing benefits of many forms. Some of the specific examples given is through assisting with life choices and skill building. Other benefits mentioned are those of encouragement and empowerment. These benefits bestowed through Intergenerationality help fulfil needs such as achievement and self-esteem, therefore contribute to wellbeing. A similar excerpt in agreement with the previous is shown below:

“I like to try and empower the younger ones to ... and anyone else who comes here to be. Don't sit back, be as involved as you want to be. A couple of new people here with us now, R and H are here for that very reason. I don't want to be sitting on the seat on Sunday and going home, I want to be involved. So, there is ample opportunity and encouragement to get involved in whatever that looks like. Whether it be breakfast or home group or Connect or kids camp - that is our flagship of the year really, in kids camp the whole church is involved in one way or another, either prayer support or transport or direct involvement whatever that might look like. So, you were very encouraged to get involved and supported.” ~ C3 BB

Here a Baby Boomer is expressing that their intergenerational congregation empowers the young through mentoring and modelling; or even simply by having a meaningful relationship with them. Further than just the young, everyone is given the opportunity to serve in a variety of capacities no matter their age. This implies that being intergenerational has the ability to fulfil the desire for engagement and also to render responsibility to those who desire it regardless of age, or any other form of discrimination. Having good social support networks, engagement, and a means of accomplishment as can take place through mentoring contribute to wellbeing (Diener 2010; Seligman, 2011; Walsh, 2011).

Looking at the interview data from a broad viewpoint, it is worth noting that 12 out of 14 participants believed that what made an intergenerational church healthy was that everyone was like family, making the community united despite differences. 13 out of 14 participants expressed that their church's intergenerationality resulted in social support, and the same number expressed that a benefit for intergenerational congregations was the

promotion of positive relationships with others. Considering this along with previous research in the literature, it may not come as a surprise that all but one participant stated that intergenerationality helped them to flourish as a person. See Table 6.21 for more details.

Table 6.21

Categories and Codes of Intergenerational Congregations

Category	Description	Mentions	# Part.	Category	Description	Mentions	# Part.	
IG* Churches Are	Accepting: Treated like Family	58	12	IG* Churches Do	Social WB Support	41	13	
	God centred	24	10		Physical WB Support	11	9	
	Needs Focused	21	9		Brings closer to God	13	6	
	Three E's**	14	8		Pray	6	6	
	Safe	8	6		Training & Mentoring	9	5	
	Everyone's a Minister	11	3		Financial Support	5	3	
	Inspiring Service	4	3		Mental WB Support	3	2	
	Same Mission & Values	3	3					
Respectful & Courteous	1	1						
Benefits of IG* Churches	Relationships with Others	53	13	Making IG* Work	Communication	9	5	
	Flourishing	21	13		Being Together	9	5	
	Growing/Learning	43	11		Tolerance	4	3	
	Needs Met	32	11		Focus on Goal	3	1	
	Purpose/Respect	13	6					
	New Perspective	8	5					
	Relationship with God	11	4					

*IG – Intergenerational

**Three E's – Encouraging, Empowering & Edifying

In reflection of the interview data, the three themes of Wellbeing (as the Goal of Healthy Christian Communities), Discipleship (as the Means of Healthy Christian Communities), and Intergenerationality (as a Context for Healthy Christian Communities) are core aspects of the interview data. The conversations with participants seem to add weight to the argument that Christianity through discipleship can be considered to be a means of wellbeing, particularly when it takes place within a diverse context such as an intergenerational congregation.

Interestingly, there were other findings worth considering from the interview data that are not part of the main study. Specifically, the interviews were found to be useful in portraying two important pictures of Christianity: A Picture of a Disciple and A Picture of a Healthy Church. These findings can be found in Appendix E.

Having presented the themes in the qualitative data which probe the goal, means, and context for Healthy Christian Communities, as well as giving a picture of what a disciple and intergenerational church is like (see Appendix E), an exploration of the interplay between the questionnaire and interview data must take place. Therefore, a consolidation of the overall findings will now take place.

Consolidating the Findings

The questionnaire data has given a broad understanding of the relationships between the variables of intergenerationality, discipleship and wellbeing. Following the concurrent-transformative mixed-method approach, the interview data seeks to deepen the understanding of the questionnaire data in order to triangulate the understanding of both the qualitative and quantitative findings. Hence, an exploration of how both sets of data compare and contrast will now take place.

Wellbeing as an Outcome

In order to seek the answer to the question, “how is a person’s wellbeing impacted by their level of social and spiritual connectedness as they are disciplined in an intergenerational congregation?”, an understanding of what variables have been shown to influence the wellbeing of an individual will first be discussed.

Discipleship positively impacts wellbeing

There were four variables which concern the Christian characteristics of the individual in this study: Participation in Spiritual Activities, Compassion, and Spiritual Growth, which are Discipleship variables, and Bible Study and Prayer, which are background variables. To begin the discussion, first an exploration of the findings concerning Participation in Spiritual Activities will be explored.

Participation in Spiritual Activities

Before having a discussion about Participation in Spiritual Activities, a caveat must be noted that Participation in Spiritual Activities is an indication of an individual's faithfulness to God – as discussed on page 93 in Chapter 5. Therefore, conversations held concerning participants' active faith are of relevance to this discussion since a disciple actively participates in spiritual activities associated with Jesus and Christianity because of their faith (Vos, 2012). This is done to strengthen their connection with God and others, and in order to increase their faith. With this understanding in mind, a discussion regarding Participation in Spiritual Activities as an indication of faithfulness to God can take place.

As discussed on pages 125 – 127, quantitatively speaking Participation in Spiritual Activities had a moderately positive impact on the Spiritual Wellbeing of an individual. However, in terms of Psychological and Social Wellbeing, Participation in Spiritual Activities did not exert a significant influence. This seemed somewhat contrary to studies such as Snider and McPhedran (2013) who found that although few studies existed concerning the Australian context on the relationship between religiosity and wellbeing, at the time the majority of research found that spirituality and religion were indeed relevant to mental health. Ray and Wyatt (2018) also found in their research with religious and spiritual medical students at university that the individuals interviewed found their faith and the activities associated with it helped them cope with the many challenges in medical school. However, considering that not all spiritual activities were included in the measure (specifically acts of service, hope and gratitude) it can be seen why the results may have been different.

The interview data however provided some depth to the questionnaire analysis, as it seemed to show that aspects of all three dimensions of wellbeing were greatly impacted by the Participation in Spiritual Activities of those in the study. An example of this is that several participants indicated that their faith in God reduces their anxiety, which is an aspect of psychological wellbeing assessment. This being the case, statements such as the following are evidence that one's faith impacts one's wellbeing:

Interviewer: “Do you believe being a Christian makes your life better?”

Participant: “Oh definitely yes!”

Interviewer: “Why is that?”

Participant: “Just because you have something to hang on to, there’s a reason for you being here, and there’s a reason for things happening around you. Because I just look at my neighbours and they have no belief. They're not atheist, but they're not Christians, they're just...”

Interviewer: “Agnostic?”

Participant: “They're just home in there and when things go wrong, you know they come up with all these weird questions and to us it’s like, “Yes, there’s a reason.” And if the grand kids do something or don’t do something you can explain to them in a way, you know. You’re not just naughty, there's a reason why you are naughty. Do you know why you do these things? It's because there is this fight between good and evil. And its good angels and bad angels, having a fight. And to me if we're here for no reason, I mean why be here?”

Interviewer: “Hmm... So, I guess if I hear what you're saying, just understanding the reason why [...] probably helps a lot with when it comes to your peace?”

Participant: “Oh absolutely yes, because things can go wrong around you, but you know that it has to happen anyhow. You know the reason why [bad things are] happening so it doesn't bother you that much. I'm not constantly like scared of things that's happening around you, you can't do anything about it anyhow. If it's God's law it will happen, if it's not Gods law it won't happen. [...] And then also, you know, explain to people why for instance, a good person gets sick. People who are vegan their whole life and they didn't smoke, they didn't drink but they get cancer in the end, why? To be able to say to them, you know, it's not their consequences that they carried, but there's good and evil. And there's life that's happening around us, stuff happens. To me that's the main thing you know and if you don't just live here for no reason, you live towards something, something better, which is awesome. Death is like, death is more just sad, well you went before us, lucky you!” ~ C8 BB

The participant explicitly states that her belief in God from a Christian perspective (worldview) influences her participation as a disciple which positively impacts her wellbeing as a whole. Referring to the reduction of anxiety through her faith in God, this impacts her sense of purpose. Such purpose influences her time spent participating in spiritual activities which brings about an increase not only in her Spiritual Wellbeing but her Psychological Wellbeing as well. This is evident by her confidence and peace regarding her understanding of the ‘big’ questions in life as they reflect a Biblical understanding. Her walk as a disciple is a reflection of this worldview, and it clearly gives her a sense of peace, even in light of the deaths of loved ones who lived a healthy but short life. She has a sense of how much her participation in spiritual activities impacts her when she compares herself to those who don’t believe or participate in Christianity, noting that they seem frightened or quite perplexed about life events that she, though concerned, has peace about.

This participant is not alone in her reasoning, as several other participants reported the same sense of peacefulness due to their faith in Jesus. In fact, the sentiment of having hope and peace was recorded by 11 of 14 participants under the category of ‘Disciples Have.’ The research of Aan et al. (2018) agrees with this sentiment, as they found that spiritual wellbeing is negatively correlated with anxiety and depression in that the higher the spiritual wellbeing, there is a tendency for lower instances and/or degrees of anxiety and depression. In addition to this, the work of Polson et al. (2018, p. 74) in their work in exploring the relationship between hope and resilience in elderly communities found, “*The results of our analyses suggest that for this group of older persons, hope is a strong and significant predictor of resilience or the ability to cope with the challenges of life.*” Therefore, the sentiment given by several participants in this study in having hope in a risen Saviour through a personal faith in God is supported in other studies.

Concerning a sense of Social Wellbeing, the concept of family came up throughout the interviews. While having a sense of belonging seems to have more links to the actual congregation rather than faith itself, it is worth considering that the underlying theology and philosophy of other non-related people being considered as fellow brothers and sisters of Christ is an important contributor as to why the congregation is attributed with such a sense of connectedness. Consequently, the Participation in Spiritual Activities done by individuals within a congregation impacts others in the congregation respective of spiritual activities, faithfulness, and wellbeing; as well as the wellbeing of individuals themselves. One participant spoke to this when they said,

“Christianity involves a sense of community which is essential. It provides an emotional and physical safety security net which is not so valued in the modern welfare society, but it's always been. A good thing to know that you're part of a bigger family that will look after you if something goes wrong at least to some extent.” ~ C7
GX

It is worth noting that the participant was discussing Christianity, not simply their local congregation. It is suggested therefore that part of being active in the Christian faith is to see other people (especially, but not exclusively, other Christians) as community members regardless of their background. In addition to this, the participant sees this community mentality as an advantage, as it gives safety both in terms of social wellbeing and even physical wellbeing. His analysis is that what Christians have as a community mindset is not necessarily shared in secular society. In this sense therefore, Participation in Spiritual

Activities could be argued to also contribute to social connectedness and consequently impact an individual's Social Wellbeing.

The interviews have brought up the reality that twelve of the participants viewed their congregation as a family or were treated as though they were family members though they were not biologically or maritally related. It is possible that those participating could have felt loved and supported by their 'church' family but not necessarily by their biological family, and therefore have answered the questionnaire with a lower scored response. However, from what was declared in the interviews many of them felt a sense of social wellbeing largely due to their relationships at church. An example of this is what was said by this female Xer:

I think probably the main reason I choose [my church] and continue to choose [my church] is the sense of belonging and being understood, but then there is also just knowing that it is a church that [...] is a family. We have got all ages worshipping together, you have got social nights where you have got all generations attending, you have got church, we have got all generations participating at the front and contributing up the front and even though everyone is trying to do their best, if mistakes happen, they are almost celebrated and people having to go and I do not know it just feels that we are really safe community family, so that is why for me. ~ C5 GX

As can be seen in the above quote, the participant feels that her church community is like family to her. Words aside from family, such as 'together' and 'all' permeate the conversation. Just as one's home could be considered a place of sanctuary, to this participant church also seems to be a place where there is safety and freedom. This sentiment is evident by the statement, "*if mistakes happen, they are almost celebrated.*" Such connectedness which seems to take place in intergenerational congregations may explain the causal relationship to wellbeing.

The question remains, however, why is there a discrepancy between the questionnaire and interview data? While the answer to this is not known, there are perhaps several possibilities. One reason may be that the Participation in Spiritual Activities scale is a measure of activity, whereas the modified Shortened Psychological Well-Being Index (Grossi et al., 2006) is a measure of experience and emotion, and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988) is largely a measure of social connectedness. Further as briefly mentioned, not all spiritual activities were included in the scale and concepts such as gratitude, acts of service, and hope may have made a difference (Seligman, 2011; Shourie et al., 2016; Yaghoobzadeh et al. 2017). It is worth considering that as

behaviour is not the same as experience, cognition, or emotion, this fact may cause some discrepancy.

Poorer psychological wellbeing could also result from not participating in the activities one believes they should, thereby not living according to the values one believes, or professes to believe to be true resulting in cognitive dissonance (Yousaf & Gobet, 2013). This could take place in a variety of ways such as not being satisfied with the level of performance they have indicated on the Participation in Spiritual Activities response even though it may be considered as an above average score by the assessment standards. Cognitive dissonance in a religious context has been shown to result in feelings of guilt and shame for the affected individuals (Yousaf & Gobet, 2013). Such emotions could potentially impact the responses of both the psychological and social wellbeing assessments.

In terms of the assessment of Social Wellbeing, one aspect of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support that could cause some issues is that of the twelve items, four of them concern family support. The sense of family belonging as discussed in the above conversations may not be true regarding one's biological or marital family, therefore, it could be a reason for the discrepancy. It is also possible that this question could be answered in different ways depending on whether the participant is a parent, and if so whether they are answering according to their original family including their own parents and siblings, or their current family composed of their own children and their spouse. This is relevant as, if they are answering according to their original family, they may not hold the same belief system as their parents or siblings do. In addition to this, they may not be in regular contact with them which impacts the responses as well. It can be possible that they may be single and without any family to consider which again makes a significant difference statistically. In this particular study, it could be argued that family support has little to do with spiritual or congregational support.

In light of analysing and comparing the sets of the study data, it could be considered that Participation in Spiritual Activities does indeed greatly impact the wellbeing of an individual in a variety of dimensions. When participants were asked directly, what contributed to their wellbeing, spiritual contributors such as a relationship with God or having faith was expressed without prompting in seven out of the fourteen participants. This is not to say that the others did not bring it up in other parts of the interview, as they all discussed it, but it is worth noting that so many gave spirituality as a specific contributor even before the

spiritual tone of the interview was set. Arguably related to Participation in Spiritual Activities is the practice of Bible study and prayer, which will be discussed presently.

Bible Study and Prayer

The background variables of Bible Study and Prayer are background variables in this study that concerns the spirituality and religiosity of the individual. Bible Study and Prayer were also significant as indirect variables to Spiritual Wellbeing. Further to this, they were also found to directly impact all three discipleship variables. However, regarding Social Wellbeing Bible Study had a negative impact according to the quantitative data, which seemed to be inconsistent with the interview data as the practices of Bible study and prayer were considered contributors by many in the interviews.

The thematic code of ‘Communicate with God’ came out as the most mentioned item and was discussed by 11 of the 14 participants. While this may not seem as prominent as some of the other categories and their items, the participants often spoke of prayer and Bible study as their means of guidance in doing their activities as followers of Christ. In reviewing the actual statements, it is interesting to note that often both reading the Bible and prayer (or the implication of prayer through the use of the term, ‘communicating with God’) are found together. To give evidence to the importance participants put on Bible study and prayer to their wellbeing either directly or indirectly, the following are some excerpts from their interviews:

I guess when I think about what you do to grow, I would think like having a prayer life, having like an active prayer life. Having Bible study, studying the Bible and really like digging into it and understanding it and praying about it and applying it in your life... this idea of what Jesus would be like, that I’m aspiring to, that I’m praying about, and that I’m reading the Bible and trying to ingrain that into myself and just that process of hopefully approaching the idea. ~ C8 ML

In this response to, ‘What does it look like to grow as a Christian?’, the aspiration or driving force of where this participant wants to go and who they want to be, is through the practices of Bible study and prayer. The participant seems to be clear; just reading and talking to God is not enough, but rather a wrestling of understanding what God is trying to say to them as an individual is the essence. Having a sense of purpose and accomplishment through reading the Bible and praying is a contributor to this participant’s wellbeing. Another participant states:

Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the word God... if you read the word of God and really absorb it, the rest takes care of itself. Because if you have got it within you, in your mind, in your heart, you cannot help but share. It has to come out sooner or later. I think that you have to continue reading, learning, listening, talking, and all those things to keep your faith from being stagnant. C7 TR

Here the participant expresses that their whole system of belief and understanding, and therefore their worldview comes from communicating with God. They further express the need to share their perspective on life based on reading the scriptures and perhaps their spiritual experience. Spiritual stagnation is to be avoided for this individual, and the means of avoidance is through communicating with God through the Bible, and by talking and listening to God. It may be seen that purpose and meaning are established through Bible study and prayer for this individual, as well as their engagement and direction of their life through it. One last example is as follows.

Our attention really needs to be on God. Our attention really needs to be on something to walk with God by praying daily, by studying God's word daily, by spending time listening to God, I think that's a big one as well like seeing what God has to say, the walking in the truth that we know to this point, and I think that's another big one. ~ C5 ML20

Here the participant is urging that engagement and purpose needs to be bent towards God through prayer and the study of the scriptures. They go on to say that it is by these means that 'truth' for them is founded. Clearly, for these three individuals, reading the Bible and praying contribute at the very least indirectly to their wellbeing, but it seems rather that their communication with God directly impacts their wellbeing in a positive sense.

Considering other studies, there is research which supports the positive findings of this study. Studies that pertain to prayer will be first explored. Tait, Currier, and Harris (2016) in their study on '*Prayer Coping, Disclosure of Trauma, and Mental Health Symptoms Among Recently Deployed United States Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan Conflicts*' found several outcomes which show that prayer contributes to the wellbeing of those on the battlefield. Active prayer was associated with a greater desire to discuss their trauma, which helps individuals come to terms with the reality of their experience. Prayer was also found to be associated with lower depressive symptoms. Further, "*Prayer for Assistance, which reflects the desire to collaborate with God in working through challenges, was negatively associated with symptoms of PTSD...*" showing that soldiers who spent time

communicating with God came out of war situations with less dysfunction (Tait et al., 2016, p. 40). In light of their findings, harmony exists between this study and theirs.

An interesting study by Ellison, Bradshaw, Flannelly, and Galek (2014) on, '*Prayer, Attachment to God, and Symptoms of Anxiety-Related Disorders among U.S. Adults*' compares individuals who spend time praying to God based upon their attachment to God. They have reported on page 226 that, "*Secure attachment to God bears a modest inverse association with symptoms of anxiety (when anxious attachment is not in the model), while anxious attachment to God is more strongly and positively linked with these outcomes.*" This is fascinating, as while both groups sampled pray to God, their picture of who God is (loving and personal, versus distant and apathetic) determines if it impacts their level of anxiety. Those who have a secure attachment to God report that the higher the frequency of their prayers results in a reduction of their anxiety, while those to have an anxious attachment to God report the opposite. As people in this study have reported a positive association between prayer and wellbeing it would seem that people interviewed in this study have secure attachments to God.

Turning attention towards Bible study, a study by Hamilton et al. (2013) which used an older African American sample concerning, '*Reading The Bible for Guidance, Comfort, and Strength During Stressful Life Events*', found that the scriptures were helpful as a means of reducing negative emotions during the challenges of life; such as the death of a loved one, health issues, and work related difficulties among others. In another study by Krause and Pargament (2018) on "*Reading the Bible, Stressful Life Events, and Hope: Assessing an Overlooked Coping Resource*", it was found that reading the Bible moderates the negative relationship between stress and hope. They also found that those who read the Bible are more likely to look for the good when impacted by poor circumstances, thus increasing positive emotion. In consideration of these findings, Krause and Pargament found that reading the Bible gives hope for the future. Both of these studies therefore support the finding that reading the Bible positively impacts wellbeing in an individual.

Considering the slight negative influence Bible Study had on Social Wellbeing, Bolst (2012) discusses four quadrants of spiritual disciplines, based on inward versus outward focus and abstinence versus engagement. Each of the four quadrants are necessary to build upon a positive relationship with God and others. As Bible study is an inward category, it may be argued that if an individual does not balance their spiritual disciplines so that they

spend more time reading the Bible than they do building their relationships with others, it would not be surprising that their Social Wellbeing would suffer. This follows a similar understanding of composite wellbeing theories in that there are several aspects of life that contribute to overall wellbeing (Seligman, 2011; Walsh, 2014). A study by Barnes (2018) found that individuals working alone remotely on projects experienced lower levels of wellbeing due to a lower frequency of social connections than those who were working on projects on site with others, suggesting that any activity done alone for long periods of time can negatively impact one's social wellbeing.

In respect of the data in this present study as well as the findings cited from other studies and reflecting on the agencies that contribute to wellbeing through wellbeing proponents, both reading the Bible and praying have been found as a means for contributing positively to wellbeing; positive social interactions must be pursued as well for balance. As these means of communication with God are an expectation of those being disciplined through Participation in Spiritual Activities, the focus of discussion will now return to the other two intermediate variables in the study which are also discipleship factors; the first of which being compassion.

Compassion

Quite unexpectedly, the questionnaire data (as shown in Figures 6.1 and 6.2) showed that Compassion (using the Santa Clara Brief Compassionate Scale by Hwang et al. (2008)) yielded a slightly negative influence on Psychological Wellbeing and Spiritual Wellbeing, and no significant impact on Social Wellbeing. This can be interpreted to mean that the more compassion an individual has for another person who is facing a problem, the worse their wellbeing fares. It was expected that quite the opposite would take place, as the reviewed literature seemed to be replete with the understanding that caring for another is generally good for wellbeing; unless it prevents the normal function of the individual.

In particular, Lowe and Lowe (2010) discuss the importance of reciprocity as a means for spiritual development as social interaction is based on mutual beneficence. An example of this is within a community setting where the needs of one person are met through the contribution of the group in order to maintain the overall communal wellbeing. Further to this, as Compassion is often thought of as a positive emotion it appears to go against previous research in that positive emotions have been repeatedly shown to contribute to wellbeing (Armenta et al., 2017; Skevington & Böhnke, 2018; Van Cappellen et al., 2016). Martin

Seligman's PERMA theory and indeed most positive psychology theories are based on the understanding that positive emotions contribute to the flourishing of an individual; the P in PERMA stands for 'positive emotions' after all.

In addressing the understanding of Compassion in the interviews however, the expected responses were much aligned with the positive psychology literature. Much of what was discussed throughout the interviews revolved around either having one's own needs met or helping to fulfil someone else's needs in various circumstances. It is for this reason that it was noted that need fulfillment was one of the topics dispersed through many of the categories in the data. When asked about contributors to wellbeing, the form of 'needs being met' through compassion was often used as responses. Similarly, fulfilled needs were expressed as the benefit of intergenerationality, discipleship, and being in an intergenerational congregation. In reading between the lines of all of these responses and categories was the fact that the driving force behind having needs being fulfilled was compassion for other people.

Excerpts that give evidence to this are as follows:

So, if something would go wrong in your house, somebody from your friendship circle would immediately go out and go online and say, "Listen, this person's in trouble at the moment, they need food for a week." And they would get onto the meal train and deliver food for that week... ~ C8 BB

Here the participant is sharing what seems to be a frequent occurrence in their church. A member of the community is showing compassion for someone who is in need, sharing this information with the rest of the community with the anticipation that the other church members will also have compassion and help the person with food. This is followed up by a compassionate action being taken resulting in the flourishing of the down and out individual. Not only is compassion evident for the participant, but it's evident for other members and the community as a whole. Below is another example showing evidence:

I have an interest in their lives. If they're not there at the church, you'll find out why. ~ C8 GX

This participant expresses concern at the absence of an attendee, and through compassion seeks to find the reason why. The following is concerning expressing a desire to be compassionate and loving:

...probably I am not so loving some days, you know, but [being loving] is the essential of why we do what we do, and if we cannot feel loving, then it is time to get down on our knees and communicate with God some more, so that his spirit can influence us to be more loving. ~ C7 TR

This participant sees being loving (and therefore compassionate) as an essential aspect of being Christian. There is an acknowledgement of incidental feelings of apathy, but these are admittedly seen as problematic to the participant as they go against what it means to be a disciple. When they are not behaving in a compassionate way then a solution must be found to bring them back to a place of love. A similar thought is shared here:

I guess being a Christian makes me realise the value of loving other people and treating them well and just living a healthy life. And I feel like if I was not a Christian, there would not really be a point for living to help other people, I would just be living for myself. But, because of what I know and what I believe, it makes me realise the importance of living to help others and not just be focussed on self. [...] I think the two greatest commandments loving God with all your heart and then loving neighbour as self, because in doing that you are helping other people and just being a genuinely a kind loving person is second nature and yeah so, loving on others, serving others, looking after yourself because if you are not looking after yourself or loving yourself you cannot really love anyone else and so, yeah, self-care and then care for others. ~ C7 ML

The identity of this participant's Christianity is wrapped in being a loving person. They express that it is their spirituality which serves as the driving force of their compassion, to the point that not being loving is breaking one of their most valued principles. To the participant, putting other people first is a priority which if not done seems to undermine their own value. Finally, this last example perhaps highlights the reason why compassion is such a driving force for those who consider themselves to be a Christian:

...but as a Christian, I think that extends to, you know, not just the people in poverty. It's others around you. It's family. It's, it's... you know, compassion and love. I mean, without God's love for us, there wouldn't be any salvation or meaning. Um, so we've got to have love and compassion... ~ C3 GX

Here the participant is stating that his own eternal salvation is due to the compassion that God has expressed for him as an individual and has acted upon that compassion in order to save him. When this sample is taken with the others, it may be seen that compassion is an integral aspect of the lives of these participants. Compassion accounts for their existence and salvation, it is how they measure their Christianity, and it is a natural reaction to another's struggle which expects a resolution. Compassion then through qualitative analysis has been

shown to be quite connected to wellbeing on several levels, as it is a means of physical, emotional, social, and spiritual fulfilment.

Considering the regression analysis it is not clearly understood why Compassion displayed a negative influence on wellbeing in the regression analysis, though it is clear that further study needs to be done to better understand this relationship. While the quantitative data may suggest Compassion as a variable should be removed from the model the discussions from the interviews have indicated that it should still be considered as noteworthy. It is worth noting that with the larger number of variables being present in the regression, it may have been displaced from the model due to the presence of another variable.

One other aspect of consideration is that the Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale could arguably be an assessment of sympathy as well as compassion. Given that sympathy is having feelings, pity or sorrow for another, it aligns well with the items which mostly come from a 'feeling' rather than an act of service. Perhaps if a scale that measured actual acts of compassion had been used, the regression may have turned out differently.

Another alternative thought as to why there exists a negative impact may lie in the discomfort of Christian participants in seeing injustice and trauma while also believing in a loving God. The questions, 'why do bad things happen to good people?' and, 'if God is loving and powerful, why does he allow such things?' have long been a source of despair and doubt for many; it is often the primary criticism of atheists and agnostics towards Christian belief (Gray & Wegner, 2010). While theological answers exist for a reason behind suffering (such as the concept of living in a sinful world), nevertheless it brings up feelings of negative emotions and perhaps a sense of confusion and hopelessness for those who hold on to the faith of God.

Therefore, in consideration of the interview data it is the understanding in this study that in a loving community, compassion does lead to an increased sense of wellbeing; though in what strength is debated.

Having considered Participation in Spiritual Activities as well as Spiritual Growth, the discussion will now consider Spiritual Growth within the two sets of data.

Spiritual Growth

Spiritual Growth was the greatest influential variable out of all three intermediate variables regarding each of the three dimensions of wellbeing. The findings were not surprising considering the previous research done in relation to learning, growth, and accomplishment by various wellbeing studies (Church et al., 2013; Reymann, Fialkowski, & Stewart-Sicking, 2015; Van den Broeck et al., 2016; Whitehead & Bates, 2016). Such was the case particularly concerning Spiritual Wellbeing, as both Spiritual Growth and Spiritual Wellbeing had items concerned with an individual's relationship with God.

It was also evident that Spiritual Growth was a significant influencer of wellbeing according to the interview data, as there were 17 categories concerning Spiritual Growth in the themes with one participant listing their own growth as a specific contributor to their own wellbeing. An example of how Spiritual Growth impacts wellbeing from the interviews is the following excerpt:

...I know I have had high points in my life where you know just the growth is almost exponential and your mind is exploding with new ideas and God shaping you which is often painful and all that and at other times where you are coasting a little bit and everything. I think that is just natural and that is a natural cycle, but I think growth should always be the goal... ~ C5 GX

As can be seen in the statement, the participant actually sees Spiritual Growth as a goal for themselves. As expressed in the writings of R. M. Ryan and Deci (2000) in Self-Determination theory, goal setting and achievement is an essential aspect of wellbeing. The description of growth being exponential and painful is interesting in that it seems to speak of transformation as an active, and even stressful experience though worthwhile, nonetheless. Another participant expresses the idea that Spiritual Growth transforms individuals in a beneficial manner:

I think... What was this Bible verse where, constantly being transformed from glory to glory? I think it's about the restoration of humanity as I said before and I think we come in as Christians and we're babes, and we're wounded and broken... In [...] that sense we've been freed, and we've been healed, but there's a long, there's a long journey from there on in, to be fully transformed and we never get there. ~ C3 BB

Using language such as, 'being restored' expresses the understanding that Spiritual Growth brings about a transformation which results in a person becoming who they were meant to become – as though they will be refurbished into the perfect being that they would

have been if sin had not occurred. The sentiment of completion is not the sole expression however, as, 'being transformed from glory to glory' poses the notion of a never-ending improvement of self through God's power. In this understanding to spiritually grow means to heighten one's current level of wellbeing, at least in an existential, cognitive or spiritual sense. Another evidence from the interview data is the following instance, where spiritually growing is a worthwhile endeavour:

...I think that you have to go, like I've always have said, you kind of have to go through the darkness to find the light and so in every period of your life, like you are going to have some hard times and I think that they are the times that you really push into who you are and to who like Jesus is in your life and then you come out of that with growth. ~ C3 ML

Going through the darkness, which is interpreted to be a difficult time, seems to be worthwhile to this participant as an outcome of the hardship is growth. The fact that this sentiment echoes a previous one indicates congruency. Putting this together with some of what the others have said, Spiritual Growth, though at times a result of challenging circumstances is worthwhile as it is an essential process and is itself a goal that benefits wellbeing.

Several studies have been done that would agree with the findings reported in this study. In a study that Russo-Netzer and Moran (2018, p. 62) undertook which explored the benefits gained from adversity through spiritual growth found that there were three main ways flourishing took place when positive change and growth followed adversity: i) a strengthened sense of self; ii) a deepened relational approach to others; and iii) a commitment to generativity and contribution. Interestingly, aspects of all three of these points have been mentioned in the above interviews – particularly a strengthened sense of self was quite evident. In a similar study with those who experience post traumatic spiritual growth, De Castella and Simmonds (2013) reported that participants' spiritual growth came from a desire for a deeper spiritual connection to help them through their experience. Such growth, though quite challenging to the participants, helped them to find meaning in their situation and lead to a much stronger sense of spirituality than what they previously felt they had. Several studies aside from these have also examined spiritual growth in light of post traumatic events, each finding Spiritual Growth as a contributor to flourishing (Bray, 2010; Denney, Aten, & Leavell, 2011). As these studies show a link to several contributors to wellbeing (meaning, relationships, and achievement among others), it can be said that their data collaborates with

this present study in that Spiritual Growth contributes to wellbeing (Church et al., 2013; Jayawickreme et al., 2012).

In consideration of the findings in this study as well as other studies, it can be said that Spiritual Growth also positively influences the wellbeing of the individual.

Discipleship as a whole

In this study, the intermediate variables concern factors that account for the process of the discipleship of an individual, in that to be developing as a disciple one must be faithful to the teachings of Jesus and therefore actively participating in spiritual activities associated with Christianity, have compassion for others (as well as self), and be continually growing spiritually on a personal level. The data from the study suggests that these factors positively impact the wellbeing of the individual. Further to this, the two variables of Bible Study and Prayer found that reading the Bible and praying also contribute to wellbeing.

This outcome is therefore aligned with what Jesus stated in John 10:10b (NASB) that, *“I (Jesus) came that that they (those who follow him) may have life, and have it abundantly.”* While this applies to both those who adhere to some of the teachings of Jesus and those who strive to live their life according to the path of a disciple, the data indicates that following the teachings of Jesus can positively influence one’s wellbeing.

This is evident particularly in the interview data in how the participants answered the questions, “Does being a Christian make your life better?” In the category of codes pertaining to the theme of discipleship called, “Disciples Have”, four out of seven codes concerned items that contributed to wellbeing. These items were Hope and Peace (mentioned by eleven participants), Wellbeing (mentioned by eleven participants), Purpose and Reason (mentioned by seven participants), and Community and Support (mentioned by five participants); with a total of 60 wellbeing related expressions. While some participants answered more specifically than others, all fourteen unanimously agreed that being a follower of Jesus contributed to their wellbeing and made their life better than if they were not a Christian. The following are three examples of how participants articulated that being a follower of Jesus positively impacts their wellbeing:

Look, I think I have always from a young age, I was fortunate enough to have a faith... As I have got older what I realised is that, actually life can take some challenging turns and I think having a faith, a relationship with Jesus means that okay, you know, not that everything is fixed straight away or what have you but that, that

relationship is really helpful because you can go, and be, and then have someone that you can reference and connect with you to go through the challenges of life. And you have a world view that actually goes, yes, that is a struggle, that is a challenge, but actually there is actually hope. There is actually always hope even in the midst of whatever challenge you are facing so, for me it makes a massive difference to my life and I wonder sometimes how people who do not have a faith, when tragedy happens, when other situations happen, how they get through? So, you know, I do not know how I would cope without having any reference point... [It gives] a peace, a resilience, a hope. Yeah, like there is always, there is always hope. There is always a future. There is always that sense that like yes, this is not perfect, but God has got that, that big picture and I need to just kind of apply into that and some of them I will be appreciating the moment or the day, but the fact that the God has got things and I can reach out when I am in pain or things are happening or whatever, I have got someone that can be that rock in that foundation. Yeah, it makes a massive difference. ~ C3 GX

I would say [being a Christian] absolutely [improves my wellbeing]. I think it puts you in the firing line at times, but even though at times I feel super stressed, I am never without hope, there is always the knowledge that tomorrow could be better or will be better. I have learnt throughout my life that in fact this is something God has impressed upon me very deeply, he has everything in hand, tomorrow will be okay - I just do not have to know what okay will look like. And so even though life is stressful and it has some really big ups and downs and even though at the moment I am feeling particularly stressed, there is always that underlying sense of hope, and not hope that maybe one day it might be good, it is just that the hope, the knowledge that there is actually far more to [life] than this. What I am experiencing right now is actually just a small thing compared to what God actually has [done] for us and so I think that certainly enhances my overall sense of wellbeing just the knowledge of that. I probably would have given up already by now. ~ C5 GX

Definitely...Oh, on a whole range of levels. So, Christianity involves a sense of community which is essential. It provides an emotional and physical safety security net which is not so valued in the modern welfare society, but it's always been. A good thing to know that you're part of a bigger family that will look after you if something goes wrong at least to some extent. And of course, the fundamental teachings, Christ's generosity, kindness, and goodness I think in which my life vary greatly and provide a deeper sense of purpose. In a very transient world, I guess. ~ C7 GX

Some of the prominent ideas spoken in these texts are that of having hope (or trust) in God, purpose, and relationships. As having hope is further expressed in the voices of participants into having peace and reduced anxiety, it is evident how their journey as a disciple helps them flourish; as this is considered to be a positive emotion. It is worth noting that most wellbeing theorists would concede that such sentiments would contribute to the flourishing of an individual, as positive emotions, positive relationships, and meaning are contributors to wellbeing (Aan et al., 2018; Bloch-Jorgensen et al., 2018; Diener, 1984; C.

Keyes, 1998; R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Seligman, 2013; Walsh, 2011). Further to this, other studies have found results which would align with the present findings.

An example of this in regard to hope or trust in God, Krause and Hayward (2015, p. 319) found that, “*when individuals are faced with chronic financial strain, those who have greater trust in God experience fewer symptoms of depression, experience higher levels of life satisfaction, and rate their health more favorably than individuals with less trust in God.*” The article goes on to recommend the use of pastoral counselling or conversing with churchgoers as a means of giving hope to those who are struggling financially and otherwise. In this way, those who follow Jesus have a greater sense of wellbeing particularly with financial matters.

Another study which supports the findings is in, ‘*An examination of attachment, religiousness, spirituality and well-being in a Baptist faith sample*’ by Freeze and DiTommaso (2014). Spirituality (understood in the study as a construct which includes religiousness) was found to be positively associated with levels of wellbeing. Specifically, their research indicated that the greater spirituality a participant reported the less the participants scored for emotional distress. They drew similarities in their explanation as secure attachment theories expressed, as the stronger the attachment to a parent an individual had the less anxiety would result (Freeze & DiTommaso, 2015). Therefore, it aligns with the current findings as those who scored higher on discipleship variables had higher wellbeing, and therefore less emotional distress.

In summary, further support has been found that lends itself to the argument that discipleship can be a means of wellbeing. Specifically, this has been found through the spiritual disciplines of Bible study and prayer, and through aspects of the process of discipleship; particularly through participation in spiritual activities, compassion for others and self, and through spiritual growth.

Intergenerationality positively impacts wellbeing

As reported on pages 125 – 132, the questionnaire results have found that intergenerationality positively influences wellbeing. The interview data echoes what the questionnaire data has found, though with some specifics as to how and why intergenerationality in a congregation is a positive influence concerning the wellbeing of both the individuals and the community. While there are several ways that wellbeing is influenced

according to the interview data, the central voice seems to revolve around social support and relationships.

Under the theme of Intergenerationality and in the category of 'Benefits', aspects of social wellbeing through intergenerationality came up numerous times. Specifically, all but one participant discussed positive relationships with others as a benefit, and the same number specifically expressed that their wellbeing benefitted by being in an intergenerational congregation. 11 of 14 also stated that intergenerationality helped meet their needs or the needs of others. As mentioned previously, most of the participants in the interviews used the term 'family' when discussing their local congregation. This is quite interesting, as it reflects the findings that Ross (2006) has in her thesis on, "*A qualitative study exploring characteristics of churches committed to intergenerational ministry.*" The fact that the participants use such a relational term states the connectedness they feel towards those in their church community. An example of this is from a Baby Boomer female when asked a reflective question pertaining to her describing her fellow congregants as family.

Well, they are my family! And you just want the best for your own family and that's what you see for these kids. They just become your own, which is actually weird. I never thought of it but now that you asked me... C8 BB

Considering the enthusiasm of the participant, it is clear that she sees the people in her congregation as personally important to her. An unmistakable social connection exists; some may argue a spiritual connection as well. This seems to surpass mere acquaintance since she expresses a desire to seek what is best for those in her community, particularly for those who are younger. It is interesting that the participant did not even think about how she saw fellow attendees as her family even though she described them in this way. It speaks to how natural and innate the relationships she has with others in her congregation are to her.

Moving on towards how supportive an intergenerational congregation is, and how it benefits the wellbeing of an individual, the following is an excerpt stating such flourishing through intergenerationality:

I love connecting with the youth and the kids. I spend half of my time [with them] while at Church. If I am on the premises, I am watching kids, I just really love them, and I am involved from time to time with the youth Sabbath School. The young youth and the older youth all go in and take the Sabbath School from time to time and I really love that and just love connecting with them and saying hey to them after church, and I do not really connect with them at any other time...In terms of the older

people, I love arriving at church, you know you are going to get a hug from someone and just having them look into your eyes even for just one split second and asking how are you - and they want a real answer, they don't want a long answer because, hey who has time that, but you know that they do care, so I just love connecting with them. It is pretty special. ~ C5 GX

The participant in this interview was expressing how much being connected, both to the young and the old means to her. Strong affectionate words such as love and hugs a bound, and though some might find such vigilance over children cumbersome (especially if they are not one's own), the participant sees it as a joy and a further reason to go to church each week. While it is evident that she spends a great deal of time and energy particularly on the young, it is also evident that for her she is getting a lot of meaning and positive emotions out of it through the relationships. Seeing the elder members of her congregation also clearly shows joy, perhaps as while a need exists to show compassion to others similarly a desire to be the subject of compassion also exists; as the participant speaks of filling her own need of being known and understood. This all equates to flourishing for this individual.

The perspective from a Millennial in such an environment is equally positive:

I am big into like, intergenerational [church]. I have always seen the power in it and the quality in it, and I know with my own family, like I love sitting down and talking to my older family members and even my younger family members. It is just so good to have like such a wide variety in our church, it is like you can have a really deep and meaningful conversation, like with one of the older generation [members] and just like have really good time. And like, they speak to you. And then you go outside with N and S (two children) and then you just kick a ball with them, and laugh with them so, I think that is really cool. But then, I also like the older people in our church [as they] are also really playful too, so we are able to have fun times in both situations just in different ways. ~C3 ML

Even though Millennials are the youngest participants in this study, here it may be seen that this young woman though speaking mostly concerning those older than herself has also found time and energy to develop relationships with the children in the congregation; of whom she is not related. Knowing that though she herself is not out of school and contributing to society in a career or as a mother but can contribute to those younger than herself as a mentor and playmate seem to fulfil a desire within herself. The positive emotion and meaning that comes through her experience are notable as well. Though different to the Xer of the previous excerpt, she also expresses not so much how she gives but what she receives from intergenerational interaction. The children and elders bring her joy (laughter and play), the elders listen to her and give her encouragement and advice.

Finally, a Baby Boomer's response to being asked the question, "*Do you think that when you mix with people from other generations in your life, do you think that contributes to your wellbeing?*" will be heard.

Participant: Oh, absolutely yes, because I mean we're older now, but your mind doesn't go old. [Pauses] Well your mind goes old, but your thinking doesn't go old - you still feel young. I like, I can just speak from my own experience, but we've grown up in a family that had cousins and uncles and aunts, and old people, and young people all together. Coming to Australia, church is our family. We don't have other family, that's our only family and we love the young people for some reason, I mean it keeps you young. Our kids are most probably around about your age umm, a little bit younger, 30's, in their 30s. So, yes at church especially, I like knowing all the people's names, all the kids' names. [Pauses in thought] I used to. The last two years things changed dramatically. I was tucked away in kindy, so I just didn't have the opportunity to do that. But it's very important to do that. It just keeps you young when you mix with everyone.

Interviewer: Why do you think it keeps you young?

Participant: Oh, you have to think like them! You get respect from them, and I think in a way, you meant [something] to people as well without you realizing it, because you always see the kids and the young people come back - and it's very fulfilling to see that... I can call out to a child and they will immediately come and say hello which is great. And I suppose it's because these kids grew up in front of us as well, because we came about twenty years ago. The generation that is twenty years old were all babies at that stage, so they are basically like your own kids. To me that's so precious actually. ~ C8 BB

There is so much that is expressed by this participant in this citation – much of it is self-explanatory. For this Baby Boomer, forming relationships with younger generations actually gives her revitalisation, making her feel as though she herself is younger. As mentioned earlier, half-way through her first response in this quote, she also feels as though her congregation is her family – especially as an immigrant. This is an extra level of support that she could not receive as a migrant to Australia as would someone who grew up with their family at hand. This highlights the importance of intergenerational congregations to those who have no family close-by, or who feel isolated. The fact that this participant has been around for the entire lifetime of those who are twenty years old or less in her church, watching them grow up and nurturing them as their friend and teacher gives so much value as to the power that intergenerationality can have – both for the old and the young. It is clear in her experience that while not related, the participant truly sees the younger people as her own family members; even as her own adopted children.

In the study done by Tian (2016) regarding, “*Intergenerational social support affects the subjective well-being of the elderly: Mediator roles of self-esteem and loneliness*” which was done using a Chinese sample found similar findings. When the elderly participants accepted and/or gave support through intergenerational relationships, their self-esteem was positively impacted. Through their structural equation model, subjective wellbeing was indirectly impacted in a positive way through intergenerationality. A difference between the current study and Tian’s was that there was a direct impact noted; although Tian’s study focused on intergenerational family relations.

In the research conducted by Massi et al. (2016) on the “*Impact of dialogic intergenerational activities on the perception of children, adolescents and elderly*” intergenerational activities were shown to give benefits to both the elderly and the young. Specifically, the children and youth in the study found that through their interactions with the elderly they were given more learning opportunities to enable them to be better prepared for the future. This also reduced their discrimination towards the elderly and gave them more connection with the older members of their community. Similar results were found with the elderly participants, as more respect and value were given to the young, and the elder members found they had some things they could learn from those younger than themselves. Therefore, agreement could be found between both this present study and that of Massi et al., as the benefits experienced by both young and old in the latter study can be seen in this study.

Finally, an article written by Frankland and Conder (2012) entitled, “*Preventing lost generations: using intergenerational work to help young people*” highlights the potential benefits through the experience of when a youth charity organisation in north London came into contact with the elderly members of their community. Before the interactions, both groups avoided each other due to stereotyping; with the elderly people being fearful of the rowdy youth in the community. However, through working alongside each other a bond was created where both groups helped each other resulting in new meaningful relationships and a healthier community. The youth found parent and grandparent figures (most of whom, did not have such biological relations on hand) while the older generations were given compassion and assistance with strenuous work. While it was not the intention of the youth charity ‘Prospex’ to work with the elderly, they have since made it part of their strategy to have older generations mixing with the youth as it has increased their effectiveness as a youth

outreach. In reflection of this, the experience of this charity aligns with the present study in that through intergenerationality much reciprocal flourishing takes place for all involved.

Therefore, with the evidence arising from both sets of data in this study, and in the reflection of previous research, it would seem that belonging to an intergenerational congregation is indeed beneficial to the wellbeing of an individual.

Considering the research question, “how is a person’s wellbeing impacted by their level of social and spiritual connectedness as they are disciplined in an intergenerational congregation?” a review of both the analysed data as well as correlating literature suggests that a person’s wellbeing is enhanced through discipleship in an intergenerational congregation. To summarise the findings thus far, it can be said that wellbeing has been found to be positively impacted by the process of discipleship. Specifically, in discipleship, when individuals participate in spiritual activities, treat others with compassion, and grow spiritually their sense of wellbeing has a tendency to increase; this includes spending regular and frequent time studying the Bible and praying to God. In addition to this, wellbeing has been found to be positively impacted within an intergenerational context.

The nature of the study however also enables an analysis of discipleship as an outcome in itself. This is pertinent to the research question, as it is valuable to understand how discipleship itself is influenced so that such influence can impact wellbeing. With this understanding, discipleship will now be discussed as an outcome in this study.

Intergenerationality’s Impact on Discipleship

Intergenerationality impacted all three aspects of discipleship in the analysis. Each of the intermediate variables, which represents an aspect of discipleship will now be specifically examined in relation to intergenerationality. Considering that Intergenerationality is a Context for Healthy Christian Communities, intergenerationality will be a point of focus in this discussion.

Participation in spiritual activities

Intergenerationality was found to impact Participation in Spiritual Activities to a moderately positive effect in quantitative terms; see pages 125 – 132. This in effect means according to the data, the more intergenerational the individual considers their congregation

to be, the higher the Participation in Spiritual Activities score the individual will likely obtain.

Qualitatively speaking, there was also evidence to support that belonging to an intergenerational congregation positively impacts faithfulness and therefore Participation in Spiritual Activities. Some of the evidence to support this is as follows:

I think [indecision] is the source of my biggest frustration with young people and I have to constantly remind myself of [being in their shoes] and it keeps me humble and helps keep me grounded in what is real. It exercises my grace, my patience, and all of those other fruits of the Spirit. The young particularly challenge me in those areas. The older people than myself, I just got a lot of time for them. They do challenge me in some ways, but I think mixing with different generations helps keep us not so... well it comes back to self-centeredness I suppose, it keeps us others-centred. If we are aware of what they offer and how they challenge us across the board and what they offer us, and the positive and negative aspects of what they bring out in ourselves, and helps keeps us grounded and keeps us aware of where we should be. Those areas where we do not love particularly well, and I think it's good to have that. C3 BB

Here an authentic frustration is taking place for this Baby Boomer mixing with Millennials. However, it should be noted, that the Baby Boomer sees the frustration as a learning point on his behalf as it helps him as an individual to exercise patience and humbleness through empathising with those different to himself. Such fruit of the Spirit is intricately linked with faithfulness as evidenced through spiritual activities (Bolst, 2012). Another direct piece of evidence is below:

I was blessed with the church I went to when I was growing up and that older generation, not the generation next to me above me but that the older ones again were pivotal. They ran the... I was brought up in the Methodist Church, they ran the Sunday school, a Christian endeavour they faithfully took Sunday by Sunday. C3 TR

This elderly woman is remembering back to her youth as the church members took her to church, and in doing so taught her about God and inspired her in her Christian journey; and therefore to participate in spiritual activities. There are positive feelings in this memory, as there is a sense of gratitude. One more final perspective is to be shared concerning Participation in Spiritual Activities:

We've had prayer partners, I pray for you. You choose an older person; you pray for that person, that person prays for you. Then we actually, we had one pastor that who would do that. He was amazing, and he would say from, "This is my prayer partner, and he has been praying for me every day for the last two years." The next moment you see this child getting baptized, that's just amazing. ~ C8 BB

In this congregation, the young and the old are paired up as long-term prayer partners. In this way, both are blessing each other and encouraging each other in their Christian walk. A result of this, as described by the participant is a child being baptised through the affirmation and encouragement of their prayer partner – who happened to be the pastor himself. Therefore, through this intergenerational act, a child confirmed their faithfulness to God through baptism; considered a very important and life changing act of participation in a spiritual activity.

In intergenerational ministry literature, one of the most common discussion topics concerns the link between intergenerationality and faith formation (Allen, H. C. & Ross, 2012; Linderman, 2016; Merhaut, 2013; Roberto, 2012; Snailum, 2012b). Surprisingly, however, few studies of the nature of this research endeavour have taken place; particularly of a quantitative nature (Allen, H. C. & Ross, 2012). Ross (2012, p. 142) reported in her phenomenological qualitative research study of four intergenerational congregations found that, “*Leaders among the four faith communities in this research expressed their belief that intergenerationality is a ministry approach that nurtures participants' faith formation in unique ways.*” The reason for this as described by the participants was in part that it is how faith was transmitted in Biblical times, and therefore it is one of the best means of building faith.

This concept of faith transmission through intergenerational means is supported by Beagles (2012) report on, ‘Growing disciples in community.’ Using the findings of the ValueGenesis II study (Gane, 2012), the structural equation modelling has found that the discipleship-based attitudes and behaviour of community members (both related and unrelated) were, ‘*highly correlated with adolescents personal discipleship*’ (Beagles, 2012, p. 155). It is relevant to understand that those included as community members were composed of a variety of age groups who were older than the adolescents in the study. It may also be worth noting that the participants in the ValueGenesis II study were primarily students attending Seventh-day Adventist schools; as most of the participants in this study were attending Seventh-day Adventist congregations. These findings align well with what has been found in this study.

From a theological point of view, Allan Harkness (2012) has argued that congregations should become more intergenerational as it is essential for personal faith formation. Such a position is rooted both through the cultural evidence concerning faith

transmission in both the Old and New Testament as well as several key theological concepts from the New Testament; several of these concepts are discussed on pages 40 – 42 of Chapter 2. Harkness further notes that intergenerationality is an, “expression of who God is” and, “is the essence of the church” (Harkness, 2012, p. 125). Therefore, from a theological and Biblical perspective the findings of this study also find alignment.

Given the strength of the questionnaire data alone, along with some of the conversations had in the interviews it has been concluded in this study that belonging to an intergenerational congregation has a moderately strong positive impact on a Christian’s faithfulness to God as evidenced through Participation in Spiritual Activities. Having discussed the implications concerning the faithfulness aspect of discipleship, the implications of intergenerationality on compassion will be investigated.

Compassion

Intergenerationality was shown to have a moderately positive effect when the background variables were regressed onto Compassion; see pages 125 – 132. This would seem to indicate that the more intergenerational a congregation was, the more positive the impact would be on an individual’s level of compassion than a congregation that is equal in all respects aside from having a poorer level of intergenerational diversity.

From a qualitative perspective, there was a great deal of citations of participants referencing their intergenerational experience with respect to acts of compassion. Under the category of ‘Intergenerational Churches Are’ was the code ‘Accepting: Treated like Family’, 58 items were mentioned by 12 out of 14 participants. Some of these expressions are given as examples as follows:

I like to try and empower the younger ones to ... and anyone else who comes here to be. Don’t sit back, be as involved as you want to be, a couple of new people here with us now R and H are here for that very reason. I don’t want to be sitting on the seat on Sunday and going home, I want to be involved. So, there is ample opportunity and encouragement to get involved in whatever that looks like whether it be breakfast or home group or Connect or kids camp - that is our flagship of the year really, in kids camp the whole church is involved in one way or another, either prayer support or transport or direct involvement whatever that might look like. So you were very encouraged to get involved and supported. ~ C3 BB

There are several elements that could be mentioned in this response even though the participant is not directly mentioning compassion. First of all, empowering someone can be

argued to be an act of compassion as it requires letting go of one's own authority and giving it to someone who doesn't have it. Giving someone an opportunity to lead and encouraging them is helping to fulfil the need to achieve and accomplish a task, as well as adding meaning and purpose to their life. Another relevant point in this conversation piece is that younger people are being empowered so that they can help other people flourish through meeting other people's needs such as providing breakfast, running a camp for kids, or other ways that are not listed above. Such ministries to others are acts in compassion themselves, showing that in this intergenerational congregation different generations are acting in compassion through empowerment and as a result of empowerment.

Another expression of compassion through inclusion is as follows:

From time to time, we have gone into another church environment, and our kids have gone, "why is this church different to ours? Why is this church different, like we cannot really even talk or participate!" There is an opportunity for children, children whatever their age to be able to participate and be part of, so not sitting back as consumers, not just sitting back in the kids program or what have you, but they can actually actively engage and be part of a service and you know, sometimes even heckle [during the sermon asking], "what is happening there?" or "what do you mean?" And even find a place to serve. My son now is doing the [...] PowerPoint stuff this morning as well. So, he just started to do that and some sound so, he found a place to serve as well. I think it is really, really important. ~ C3 GX

When this participant has taken his children to less intergenerational churches, they note a great deal of difference in that no one seems to be empathetic to their needs and desires to be participating members of the church. An intergenerational congregation is compassionate in allowing children to have ownership in their own community – not simply in being served but in being useful. One last report noting Compassion is shared below:

I mean, people get sick, die, and the kids need taking around, they do school runs, they do pick up, they do [care] and then also we've gone through a lot of things like the chook program, depression recovery, Cooking classes that kind of thing which is really great, so that's yes for health, for health. So that's just a few of things, then also we just closed down the playgroup that there was, reaching out to the community to get them in because around [...] Church is a lot of immigrants and lonely mothers sitting around there with their kids. So, the fathers go off to Sydney to work and they're alone. So, a lot of those people came to the playgroup, it was amazing. And from there they would be picked up for depression recovery or chook program which is good. They even had "want a basket" with people would bring in their second-hand clothes put it in the basket, and the people that would come, grab it from there, take it home, that was, that was pretty good. ~ C8 BB

In this profession, the participant has listed a number of acts of compassion, many of which are directed at a variety of different generations and served by different generations. Listed are acts of compassion for children and parents, such as taking kids to and from school when a parent has something traumatic taking place, along with playgroups and second-hand clothing. For other age groups, there are depression programs and cooking classes, as well as a means of helping people financially through providing chickens which can lay eggs for consumption, selling, or even as a way of providing more chickens in the future. Intergenerationality, in this case, serves as means of compassion for all generations while also is a means of all generations being compassionate.

Reflecting on previous studies, an example of how intergenerationality positively influences compassion can be found through storytelling the trials of past generations in order to understand not only their current circumstances but give support to current issues of similarity. In Harris (2017)'s article entitled, "*Bridging Generational Gaps Through Out-of-Classroom Intergenerational Experiences*", Professor Natanya Duncan took three college students to a discussion event surrounding the experiences of three women who were members of the Black Panthers Party, which participated in the American Civil Rights movement. This event helped the three students understand the historical underpinnings of the current, 'Black Lives Matter' movement, as well as stir compassion for what the older generation went through, and what can and should be done to help relieve the racism currently taking place in America.

Grefe (2011) discusses the potential of different groups mixing together through narrative expression as a means of learning from one another. In such a method, different generations were able to understand the personal experiences of individual group members better and therefore be able to empathise and therefore encourage each other through compassion and even provide mentoring opportunities for those who had less experience.

Through the questionnaire assessment as well as what was revealed through the interviews, it was concluded, that the more intergenerational the individual considers their congregation to be, the more likely they will choose to show compassion. The discussion will now turn towards the third discipleship component of Spiritual Growth.

Spiritual growth

Five background variables were found to exert a significant influence on Spiritual Growth; Intergenerationality, Bible Study, Inclusive Climate, Prayer, and Church Participation; Mentoring and Modelling was also a positive influence when Spiritual Wellbeing was the outcome variable (see Figure 6.1). This was supported during the interviews as one of the items most mentioned as a benefit of intergenerationality was that of ‘Growing/Learning’; reported by 11 of 14 participants. Particularly, much of the Spiritual Growth that seems to take place according to the interviews concerns mentoring and role modelling.

Looking at some examples from the interviews, the perspectives of the participants on how being in an intergenerational congregation has contributed to their Spiritual Growth can be seen:

“...people in the church and especially the older men, have really provided a role model for me. And like, to look towards and to have them really support me in that way, like they're always just supporting me and always encouraging me in whatever I do and they're just there to really care for me and I go to church and they are like, “how are you?” and I'm like, Ah!!, like it such a good thing to have someone say like actually how are you. It's not about like oh yeah, my day was great, but it's about actually like journeying together and being with each other through everything. So, definitely the older people in church really provide guidance. And I know like, I have spoken to some other people like T (female) especially, and the more you get to know them, the more open they are with you. You get to know that you're not alone in it, like I know that sometimes I feel like I'm the only person going through this, I feel like I'm the only teenager in the world that has ever have to deal with this, but like you talk to the older people and you are like, Wow, they went through this too? And just because it is a different time, it doesn't mean that they don't understand...” ~ C3 ML

In this response, the young female Millennial has found guidance in her life decisions. Specifically, her congregation has provided male role models for her; which is important in helping women have father figures and knowing what should be expected from men (McGrath & Sinclair, 2013). Also, the use of the term, ‘journeying’ itself suggests a growing concept, as going on a journey is a learning experience by both process and product. Finally, having an increased perspective that other people have experienced what she is currently experiencing is both a revelation and a means to acquire knowledge as to how to get through her current struggles. Here is another perspective from a different generation and a different congregation:

“Friday night next, the youth have organized a relationship meeting where the youth come together, and they have a few of us adults who will be on a panel and they can ask relationship questions. Would you date? Do you date before you get married? [Those] kind of questions, which is an initiative from them! And then, I feel that we are actually mentoring them, they’re such amazing young people you know, with marriage going out the window, just getting to talk to people who actually still have a marriage, it’s amazing. That had nothing to do with the adults mentoring the kids. They came, and they asked. So, they must see something that’s good in the Church.”
~ C8 BB

An incident where it is an older person being intentionally approached for guidance by a group of younger people is presented. While it may be the case in many congregations that the older adults will approach the younger generations and offer guidance, the approach is described in this interview is considered to be far more effective (French et al., 2015). Specifically, the youth are creating an open learning opportunity to be mentored and given guidance on the topic of romantic relationships. Such an initiative could not take place in a context where there was either little diversity or where no positive relationships between the generations were taking place. A final example:

“I have always been even when I was younger, being the sort of person that probably interacts and mixes more with people that are older than me and there's been multiple reasons I guess for that. But I guess have always sort of interacted with people that are more so older than me, probably not people of my own age and that is being probably on multiple levels. I have some fairly unique hobbies and interests and I have had quite a few mentors in several different areas of those interests. And of course, there have been older people that have actually spent the time and actually in working with me to help me with those things to sort of for me growing in those areas, so I have spent more time with all sorts of people. They have been a sort of people that have been around me... Some of those [mentors] aren't in the church too - so it is quite a broad sort of thing, but I always sort of felt more comfortable spending time, gaining information, soaking up information from people that probably were older than me and learning from them. So, across generations, you know, it is probably more so mixing with different generations - look you can get a lot of information from that sort of thing, even now I am learning new things, and learning how to interact with younger people.” ~ C5 ML38

For this older Millennial, one of the main reasons for mixing with older generations is to learn from them. This is taking place due to specific hobbies and interests he has, but also seemingly in general areas of life as well; including spiritually and religiously.

Intergenerativity, a term coined by Whitehouse (2017, p. 70) to, “*capture the lessons we learned about the more general concept of learning from difference and diversity*”, speaks towards learning through intergenerational diversity. An example of intergenerativity is

evidenced through the research of Horan (2017) on, “Fostering Spiritual Formation of Millennials in Christian Schools.” In a mixed-method design, Horan examined the specific programs utilised by schools in the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) network in order to assist with the spiritual formation of their students. The study found that personal relationships, mentoring, and role modelling were considered the most effective means of fostering spiritual formation in Millennials according to the participants. However, while it was agreed that these personal interactions were the most effective means they were found to be the least implemented kinds of programs due to the commitment involved. Such findings agree with this present study’s analysis that intergenerational relationships (based on personal relationships, mentoring, and role modelling) positively influence Spiritual Growth.

In the research of Williamson and Hood (2015) on, “*The Role of Mentoring in Spiritual Transformation: A Faith-Based Approach to Recovery from Substance Abuse*” conducted interviews with six successful mentors for helping people become free of substance abuse through spiritual mentoring. Five main themes emerged from the qualitative data: i) Connection, ii) Compassion, iii) Encouragement, iv) Spiritual Change, and v) Parental Pride. The fourth theme specifically, ‘spiritual change’ was deemed as one of the ways successive spiritual growth took place. As these six mentors were themselves middle-aged adults mentoring primarily young adults, intergenerationality is considered an aspect of such spiritual growth. In consideration of the present study, it can be surmised that the research of Williamson and Hood would agree that intergenerationality positively impacts spiritual growth.

Upon reflection of both sets of data in this present study, as well as the similar research found in the literature, it has been determined that an intergenerational congregation positively impacts the spiritual growth of the individuals who belong to it.

Considering the overall discussion regarding the influence of intergenerationality on discipleship within the confines of this study, it has been found that the more intergenerational an individual perceives their congregation to be, the better the context for discipleship the congregation is likely to be. This has been evidenced due to intergenerationality positively impacting the participation of spiritual activities of the participants in the study, their levels of compassion, and their spiritual growth capacities.

Summarising the Findings

This study has found that there are worthwhile benefits that can be gained in relation to belonging to an intergenerational congregation. Specifically, belonging to an intergenerational congregation has the potential to increase individual and community wellbeing, and strengthen the aspects of discipleship; specifically, regarding participating in spiritual activities, having compassion, and spiritually growing. With these benefits in mind, intergenerationality is recommended as a viable context for improving the overall health of a congregation.

Taking all of the analysis in mind, a conceptual model of the Framework for Healthy Christian Communities has been created in Figure 6.5. This model summarises the major findings of the study, showing both the relationships and the correlations reported in the findings and discussion chapters.

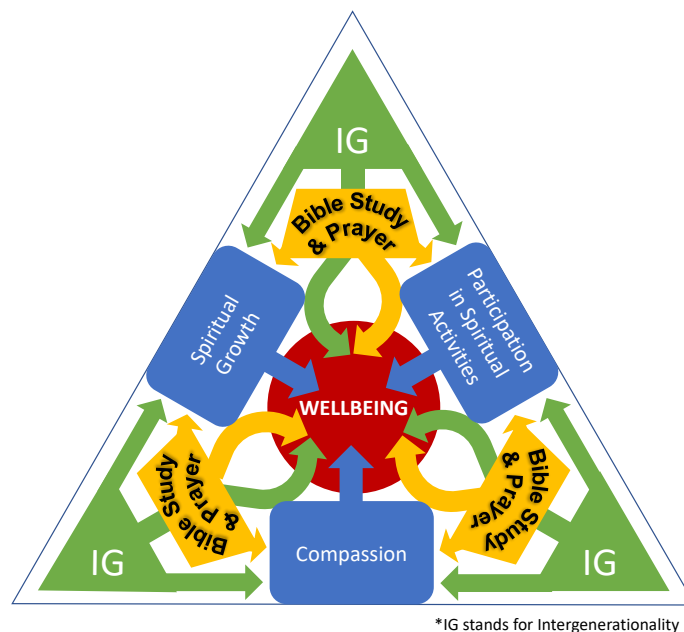


Figure 6.5

The Framework for Healthy Christian Communities

Upon reflection of the model, Wellbeing can be seen at the centre of the model as a red circle indicating it as an outcome and goal of Christian communities. Too often the final goal of Christianity is in having someone accept Jesus as their Saviour and becoming a

member of a congregation. Whilst salvation is indeed the most important goal in many respects, it is argued in this study that the final outcome of Christianity is actually wellbeing and that the acceptance of Christ is the beginning of the journey towards becoming connected with Jesus and with others. Salvation, therefore, leads to ultimate connectedness and therefore, ultimate wellbeing.

The three blue rounded rectangles are Discipleship variables, being Participation in Spiritual Activities, Spiritual Growth, and Compassion, which are shown to be contributors to wellbeing. These three discipleship factors have been shown to positively impact the wellbeing of individuals and the community as a whole. Bible Study and Prayer shown in yellow, have been found to positively contribute to both the three discipleship factors as well as wellbeing itself as indicated by the yellow arrows.

Finally, Intergenerationality (abbreviated as IG in the green triangles) has been found through the data to be a positive contributor to wellbeing, both as an indirect contributor to the three discipleship factors as well as a direct contributor. As Intergenerationality and the three discipleship factors of Participation in Spiritual Activities, Compassion, and Spiritual Growth are shown to be on the outside of the triangle encompassing wellbeing, so should the environment of a healthy congregation be one of intergenerational discipleship.

Considering the Research Questions

The five themes (three main themes, and one which can be divided into three sub-themes) which form the *Framework of Healthy Christian Communities* show evidence from both the interviews as well as the questionnaire that individuals may find that their wellbeing is increased by belonging to an intergenerational congregation through the means of discipleship. Having analysed both sets of data, a conclusion concerning the research question has been identified. Quantitatively, as shown in Figure 6.1, the structured equation model shows that all three discipleship variables in the study contribute to Spiritual Wellbeing; Compassion indicated a slightly negative effect, however, as discussed in respect to the interview data and previous research as having a positive influence in the long term on pages 168 – 173. The same was not true, however, for the other two wellbeing models (Figure 6.2 and 6.3), as only Spiritual Growth made a significantly positive contribution. However, the interview data gives an interesting viewpoint.

From the interview data, every participant declared that being a Christian does contribute to their wellbeing; not only spiritually, but psychologically and socially. While some variance exists among the participants interviewed, the direct responses seem to indicate that Christianity gives participants a sense of purpose, peace and hope. Indirect responses point to the Christian community the participants are a part of through the relationships formed by other believers and also the practical ways that their local congregation try to contribute to their personal needs; be it depression recovery or empowerment.

It is also reported that Intergenerationality significantly impacts an individual. Quantitatively speaking, when looking at Figure 6.1 which shows all three discipleship variables, the variable Intergenerationality exerts a moderate positive influence on all three (Participation in Spiritual Activities $\beta = 0.38$, Compassion $\beta = 0.26$, Spiritual Growth $\beta = 0.23$). In the interview analysis, responses concerning intergenerationality seemed to indicate that the natural outcome of being an intergenerational congregation is to produce disciples. This is primarily done through mentoring, which is itself a form of discipleship. Other participants testified that wisdom, inspiration, encouragement, and other benefits from being an intergenerational congregation assisted them on their journey as Christians; which translates as being an authentic disciple of Jesus.

After analysing the data and considering the question, *“how is a person’s wellbeing impacted by their level of social and spiritual connectedness as they are discipled in an intergenerational congregation?”* it has been concluded that a person being discipled in an intergenerational congregation is likely to experience an increased sense of wellbeing as they have made social connections with others and spiritual connections with God. Further to this, such an individual is also more likely to grow as a disciple and have a greater probability to have an authentic walk as a Christian.

Having analysed and explored the findings and the meaning of the results as well as why some anomalous results may have been produced, the implications of the findings will now be unpacked along with the conclusion of this study.

CHAPTER 7 : IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This study has sought to understand the impact of belonging to an intergenerational congregation on wellbeing. In order to discover how a person's wellbeing is impacted by their level of social and spiritual connectedness as they are disciplined in an intergenerational congregation, a concurrent transformative study was undertaken to find a sociological answer to these questions.

All of the self-reporting tools used in this study have been shown to be reliable and valid when used through the current sample. The interview data gathered through semi-structured interviews has served to expand understanding of the questionnaire data by providing explanations of irregularities between the theory and the data, strengthen the case made by previous research as well as those made in the literature review, and fill in gaps of knowledge not provided by the questionnaire data. It has also served to provide narrative support for the results.

This study has added weight to the argument that an individual's wellbeing is positively impacted by being disciplined in an intergenerational congregation due to an increase in social and spiritual connectedness. This chapter will provide: i) a concluding report of the major and minor findings of the study, ii) a discussion regarding the implications of the study, iii) a discussion regarding the limitations of the study, iv) a discussion regarding what areas of further research should be pursued, and v) some closing remarks.

Major Findings

Wellbeing is positively impacted by discipleship

The findings have shown that those who are actively applying the principles of the Bible through the means of an intimate relationship with God and exhibited by their care towards other persons are likely to experience a greater sense of wellbeing. This bears true regarding Psychological Wellbeing as discipleship positively influences concepts such as meaning and purpose, as well as providing positive emotions through acts of service and a sense of peace and hope; among other benefits. Social Wellbeing is positively impacted through the sense of belonging which takes place within a community of likeminded people

who are striving towards making the world a better place. Strongest of all is the influence of discipleship on Spiritual Wellbeing, as it provides a pathway towards grappling and understanding the big questions in life in a way that provides a relief from the burdens of the past, a mission for the present, and hope for the future.

Participants who scored higher on the Participation in Spiritual Activities scale had a higher Spiritual Wellbeing score. While the questionnaire results for Psychological and Social Wellbeing assessments did not register as significant, the interview data consistently found that all three forms of wellbeing increased due to the faithfulness each of the participants had to God and his teachings. Therefore, it has been concluded that having faith in God as evidenced through the participation in spiritual activities can indeed lead to a higher sense of Spiritual wellbeing.

Reading the Bible and praying were discussed as sources of peace, joy, and comfort by participants in the interviews and showed slight indirect influence of Psychological Wellbeing. Therefore, it has been concluded that reading and studying the scriptures as well as spending time in prayer with God can be a means of flourishing to those who have a positive image and relationship with God.

Although the questionnaire data revealed a negative correlation between Compassion and Spiritual and Psychological wellbeing, the interviews suggested that Compassion was still worthwhile as the participants expressed clear links between acts of compassion and wellbeing. However, more study needs to be done in regard to the relationship between Compassion and wellbeing, it was concluded that when compassion is undertaken in a compassionate community, those within the community will help increase each other's sense of wellbeing when there is suffering.

Those participants who had assessed themselves with a greater Spiritual Growth score were found to also assess higher in all three areas of wellbeing. This was also strongly evident in the interview data. Therefore, it can be said that Spiritual Growth leads to a higher sense of wellbeing.

In light of these findings, it has been concluded that discipleship can be a means of several dimensions of wellbeing. This being the case, Christian congregations have been found to be a potential context for providing both social and spiritual connectedness as they are discipleship orientated communities. The potential of discipleship's ability to positively

influence wellbeing is dependent on the kind of attachment an individual has on God, as those who have a secure attachment with Christ and who see God as a loving and personal deity will have better a sense of wellbeing than those who may view God as distant, angry or apathetic.

It is therefore recommended that congregational leaders use this research as a means to reach the secular community. Utilising church spaces, equipment and personnel as an overt means of providing both immediate and ongoing needs for the community would likely be welcomed by those outside of the Christian space. Providing resources alongside non-Christian individuals through programs that particularly promote psychological and social wellbeing will enable Christians to be the representation of Jesus they are called to be while strengthening the wellbeing of others and themselves. This would also be a non-threatening way to introduce the world to real Christians and perhaps lead individuals to Christ through relational means. It is of course recommended that at an appropriate time, the understanding that choosing to follow Jesus results in a better wellbeing should be shared with non-Christians, as it may be the necessary motivation for them to take further steps towards Christ.

Wellbeing is positively impacted by Intergenerationality

The research provided in this study has shown that wellbeing is also positively influenced through the benefits realised in intergenerational relationships. This is not limited to only family relationships, but rather individuals are encouraged to establish and maintain healthy relationships with those from different generational backgrounds who are unrelated by blood and marriage through an intergenerational community. Intergenerationality has been linked to acceptance and belonging, through being part of a diverse and yet unified ‘family.’ This connectedness brings with it several benefits, and therefore an increase in wellbeing for those who are part of such a community.

Specifically, Intergenerationality has been found to positively impact Psychological Wellbeing. In the regression analysis, a direct positive pathway emerged from the model showing that Intergenerationality yields a moderate influence. This was confirmed through the interviews, as many of the participants reported the benefits of being mentored by more experienced members of their congregation which in turn assisted with their sense of accomplishment. Engaging with an intergenerational community has been noted to influence

positive emotion, achievement, and autonomy while sharing one's journey with others of diverse generational backgrounds.

Intergenerationality also positively influenced Social Wellbeing in the research data. The analysis of the model revealed that Intergenerationality rendered a moderately positive influence on Social Wellbeing. Again, this was echoed through the analysis of the interview data as the participants gave evidence of having their relationships benefitted through a sense of family, in having older members act as parental figures offering wisdom and generosity while younger members as spiritual children give both affection and help when needed. Pursuing and maintaining intergenerational relationships has been found to strengthen a sense of self within community as well as provide a sense of engagement from a greater diversity of voices.

Spiritual Wellbeing has also been found to be impacted by Intergenerationality. While a direct effect was not found in the regression analysis, a positive moderate indirect pathway emerged which showed that Intergenerationality quantitatively influence Spiritual Wellbeing. The participants overwhelmingly expressed how their spiritual journey was strengthened by those older and younger than themselves, particularly when personal trials took place in that each generation offered their unique strengths towards them in their suffering. Being a part of an intergenerational community has been shown to add a sense of meaning and purpose in one's life and strengthen one's outlook on life in general.

The five factors of Intergenerationality (Positive Interactions, Connectedness, Interdependence, Empowerment, and Accommodation) specifically lend themselves towards individual flourishing as they each provide towards specific aspects of wellbeing components. The validation of the Intergenerationality Index has added weight to its usefulness as an assessment tool, as well as strengthened conceptual framework of the five factors as components of Intergenerationality itself.

Considering these findings, it can be concluded that having intergenerational relationships and engaging in an intergenerational community is beneficial for one's wellbeing, from a psychological, social, and spiritual perspective. This being the case, there is great motivation to seek the friendship of those of different generational backgrounds in order to reap the benefits therein.

It is recommended that congregational leaders promote the concept of unity in diversity within congregations in order to bring about community wellbeing in religious settings. This is not suggesting an abandonment of theology or morality, but rather utilising the church as a place of respectful and fruitful discussion in order to present Jesus as the peacemaker he has promoted to be. Establishing a community based on equality and mutuality leads to wellbeing and will also be a point of evangelism in itself to the surrounding secular community.

It is also recommended that individuals seek to connect with those from different generational perspectives. This can be encouraged by congregational leaders by means of social and spiritual activities that be understood and enjoyed by all ages where possible. Further to this, representation from a diverse generational representation on leadership teams and in all branches of ministry will promote a sense of value and respect to each age group leading to a greater sense of belonging and therefore wellbeing.

Discipleship is positively impacted by Intergenerationality

The study has also found great benefits concerning the process of Discipleship and how Intergenerationality serves as a context. Intergenerational congregations have been found to be beneficial in regard to the Discipleship of individuals. It can be said that Intergenerationality, using the construct of the five factors in this study, has been shown to strengthen the three disciple variables of Participation in Spiritual Activities, Spiritual Growth, and Compassion.

Being a part of an intergenerational congregation increases the faithfulness to God of individuals as evidenced through Participation in Spiritual Activities. In the regression analysis, a moderately strong positive pathway became evident showing that Intergenerationality influences Participation in Spiritual Activities. The interview data reveals that Intergenerationality within a congregation directly increases an individual's ability to serve and reproduce as a disciple largely in part due to mentoring and modelling. Being in an intergenerational congregation encourages the less experienced to engage with God through the example of those who have journeyed longer with God while strengthening the faith of the old as they see the passion and expectant faith of those new in their Christian walk.

It was also found that Spiritual Growth was impacted by Intergenerationality. The regression analysis found that there was a moderately positive pathway from

Intergenerationality to Spiritual Growth. This was emphasised by the participants during the interviews as most expressed how much knowledge, wisdom, and skills they received from those who mentored them in their intergenerational community. Specifically, areas such as being given sage advice from elders in making important life choices and having opportunities such as teaching those younger contributed to the spiritual growth within such communities.

Similarly, Intergenerationality was found to be a positive contributor to individual Compassion. This was shown in the model analysis as a moderately positive regression took place from Intergenerationality to Compassion. When interviewed the majority of participants expressed how being in an intergenerational congregation gave them opportunities to give compassion to others as well as receive it. Specific examples came in the form of helping elderly members with labour intensive or technologically related work, and young parents help raising their children.

It is therefore recommended that congregational leaders take steps towards teaching their membership how to intentionally connect with both prospective disciples as well as those who are outside of their generation. This involves utilising members from each of the generations to assist with understanding how to reach and teach their generational cohort. It is strongly recommended that congregational leaders educate their communities on the different generations, particularly in terms of their history, their characteristics and value priority, and their needs. Unless individuals are able to put themselves in the shoes of others, they will struggle to connect with them, let alone disciple them into the kingdom of God.

In summary, the major findings of this study have been that belonging to an intergenerational congregation brings many benefits to both individuals and the community as a whole. The other findings (see Appendix E) yielded a picture of what a disciple is like in both character and behaviour, as well as what a healthy church looks and operates like. These benefits are noteworthy in that they lead to a better and longer life in this present world, and quite possibly the opportunity to lead more individuals into the life eternal.

Implications of the Research Findings

Through the research done in this study, three specific recommendations have been made.

Individuals and congregational leaders should consider authentic and active Christianity as a potential means of wellbeing

Having social and spiritual connectedness has been shown in the current study and previous studies to have a positive impact on wellbeing (Cavalletti & Corsi, 2018). Christianity through discipleship is a practical means of being connected to other people through active service and comradery, as well as being connected to the Divine through faithfulness.

As discussed on p. 19 – 31, Christianity pursued through discipleship is a means of connectedness both socially and spiritually (Gallet, 2016). Consequently, it is recommended to individuals that it is not mere acceptance of Christianity that leads to a positive impact but following the teachings of Jesus as expressed in the Bible and applying them to one's own life (McCrindle et al., 2017; Taylor, 2013). In addition to this, individuals should become active ministers in a local congregation so they can live out their Christian walk in a community of fellow disciples (Camp, 2008; Talbert, 2010).

Specifically, individuals are recommended to actively participate in spiritual activities as they can strengthen relationships with others, as well as with God (Bolst, 2012; Thomas, 2010). Disciples should know God, and act on his behalf. This is not in regard to knowing about God but rather they know God personally and have a relationship with him (Hull, 2006). This knowledge of Jesus extends past the ten commandments and results in a disciple being able to both speak and act on Christ's behalf (Morrison, 2016). Disciples are also aware of God's leading not just in terms of morality, but with knowing what life choices they should make (Celano, 2013). Therefore, individuals are recommended to devote themselves to the teachings of the Bible by putting God first in their life and treating others as they themselves would want to be treated if they were in their place. Congregational leaders are recommended to prioritise promoting having a strong relationship with God and healthy relationships with others to their congregations above any other matter at the pulpit, during visitations, or when conducting meetings.

Wellbeing is distributed largely by acts of compassion by others. Although there are some aspects of wellbeing which could be argued to take place solely due to the mindset of an individual, many aspects are either products or by-products of compassion (Elliott, 2012). Compassion is not driven by selfish notions, such as fulfilling a quota or a goal, but rather by empathising with another person who is suffering in some capacity and trying to alleviate

their suffering (Lowe & Lowe, 2010). In light of this, congregational leaders should oversee community support not in order to gain members or fulfil a commitment, but because it is the right thing to do (Aghababaei et al., 2016). When the community sees the Church serving solely in order to have compassion without any other expectation, they will see it as a dispenser of wellbeing.

Individuals who are actively and authentically pursuing Christ strive to grow as people. Spiritual growth has been found to directly impact the wellbeing of participants, as it gives a sense of accomplishment and experience to individuals (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). This aligns with the Christian sentiment of *becoming* more like Christ; though not in a perfectionistic sense (De Waal, 2017; Morrison, 2016). Religious institutions, ministers, and individuals should partner in challenging the status quo at every level, both inwardly and outwardly, in order to progress positively and avoid stagnation and decline.

In speaking specifically to congregational leaders, it is strongly recommended that quality must be prioritised over quantity in most aspects of life, but especially regarding evangelism and discipleship. While it may be argued that it is easier to use baptisms and membership transfers as indicators of church performance, rather than lifelong discipleship, it is because of such a mentality that there is a struggle to retain those baptised and/or raised in the church. It is for the same reason that secular society largely sees Christianity as irrelevant; since flourishing is not taking place in the lives of those on the church registry (Kinnaman, 2011). If transformational, lifelong discipleship was the primary focus with holistic wellbeing showing evident, the secular community would have the motivation to approach the church rather than having to spend enormous resources in exclaiming a message that will not likely be received (McCrinkle et al., 2017).

Individuals and congregational leaders should consider intergenerational relationships and intergenerational communities as a potential means of wellbeing

Intergenerational relationships have been shown in this study to positively influence wellbeing. While in many aspects of life generational segregation takes place, an effort should be made on an individual and communal level to foster intergenerational relationships as it has the potential to improve wellbeing (Biggs & Carr, 2015).

Intergenerational communities have been noted to display five characteristics that set them apart from other communities. Positive interactions between members of different

generations help build and maintain healthy relationships through frequent and meaningful communications (Massi et al., 2016). This is not to say that there should never be any disagreements or challenging conversations, but rather that these take place within a safe and loving context that has been built upon trust (Shaw, H., 2015). Individuals are recommended to seek out positive interactions with not only their own generation, but those above and below their own. Congregational leaders are encouraged to provide safe environments for this to take place.

Connectedness is also an aspect of intergenerational communities. Such communities celebrate diversity though they are bonded as a united community, and they are also inclusive of new members so long as a spirit of respect of the group's boundaries is demonstrated (Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2017). A sense of identity and belonging regardless of an individual's age is an essential aspect of intergenerational communities (Cortellesi & Kernan, 2016). Therefore, individuals are recommended to strive to connect with others from various generational backgrounds. Congregational leaders are recommended to ensure the values of intergenerational acceptance and belonging are woven into the governance and structure of the congregation.

Intergenerational communities exhibit a sense of interdependence between the various generational cohorts. An understanding that everyone and every generation has something to offer makes the group more connected and ultimately more equipped to deal with any challenges the individual members or the group as a whole may face (Andreoletti & Howard, 2016). While each person and each generation may have flaws, interdependence ensures not only accountability but a safeguard from such flaws. It is recommended that individuals and congregational leaders make an effort to appreciate the gifts that every generation brings to it, as well as be teachable regardless of age.

Intergenerational communities empower their members regardless of their age so long as an individual is able to carry out the responsibilities that are expected of the authority given to them. There is equal representation of every generation at every level of authority and every agency of an intergenerational community when possible (Allen, H. C. & Ross, 2012; Voegtlin et al., 2015). In this way, every generation is given respect and value as potential sources of direction and opinion. It is recommended that individuals respect the authority given to someone regardless of their age. It is recommended that congregational leaders empower not only the majority or the seasoned, but empower those who have

potential, and to be vigilant in ensuring generational equity in every ministry and at every level where possible.

Intergenerational communities are considerate of the needs and desires of every generation and are therefore accommodating (Crispin, 2017). This does not mean that there is no place for specific rules or ideologies that govern the community, but rather that decisions are made based on a spirit of empathy (Menconi, 2010). Where possible consensus will define decisions, but when consensus is not possible then an endeavour to create times and spaces where conflicting opinions can be enacted will be made. It is recommended that individuals 'do unto others' and endeavour to put themselves in the shoes of those they may not agree with in order to accommodate for the sake of God's kingdom and God's children. It is recommended that congregational leaders safeguard the minority generations, ensuring that their needs are met and their desires are earnestly considered.

Individuals and congregational leaders should consider intergenerational relationships and intergenerational communities as a potential context of Christian discipleship

Intergenerational relationships and intergenerational congregations have been found to be a potentially ideal context for discipleship to take place. This heralds back to the diversity exhibited in the early Christian movement (Bock & Köstenberger, 2011), as a diverse Christian context undergirds the theological concepts of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9) (Long, 2011), the body of Christ (Roman 12, 1 Corinthians 12)(Harkness, 2012), and the gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12)(Harkness, 2012; Schwarz, 2006).

Intergenerational relationships have been found to positively influence faithfulness through an increase in participation in spiritual activities. Most notably in the literature, faith formation increases through mentoring and modelling relationships, which are often intergenerational in nature (Allen, H. C. & Ross, 2012; Linderman, 2016; Merhaut, 2013; Roberto, 2012; Snailum, 2012b). Older generations have also been positively influenced in their faith through wanting to pass on a legacy of faith to those younger than themselves, and therefore find purpose in being kept accountable not only for the sake of the connectedness with God but also for the sake of future generations (Andreoletti & Howard, 2016; Massi et al., 2016). Individuals are recommended to model faithfulness to God and his principles not

only in words but through actions and life choices. Congregational leaders in particular are strongly encouraged in this, as they have more responsibility.

Intergenerationality has also been found to positively influence the discipleship component of Compassion. Intergenerational congregations have been noted for being accepting and inclusive environments, which therefore require compassion, sympathy, and empathy to develop (Elliott, 2012; Glassford, 2018). Being communities that display accommodation requires acts of selflessness, submission, and sacrifice, all of which are characteristics of Jesus (Cherry, 2016; Shaw, P., 2016). Flowing on from this, as empowering communities' compassion is required in order for those in authority to share authority with others (Crispin, 2017; Nesbit Sbanotto & Blomberg, 2016). It is recommended that individuals endeavour to be compassionate towards others regardless of their age, this includes assisting in meeting the needs of others, respecting them as a child of God, and accommodating and empowering others where possible. It is recommended that congregational leaders strive in upholding Christ's mission for justice and mercy by standing up for the marginalised regardless of age and encouraging others to do the same.

Spiritual Growth has also been found to increase in intergenerational congregations. Aspects of spiritual growth such as having individuals strengthen the fruit of the Spirit, such as but not limited to patience, kindness, and gentleness in order to accommodate other generational perspectives is a consideration (Crispin, 2017; Vos, 2012). As mentoring and modelling exists with intergenerational environments, younger individuals learn a great deal from their elders on a variety of topics whilst those mentoring are benefitted with purpose, meaning, and fellowship resulting in legacy beyond their own lives; the elders also learn a great deal from those younger as well (Cortellesi & Kernan, 2016; DeMichelis et al., 2015; Grignoli et al., 2015; Whitehouse, 2017). Therefore, it is recommended that individuals actively seek out suitable mentors who exemplify Christ-like qualities while striving to be mentor others while striving to mentor others themselves. As to congregational leaders, it is recommended to provide adequate training regarding mentoring as well as a safe environment for those who are mentored as well as those who do the mentoring.

Congregational leaders are recommended to undertake measure to educate their congregations regarding understanding each of the generations in the greater community. This includes understanding the history, characteristics and value priorities, and needs of every living generation. Further it is recommended that training opportunities are provided

for their congregation to understand what it means to be intergenerational, why it is important, and what they can do to develop intergenerationally as a congregation.

Congregational leaders and individuals alike are recommended to implement intergenerational strategies in order to meet the needs of both their own congregation, as well as potentially the surrounding community.

Conclusion

It has been recommended that individuals should consider authentic and active Christianity as a potential means of wellbeing as it has been found that discipleship is indeed a mechanism in Christianity which leads to being socially and spiritually connected. This sense of connectedness in turn leads to an increase in spiritual, psychological and social wellbeing. Therefore, it can be said that Jesus' promise of rendering an abundant life by following his teachings is a true statement in the case of those who were part of this study, as it has shown that it leads to individual flourishing.

It has also been recommended that individuals should consider intergenerational relationships and intergenerational communities as a potential means of wellbeing as belonging to an intergenerational congregation leads to a variety of positive outcomes. All three measurements of wellbeing were found to be either directly or indirectly impacted positively by Intergenerationality.

Further to this, it is also recommended that individuals should consider intergenerational relationships and intergenerational communities as a potential context of Christian discipleship since the study also found that Intergenerationality positively impacts the three discipleship areas of participation in spiritual activities, compassion, and spiritual growth. Therefore, Intergenerationality has been found to positively impact the discipleship process of individuals in the study.

Limitations of The Study

Although the study attempted to have more denominational representation in the study, only one of the eleven congregations was not a Seventh-day Adventist congregation. Having greater denominational diversity would have lessened any bias regarding characteristics that reflect a denominational perspective rather than say an intergenerational one. However, having a sample largely of one denomination assisted with pinpointing

intergenerational differences as the faith tradition of the participants and their respective congregations were homogenised. In addition to this, geographically the sample was fairly narrow being as far north as Raymond Terrace, NSW and as far south as Quakers Hill, NSW (approximately 170 km between).

Another limitation of the study is that the congregations which were used in the study would be largely considered to be Australian (Caucasian) in ethnicity with some exceptions in some of the congregations. While there were some differences between the eleven congregations in terms of traditional leanings, most of the congregations would be considered moderate to conservative in terms of their religious views. Therefore, culturally there is a great deal of homogeneity.

A final limitation is that the sample was limited to those over the age of sixteen years old, and there were only three representatives between the age of sixteen and eighteen. Ideally, the questionnaire would have been administered to younger children as well in order to hear their point of view. However, due to reading ability and ethical considerations, the questionnaire was relegated to those who were older.

Opportunities for Further Research

The findings of this study have opened up the need for further research, as knowledge always results in further questions to be answered. As mentioned in the previous section, conducting the assessments on a greater variety of congregations would be useful not only in fine tuning the questionnaire and interview questions, but also in comparing different denominations and ethnic groups. For example, how would a Fijian congregation with a strong family orientation compare with a typical Australian congregation in terms of empowerment or interaction? Considering that both cultures have different perspectives on 'church', it would be valuable to learn from the strengths of each as well as find the weaknesses that exist.

Stemming from the cultural perspective above, it would also be relevant to investigate how intergenerational immigrant congregations are in light of having to deal with issues of integration. Specifically, considering the difficulty in keeping a church which speaks a minority language hospitable to the younger generations who will likely be more comfortable speaking the common language. This issue in particular paired with the first generation's

often refusal of giving up on the old ways has made it particularly difficult in retaining second and third generation immigrants.

Alternatively, modifying the questionnaire so that it can be used for younger age groups would be quite interesting especially for knowing whether the children are respected and empowered. Additionally, it may be useful in assessing if mentoring support is where it ought to be for those in middle school or in their adolescent years. Modification could also be done so that those who speak other languages can do the questionnaire in their own tongue.

Comparative research can be done to assess discipleship and wellbeing between intergenerational and monogenerational congregations. This study has used congregations who had corporate worship together and who were at least multigenerational in nature but being able to assess congregations who have separate services based on age or who cater for only one generation would be of interest to understand when and if such formats are viable regarding discipleship.

A research study exploring an intervention model to assist congregations who desire to become more intergenerational should also be pursued. The first step would be using the current questionnaire as an assessment for congregations to establish what their areas of strength and weakness are followed by consultation, training seminars, and reassessment. This would be valuable as it would not only contribute further to theoretical aspects but use theory for practical purposes in order to transform a congregation into a more intergenerational community.

Another research endeavour could be to assess the attitude and perception of ministers of religion regarding discipleship. Endeavouring to discover whether their education has focused more on evangelism rather than discipleship would be useful, as would their confidence in practical theology. Similarly, discovering the attitudes and perception of professional ministers concerning intergenerationality would be useful, as it cannot be established in a church unless the ministers and church leaders consider it a core value (Snailum, 2013).

Conducting methodological analysis of discipleship in congregations would also be beneficial in understanding what is working and what is not. Such research could inform practitioners as well as seminary institutions on the best kinds of methods to use, as well as what principles such methods are based on.

Further research could also be done concerning a comparison between the shared developmental stages of each of the generations; where possible. This is worth considering since regardless of the historical standpoint of each generation, every generation goes through similar developmental stages.

Another comparative research study could revolve around understanding how individuals of similar temperaments and learning styles could bond despite being from different generational backgrounds. This would be a means of strengthening intergenerational relationships from a trait and interest perspective.

In order to understand the relationship between Compassion and wellbeing with greater clarity, a different scale could be used which assesses acts of service rather than emotion. Further, the Participation in Spiritual Activity Scale could be bolstered by including a sub-scale for gratitude and hope. By doing this, a much better understanding regarding discipleship and its components in regard to their relationship to the various forms of wellbeing can be hopefully achieved.

Finally, further research in understanding the perspectives of each generation concerning discipleship, wellbeing, and ministry would be beneficial. While there are several books on this topic that are available, such perspectives are in constant flux as each generation matures and new generations join the ranks of leadership.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of an individual's level of social and spiritual connectedness on their wellbeing as they are discipled in an intergenerational congregation. A mixed-methodology was pursued using interviews and questionnaires in order to triangulate the data using 545 participants in 11 congregations between the Hunter Valley region of NSW in the north to Wollongong, NSW in the south. The data supported the hypothesis that intergenerationality would positively impact both discipleship and wellbeing and that being actively engaged in the discipleship process would positively impact wellbeing.

It is therefore recommended that creating or seeking an intergenerational context within a Christian congregation be pursued for the sake of being properly discipled and improving one's wellbeing. This is not to say that there are no avenues to achieve these goals,

but this study has found such contexts to be favourable towards flourishing as a Christian individually and as a community.

APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORMS

Appendix A1: Parental Consent Form – Interview



ADOLESCENT INTERVIEW INFORMATION

Assessing the Impact of Discipleship on Wellbeing in Intergenerational Congregations

Dear Parent/Guardian,

The purpose of this letter is to request your permission for your child (aged between 16 – 18) to take part in a interview that is part of a research study that aims to assess how they perceive how the different generations in your congregation relate to each other and what the impact this has on discipleship and wellbeing. The ultimate purpose of this study is to determine what impact discipleship has on wellbeing in intergenerational congregations.

Data will be collected through an interview of around 20-30 minutes duration. This interview will take place at your convenience either at an address of your choice or if necessary via Skype.

Your child is free to change their mind and withdraw at any time. Refusal or withdrawing will not in any way affect your relationships with your congregation or Avondale College of Higher Education (Australia).

All information will be confidential. Interviews will be digitally recorded and no actual names will be used in my thesis or any ensuing publication.

If you are willing as a parent or guardian for your child to take part in this project, please sign the attached participant consent form. Please first discuss this with your child to make sure they are also willing to be part of this interview. Please have them sign below as well.

For further information please contact Pr. Joe Azzopardi at the following address.

Pastor Joe Azzopardi
 School of Education, Business and Science
 Avondale College of Higher Education
 PO Box 19, Cooranbong
 NSW, 2265
 Australia
 Email: joseph.azzopardi@avondale.edu.au
 Phone: 0474 826 379

This research project has been approved by the Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Avondale College requires that all participants are informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted it may be given to the researcher, or if an independent person is preferred, to the College's HREC Secretary, Avondale College, PO Box 19, Cooranbong, NSW, 2265 or phone (02) 4980 2121 or fax (02) 4980 2117 or email: research.ethics@avondale.edu.au.



PARENT/GUARDIAN & ADOLESCENT CONSENT FORM

Assessing the Impact of Discipleship on Wellbeing in Intergenerational Congregations

I understand that my child has been asked to participate in an interview that is part of a research project undertaken by Pastor Joe Azzopardi - Avondale College of Higher Education.

I have been given information about the research project and I have been provided with the opportunity to discuss this project with Pastor _____ of _____(church). I understand that if I have any more questions I can contact Pr. Joe Azzopardi.

I understand that:

- My child may be requested to take part in an interview.
- They or I can withdraw at any time without penalty during project.
- Their participation in this research is voluntary and that my child or myself can refuse to participate and we are free to withdraw from the research at any time.
- Our refusal to participate or withdrawal of consent will not affect our relationship with Avondale College of Higher Education or _____(church).

I have been advised of the potential time elements associated with this research and have had an opportunity to ask any questions I may have about the research and my participation.

If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted I am aware I can contact Pastor Joe Azzopardi in the first instance, and if unresolved the Avondale's HREC secretary.

This research project has been approved by the Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Avondale College requires that all participants are informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted it may be given to the researcher, or if an independent person is preferred, to the College's HREC Secretary, Avondale College, PO Box19, Cooranbong, NSW, 2265 or phone (02) 4980 2121 or fax (02) 4980 2117 or email: research.ethics@avondale.edu.au.

Parent or Guardian's Name: _____

Parent or Guardian's Signature: _____

Child's Name: _____

Child's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix A2: Parental Consent Form – Questionnaire



PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

Assessing the Impact of Discipleship on Wellbeing in Intergenerational Congregations

I understand that my child between the ages of 16 and 18 has been asked to participate in a questionnaire for a research project undertaken by Pastor Joe Azzopardi - Avondale College of Higher Education.

I have been given information about the research into how different generations in church congregations interact with each other, and how their relationships influence their spiritual and psychological wellbeing.

I understand that:

- Their participation in this questionnaire is voluntary and that my child or myself can refuse to participate.
- Our refusal to participate will not affect our relationship with Avondale College of Higher Education or my local church.

Many thanks for your help. By filling out this consent form, you are consenting for your child to participate in this study.

If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted I am aware I can contact Pastor Joe Azzopardi in the first instance, and if unresolved the Avondale's HREC secretary as detailed below.

This research project has been approved by the Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Avondale College requires that all participants are informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted it may be given to the researcher, or if an independent person is preferred, to the College's HREC Secretary, Avondale College, PO Box 19, Cooranbong, NSW, 2265 or phone (02) 4980 2121 or fax (02) 4980 2117 or email: research.ethics@avondale.edu.au.

Parent or Guardian's Name: _____

Parent or Guardian's Signature: _____

Child's Name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix A3: Adult Consent Form – Interview



ADULT INTERVIEW INFORMATION

Assessing the Impact of Discipleship on Wellbeing in Intergenerational Congregations

Dear Church Member,

My name is Pr. Joe Azzopardi, and the purpose of this letter is to request that you take part in a research study that is part of my doctoral program. This study aims to determine what impact discipleship has on wellbeing in an intergenerational congregation. I am doing this project with a research team at Avondale College of Higher Education. In specific terms, I am seeking your perception of how the different generations in your congregation relate to each other, and to what the extent this impacts discipleship and wellbeing.

Your participation in this project will include an interview of around 20-30 minutes duration. This interview will take place at your convenience either at an address of your choice or if necessary via Skype.

You are free to change your mind and withdraw at any time. Refusal or withdrawing will not in any way affect your relationship with your congregation or Avondale College of Higher Education (Australia).

All information will be confidential. Interviews will be digitally recorded and no actual names will be used in my thesis or any ensuing publication.

If you are willing to take part in this project, please sign the attached participant consent form.

For further information please contact Pr. Joe Azzopardi at the following address.

Pastor Joe Azzopardi
 School of Education, Business and Science
 Avondale College of Higher Education
 PO Box 19, Cooranbong
 NSW, 2265
 Australia
 Email: joseph.azzopardi@avondale.edu.au
 Phone: 0474 826 379

This research project has been approved by the Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Avondale College requires that all participants are informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted it may be given to the researcher, or if an independent person is preferred, to the College's HREC Secretary, Avondale College, PO Box19, Cooranbong, NSW, 2265 or phone (02) 4980 2121 or fax (02) 4980 2117 or email: research.ethics@avondale.edu.au.



ADULT PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Assessing the Impact of Discipleship on Wellbeing in Intergenerational Congregations

I understand that I have been asked to participate in a research project undertaken by Pastor Joe Azzopardi - Avondale College of Higher Education.

I have been given information about the research project and I have been provided with the opportunity to discuss this project with Pastor _____ of _____(church). I understand that if I have any more questions I can contact Pr. Joe Azzopardi.

I understand that:

- I am being asked to take part in an interview (20-30 minutes duration).
- I can withdraw at any time without penalty during project.
- My participation in this research is voluntary and that I can refuse to participate, and I am also free to withdraw from the research at any time.
- My refusal to participate or withdrawal of consent will not affect my relationship with Avondale College of Higher Education or _____(church).

I have been advised of the potential time elements associated with this research and have had an opportunity to ask any questions I may have about the research and my participation.

If I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted I am aware I can contact Pastor Joe Azzopardi in the first instance, and if unresolved the Avondale's HREC secretary.

This research project has been approved by the Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Avondale College requires that all participants are informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted it may be given to the researcher, or if an independent person is preferred, to the College's HREC Secretary, Avondale College, PO Box19, Cooranbong, NSW, 2265 or phone (02) 4980 2121 or fax (02) 4980 2117 or email: research.ethics@avondale.edu.au.

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix A4: Adult Consent Form – Questionnaire



RESEARCH STUDY INFORMATION

Assessing the Impact of Discipleship on Wellbeing in Intergenerational Congregations

Dear Church Member,

A study is being undertaken that assesses how different generations in church congregations interact with each other, and how their relationships influence their spiritual and psychological wellbeing. This congregation has been selected to be one of several involved in the study. Part of the data collection for this study is through a questionnaire, which is to be filled out by church attendees who are aged 16 years and older.

Anyone between the ages of 16 and 18 are encouraged to participate in this study, however they will need to have their parents fill out a consent letter in order to participate.

These questionnaires are anonymous, and all information taken from the questionnaires will be kept confidential.

Many thanks for your help. By filling out the questionnaire, you are consenting to participate in this study.

For further information or concerns please contact Pr. Joe Azzopardi using the following contact details.

Pastor Joe Azzopardi
School of Education, Business and Science
Avondale College of Higher Education
PO Box 19, Cooranbong
NSW, 2265
Australia
Email: joseph.azzopardi@avondale.edu.au
Phone: 0474 826 379

This research project has been approved by the Avondale College Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Avondale College requires that all participants are informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted it may be given to the researcher, or if an independent person is preferred, to the College's HREC Secretary, Avondale College, PO Box19, Cooranbong, NSW, 2265 or phone (02) 4980 2121 or fax (02) 4980 2117 or email: research.ethics@avondale.edu.au.

**APPENDIX B: WELLBEING, INTERGENERATIONALITY, AND DISCIPLESHIP
ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Those interested in accessing the questionnaire must contact the author to make a request at: joeazzopardi77@gmail.com

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) What is your level of wellbeing? (the quality of your life).
- 2) What do you see as the major factors that impact your wellbeing?
- 3) Do you think mixing with other generations in life contributes to your wellbeing?
- 4) Do you believe being a Christian makes your life better? How?
- 5) What does it look like to be a follower of Jesus? Are you better off?
- 6) Why do you choose to be a part of your church community?
- 7) What does your church offer that would improve peoples' lives?
- 8) What about the unchurched. What does your church offer that would improve the life of someone who doesn't attend church?
- 9) How does your church community encourage you in your walk with Jesus?
- 10) Do you think being with other generations in your church makes it a better or worse experience for you?
- 11) Does mentoring take place in your church? If so, what does it look like?
- 12) What does it look like to grow as a Christian? What would that look like? How do we go about it?
- 13) What do you think it means to be faithful to God?
- 14) Why is love and compassion important for followers of Jesus?

APPENDIX D: CODING MATRIX

		Mentions		Participants			
Intergenerational Communities							
Making IG Work	Communication	9	5	IG Churches Are	Safe	8	6
	Being Together	9	5		Everyone's a Minister	11	3
	Tolerance	4	3		Inspiring Service	4	3
	Focus on Goal	3	1		Same Mission & Values	3	3
	Accepted: Treated Like Family - united	58	12		Respectful & Courteous	1	1
	God centred	24	10		Social Support	41	13
	Needs Focused	21	9		Physical WB Support	11	9
	Three E's	14	8		Brings closer to God	13	6
					Pray	6	6
					Learning, mentoring & Mentoring	9	5
			Help Financially	5	3		
			Mental WB Support	3	2		
			Family	8	6		
			Leading	8	5		
			Loving	4	2		
			Authentic	3	2		
			Friends	2	2		
			Growth	3	1		
			First encounter	1	1		
			Like Minded	1	1		
			Relationships with Others	53	13		
			Flourishing	21	13		
			Growing/Learning	43	11		
			Needs Met	32	11		
			Purpose/ Respect	13	6		
			Perspective	8	5		
			Relationship with God	11	4		
Picture of a Disciple							
Disciples Have	Hope/Peace	25	11	Disciples Are	Christ-Like/ Christ-centred	21	11
	Wellbeing/ Blessing	14	11		Faithful/ Follower	19	10
	Guidance & Accountability	11	8		Accepting/ Accepted	11	5
	Purpose/ Reason	10	7		Challenges Status Quo	8	5
	Community/ Support/ Accep	11	5		Trust/Peace/ Supported	10	4
	Transformation	5	4		Authentic/ Intentional	7	4
	Loving/ Selfless	45	13		Transforming	4	4
					Reliable/ Serving	4	3
					Inspired	2	2
					United	2	1
			Communicate with God	37	11		
			Help Needy	17	9		
			Witness/Share/Praise	11	7		
			Loves/Cares	9	6		
			Challenges/ is Challenged	9	5		
			Encourages	5	5		
			Obey God	6	4		
			Teachy/Equip/ Empower	3	3		
			Stand up for oppressed	3	2		
			Use their gifts	2	2		
			Change = Becoming Better	17	9		
			Change Happens	14	7		
			Change is Hard	10	6		
			Journeys aren't the Same	7	4		
			Change is Ongoing	4	3		
			Change Must Happen	3	3		
			Can only grow through God	1	1		
			Stagnant	5	5		
			Judgemental	4	2		
			Legalistic	3	2		
			Slander	2	2		
			Fake	2	1		
			Irrelevant	2	1		
			Don't Apologise	1	1		
			Selfish	1	1		
			Self-Sufficient	1	1		
			UnChrist-Like	1	1		
			Disciples Aren't				
Wellbeing							
Promote Wellbeing	Relationships	33	13				
	Spiritual	19	11				
	Health	16	9				
	Growth	3	3				
	Nature	2	2				

APPENDIX E: OTHER FINDINGS

Other Findings

Aside from the findings of the research question pursued in this study, other data from the interviews has been found which sheds light on two relevant topics in relation to practical theology. From the interview data, the themes '*Picture of a Disciple*' as well as a '*Picture of a Healthy Church*' have emerged. These two themes will be explored in how they relate to Christianity.

Appendix E1: Picture of a Disciple

At the heart of Christianity is Christ, and specifically is the concept of following him in thought, emotion, and behaviour (Camp, 2008). Authenticity as a follower of God is profusely discussed throughout the New Testament (particularly the gospels) while hypocrisy is often a primary subject of rebuke from Jesus and his apostles (Bonhoeffer, 1959). Interestingly, the concept of authenticity as explored when comparing being a nominal Christian versus a disciple is still a source of both discussion and research today (Himes, 2011; McCrindle et al., 2017; Putman et al., 2013a; Roennfeldt, 2017; Taylor, 2013). This being the case, the present study speaks regarding what the fourteen participants interviewed believed a disciple of Jesus looks like in practice. Specifically, the participants described a disciple in terms of what disciples are and are not, what disciples do, what disciples have, and how disciples change.

Disciples Are...

Table A.1 denotes the descriptions given regarding what the participants believed a disciple was like. A total of 11 characteristics were used when describing the category of what disciples are in the theme of '*Picture of a Disciple*.' While three of these characteristics are discussed far more profusely than others, all twelve characteristics find support in the scriptures. To start the discussion, the most popular characteristic according to the interview data which describes what disciple are like will be explored: Disciples are Loving.

Table A.1
Picture of a Disciple - Disciples 'Are'

Disciples Are...	Mentions	Participants Cited
Loving	45	13
Christ-Like / Christ-centred	21	11
Faithful	19	10
Accepting / Accepted	11	5
Challenges Status Quo	8	5
Trust / Peace	10	4
Authentic / Intentional	7	4
Growing / Transforming	4	4
Responsible / Serving	4	3
Inspired	2	2
United	2	1

The characteristic of '*loving*' to describe what a disciple is was cited 45 times by 13 of the participants in the interviews; this is particularly notable given that all but one mentioned this characteristic. Considering Jesus summed up the commandments of the Bible through the use of the concept of compassion and lived a life in complete service to others it is not surprising (Mark 12:30-31, 1 John 3:16). Two examples given by participants regarding the discipleship characteristic of compassion are as follows:

"I think love is like an unspoken thing, where you just like... everyone feels love and when people go oh, I don't love that but it's just this undenyng ability to just love people. And being a Christian is all about just loving people, and walking with people, and loving God, and trusting in God. And so, I think that love is just everything like God is love and so I think that you can't really live life without love. If that make sense, whether like your love is misplaced or not, it is still love." ~ C3 ML

“Love is absolute essential core of everything about being a Christian. It is why, Jesus came, it is why Jesus was willing to die. It is the absolutely... If you do not grow your faith, you can have your religion, but it lacks love, and to me, it is nothing without love. You know, love God first and love fellow man second, that is what it is all about.” ~ C7 TR

Both participants express that love (compassion) is at the heart of following Jesus, and it is therefore one of the best pieces of evidence that someone truly is a disciple of Christ. A compassionless Christian is a Christian in name only according to the participants. This matches the description expressed by Bloesch, Elowsky & Oden, and others reflected on page 28.

Another characteristic, ‘*Christ-like/Christ-centred*’ was mentioned 21 times by 11 participants. This code concerns the concept that a disciple is someone who has the characteristics of Jesus and intentionally puts Jesus at the centre of their rationale for what they do. This characteristic is also at the heart of discipleship much like being loving is, since the characteristics of Jesus are characteristics of compassion; these are listed in Galatians 5:22 – 23 as spiritual fruit. Additionally, Ephesians 4:15 states that a disciple should become like Jesus. Evidence taken from two of the participants which reflect this understanding are as follows:

“I guess to me [following Jesus] is having that sort of a Christ-centred life and living how - trying to as best I can live my life in the way that Christ would want me to live it. If that means helping someone out with something, then I try and make that effort. If it means, if it involved a sort of doing interview with [the author] to help him out with some research on things, then that is the sort of thing that I sort of look at. And I think it is different for everyone, but [thinking noises]... I think it is a desire with... to sort of be closer to God, to have a life that certainly is focussed around or focussed on him, in little ways in sharing that with the people that you come in contact with, in the things that you do in any part of your life.” ~ C5 ML2

Here the participant talks about how decisions should be based on what Jesus would want him to do, showing Christ-centeredness. This Christ-centeredness is a means of becoming closer to both other people and God himself. This again echoes back to Chapter 2’s section on discipleship referencing authors such as Bonhoeffer and Camp on pages 26 and 27.

The next excerpt to be shared is a conversation with a Baby Boomer who recalls an old television show called, ‘Kung Fu’ where the main character (an immigrant who is a Kung Fu master) though not Christian actually has many of the characteristics that the participant sees Christ as having:

Interviewer: “What would you say it looks like to be a follower of Jesus?”

Participant: “What it looks like... What it looks like... I don't know if you remember a show called Kung Fu? There was an American television show set in, during the gold rush I guess, and there was a Chinese fellow... he was a very powerful man, a Kung Fu specialist... He was very peaceful, very humble, very - wise man. And with the people and the locals he would always find himself in lot of trouble. [But] he would always approach that with grace, and with peace, and with calm, trying to defuse the situation until he had no other choice but to defend and it was always defence. It was never attack... I actually found it a very good example of storytelling which sort of personifies who Christ would have been [like]. He was very quiet, he was bold when he needed to be, he had grace, he had peace, he had calmness and he exuded the calmness and the peace about himself and assuredness and strength, a quiet strength... I think a Christian would exhibit that... When someone is [in] that space, where they think, ‘there is something different with that guy or that woman’ they'll have something when it comes back to the Bible verse - how does it go? I want what she's got or what he's got?”

Interviewer: “We will know them by their fruit?”

Participant: “We will know them by their fruit, yeah. What is it about them? What is [it] about these people? I am sure you see it, I think [there] isn't enough of it in Christendom - you can't tell that someone's a Christian straight up. I guess it is not to be expected, but you sit there and you start talking to someone - is there something different about you? I guess it is not until you get in this space, but you can recognise [it]. I think that's what should differentiate a Christian from a non-believer.”

Interviewer: “So, from what you said it sounds like a Christian would be exhibiting the qualities that Jesus had?”

Participant: “Yeah”

Interviewer: “That be peaceful, someone who stands for justice?”

Participant: “That they will have an assuredness about themselves, they would have a confidence about them. That would be a quiet confidence, and strength, and – yes, they would be gracious and honest. There will be integrity. I don't think they'd get drawn into the other conversations that go on around the place I mean, stand back... There'd be a difference in telling. If you put in a nutshell it is exhibiting the qualities of Christ.”

From these the excerpts so far then, a large part of the picture of a disciple is being like Jesus, through the characteristics of compassion which Jesus had. A disciple should stand apart from the regular person by their behaviour and actions. These qualities are based in having a Christ-focussed lifestyle, where many decisions are based on choosing what Jesus would want an individual to choose. This is again a reflection of Chapter 2, an example of which is on pages 29 – 30.

'Faithful' was another noteworthy characteristic of what disciples are. This was discussed at length in the previous sections, but to emphasise it as a characteristic as viewed by the participants it should be noted that it was cited 19 times by 10 participants when asked, 'what does it look like to be a follower of Jesus?' Therefore, without the need to repeat previous discussions it can be said that being faithful to God is what disciples are as well.

As to the rest of the characteristics, Table A.2 gives evidence to support that disciples are also trustful of God and feel supported, they feel accepted by God and therefore accept other people, they challenge the status quo and seek justice for the oppressed, they are authentic and intentional, they take responsibilities and serve, they grow and transform, are inspired by God, and are united as disciples.

It is also worth noting that participants also mentioned what disciples were not. While this category was much smaller than others, it is still worth noting – particularly alongside what they have said disciples were. Table 6.23 gives the details of the evidence that express that disciples are *not* stagnant, judgemental, legalistic, fake, irrelevant, slanderous, unapologetic, selfish, self-sufficient, and unlike Jesus.

Table A.2

Picture of a Disciple - Disciples 'Are Not'

Disciples Are Not...	Mentions	Participants Cited
Stagnant	5	5
Judgemental	4	2
Legalistic	3	2
Fake	2	2
Irrelevant	2	1
Slanderous	2	1
Unapologetic	1	1
Selfish	1	1
Self-Sufficient	1	1
Unlike Christ	1	1

Disciples Do...

Just as a description of a person is not only a reflection of who they are but also what they do, so does the 'Picture of a Disciple' require activity that couples with characteristics. This understanding is noted by Jesus in Matthew 25, when describing the difference between the sheep (those who are his true followers) and the goats (those are only Christian in name). This understanding was reflected by the participants, as their description of a follower of Jesus included behaviour and action. Such verbs expressed by the participants have been allocated into a category called, 'Disciples Do...' which includes 10 actions that disciples undertake regularly. Table A.3 describes what the participants expressed as what disciples do.

Table A.3

Picture of a Disciple - Disciples 'Do'

Disciples 'Do'	Times Mentioned	Participants Cited
Communicate with God	37	11
Helping the Needy	17	9
Witness/Share/Praise	11	7
Loves/Cares	9	6
Challenges/ is Challenged	9	5
Encourages	5	5
Obey God	6	4
Teach/Equip/ Empower	3	3
Stand up for oppressed	3	2
Use their gifts	2	2

At the top of the list is the action of, ‘*Communicating with God*’ which was mentioned by 11 of the participants a total of 37 times. This specifically pertained to all types of communication with God which comprised mostly of Bible study and prayer; along with some unspecified remarks about communicating with God. As discussed previously in Chapter 2 by authors such as Morrison, Bolst and Keener on pages 22 – 24, this is an important aspect of being a disciple.

In terms of specific expressions from participants, the following are excerpts from two participants:

“Our attention really needs to be on God, our attention really needs to be on something to walk with God by praying daily, by studying God’s word daily, by spending time listening to God, I think that’s a big one as well like seeing what God has to say, the walking in the truth that we know to this point, and I think that’s another big one.” ~ C5 ML1

“And I think, I was hearing something recently - discipleship is actually just walking - we call it walking with Jesus and I'm not saying I've nailed that perfectly, but I suppose that as my faith develops I think I am learning more that it can be actually just being still and listening, and trying to say, "what about this situation God, where do you want me to go here?" At other times it can be you know, reading the word, but there is a multitude of ways in which I can get in a place where I can hear from God that influences where and what, then how I do, but ultimately, it's that walk, it's that daily kind of relationship.” ~ C3 GX

Interestingly, while both participants are from two different congregations, two different generations, and two different denominations they are speaking in the same manner. Both use the term, ‘walking with Jesus’ as a way of conveying a friendship with Jesus that involves everyday communication. It is worth noting that communication does not just go in one direction with God, but two. Conversing through prayer involves both speaking and listening. Such conversation is where their guidance comes from, as does reading the word of God.

Another aspect to what “Disciples Do...” according to the data is ‘*Helping the Needy.*’ Items within this category were reported by nine participants a total of 17 times. Specific things that have been mentioned range from running a homework club for underprivileged children to helping a struggling family with groceries, along with several general help items. As a disciple is supposed to imitate Jesus, it is fitting that this has also been highlighted as Jesus is renowned for helping people in a variety of ways from his earthly

ministry. This was spoken of in several sections of Chapter 2 by authors such as Himes and Elliott on pages 21 – 22, and Longenecker with others on pages 29.

One participant specifically used the term, ‘being the hands and feet of Jesus’ when discussing what a follower of Jesus looked like, which shows an understanding of imitating the ministry of Jesus.

A couple of reflections given by participants as to what disciples do are as follows:

Interviewer: “...What would you say following Jesus looks like, what does it look like to be a follower of Jesus?”

Participant: “Well, [Jesus] spent a lot of his time mixing with people, serving them, healing them and he preached too but he spent a lot of time in meeting their needs and hence revealing the character of the trinity.” ~ C8 TR

“So, if something would go wrong in your house, somebody from your friendship circle would immediately go out and go online and say, "Listen, this person's in trouble at the moment, they need food for a week." And they would get onto the meal train and deliver food for that week, or "this guy's gone out of work, let's all pray together for work and in the meantime, who's going to do groceries for this person?" So that's just the day to day thing. I mean, people get sick, die and the kids need taking around, they do school runs, they do pick up, they do caring, and then also we've gone through a lot of things like the chook program, depression recovery, Cooking classes that kind of thing which is really great, so that's yes for health, for health.” ~ C8 BB

Both examples present a different perspective with the same sentiment. The first uses the example of how Jesus behaved, while the second reflects the same thought but shows how the disciples in her congregation act it out in real time.

The other things disciples do according to the participants was witness and praise God, challenges other and is challenged by God, shows compassion for others, obeys God, encourages others, teaches and empowers others, stand up for the oppressed, and uses their spiritual gifts. The details of these can be seen on Table A.3.

Disciples Change

One of the three characteristics of the discipleship process is that of Spiritual Growth; as discussed in Chapter 3 and assessed as a scale in the questionnaire data. The participants agreed with this understanding as reflected in the interview data as a category within,

“Picture of a Disciple” also emerged as ‘Disciples Become...’ One of the most mentioned aspects of ‘Disciples Become...’ is regarding the concept that disciples are becoming better; mentioned by nine participants a total of 17 times. The following are two examples of such sentiment given by participants:

“I think as you grow you should be [...] more comfortable about what you believe in how to articulate that... as you get older [...] you mature in your faith... my faith journey became richer... you’re just continue to push it and go deeper and deeper.” ~ C3 GX

“more sense of who God is, a deeper sense of where I am in the story and what my part is to play... constantly being transformed from glory to glory ...you become more aware of Him and as you become more aware of who you are... you become more whole and more transformed and what have you.”C3 BB

Notice the words such as, ‘grow’, ‘more’, ‘mature’, ‘richer’, ‘deeper’ which imply improvement taking place from being a disciple. The use of the Bible phrasing, ‘glory to glory’ also gives a sense that a follower of Jesus is changing for the better – at least in the spiritual, cognitive and affective sense. This echoes to pages 27 – 28 among others using authors such as Fowler.

Participants also expressed that transformational change is inevitable as a disciple of Jesus, change is hard, every follower of Jesus has a different journey, the change is ongoing, it must happen, and it can only truly take place through God; specific details are shown on Table A.4.

Table A.4

Picture of a Disciple - Disciples 'Become'

Disciples 'Become'	Times Cited	Participants Cited
Becoming Better	17	9
Change Happens	14	7
Change is Hard	10	6
Different Journeys	7	4
Change is Ongoing	4	3
Change Must Happen	3	3
Can only grow through God	1	1

As reflected by the accounts of the participants in the categories of 'Disciples Are...', 'Disciples Do...', and 'Disciples Become...' a picture is formed of what a follower of Jesus is. In addition to this, a category named 'Disciples Have...' was also included in the 'Picture of a Disciple' theme, however the aspects contained within this have been discussed at length as it reflects many points concerning wellbeing. These are described on Table A.5.

Table A.5

Picture of a Disciple - Disciples 'Have'

Disciples 'Have'	Times Mentioned	Participants Cited
Hope/Peace	25	11
Wellbeing/ Blessing	14	11
Guidance & Accountability	11	8
Purpose/ Reason	10	7
Community/ Support/ Acceptance	11	5
Transformation	5	4

Having reflected on this Picture of a Disciple, it can be considered useful as how followers of Jesus are perceived – at least by those who see themselves as followers themselves. Interestingly, through the interviews yet another picture was formed related to discipleship which will now be explored: Picture of a Healthy Church.

Appendix E2: Picture of a Healthy Church

Local congregations are meant to be both a community for disciples and a community which produces disciples (De Waal, 2017). As such, it is worth hearing what the participants thought that a healthy church looked like; church in this case meaning a congregation. The theme called, ‘Picture of a Healthy Church’ has emerged through the words of the participants, which gives a perspective of what a healthy Christian congregation is like.

Reasons Why People Choose Their Congregation

When asked “why do you go to your church?” specific reasons were given by the participants, which help to understand what makes a healthy church. The most popular response was that of having family members going there as six participants mentioned it. Often in response to this question, participants mentioned their spouse or parents attending the congregation, or that it was good for their family. The other socially driven response was that of having friends in the congregation, though it was mentioned by just two participants. Relationships therefore are the biggest reason, especially when ‘friends’ is added with ‘family’. In one study, this reason was among the top reasons why Americans look for a new congregation, though it came out as the sixth reason why (“Choosing a New Church or House of Worship,” 2016).

The second most mentioned reason why a congregation was chosen was due to having a leadership role in a ministry. Five participants mentioned that they were leading or founding members of their congregation. This reflects a desire to be involved and have responsibility and has been argued by some to be a means of attracting and maintaining attendees in a congregation (Cole, 2010; Kidder, 2011).

The rest of the reasons given were only mentioned by two or less participants, however they are worth noting as they are reasons why some choose their congregation regardless. These participants stated that they attended their church because: it is loving, it is authentic, it helps them grow, it is the first church they ever attended, and the people are like-

mind. Bearing all the reasons that have been discussed in mind, a discussion on what the participants thought a healthy church looked like will now take place.

Healthy Churches Are...

Participants were asked several questions regarding their own congregation, two specific questions were “What does your church do that improves the lives of people?” and “How does your church community encourage you in your walk with Jesus?” Aside from these questions, participants also discussed aspects of both their own congregation and what they thought a congregation should be like. The most commented on characteristic given by the participants was labelled, ‘Accepting: Treated like Family/United.’ This is on a similar thread to pages 41 – 42 at the end of Chapter 2 discussing the importance of diversity, and much of what is discussed in Chapter 3 as it pertains specifically to what it means to be intergenerational.

Although not all fourteen participants mentioned the characteristic of being ‘Accepting: Treated like Family’, twelve did so overwhelmingly as a total of 58 comments were cited. Of the comments mentioned on this topic, several participants mentioned specifically that their congregation treated them or others like family. Two pieces of evidence are given as follows:

“I really like the atmosphere that we have at [...] church and the people there, it is easy to connect with people older and younger and it is like a big family. And so, having that big family, it is comforting and after a busy week, you always just want to spend time with family - and being away from home, being able to have this family here is kind of like a comfort safety net and I found at [my church], yeah... I feel like [my church] is pretty intentional in relationships... Just from the morning program, which is breakfast for people to just come in, it breaks down barriers if visitors come in and so, by doing that and getting people comfortable, you allow people to connect and once a connection is made, people come back. And I think that is something that they have done really well, and a fellowship lunch that happens every week, so it is like no one is ever left out or left behind. There is someone for someone.” ~ C7 ML

“it just felt so warm and accepting... it felt really like they just opened their arms up literally to whoever comes in... I think probably the main reason I choose [my church] and continue to choose [my church] is the sense of belonging and being understood... but then there is also just knowing that it is a church that it is a family... even though everyone is trying to do their best, if mistakes happen, they are almost celebrated and people having to go and I do not know it just feels that we are really safe community... you do feel like the whole church is putting their arms around you in acceptance you are part of us, that is obviously going to be beneficial... and people

specifically seeing God blessing or using people of certain ministry or certain group and that was really powerful and making everyone feel like a family.” ~ C5 GX

As can be seen in the two examples, both felt that one of the best things about their congregation was the fact that they were accepted and even treated as though the whole community was a family. As discussed throughout this paper, connectedness is an important aspect of wellbeing and the perception shown by the participants shows that it is very important reason for them.

Another characteristic of ‘Healthy Churches’ is that of being God-centred, as it was mentioned by 10 participants a total of 24 times. Considering that a Christian congregation is supposed to be built upon the teachings of Jesus, this is not surprising. Biblical texts such as Matthew 6:33, Hebrews 12:2, and 1 Timothy 4:13 exemplify the importance of having a God-centred quality for a discipleship-centred community. This is reflected in the writing of Harkness (2012) and is also seen as an essential strategy of churches that are ‘Growing Young’ in the research of Powell et al. (2016).

Two expressions of the same perspective are given:

“I suppose to always go back to what does the Bible say and what does Jesus say and what does that look like? And to be able to yes, connect and come together for worship but also what does that look like in terms of, I suppose we come under this... Our philosophy flows from... We want to reach up to God, we want to reach in together and value relationship together, but what does it mean? How do I reach out? How am I using what I’ve been given to actually reach out in my faith the others as well? So, it kind of enables me to not to just sit thinking all this is great, but to come to, to grow, to be fair to, and also to reach you out and to make sure we are living in active faith rather than a passive faith. So, I think personally it has provided a model that enables me to live out my faith in a real and a practical and authentic way and you know, whether it be the gatherings that we have on a Sunday to a life group that we have midweek, there is always a sense that we are wanting to grow and to journey deeper with God and each other. So, I think I suppose it is that active engagement, that active pursuing of God, I think is very important because it is not just what we turn out, we listen to someone giving a 30-minute sermon and we go back into the world.” ~ C3 GX

“We have an opportunity to, through sermons, to pointing out to your walk with God and to your relationship with Him. To seek Him every morning. Prayer meetings.” ~ C8 GX

Both voices express the importance of seeking God authentically. Seeking him every day gives light to the fact that the participant believes the pursuit of Jesus must be put as a high priority, not just once a week – and the word seek is one of action. The first participant

discusses at length the emphasis of such active pursuit, in that just accepting or believing cognitively is not enough. It may be seen that a difference between the membership of a congregation versus being a discipleship focused congregation exists; it is intimated that one cannot simply passively accept Jesus in such a community.

Several other characteristics of Healthy Churches were also mentioned, such as being needs focused, being an encouraging, empowering and equipping community, including every member of the community as a minister, being a safe place, being united in mission and values, having inspiring services, and being respectful and courteous to others. These reflect the qualities described in intergenerational communities on pages 57 – 61 in Chapter 3. The specifics of each of the characteristics are shown on Table A.6.

Table A.6

Picture of a Healthy Church - Healthy Churches 'Are'

Healthy Churches Are...	Times Mentioned	Participants Cited
Accepting: Treated Like Family	58	12
God centred	24	10
Needs Focused	21	9
Three E's: Empowerment, Encouraging & Equipping	14	8
Safe	8	6
Everyone's a Minister	11	3
Inspiring Service	4	3
Same Mission & Values	3	3
Respectful & Courteous	1	1

Healthy Churches Do...

Just as disciples take certain actions, so do 'Healthy Churches' according to participants. Healthy churches not only are places where cognitive learning and expression take place, but also a place where Christian practice occurs. The participants in the interviews

would concur with this, as they have given several behavioural aspects of what an healthy church does.

The most discussed action that ‘Healthy Churches Do...’ is quite reflective of what the Early Church was known for in his Earthly ministry, which is giving social support (Jacobus, 2012; Stark, 2011). ‘Social Support’ was mentioned by all but one participant interviewed, with a total of 41 expressions. A couple of excerpts are given as follows:

“Next week, we do another camp up at the [location]. We will have about thirty one kids who are always recommended by [government organisation] or [charity] or some other, so they come from pretty difficult backgrounds and the stories are heartbreaking, but you cannot do anything about that, but you can give them a week where they are treated with dignity, where they are shown love, where they are shown acceptance...some of those, we have at our homework club, and some of those we have at our [...] kids club that we have been running here.” ~ C3 TR

“We run a service thing which goes out to help people and we try reach the unchurched in that and so for someone who does not usually come to a church, but to know that the congregation, the family there is willing to help whenever they need help, something that if you did not have a church connection. It will be something that keeps you coming back because you have that relationship being built and then you know if you need a hand in anything there is a program set for that specifically...there is food if there is needed, sometimes financial help if people need to move houses or the house needs to be cleaned or someone they fall ill, cannot do certain things, yeah, we meet their needs if we are able to and if not we guess we try find a way of, reach out to other people who will be able to assist in that specific area.” ~ C7 ML

With both of these participants from two different congregations, serving their community seems to be a natural behaviour of their congregations. Whether it is helping disadvantaged children in the community or general help for local families, healthy churches seem to socially support those in need.

Of a similar nature, the next most commented on behaviour of healthy churches is that of Physical Wellbeing support, which was mentioned by nine participants a total of 11 times. Specific ways various participants mentioned their congregations aided with this was mostly through food provision and lifestyle education. It is also worth noting that two participants mentioned mental wellbeing support through the provision of depression recovery programs. Many comments made merge together the actions of social support, physical needs support, and mental wellbeing support. It is worth noting that both social and physical support is an aspect of discipleship discussed in Chapter 2 on pages 20 – 22 regarding social connectedness through Christianity.

While Mentoring and Modelling did not appear to play a significant role according to the regression analyses of the three wellbeing dimensions of spiritual, psychological, and social wellbeing (see Figures 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3), Mentoring and Modelling was discussed in relation to intergenerational congregations throughout the interviews. It is worth noting that the root word of ‘mentor’ was mentioned 96 times throughout the interviews, making it the 14th most common relevant word in the interview data. Mentoring and modelling have also been discussed on pages 66 – 67 as evidence of intergenerationality.

The specifics of how much of each behaviour was mentioned for the category of ‘Healthy Churches Do...’ is listed on Table A.7.

Table A.7

Picture of a Healthy Church - Healthy Churches ‘Do’

Healthy Churches Do...	Times Cited	Participants Cited
Social Support	41	13
Physical Needs Support	11	9
Brings closer to God	13	6
Pray	6	6
Training, Mentoring & Modelling	9	5
Help Financially	5	3
Mental WB Support	3	2

Benefits of a Healthy Church

Finishing off the ‘Picture of a Healthy Church’, the interviews yielded a category which expresses what ‘Benefits of a Healthy Church.’ As many of the items within this category have been mentioned previously, along with the excerpts expressed, a brief summary will be given.

According to the participants, the benefits of healthy churches are Relationships with Others, Flourishing, Growth/Learning, Needs Being Met, Purpose/Respect, Perspective, and Relationship with God. These benefits have been discussed in Chapter 3 under the section,

“The Benefits of An Intergenerational Congregation” found on pages 61 – 67. The specific details of each of these items are shown on Table A.8.

Table A.8

Picture of a Healthy Church – Benefits of a Healthy Church

Benefits of a Healthy Church	Times Cited	Participants Cited
Relationships with Others	53	13
Flourishing	21	13
Growing/Learning	43	11
Needs Met	32	11
Purpose/ Respect	13	6
Perspective	8	5
Relationship with God	11	4

Through the interviews, the data has painted a *Picture of a Disciple*. Unsurprisingly, the description of a disciple is akin to a description of Jesus, although there was no expectation of perfection given by the participants. Disciples were expressed as being loving people who centred their lives and decisions upon the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, being faithful, accepting, and peaceful, among other characteristics. Such persons also behave as Jesus did in communicating with God the Father in order to carry out acts of compassion such as helping the needy, witnessing, being a part of social justice, obeying God, and other behavioural aspects of Christ. Disciples are also individuals who change for the better over time, and who have hope, guidance, and a community of fellow believers.

The interviews also painted a *Picture of a Healthy Church*. It was revealed that most participants chose their local congregation due to being connected to family or friends who also attended, which is understandable as the data has found that healthy churches are accepting. As there were characteristics that encompassed the essence, behaviour and results of disciples, the same can be said for healthy churches. Such churches were described as accepting, God-centred, needs-focused, empowering, encouraging, diverse, and safe. Healthy churches engage in various kinds of support, training and equipping. Healthy churches result

in positive relationships, personal growth, needs being met, and other benefits for both individuals and communities alike.

In reflection of what a Picture of a Disciple and a Picture of a Healthy Church look like, it is worth considering that both are related to the picture of Jesus found in the Bible. The Picture of a Disciple could be considered to be a reflection of what Christ is like and therefore disciples should imitate Jesus in every way possible. The Picture of a Healthy Church is similar in that it is to be a community made up of disciples of Jesus, functioning as a space where people can go to get a glimpse of Jesus and perhaps become the people he would desire them to be.

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