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THE PAULINE CONCEPT OF DISCIPLESHIP AS A MODEL FOR ADDRESSING THE YOUTH DROPOUT IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY UNITED STATES OF AMERICA CHURCH.

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THE PAULINE CONCEPT OF DISCIPLESHIP AS A MODEL FOR ADDRESSING THE
YOUTH DROPOUT IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY UNITED STATES OF
AMERICA CHURCH.

PRESENTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY
IN THE BARNETT COLLEGE OF MINISTRY AND THEOLOGY
AT SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

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

BY

JACOB AL HASSAN

APRIL 2020.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE SIGNATURE PAGE

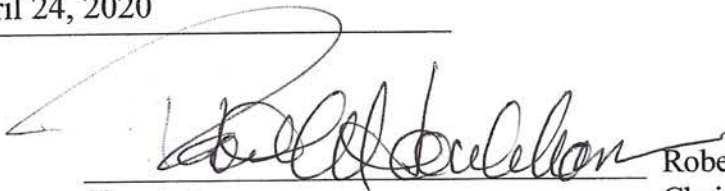
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under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Committee and approved by all members of the Committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Divinity in the Barnett College of Ministry and Theology at Southeastern University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry.

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ABSTRACT

The dropout rate of more than five million young adults from faith and church in the last decade, who were originally born and raised in Christian homes, has reached a critical point. The Christian community must rethink its discipleship methods in order to impact the youth of today.

The researcher explored the root causes of the problem and identified that the current discipleship assumptions and strategies, rooted in modern mechanistic mass production paradigm do not work. Therefore, these assumptions and strategies must give way to a personally crafted one-on-one relational fatherly mentorship interconnected approach for the faith formation of the youth of the Church in the United States. Existing research findings from Barna, Pew, and Fuller Institute indicated a crucial need for a new ecosystem of spiritual and vocational apprenticeship. This system can support deeper relationships and more vibrant faith formation and discipleship, which must be intentionally pursued by church leaders of today.

During the first century, the Apostle Paul, undoubtedly understood the concept of one-on-one relational mentorship. His discipleship efforts impacted significantly the lives of young adults like Timothy, Titus, Luke, and Onesimus, to name a few. Paul's influence on these young men was so impactful that his departure from active ministry following his arrest in Jerusalem did not affect negatively the growth of the church.

The researcher identified the great principles of the Pauline concept of discipleship, including love, relationship, fathering, and mentorship, and has employed these concepts to address the reasons youth gave for their disconnection from faith and church. These include, but are not limited to overprotective parents and leaders, shallow teachings, anti-science rhetoric, repressive bias, doubts, and exclusivity. Leaders of the twenty-first-century church in the United

States of America must innovatively adopt and incorporate the basic principles of the Pauline model of discipleship to end or at least minimize the current youth dropout rate.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to Al Hassan Adam, my late father, who never had the opportunity to obtain a formal education. He sacrificially devoted his resources to make sure that all my siblings and I had the chance to attain the highest education we could ever attain. He became a devoted follower of Christ in a predominantly Muslim community. He lived an exemplary Christlike life, leading us to Jesus, thereby leaving us a godly legacy and testimony in a hostile Muslim population of the northern region of Ghana.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am most grateful to the Lord for my life and salvation. God divinely orchestrated my life and made it possible for me to be born to Christian parents in a predominantly Muslim region of Northern Ghana, West Africa. My journey in this doctoral program would never have begun without the innovative Master of Arts in Ministerial Leadership (MAML) program, introduced by Southeastern University to help ministers already working in the field to acquire quality graduate, practical, and holistic knowledge in leadership.

Dr. Alan Elher, one of the leaders behind this innovative graduate program after witnessing my progress in the MAML, encouraged me to consider pursuing the Doctor of Ministry (DMIN) program. I am forever thankful to the Lord for using Dr. Elher to see the potential in me and, above all, encouraging me to pursue the divine mandate for my life. The relation between my doctoral chair and mentor, Dr. Robert Houlihan, and myself was perhaps a “match made in heaven.” His vast experience in foreign cultures brought to bear in his unique way of helping me sort out which of my African colloquium will be accepted and understood in a Western context. I am thankful to the Lord for his spiritual fatherly role to me throughout the process.

I am also thankful to the Lord for Dr. Jamie Stewart, my second reader, and content specialist. He provided invaluable criticisms and feedback that challenged me to produce a quality comprehensive project of excellence. Dr. Jim Vigil, Director of the DMIN program at Southeastern University, is the anchor that helped me refocus and brought together my ideas, which had the tendency to go in all directions. I’m forever grateful to Mrs. Rebecca Lloyd, of

River of Life Worship Center for painstakingly reading and correcting the initial drafts of the various chapters of this project.

I am indebted to David Kinnaman, President of the Barna Research Group, for permitting me to use the research data in his book, *You Lost Me*, as the primary source for this project. His most recent book, *Faith for The Exiles*, was also invaluable as it provided me with the most updated research findings on the critical youth dropout dilemma.

Finally, there is no way I could have accomplished the successful completion of this doctoral program without the unwavering support of my dear wife, Ivy, and my three sons, Philemon, Theophilus, and Titus. Their sacrificial support and encouragement were second to none. I am forever thankful to the Lord for their lives and look forward to the next divine chapter of our lives together.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

TERMS USED FOR GENERATIONS

1. **BOOMERS** were born 1946 to 1964.
2. **ELDERS** were born before 1946.
3. **GEN Z** were born 1999 to 2015.
4. **MILLENNIALS** or **MOSAICS** or **GEN Y** were born 1984 to 2002.
5. **GEN X** were born 1965 to 1983.
6. **BOOMERS** were born 1946 to 1964.
7. **ELDERS** were born before 1946.
8. **NONES** identifies as agnostic, atheist or “none of the above.”
9. **ENGAGED CHRISTIANS** identify as Christian, have attended church within the past six months and strongly agree with the each of the following.
10. **YOUTH** these from ages 9 to 20 years old.
11. **YOUNG ADULTS** from ages 21 to 29 years old.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AG	Assemblies of God
BSB	Berean Study Bible
ESV	English Standard Version
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
ROLWC	River of Life Worship Center
ROLC	River of Life Church (Name change from ROLWC to ROLC in January 2020)
KJV	King James Version
MSG	Message Bible

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The youth dropout rate from church and faith has escalated from 59 percent in 2011 to 64 percent in 2019 in less than a decade. There is ample evidence in the most notable Christian research findings from Burna, Fuller, and Pew that the current modern mechanized one size fits all method of discipleship has been ineffective. It has become crucial for the Church in America to discover a new organic one-to-one relational mentorship method of discipleship to replace the current less effective youth discipleship.

The purpose of this research is to employ the mixed research methodology to uncover the current socio-cultural complexities that account for the root causes of the youth disconnection from their childhood faith. The individual stories of these young faith dropouts will be revealed and classified under their appropriate headings. Since there is evidence in the New Testament that Paul was successful in discipling young adults like Timothy, Titus, and Onesimus, this study will identify the basic principles of the Pauline model of discipleship with the ultimate goal of applying it to address the youth dropout problem.

Rationale for the Project

There is no doubt that some people have questioned how a loving God could ever allow the amount of suffering and pain that exists in the world. This dilemma has become even more prevalent and daunting in the age of social media, where images of people in need are being

shared in real time. Walter Isaacson in one of his best-written biographies illustrated this situation:

Pastor, if I raise my finger, will God know which one I am going to raise even before I raise it? Thirteen-year-old Steve attended church every week with his parents. This particular Sunday, he had stayed after the worship service to ask his pastor this pressing question. The pastor replied, “Yes, God knows everything.” Haunted by the plight of African children suffering from dire famine, Steve then pulled out a Life magazine cover depicting two children tormented by starvation. He asked the logical follow-up, “Well, does God know about this and what’s going to happen to those kids?” The pastor gave a similar response: “Steve, I know you don’t understand, but yes, God knows about that.”¹

Kara Powell, lead researcher at the Fuller Youth Institute, in her book titled *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*, asked the following question, “If you were Steve, would you be satisfied with the pastor’s answer to your question?”² Steve was not. He walked out of his congregation that day and never again worshiped at a Christian church.³

Powell believes that the good—even remarkable—news is that Steve was drawn like a magnet to the faith community, and specifically to his pastor, for answers to the dilemmas that most troubled him. The bad—even tragic—news is that his pastor’s shortsighted response repelled him from the faith community permanently. Even more disheartening is that the pastor failed to grasp the question behind Steve’s question, similar to what happens to the young people in most congregations of the American church today.⁴

1. Walter Isaacson and Steve Jobs. *Steve Jobs* (London, England: Abacus, 2015), 14-15.

2. Kara Powell, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group 2016), 1211.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

Steve was not merely asking an existential question about the nature of suffering. Is it possible that behind Steve's rather esoteric inquiry about children in Africa were more personal questions about life and faith? Perhaps Steve wondered why God would allow the suffering he himself had experienced in his 13 years of life, which included bullying at school, financial struggles at home, and most painfully, being relinquished for adoption by his birth parents. As Steve was trying to make sense of the pain in this world, he wanted his pastor to understand and help him make sense of his own pain.⁵

Maybe you have heard of Steve. His last name is Jobs. Steve Jobs, founder and CEO of Apple, Inc., was a churchgoing teenager who wrestled with big questions. He sought out leaders in his church to help him discover the answers, but his church family failed to understand what he was really asking. Imagine if Steve had received a different answer from his pastor, one that led to a deeper discussion about faith rather than a conversational dead end, one that acknowledged Steve's curiosity about suffering in Africa, as well as his deeper questions about life goals, divine love, and his own place in the world.⁶

Powell wondered what would have happened if, instead, the pastor had replied to 13-year-old Steve, "That is a great question. How about if you and I and also your dad meet for breakfast this week and talk about it?" Or imagine if Steve's parents had been attentive enough to initiate a discussion with Steve, or that any adult had hit the conversational ball over the net to Steve instead of letting it slowly dribble off the court. Imagine if Steve Jobs had his questions taken seriously by his faith community, and he had later poured his entrepreneurial brilliance not

5. Powell, *Growing Young*, 1222.

6. *Ibid.*, 1223.

only into furthering high-tech interfaces but also into furthering the gospel and mobilizing others to respond to needs globally, the world could have been different today. Unfortunately, no adult provided convincing and compelling answers to Steve's questions. No adult looked beyond his words to understand the inner cries that sparked his deep dilemmas. As a result, Steve, like so many young people today who have similar questions unanswered by the church, walked away from both faith and the church community.⁷

In a startlingly similar language, for some reason, it appears young adults are reading from the same script when narrating their faith journeys. The stories of these young adults, according to David Kinnaman, President of Barna Research, include mostly substantial disengagement from church—and sometimes from Christianity altogether. But, it is not merely dropping out of church and faith that they have in common. Many young people who grew up in the church and have since dropped out do not hesitate to place blame. They point their finger at the establishment: *You Lost Me*.⁸

Within a five-year period (2007-2012), the dropout rate increased to more than five million young adult Christians from the American Church.⁹ The most recent data from Kinnaman's latest book, *Faith for Exiles*, indicated an increase in the dropout rate from 59% in 2011 to 64% in 2019. This increase is a clear indication that the situation has reached a crucial point. Therefore, the Christian community must rethink its discipleship methods if it hopes to

7. David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 9.

8. Ibid., 126.

9. Ibid., 70.

reach the youth of today.¹⁰ In his book, *You Lost Me*, Kinnaman highlighted how the 18 to 21-year-olds have "dropped out" from their faith. By his estimate, a good number of these young people who grew up in church, for the most part, have not entirely abandoned the faith but "are putting their involvement in church on hold. Significantly, one of the most important reasons why he found was that they could not connect their Sundays to Mondays."¹¹

The current assumptions and strategies, rooted in modern mechanistic mass production paradigm, must give way to a handmade one-on-one relational mentorship interconnected approach from the transference of faith to maturity in the faith. There is a crucial need for a new ecosystem of spiritual and vocational apprenticeship that can support deeper relationships and more vibrant faith formation and discipleship of the youth.¹² The goal of this research is to highlight the causes of the youth dropout problem by analyzing the existing credible qualitative and quantitative data available on the issue in order to make a compelling case that the youth dropout problem is a discipleship problem. The Pauline concept of discipleship will then be identified, and the basic principles used to resolve the youth dropout problem of the 21st century Church of America.

American Baptist Theologian, James Emery White, in his book, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World*, pointed to a recent survey of

10. David Kinnaman, and Mark Matlock. *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group), 2019.

11. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 10.

12. This paragraph, which is the thesis of the research and most of this "Introduction," was first developed for the "Theory and Practice of Ministry" Class PMIN 6013. A final research paper entitled "Youth Dropout from Church and Faith: Rethinking Youth Discipleship" was submitted to Dr. Alan Ehler.

35,000 Americans performed by the Pew Research Center, which found that the rise of the "nones" has grown to encompass 23 percent of America's adults. The implication is that nearly one of every four adults in the United States when asked about their religious identity would say "none." Furthermore, many who were once in the church are now leaving it. About 19 percent of Americans would call themselves "former" Christians.¹³

The generation being shaped most significantly by this aptly called Generation Z (Gen Z), will come to typify the new reality of a post-Christian world.¹⁴ There is no doubt that Generation Z will be considered as the first genuinely post-Christian generation, and numerically, the most significant and most influential religious force in the United States, thereby becoming the heart of the missional challenge facing the Christian church.¹⁵

Unfortunately, the realities of a post-Christian context for the American church have yet to be fully grasped, much less responded to adequately. The speed of the youth departure from faith and/or church consisting of the combined forces of Generations X¹⁶ and Z will inevitably

13. James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World* (Chicago, IL: Baker Publishing Group 2004), 11.

14. Generation Z is defined as those born.... etc.... Born: 1995-2012 Coming of Age: 2013-2020 Current Population: 23 million and snowballing. The Millennials' little siblings are growing up and growing up fast. This June 2019, the very first-Generation Z kids will finish college and enter the workforce. Born in 1995 or later with a very different outlook from their Millennial siblings, Gen Z is a smart, savvy, globally connected. <https://www.coursehero.com/file/p1e9s74/Generation-Z-Born-1995-2012-Coming-of-Age-2013-2020-Age-in-2014-9-19-Current/>. Accessed January 13, 2019.

15. White, *Meet Generation Z*, 12.

16. Born: 1966-1979 Coming of Age: 1988-1994 Current Population: 41 million Gen-Xers are often referred to as the first latchkey or daycare kids. As divorce became more acceptable and rates rose in the 1970s, and working mothers increased, Gen-Xers were left to look after themselves while both parents entered the workforce. <https://www.iacet.org/news/iacet-blog/blog-articles/do-you-know-the-difference-between-generation-x-y-z/> Accessed January 13, 2019.

challenge every church to rethink its strategy in light of a cultural landscape that has shifted seismically. Semiotician Leonard Sweet rightly called it the socio-cultural volcanic eruption.¹⁷ If the heart of the Christian mission is to evangelize and transform the culture through the centrality of the Church, then understanding that culture is paramount.¹⁸

More recently, according to an extensive survey performed by the Pew Research Center, the share of adults in the United States who identify as Christians fell from 78 percent to 71 percent between 2007 and 2014. The corresponding increase in those who identify as “religiously unaffiliated” (meaning atheist, agnostic, or “nothing in particular”) jumped by almost seven points, from just over 16 percent to 23 percent.¹⁹

According to Powell, this well-publicized “rise of the nones” varies by denomination. Mainline Protestantism, including the United Methodist Church, the American Baptist Churches USA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church USA, and the Episcopal Church, have experienced the most significant dip in numbers. From 2007 to 2014, mainline Protestant adults slid from 41 million to 36 million, a decline of approximately five million.²⁰

A recurring theme with dropouts in the Barna research is the idea that the Christianity they have been taught does not have much, if anything, to say about their chosen profession or

17. Leonard Sweet, *A World on Fire: Eruptive Faith in a Volcanic Culture* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2019).

18. White, *Meet Generation Z*, 12.

19. Pew Research Center, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” May 12, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

20. Powell, *Growing Young*, 189-190.

field of interests. Kinnaman posited, “It is a modern tragedy. Despite years of church-based experiences and countless hours of Bible-centered teaching, millions of next-generation Christians have no idea that their faith connects to their life’s work.”²¹

For example, Alex²² was a 24-year-old young adult who graduated from college two years ago and started his first job as a personal banker with a local bank. He was an enthusiastic young man who attended a vibrant Pentecostal church in the Fredericksburg, Virginia area and from time to time helped in the sound booth. But for a protracted period of time, Alex stopped attending church until quite recently, when one of the pastors of the church bumped into him at the local gym and asked why he no longer came to the church. He looked directly at the pastor and responded, "Pastor, I found it increasingly difficult to connect my Sundays with my Mondays, so I decided to do something else on my Sundays, but do not get me wrong I am still a Christian."

Kinnaman told similar stories, like Anna and Chris who are two such young people. After years of feeling disconnected, Anna was finally pushed away by the *fire and brimstone* sermon the pastor preached at her wedding ceremony. Chris is a former Catholic who became an atheist for several years, in part because of how the church handled his parents' divorce. Graham, a natural-born leader, was attending a program for Christian students. He confessed, "I'm not sure I believe all this stuff anymore. When I pray, I feel like I'm just talking to thin air."²³

21. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 207.

22. This name is a pseudonym—not the real name of the young man who had this encounter with this Researcher.

23. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 9.

Each story is unique, yet each one has much in common with the individual stories of thousands of other young adults. The details differ, but the theme of disengagement pops up frequently, often accompanied by a sense that the decision to disconnect was out of their hands. For instance, consider these comments by two young Catholic dropouts, compiled by Andrew Sullivan in an article he wrote for *The Atlantic* called "The Lost Catholic Church in America,"²⁴: "I wonder what percentage of 'Lost' Catholics feel like I do, that we did not leave the Church, but instead, the Church left us. I hung in for a long while, thinking that fighting from within was the way to go, but I ultimately realized that it was damaging my relationship with God and my relationship with myself, and I felt I had no choice but to leave."²⁴

It is not easy for parents and church leaders to hear similar themes emerging from such stories, as they have poured out much effort and prayer into young lives. Eerily similar are the stories of parents' descriptions of the you-lost-me phenomenon. An earnest mom, Stella, wanted to know what she should do about her engineering student son who, after being a committed Christ-follower his entire life, was now having significant doubts about the relevance and rationale of Christianity.²⁵

Kinnaman recounted the story of another Christian parent near tears because his 19-year-old son had announced he did not want anything to do with his parents' faith. The parent lamented, "I cannot explain the loss we feel about him. I am hopeful that he will return to faith because I see how good and generous, he is. His decision has been so difficult for his mother and

24. Andrew Sullivan. "The Lost Catholic Church in America" in *The Atlantic*. October 24, 2010. <https://www.theatlantic.com/daily-dish/archive/2010/10/the-lost-catholic-church-in-america/180848/>. Accessed April 10, 2019.

25. Ibid., 10.

me. And I can barely stand the way his negative choices are affecting our younger kids. It is all I can do not to ask him to leave our home."²⁶ This story presents an inherent problem that exists and which needs to be addressed by the Church.

There is no doubt that a generation of young Christians believers feel the churches in which they were raised are not safe and/or hospitable places to express doubts. Many feel they have been offered slick or *half-baked* answers to their introspective and honest questions, and they are rejecting the "talking points" they have encountered among the older generations. Their cry "You Lost Me" signals their judgment that the institutional church has failed them.²⁷

Whether their accusations are fair or not, the church must accept the fact that there may be some truth to it, or compassionately understand that the perception young people have is the faith reality they are processing.

Powell portrayed how the youth dropout problem affects most Sunday morning worship services in powerful and unique ways when she stated:

If your church is like many, you have bare spots. Holes created by the teenagers and young adults missing from your congregation. You see them on Friday night at the local movie theater and Saturday morning at the neighborhood coffeehouse, but they are absent from your Sunday morning worship services. These bare spots make your church feel incomplete. Maybe your congregation's bare spots represent more than just missing young people. Perhaps across generations your church isn't growing as you wish. You may be a senior leader trying to hide your disappointment as you stand to preach and think to yourself, "Where is everyone?" Or you're a church member noticing it's now easier to find a preferred parking space before your worship services. Regardless of your role, your church's energy and attendance aren't what they used to be or what you would hope.²⁸

26. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 10-11.

27. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 12.

28. Powell, *Growing Young*, 1174.

Most church leaders would concur with Powell, who strongly believes every church needs young people. Their passion enriches the soil around them. The curiosity they bring to Scripture and the authenticity they bring to relationships keep the church's teaching fresh and its fellowship fruitful. On the other hand, young people also need a thriving church, which both grounds them in community, and sends them out to serve.²⁹

Having built the compelling argument that the youth have virtually abandoned their faith, the research of the Fuller Youth Institute, however, revealed that all hope is not lost. According to Powell, young people, like in the story of Steve Jobs, who swim in the deep end of challenging cultural and developmental questions often view the church as merely splashing around in the shallow end. Or, worse yet, they perceive the older generation as standing on the pool deck, wagging their finger, and blowing a whistle at them in condemnation of who they are and what they do. She revealed that instead of staying on the deck, churches that grow young dive into the deep waters of teenagers' and young adults' lives. Both in young people's descriptions of their churches and in her research team's observations during site visits, empathizing with today's young people bubbled to the surface as a core commitment of growing young.³⁰

The Fuller Institute research revealed that churches that are intentionally and purposefully growing young are rewarded with a youth generation prepared to be not merely hearers of doctrine but doers of faith; they want to put their faith into action, and not only to talk (James 1:22-13 NIV). Arguably, many young dropouts may be stalled in their spiritual pursuits.

29. Powell, *Growing Young*, 1226.

30. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 175.

Yet, many of them who are pursued relentlessly by a growing young congregation are reinvigorating their faith with new ideas and new energy.³¹ While many may be incapable of reasoning clearly about their faith and unwilling to take risks for Christ's sake, with the right connection to the church community and the power of the Holy Spirit, they can be transformed into radical followers of Christ.

Gaps in Youth Discipleship

The spiritual shortcomings of the youth seem to be evidence of significant gaps in discipleship. The Barna Research Team has identified three central areas where these gaps are apparent, namely: relationship, vocation, and wisdom. These gaps are the areas where the church has God-given opportunities to rethink her approach to disciple-making.³² These gaps are similar to the areas Paul excelled in when discipling the young adults he encountered in ministry. The Pauline concept of discipleship will be employed in this study to develop new contextual discipleship, which calls for a complete paradigm shift characterized by these three essential important attributes—relationship, vocation, and wisdom.

1. Relationship

The evidence points to relationship as the most important and critical disciple-making gap. Richard M. Lerner's studies on youth development revealed that millennials are highly relational in many respects (especially when it comes to peers), and many have positive

31. Ibid., 12.

32. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 28.

relationships with their families. But the father relationship, which is the most crucial in positive youth development, has taken a serious hit in society today.³³ Is fatherlessness a problem? Some scholars do not think so. For example, Sarkisian and Gerstel, in *Nuclear Family Values, Extended Family Lives: the Power of Race, Class, and Gender*, argued that, “not only does a focus on marriage and the nuclear family miss a great deal of family life and denigrate poor and minority families, but it also facilitates social policies that discriminate against women, people of color, and the poor and thereby reduces the power of social policy to improve lives of Americans.”³⁴ In their view, father-led nuclear families destroy the critical ties of the extended family and “fictive kin,” which is what really matters.³⁵

Disagreeing with the opinion of Sarkisian and Gerstel, in his 2008 Father’s Day speech, President Barack Obama, who was raised in a single parent household by his mother, refuted such logic:

Of all the rocks upon which we build our lives, we are reminded today that family is most important. And we are called to recognize and honor how critical every father is to that foundation. They are teachers and coaches. They are mentors and role models. They are examples of success and the men who constantly push us toward it. But if we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that way too many fathers also are missing from too many

33. Richard M. Lerner, Jun Wang, Paul A. Chase, Akira S. Gutierrez, Elise M. Harris, Rachel O. Rubin and Ceren Yalin. "Using Relational Developmental Systems Theory to Link Program Goals, Activities, and Outcomes: The Sample Case of the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development" in *New Directions for Youth Development* 2014, no. 144 (2014): 17-30. Accessed August 20, 2019.

34. N. Sarkisian and N. Gerstel, *Nuclear Family Values, Extended Family Lives: The Power of Race, Class, and Gender* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), xii.

35. *Ibid.*, 3-4.

lives and too many homes. They have abandoned their responsibilities, acting like boys instead of men. And the foundations of our families are weaker because of it.³⁶

J.R. Barras echoed Obama's sentiments in *Whatever Happened to Daddy's Little Girl?* when she wrote:

By the time I was eight years old, I had already lost three fathers ... each one had abandoned me. Each one wounded me emotionally and psychologically. At an age when I was supposed to be carefree, brimming with happiness and laughter, I frequently felt a deep sadness, an abiding loneliness. Nothing seemed powerful enough to permanently soothe the agony I felt. ...A girl abandoned by the first man in her life [her father] entertains powerful feelings of being unworthy or incapable of receiving any man's love. Even when she receives love from another, she is constantly and intensely fearful of losing it.³⁷

Having worked with a Christian, non-profit organization that ministers to and serves homeless and at-risk families within the Fredericksburg area, the researcher can empathize with both Obama's and Barras's remarks, as the cycle of fatherlessness perpetuates itself from one generation to the next. In 2011, 67.8 percent of all African American children born in the United States were born to single-mother households.³⁸

The problem of fatherlessness is an epidemic that has far reaching implications.

Sociologist, family, and marriage advocate David Popenoe argued in *Families without Fathers: Fathers, Marriage and Children in American Society*, that fathers are one of the two most

36. Barak Obama, "Text of Obama's Fatherhood Speech," *POLITICO*, June 15, 2008, <https://www.politico.com/story/2008/06/text-of-obamas-fatherhood-speech-011094>. Accessed June 26, 2019.

37. Jonetta Rose Barras, *Whatever Happened to Daddy's Little Girl? the Impact of Fatherlessness on Black Women* (New York, NY: Random House Pub. Group, 2002), 1.

38. R.M. Shattuck and R.M. Kreider. "Social and Economic Characteristics of Currently Unmarried Women with a Recent Birth: 2011" in <http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/acs-2!.pdf>. Accessed August 20, 2019.

important role models in children's lives, and the decline of fatherhood and marriage cuts at the heart of the kind of environment considered ideal for childrearing. He insisted that the decline of fatherhood and marriage in America really means that slowly, insidiously, and relentlessly the society has been moving in an ominous direction—toward the devaluation of children.³⁹ The U.S. Census Bureau, in a July 1, 2012 publication, revealed that between 1960 and 2012 the percentage of children living apart from their biological fathers increased dramatically from 8 to 24.4 percent. Along with this statistic came a sharp increase in poverty, crime, abortion, teen pregnancy, high school dropouts, teen suicide, child abuse, and child molestation.⁴⁰

Gregory E. Lamb of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary asserted that also evident is a marked increase in cohabitation and overall devaluation of marriage and traditional views on family.⁴¹ He pointed out that before they reach the age of 18, more than half of the nation's children are likely to spend a significant portion of their childhoods living apart from their fathers. Blankenhorn believed that never before in this country have so many children been voluntarily abandoned by their fathers. Never before have so many children grown up without knowing what it means to have a father. Fatherlessness is the most harmful demographic trend of this generation.⁴²

39. David Popenoe, *Families without Fathers: Fathers, Marriage and Children in American Society* (Philadelphia, PA: Routledge, 2017), 13-14.

40. US Census Bureau, "The Extent of Fatherlessness," US Population, July 1, 2012, in <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/ch5.xls>. Accessed August 20, 2019,

41. Gregory E. Lamb, "Fatherlessness: Implications for God's Word, Church, and World" in *Christian Education Journal* 14, no. 1 (2017): 99-108. <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAIBCB170424001824&site=ehost-live&scope=site>, 102. Accessed August 18, 2019,

42. David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1996), 1.

What has happened to bring about this recent rise in fatherless families in American culture? Lamb pointed out the two factors that have contributed more than any other: the sharp increase of divorce-on-demand, and unwed births. Both of these difficult issues have a common root: the decline of the institution of marriage.⁴³

Fatherlessness exacerbates the dropout problem when young people erroneously equate the love of their earthly father to that of their heavenly Father. Similarly, young people who grew up in homes where the father was present have their own challenges when the concept of the love of God is misconstrued to be equal to that of their earthly father. Theologian, pastor, and author Timothy Keller, in *Every Good Endeavor*, talked of how many Christians in his congregation are Asian and feel quite pressured by parental expectation to achieve and succeed. He indicated that they often feel they are failing their parents. However, many young “Anglo” professionals in his congregation have grown up in a much more individualistic society and in many ways struggle with anger and bitterness towards parents who, they feel, have let them down and failed them.⁴⁴ Keller addressed this range of motivations in a single sermon, reminding people that the only parental love one can lose, and the only parental love one must have, is found in the ultimate, heavenly Father, who secured us through the saving work of Jesus Christ. Even though he was God’s Son, he was cast out and lost, so that humanity could be brought into the family of God. When young people are made to realize God did that for them, the love of the Father becomes the most precious and real thing to them.⁴⁵

43. Lamb, “Fatherlessness: Implications for God's Word . . .”

44. Timothy Keller and Katherine Leary Alsdorf. *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2016), iv.

45. Ibid.

Keller concluded, “when that happens if a young man was bitter because he did not get his parent’s love, he can afford to forgive them, because they have not impoverished him, he is rich in parental love from his heavenly Father. And those young people who are feeling like failures before their parents’ expectations can relax, because they have the approval of the only Father whose opinion counts.”⁴⁶

Many young people think that older adults do not understand their doubts and concerns, which is a prerequisite to rich mentoring friendships. In fact, a majority of the young adults interviewed by the Barna Research Team reported never having an adult friend other than their parents. There is the possibility for the church to rediscover the intergenerational power of the assembly of community of believer, the attainment of which will take determination and intentionality.⁴⁷

A great example of intentional mentorship is the National Church Adopt-A-School Initiative (NCAASI), which prepares churches across the country to impact communities by using public schools as the primary vehicle for effecting positive social change in urban youth and families. Leaders of churches, school districts, faith-based organizations, and other nonprofit organizations are equipped with the knowledge and tools to forge partnerships and build robust social service delivery systems. This training and mentorship program was established on the comprehensive church-based community impact strategy conducted by Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship, led by Dr. Tony Evans.⁴⁸

46. Ibid., 1466.

47. Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 1466.

48. Tony Evans. *Kingdom Disciples: Heaven's Representatives on Earth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers 2017), 2979-2983.

Through a mentorship program, they have effectively turned failing high schools in the Dallas, Texas area into successful, thriving schools, thereby transforming the lives of thousands of young people to Christ. The program also addresses such subjects as economic development, education, housing, health revitalization, family renewal, and racial reconciliation. NCAASI assists churches in tailoring the model to meet specific needs of their communities while simultaneously addressing the spiritual and moral frame of reference. Training events are held annually in the Dallas area at Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship.⁴⁹

A Barna research paper entitled "Three Spiritual Journeys of Millennials" revealed that millennials epitomize a *me-and-we* contradiction. To generalize, they are extraordinarily relational, but at the same time, remarkably self-centered. "We want to change the world! Look at me! Let's make a difference together! I want to be famous!" They want to be mentored, and they want to make it on their own. They want to do everything with friends, and they want to accomplish great things under their own capacity. These selfish and others-oriented contradictions will certainly affect the shape of Christianity in the coming decade, but in what ways?⁵⁰

The next generation seems to be consummate artists, able to blend a diverse set of relationships, ideas, and inspirations. Their knowledge and desire includes awareness of global issues as well as maintaining a connection with people across generations, religions, sexual orientations, and ethnic backgrounds. According to Kinnaman, they expect and relish diversity.

49. Evans, *Kingdom Disciples*, 2983-2985.

50. Barna Group. "Three Spiritual Journeys of Millennials" in <https://www.barna.com/research/three-spiritual-journeys-of-millennials/>. Accessed December 07, 2017.

The eclectic nature of this generation's relationships and values inspired George Barna to name them “Mosaics.”⁵¹

A 2014 Barna report found that young adults who continue their involvement in a local church beyond their teen years are twice as likely as those who do not to have a close personal friendship with an older adult in their church. Seven out of ten millennials who dropped out of church did not have a close friendship with an older adult, and nearly nine out of ten never had a mentor at their church.⁵² The crucial role relationship play in effective youth discipleship cannot be over emphasized, especially, as it has been established by the research findings that single mothers raise more than 24 percent of Gen Z. The Church will do well to incorporate mentorship into its youth discipleship programs. The second gap discovered in the Church’s youth discipleship is in the area of vocation.

2. Vocation

Vocation is that powerful, often ignored, intersection of faith and calling. Millions of Christ-following teens and young adults are interested in serving in mainstream professions, such as science, law, media, technology, education, law enforcement, military, the arts, business, marketing and advertising, healthcare, accounting, psychology, and dozens of others.⁵³ However, their frustration and eventual exodus from church partially stems from the little or no vocational direction the church offers them. Therefore, they find it difficult to see their secular jobs as a

51. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 29.

52. Barna Group. *Making Space for Millennials: A Blueprint for Your Culture, Ministry, Leadership, and Facilities* (Ventura, CA: Barna, 2014), 48.

53. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me* 29-30.

possible calling of the Lord, which explains why they complain they are unable to connect their Sundays with Mondays.

Most Christian youth receive little or no guidance from their church community on how to connect their vocational dreams sincerely with their faith in Christ. The story of Alex, the young adult from a church in Fredericksburg, Virginia, who found it increasingly difficult to relate his Sundays to his Mondays, confirms this point. It is also especially true for the majority of students who are drawn to careers in the fields of science, including health care, engineering, education, research, computer programming, and so on. These young Christians learn very little in their faith communities about how to live honestly and faithfully in a world dominated by science — much less how to excel in their chosen scientific vocation.⁵⁴

A related gap is the church's loss of "creatives," such as musicians, visual and performance artists, filmmakers, poets, skaters and surfers, storytellers, writers, and so on. In *You Lost Me*, Kinnaman introduced the reader to singers, comedians, writers, and filmmakers who have found it difficult to connect their creative gifts and impulses to church culture: "Frequently the modern church struggles to know what to do with right-brained talent."⁵⁵

What has traditionally been a fertile ground for the arts — the church — is now generally perceived as uncreative, overprotective, and stifling. Can the Christian community relearn how to esteem and make space for art, music, play, design, and (dare I say it) joy? Father Daniel Berrigan, speaking at a symposium hosted by the Thomas More Association and the Department of Library Science, Rosary College, Chicago, on June 9, 1967, stated: "Art, has a holy and

54. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 30.

55. *Ibid.*, 31.

historical function. Art gives insights.”⁵⁶ One wonders if the church today still holds such views about the arts. It is interesting to note that 52 years from the time of this symposium the church still seem to be grappling with the problem.

The Fuller Youth Institute research team deduced that, all too often, young people cannot get their “dream job,” or they do find their dream job and then get burned out. For some, the job they thought was a dream job turns out to be a dead end.⁵⁷ Fuller research indicated that, while almost one in five young people attempts to start or run a new business themselves,⁵⁸ the challenging vocational path that today’s young people explore can easily lead to broad disillusionment and lethargy.⁵⁹ Smith and Snell confirms the findings of Fuller’s research by indicating that although the young people at churches that grow young are often less jaded, since the majority of emerging adults in the United States are either consumed by, or disappointed with their own haphazard journey. Consequently, they become jaded realists who do not believe their efforts can move the needle to help others.⁶⁰

56. Maura Sister, "Creative Arts and Christian Renewal: A Symposium." *Theology Today* 24, no. 3 (October 1967) in <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-ebscohost-com.seu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0000715299&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. Accessed December 6, 2017,

57. Powell, *Growing Young*, 1546.

58. According to the Global Enterprise Monitor 2014 Global Report, 18 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds were starting or running new businesses. Babson College, “Entrepreneurship Rebounds Globally in 2014” in <http://www.babson.edu/News-Events/babson-news/Pages/2015-gem-global-report-shows-ambition-rising.aspx>. Accessed August 20, 2019,

59. Powell, *Growing Young*, 1546.

60. Christian Smith and Patricia Snell. *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 72.

Intergenerational vocational relationships can help resolve some of these frustrations when allowed to develop naturally in congregations that grow young. Two primary avenues through which churches strategically integrate generations, according to the Fuller Group, are mentoring and worship. Mentoring often develops through one-on-one discipleship, vocational guidance, or shared ministry work.⁶¹ A common example of shared work is adults and teenagers serving together in some skill-specific task in the church, such as kids' ministry, technology, or music. Some mentoring structures are more formal than others, but most include a level of intentionality in matching young people with adults who share interests and talents.

Others have noted the lack of vocational mentoring in the church as a significant problem to address, as it does relate to the retention of young adults. The Fuller Team discovered ample evidence that when young adults are given vocational mentorship by senior Christians in the area of their career interest, they avoid the mistakes that lead to career choice frustrations.⁶² These senior vocational mentors will often help the young adults see the link between their chosen careers and their calling, thus helping them connect their Sundays with Mondays.

The final discipleship gap to be considered is in the area of wisdom.

3. Wisdom

The third area in which the church must rethink its approach to disciple-making is helping the next generation learn to value wisdom over information. Generation Z has access to more knowledge content than any other generation in human history, but many lack discernment

61. Powell, *Growing Young*, 2474.

62. Powell, *Growing Young*, 2474.

for how to wisely apply that knowledge to their lives and world. The Barna Group 2016 research on the youth ministry revealed that young adults are digital natives immersed in a glossy pop culture that prefers speed over depth, sex over wholeness, and opinion over truth.⁶³ But it is not enough for the faith community to run around in exasperation, warning about the hazards of cultural entrapment.

Aly Hawkins, writing for the Barna Group, argued that God's children in the next generation need more and deserve better. She emphasized that making sense of and living faithfully in a rapidly changing cultural context requires massive doses of wisdom.⁶⁴ But what, exactly, is wisdom? In the ancient Hebrew understanding, it is the idea of skillful living. As such, wisdom entails the spiritual, mental, and emotional ability to relate rightly to God, to others, and to our culture.⁶⁵ Proverb 9:10 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Wisdom is rooted in knowing and revering the God who has revealed himself in Christ through the Scriptures.⁶⁶

Saying the prayer or memorizing a list of *dos and don'ts* or even attending a six-week program and signing a pledge does not make a young adult wise. What makes one wise is a lifetime process of profound transformation through faith in Christ, knowledge of God's word,

63. Aly Hawkins. *The State of Youth Ministry: How Churches Reach Today's Teens--and What Parents Think about It*. (Barna Group, Ventura, CA) 2016, 78.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., 79.

66. Ibid., 80.

and living by the power of the Holy Spirit. And, above all, engaging in the vibrant community of other believers.⁶⁷

This researcher will now focus on the contextual ministerial implications of this research.

The Researcher's Ministerial Context

This researcher's current role is to serve as Prayer and Discipleship Pastor at River of Life Worship Center (ROLWC) in Spotsylvania, Virginia, focusing on developing a sustainable and effective discipleship program to resolve the youth dropout problem.⁶⁸ The church believes it is living up to its mission statement, which is: *Discover, Develop, and Deploy*.⁶⁹ In the early months of 2017, the church revamped the Life Group Ministry, which provides a small group setting conducive for building relationships among members. ROLWC is moving towards its goal by increasing the number of groups and outlining specific weekly instructions that the

67. Ibid.

68. Information taken from the data compiled quarterly by the Church Secretary for ROLWC Records, sent annually to the Potomac District Network. The last ROLWC quarterly report of 2017, when this research began, recorded an average Sunday morning service attendance of over 1,000 adult worshippers, with over 200 children in its two-morning services.

69. ROLWC's website provides the following details of its mission statement 1. DISCOVER—Your Potential. The Bible teaches us to come together to pray, to worship, and to encourage one another. Each Sunday, we create an environment where you can experience God in a real way through passionate worship and practical teaching. At River of Life, Worship Services are a time for you to celebrate the greatness of God in a corporate setting. 2. DEVELOP—Your Passion. We believe that life-change happens best through relationships. We are passionate about providing opportunities outside of Worship Services for fostering community. At River of Life, Life Groups meet regularly and serve as welcoming environments for you to further develop your relationship with Jesus and others. 3. DEPLOY—With Purpose. We are passionate about reaching people who are far from God and helping them find new life in Christ. It is our desire to invite all people to experience the life-changing message of Jesus. At River of Life, we provide regular opportunities for you to use your gifts to spread the Gospel and make a difference locally, nationally, and globally, accessed 08/27/19. <https://rolwc.net/about/>

leaders must execute weekly to ensure the viability and health of the groups. Despite all the changes, not much was seen by way of congregational engagement for the desired orthopraxy for a Christ-centered discipleship.⁷⁰

ROLWC's website indicates that the purpose of its youth ministries is dedicated to coming alongside teens, college students, and young adults, with the cooperation of their parents' help, to establish them as Christ's followers. The demographics of the church reflect the age of the Lead Pastor; as a result, 60 percent of the members are between the ages of 35 to 55 years old, with about 15 percent of the membership being above 60 years old. The remaining 25 percent is made up of the youth and young adults.⁷¹ ROLWC has a vibrant youth ministry with a full-time Youth Pastor and a volunteer team who challenges the students to know God and walk obediently, teaching them how to study His Word and training them on how to operate in the power of the Holy Spirit. They provide discipleship through Bible studies, conferences, and camps.⁷²

The progress report of the church for the last quarter of 2017, when this study was initiated, indicated that, while Sunday morning service attendance between the first and second services increased by 15 percent, all other vital indicators showed a declining trend. For example, the small group settings, like the Adult Bible Fellowship (ABF) and Home Cell Groups of the church that provide opportunities for relationship building, recorded a 10 percent decline in attendance. The church holds a prayer meeting the first Sunday evening of every month, and

70. River of Life Worship Center ROLWC, Third Quarter Report of 2017 submitted to the Potomac Ministry Network.

71. River of Life Worship Center (ROLWC), Third Quarter Report of 2017.

72. "Youth • River of Life Worship Center." *ROLWC*, accessed April 06, 2018. <http://rolwc.net/ministries/student/>.

attendance was down by more than 12 percent as well. Over 100 people gave their lives to Christ during the last quarter under review, but only forty-five people proceeded to be baptized in water with not a single Holy Spirit baptism registered.

The Youth Ministry did not fare any better. The available records at the time of this study revealed a declining trend in youth participation in church activities. Using the involvement of last year's high school graduates as a measurement, there was evidence of a youth dropout from the church. Out of the fifteen students who graduated from high school, only five moved out of the area to attend college; however, only seven of those who remain are currently involved in church. Two of them have seemingly left the faith as a result of the separation of their parents through divorce. Even though the reason for this decline could be attributed to the departure of the previous youth pastor, and the six months it took for his replacement to be there, it cannot be wholly blamed for the current decline of the youth ministry. Generally, it appears there is a disconnect between the ROLWC's orthodoxy (right beliefs) and orthopraxy (right practice).⁷³ Steven Land asserted that "The personal integrating center of orthodoxy and orthopraxy is orthopathy, those distinctive affections which are belief shaped, praxis-oriented, and characteristic of a person."⁷⁴ Branson and Martinez defined this in the book *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities*, as the relationship that

73. Orthodoxy—Authorized or generally accepted theory, doctrine, or practice. Generally referred to as the “right doctrine” in <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/orthodoxy>. Accessed 08/27/2019.

Orthopraxy—Rightness of action (as distinct from or in addition to rightness of thought); “right-doing, practical righteousness; correct practice” in <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/orthopraxy>. Accessed 08/27/2019.

74. Steven Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press), 34.

exists between studying and reflecting about God and engaging in an activity that makes him relevant to His people.⁷⁵

There is virtually no link between the congregation's studying and reflections about God and their actions in making God relevant to them by being Christ-like. In short, this event is purely a case of "broken discipleship." Thus, the need for this study to identify the unique principles of the Pauline concept of discipleship that made it successful and then prayerfully apply these principles to begin a paradigm shift in ROLWC's discipleship efforts.⁷⁶

Contextual Scope and Limitations

The assumption that will support this research is *the youth dropout problem is invariably a discipleship problem*. After more than fifteen years of research into American faith,⁷⁷ Kinnaman believed the Christian church in the United States has a shallow faith problem because there is a discipleship problem. He posited that, "The dropout problem is, at its core, a faith-development problem; to use religious language, it is *a disciple-making problem*. The church is not adequately preparing the next generation to follow Christ faithfully in a rapidly changing culture."⁷⁸ If this assessment is accurate, then it is crucial for the church to rethink its approach to

75. Mark Lau Branson; Juan F. Martinez. *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 257-261.

76. Most of the work in this Ministerial Context was initially submitted as part of the final paper for Contextual Engagement I, with Dr. Bob Houlihan in Summer of 2018.

77. Barna Group. "10 Facts About Faith in American Cities" in <https://www.barna.com/research/10-facts-faith-american-cities/>. Accessed August 28, 2019,

78. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 21.

disciple-making of the youth and evaluate if it is helping the next generation learn to value wisdom over information.

One of the essential things deduced from my interaction with youth, youth pastors, and volunteer youth workers of ROLWC, which has also been confirmed by the Barna Group study, is that there is more than one way to dropout and more than one way to stay faithful. Every person goes on a unique journey related to his or her faith and spirituality, and every story matters.⁷⁹ The reasons young people drop out, as similar to each other as they may seem, are very real and very personal to those who experience them. The Christian community needs to bear this reality in mind.⁸⁰

As much as every story is different and worthy of serious attention and care, there are patterns in the data of a youth departure from the faith that can help us make sense of the dropout problem. Consequently, lumping all the youth dropouts into one group will be at best misleading, as each of them is at different stages of their individual faith journey. Therefore, as the Barna Team discovered in its research, there are three broad ways of being lost, and consequently it classified dropouts as, Nomads—These are young adults who have walked away from church engagement but still consider themselves Christians⁸¹; Prodigals—These have lost their faith, describing themselves as “no longer Christian⁸²; and Exiles—These group of young adults are

79. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 25.

80. *Ibid.*, 26.

81. Barna Group. "6 Reasons Young People Leave Church. (Currents)" in *Leadership Win* 2012, January 01, 2012. <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-ebSCOhost-com.seu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=33h&AN=33h-FFC6A5B9-99000451&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. Accessed April 10, 2019,

82. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 32.

still invested in their Christian faith but feel stuck (or lost) between culture and the church.⁸³

More details of these different groups will be given in the project narrative.

Even though this study might look like it is all about dropouts — nomads, prodigals, and exiles — at a deeper level, it is about new pressures facing the Church and the entire Christian community, as the church seeks to pass on the faith. The study will examine, clarify, and help the body of Christ in America, consider her response to the intense pressures that are shaping our culture and the church.

There are very complex and intricate issues that contribute to the youth dropout problem as the research will show. Therefore, this researcher will not pretend to adequately cover all the nuances about this high-tech, fast-paced, socio-cultural volcanic eruption the youth of today is forced to contend with in the 21st century.⁸⁴ That notwithstanding, this study will provide the foundation for a new ecosystem of spiritual and vocational apprenticeship of discipleship for the church by adopting the Pauline model of discipleship.

Even though much has been written about Paul—his life, theology, ministry, and leadership—there seems to be a severe scarcity of information regarding Paul's role in discipling people who converted to Christ as a result of his preaching. Notable among these were young men like Timothy, Titus, John Mark, Onesimus, and others who became believers under Paul's ministry. They matured and became the leaders of the church after Paul's last visit to Jerusalem, from which time he never had the opportunity to return to the churches he planted. However, even in his absence the churches continued to grow. This efficacious, yet unforeseen succession

83. *Ibid.*, 34.

84. Sweet, *A World on Fire*, 14.

and passing on of the mantle of leadership explains why the attempt to use the Pauline concept of discipleship to address the youth dropout problem of the 21st century American church will be unique.

Project Goals and Objectives

To accomplish the project goals, the "mixed method"⁸⁵ approach will be employed, using both quantitative and qualitative research. I will draw from diverse methodologies and data sources to best address the problem. The qualitative study will lean heavily on existing interviews and surveys conducted by experienced researchers from credible sources like the Barna Group, the Pew Foundation, and the Fuller Youth Research Institute. However, the interpretation of the data to enable me to use the Pauline concept of discipleship to address the research problem will be this researcher's sole endeavor.

1. The research will examine the root causes of the "Dropout Problem"—a review of the faith journeys of the next generation and the origins of their disengagement, as it is clear that they are not monochromatic or one-size-fits-all; therefore, every one of their stories matters.
2. The research will disclose, explore and analyze the reasons for the "Disconnection" of the youth from the church.

85. Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod. *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (London, England: Pearson Education), 6.

3. Finally, the research will attempt to bring about a “Reconnection,” drawing insights heavily from the Pauline concept of discipleship.

The researcher is aware that there will be limitation to this study, as it would be impossible to address all of the nuances of the problem, or provide an all-encompassing solution to the problem. However, the research and findings will benefit the church. That being said, Paul’s concept of discipleship of the young believers will be developed and implemented as part of the solution to the problem.

As stated previously, there is evidence that millions of young adults are stopping or drastically reducing active engagement in the church as they mature out of their teen years. While some may return to the church later in life, it is tragic to think some may never return at all. Most young adults may remain in the margins of the faith community with an effort to defining their spirituality. While some young people return to robust participation with an established church, other youth remain faithful through the transition from adolescence to adulthood and beyond.

Ed Stetzer, president of Lifeway Research, affirmed that a deeper look into the data before prescribing solutions is a must. First, we need to get our facts straight: “Dropout is a key word in today's evangelical churches concerning teenagers and young adults. The quote often sounds like this: ‘86 percent of evangelical youth drop out of church after graduation, never to return.’ The problem with that statement (and others around that number) is that it is not true. But that doesn't mean there is no reason for concern.”⁸⁶

86. Ed Stetzer, “Dropouts and Disciples: How Many Students Are Really Leaving the Church?” in *The Exchange*. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/may/dropouts-and-disciples-how-many-students-are-really-leaving.html>. Accessed August 30, 2019,

According to John Upchurch, Lifeway’s multi-year study indicated the number of teens who leave the church comes to about 70 percent. This situation mainly clusters around teens from sixteen to nineteen. But, in what may come as a surprise, two-thirds of these teens do ultimately return after a “hiatus.” The researchers also found that most of the teens did not set out to reject the church or the theology of their parents; they simply drifted away. They no longer found church to be important.⁸⁷

Research Question

A clear understanding of the dropout phenomenon will set the stage for an in-depth exploration of the faith journeys of these young adults. In 2013, the Barna research team posed some questions on this issue, answers to which will make a considerable headway in addressing the research problem: "Does a dropout problem exist? If so, for what reasons do so many spiritually active teenagers put their faith— or at least their connection to a church— on the shelf as they reach adulthood? Why do young people raised in ‘good Christian homes’ wander away as young adults?"⁸⁸

This study will seek to answer these questions, and explain the next generation’s cultural context. It will also examine the broader research question: “How can we follow Jesus— and help young people faithfully follow Jesus— in a dramatically changing culture?”

87. John Upchurch, “How Many Teens Are Leaving the Church?” in *Crosswalk.com*, Salem Web Network, May 16, 2014. <https://www.crosswalk.com/blogs/christian-trends/how-many-teens-are-leaving-the-church.html>. Accessed August 30, 2019,

88. Barna Group. "5 Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to Church" in *Millennials & Generations*, September 17, 2013. <https://www.barna.com/research/5-reasons-millennials-stay-connected-to-church/>. Accessed December 03, 2017.

Every 21st-century believer must answer this question as the answer will help bring some resolution to the youth dropout problem. The stories of young people wrestling with their faith and how churches who intentionally grow young can find fresh and revitalizing answers to the faith dilemmas of the youth is helping curb the dropout problem. Earl G. Creps called it “reverse mentoring,” because the established Christian generation has much to learn from the emerging Generation Z (Gen Z).⁸⁹

Chapter Summary

The need and rationale for rethinking the role youth ministry plays in discipleship cannot be overemphasized. In this research, an invitation to meet Generation Z will be extended. As the church gets to know them, three realities will need to be kept in mind:

1. Teen church engagement remains robust, but many of the enthusiastic teens so typical in American churches are not growing up to be faithful disciples of Christ.⁹⁰

2. There are different kinds of dropouts, as well as committed young adults who never drop out at all. We need to be careful not to lump an entire generation together because every story of disconnection requires a personal, tailor-made response.⁹¹

89. Earl G. Creps. *Reverse Mentoring: How Young Leaders Can Transform the Church and Why We Should Let Them* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 34.

90. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 22.

91. *Ibid.*

3. The dropout problem is, at its core, a faith-development problem; to use religious language, it is a disciple-making problem. The church is not adequately preparing the next generation to follow Christ faithfully in a rapidly changing culture.⁹²

It seems evident that the youth dropout problem is invariably a discipleship problem. The three central areas of relationship, vocation, and wisdom are identified as areas where these gaps are apparent and have been demonstrated to be areas where the church has God-given opportunities to rethink its approach to disciple-making. Since young people think older adults do not understand their doubts and concerns, a prerequisite to healthy mentoring friendships, the Church needs to rediscover the intergenerational power of the assembly of saints which is possible with determination and intentionality.

Details of these principles will be developed further in chapter three, as the Pauline concept of discipleship is used to demonstrate how the church can rediscover the intergenerational power of the church community in these three areas of relationship, vocation, and wisdom.

In the next chapter this research will now explore the theological, historical and Biblical dimensions of youth discipleship.

92. Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

The Project in Perspective – Theological, Historical, and Biblical Dimensions

There are ample difficulties in finding the theological reasons to support the youth dropout from the church of the 21st century. Some Christians explain away the dropout problem with Paul's words found in 2 Thessalonians 2:3: "Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition" (NKJV). They argue that the youth dropout is an eschatological problem—part of the signs of the end time the church has no control over. This view of the problem is an attempt by

the church to excuse its failed attempts at youth discipleship.⁹³ If the dropout problem is mainly an eschatological fulfillment of an end-time prophecy, then why are other age groups not equally falling out of faith in similar proportions? Paul did not explicitly say the falling away would be restricted only to the youth.

Adam Clarke, in his commentary on the passage, indicated that the original Greek word *αποστασια* means “apostasy”, and by this term, he is talking of a dereliction of the essential principles of religious truth—either a total abandonment of Christianity itself, or such a corruption of its doctrines as renders the whole system entirely inefficient for salvation.⁹⁴ This view, in essence, is referring to a larger scale, systemic abandonment of the faith by all ages of followers of Christ and not just the youth.

Before His ascension into heaven, Jesus personally gave the Church what has become known as the "Great Commission": “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen” (Matthew 28:18-20 NKJV). Through these words, Jesus gave the Church its marching orders, that is, the mandate of the Church.

Sweet noted that most concretely, the MRI (Missional, Relational, and Incarnational)—shaped life appears as the core of Matthew’s “Great Commission” as it is often called. “As you

93. Most of the work in this chapter was initially submitted to Dr. Kenneth Archer as the final research paper for the Scripture, Theology, and Practice PMIN 6033 Class.

94. Adam Clarke, “2 Thessalonians 2:3,” Bible Hub - *Clarke's Commentary* in https://biblehub.com/commentaries/clarke/2_thessalonians/2.htm. Accessed August 31, 2019,

are going”: That is the Missional; “Make disciples”: that is the Relational; “Of all cultures”: that is the Incarnational.⁹⁵

For his part, Bonhoeffer pointed out that discipleship means adherence to Christ, and, because Christ is the object of that adherence, persecution and hardship should also be expected as a form of discipleship. An abstract Christology, a doctrinal system, a general religious knowledge on the subject of grace or the forgiveness of sins, he argued, renders discipleship superfluous. In contrast, he declared that, “when Christ calls a person, he bids him come and die.”⁹⁶ Discipleship is about understanding the cost of training in Christlikeness, daily self-denial, and a step-by-step journey towards the Cross—where the old is crucified, and the new is revealed in us. The decision is radical; it is hardcore; it is so much more than what our tradition has made it out to be.⁹⁷

There is much the 21st-century church can learn from the Apostle Paul's concept of discipleship. Thus, theologian Ryan Lokkesmoe can declare: “Erastus, Rufus, Gaius, Phoebe, Priscilla, Olympus, and Aquila. These names may not mean anything to us, but they were significant to Paul. Paul's letter to the church in Rome was his most theological and philosophical work, and it has become esteemed as the most systematic, categorical, and chronological declaration of faith in the entire New Testament.”⁹⁸

95. Sweet, *So Beautiful*, 32

96. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. Rev. ed. (London, England: SCM Press, 2001) 79.

97. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*.

98. Ryan Lokkesmoe. *Paul and His Team: What the Early Church Can Teach Us about Leadership and Influence* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2017), 9.

Accordingly, as Paul wrapped up his letter in Romans 16, his grand conclusion consisted of a list of almost three dozen names. After Paul put the period on his statement of faith, he let the credits roll.⁹⁹ These were people who had shaped him and formed him, people who had invested in him, and he in them, people who had taken a risk for him, and people who had been crazy enough to join him.

The list included young people who had learned from him, stepped up to continue the legacy he had passed on to them, and committed to making disciples of the next generation. Maybe these young people were his mentors (reverse mentorship) and mentees, his disciples, his spiritual family, and his team. Paul recognized that even his theology could not be developed in a vacuum, and his ministry could not be fulfilled alone. In a sense, he was declaring, "I cannot tell my story of faith without mentioning these names."¹⁰⁰

Lokkesmoe noted that Paul is credited with starting churches in Philippi, Corinth, and Crete, but they would not have thrived without the leadership of people like Lydia, Aquila, Priscilla, Erastus, Epaphroditus, Timothy, Titus, and an unnamed Philippian jailer. Paul is named as the author of 13 of the books in the New Testament, but men like Sosthenes, Silas, and Timothy were also contributors. Paul may be the name everyone knows, but completing his gospel mission required a team that he mentored and disciplined.¹⁰¹

Interestingly, the very principles of Paul's model of discipleship for young men and women (Lydia, Pricilla, and Phoebe) did not only target their "head" but also targeted, most

99. Ibid.

100. Ibid., 10

101. Michael McGarry. *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry: Teenagers in the Life of the Church* (Nashville, TN: Randall House, 2019), 10.

importantly, their "hearts." An example of this is Paul's instruction to Timothy: "As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith" (1 Timothy 1:3-4 NKJV). How could Timothy know what "other doctrine" was if he had not studied to understand what the correct orthodox doctrine was? This passage reveals that Paul required some intellectual exercises for his young mentees.

However, Paul's requirement for his mentees did not end there because he further admonished Timothy: "Now the purpose of the commandment is *love* from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm" (1 Timothy 1:5-7 NKJV). Paul was emphasizing that, when all the head knowledge does not translate to the heart, it breeds idle talks and behaviors contrary to orthodoxy, which eventually produces false doctrines.

In *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*, theologian and philosopher James K.A. Smith suggested that the most crucial question Jesus asked people was "*What do you want?*" He contends that this is the first, last, and most fundamental question of Christian discipleship.¹⁰² He indicated that, in the Gospel of John, it was the first question Jesus asked to those who would follow him. When two would-be disciples caught up in John the Baptist's enthusiasm began to follow, Jesus turned to them and pointedly asked, "What do you want?" (John 1:38). A question that is buried under almost every other question Jesus asks each disciple,

102. James K.A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group), 6.

“will you come and follow me?” is another version of “what do you want?”¹⁰³ As is the fundamental question Jesus asked of his errant disciple, Peter: “Do you love me?” (John 21:16 NRSV).

Smith is convinced that

Jesus does not encounter Matthew and John—or you and me—and ask, “What do you know?” He does not even ask, “What do you believe?” He asks, “What do you want?” This is the most incisive, piercing question Jesus can ask of us precisely because *we are what we want*. Our wants and longings and desires are at the core of our identity, the wellspring from which our actions and behavior flow. Our wishes reverberate from our heart, the epicenter of the human person. Thus, Scripture counsels, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (Prov. 4:23 NIV). Discipleship, we might say, is a way to curate your heart, to be attentive to and intentional about what you love. Discipleship is more a matter of hungering and thirsting than of knowing and believing. Jesus’s command to follow him is a command to align our loves and longings with his—to want what God wants, to desire what God desires, to hunger and thirst after God and crave a world where he is all in all—a vision encapsulated by the shorthand “the kingdom of God.”¹⁰⁴

From the above quote one can deduce that Smith is arguing that Jesus is a teacher who does not just inform our intellect but forms our real loves. Jesus is not content to merely deposit new ideas into one’s mind; Jesus is after nothing less than one’s wants, passions, and longings. His “teaching” does not just touch the calm, cool, collected space of reflection and contemplation; he is a teacher who invades the heated, passionate regions of the heart. He is the *Word* who “penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit;” he “judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews. 4:12 NIV).¹⁰⁵

103. Ibid.

104. Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 2.

105. Ibid., 3.

Smith clarified that to follow Jesus is to become a student of the Rabbi who teaches us how to love, and to be a disciple of Jesus is to enroll in the school of love. He posited, "Jesus is not Lecturer-in-Chief; Jesus's school of love is not like a lecture hall where we passively take notes while Jesus spouts facts about himself in a litany of text-heavy PowerPoint slides."¹⁰⁶ And yet, we often approach discipleship as primarily a didactic endeavor—as if becoming a disciple of Jesus is mostly an intellectual project, a matter of acquiring knowledge.¹⁰⁷

Smith asked the proverbial question: "Why is that?"¹⁰⁸ For Smith, the reason is because every approach to discipleship and Christian formation assumes an implicit model of what human beings are. Smith also agreed that while these assumptions usually remain unarticulated, people nonetheless work with some fundamental (though unstated) assumptions about what sorts of creatures they are—and therefore what sorts of learners they are.¹⁰⁹ Smith further argued that, if being a disciple is being a learner and follower of Jesus, then a lot hinges on what one thinks "learning" is. And what one believes about learning hinges on what one thinks human beings are. In other words, one's understanding of discipleship will reflect a set of working assumptions about the very nature of human beings, even if one has never asked such questions.¹¹⁰

Smith further explained that this hit home for him in a tangible way several years ago. While paging through an issue of a noted Christian magazine, he was struck by a full-color

106. Ibid., 4.

107. Ibid.

108. Ibid., 5

109. Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 5.

110. Ibid., 6.

advertisement for a Bible verse memory program. At the center of the ad was a man's face and emblazoned across his forehead was a startling claim: "YOU ARE WHAT YOU THINK."¹¹¹ That is an explicit way to state what many of us implicitly assume. In ways that are more "modern" than biblical, we have been taught to believe that human beings are fundamentally thinking things.

While we might never have read—or even heard of—the 17th-century French philosopher René Descartes, Smith explained that many people unwittingly share his definition of the essence of the human person as *res cogitans*, a "thinking thing."¹¹² Like Descartes, people view their bodies as (at best!) extraneous, temporary vehicles for trucking around their souls or "minds," which are where all the real action takes place. In other words, people imagine human beings as giant bobblehead dolls: with humungous heads and itty-bitty, unimportant bodies. The mind is pictured as "mission control" of the human person; it is thinking that defines who people are. "You are what you think" is a motto that reduces human beings to brains-on-a-stick.¹¹³

Ironically, Smith insisted that "such thinking-thingism" assumes that the "heart" of the person is the mind. "I think therefore I am,"¹¹⁴ Descartes said, and most of church's approaches to discipleship end up parroting his idea. Such an intellectualist model of the human person—one

111. Ibid., 7.

112. Rene Descartes, "Philosophy: 'I Think Therefore I Exist' Ghost in the Machine" in Motion Laws, Vortex Theory, Meditations, updated September 2018. <https://www.spaceandmotion.com/Philosophy-Rene-Descartes-Philosopher.htm#Ghost.Machine>. Accessed September 12, 2019.

113. Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 3

114. "Rene Descartes," Philosophy: Rene Descartes 'I Think Therefore I Exist.'

that reduces humans to mere intellect—assumes that learning (and hence discipleship) is primarily a matter of depositing ideas and beliefs into mind-containers.

Critical education theorist bell hooks¹¹⁵ echoed Paulo Freire and called this view a “banking” model of education: we treat human learners as if they are safe-deposit boxes for knowledge and ideas, mere intellectual receptacles for beliefs. Humans then think of action as a kind of “withdrawal” from this bank of knowledge, as if one’s work and behavior were always the outcomes of conscious, deliberate, rational reflection that end with a choice, and as if one’s behavior was basically the conclusion to a little syllogism in one’s head, whereby one thinks her way through the world.¹¹⁶

Smith cautioned that believers ignore the overwhelming power of habit. So, they assume that a disciple is a learner who is acquiring more information about God through the Scriptures—that serious discipleship is real discipleship of the mind. Scripture enjoins believers to make every thought captive to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV) and to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2 NIV).¹¹⁷

A follower of Jesus will be a student of the Word, one “whose delight is in the law of the LORD” (Psalm 1:2 NIV). A believer who is serious about following Jesus will drink up every opportunity to learn more about God, the Bible, what He requires, and what He desires for His

115. Her real name is Gloria Jean Watkins. She adopted the name bell hooks in honor of her grandmother. A woman known for her wit. The reason that the name isn't capitalized is to distinguish the two women. And (various sources state) to highlight the importance of the text rather than the author’s name. Aurel Kurtula, “Why Doesn't Bell Hooks Capitalize the Letters in Her Name?” Quora, March 13, 2015, <https://www.quora.com/Why-doesnt-bell-hooks-capitalize-the-letters-in-her-name>. Accessed September 13, 2019.

116. Charles Duhigg. *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do*. Random House, 2012.

117. Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 4

creation. One does not just show up for worship and the sermon: the true disciple is there for adult education classes, joins a small-group Bible study, reads the Bible every day, attends every conference one can, devours books that help one further understand God and His Word, drinks up knowledge, and wants to learn.

Ironically, this view is true even for versions of Christian faith that are proclaimed “anti-intellectual.” Smith was surprised that many modes of Christian piety and discipleship that are suspicious of formal theology and higher education are nonetheless “intellectualist” in how they approach discipleship and Christian formation. They are narrowly focused on filling the intellectual wells with biblical knowledge, convinced that one could think his/her way to holiness—sanctification by information transfer.¹¹⁸

That view is precisely the conviction behind the ad for the Bible verse memory program I referred to earlier in the paper: If “you are what you think,” then filling your thinking organ with Bible verses should translate into Christ-like character, right? If “you are what you think,” then changing what you think should change who you are. Right?¹¹⁹ There is ample evidence that this mindset has not worked well for discipleship in the contemporary church in general and youth discipleship in particular. There is, therefore, the need for the church to examine its youth discipleship models in an innovative contextual way that will appeal to the “heart” of the youth and not just their “head”—the ultimate goal of this study.

Youth Discipleship in the Old Testament

118. Ibid.

119. Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 5

There is ample evidence that the desire for generational faithfulness is as old as the faith itself. Looking to Scripture seems to be an afterthought in the discussions and debates regarding the "dropout rate," as if the Bible is silent about raising a faithful generation. Youth pastor and theologian Michael McGarry confirmed that youth discipleship was a central component of Jewish identity, and the Old Testament abounds with examples of Israel's commitment to their young. In his opinion, there is no verse in the OT that explicitly commands youth ministry, but the family and the community's mandate to raise the next generation in the fear and obedience of the LORD is overwhelming. He believes biblical youth ministry is a modern application of the frequent commands to pass on the commands of God to the next generation. The Bible, and especially the Old Testament, emphasizes that parents are given the primary responsibility of evangelizing and discipling their children.¹²⁰

Even though the temple did not employ youth workers who organized games, service projects, and Bible lessons, the broader community played a vital role to the next generation. Parents were given the primary calling to impress the commands of Scripture on their children's minds and hearts, but this requirement was never meant for parents alone. Because parents would be raising their children on the family property, surrounded by extended family and the broader community, all the generations of Israel were expected to come together to build the younger generations for covenantal faithfulness.¹²¹

The Old Testament's command to Israel regarding family discipleship is recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, a powerful and enduring warning regarding the failure to minister to the

120. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 19.

121. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 20.

next generation (Joshua 24; Judges 2:10), and examples of both intergenerational worship (Psalm 71:18; 78) and an example of the separation of children in worship (Nehemiah 8:1-3):

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:4-9 NIV).¹²²

Understanding this passage's significance for Israel becomes imperative to place it in its historical context. McGarry noted that, at that point in Israel's history, they had been freed from slavery in Egypt, walked through the Red Sea, witnessed the LORD delivering the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai, and wandered in the desert for decades. All this journey took place under the leadership of Moses, who knew his death was coming soon. In Deuteronomy, Moses himself was serving as the shepherd to a generation who grew up under his leadership, and he called them to renew the covenant their parents had made with the LORD. He intended to communicate the foundational identity of Israel to the next generation: God's chosen people.¹²³

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength."¹²⁴ Eugene H. Merrill revealed that the importance of this text, beginning with the imperative (*šema*), "Hear!" He explained it as a call for attention, gathering the Israelites together and giving an obvious clue that what is coming next is of utmost importance. Not only does it serve as a call to listen, but its form also

122. Ibid., 21.

123. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 22.

124. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 NIV.

carries the implied meaning that "to hear God without putting into effect the command is not to hear Him at all."¹²⁵ The statement is akin to starting a sermon by saying, "Listen up, this is important!" Yahweh is referred to as "our God," explicitly linking both the former and the current generation's identity as the people of God.¹²⁶ God's promises to parents of the youth were also His promises to the youth: they are God's chosen people.

In conclusion, raising the next generation in fear of the LORD was of utmost importance to Israel. Without this generational faithfulness, all Israel would surely break the covenant and fall under judgment. Therefore, children were instructed from a young age regarding their identity and corresponding expectations as covenant children. Parents were the primary teachers of their children, both through formal teaching and by setting a faithful example; and yet parents lived in a broader family and community context than modern families experience.¹²⁷

Youth Discipleship in the New Testament

In an effort to discern the Bible's guidance for youth discipleship, many books have been written focusing on the Old Testament, especially in Deuteronomy 6. While this exercise is a correct and healthy place to begin, McGarry admonished that the New Testament has much to offer beyond Jesus' statement of "let the little children come to me" (Matthew 19:14).¹²⁸

125. Eugene H. Merrill, *The New American Commentary*, vol. 4 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 234.

126. Rendered in English Bible translations as "LORD", in capital letters.

127. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 35.

128. *Ibid.*, 37.

Comprehending the world in which Jesus and the apostles lived opens a window to help us see not only what they taught but how they conducted their ministries. There are only a few, brief explicit references to intergenerational discipleship in the New Testament, but there are portraits of it painted throughout. This portion of the chapter will explore the ministry culture of Jesus and the apostles' contemporaries while also considering those particular verses that mention the older generation's ministry to the younger.

Jesus and the Apostles

Jesus was not the first teacher to make disciples. It was a common practice for respected teachers to receive students who would follow them to become like their master, both in life and in wisdom.¹²⁹ He explained that the Greek word, μαθητής (*mathétés*), conveys multiple layers of discipleship. In a sense, it simply means "a follower" because the disciple wanders from place to place with and learns how to imitate the life of his master. Another sense is that of "a student" who is being taught and trained in the way of knowledge, wisdom, and skill. In this way, the biblical portrait of a disciple is profoundly personal and intimate.¹³⁰ Jesus' ministry to the apostles, disciples, and the crowds did not originate in a vacuum. Instead, various contemporary patterns of discipleship influenced the way the Bible views discipleship.

Biblical Precursors of Discipleship from the Greek

Jesus or the early Christians did not create world discipleship. There are examples of Disciple-Master relationships throughout the ancient world. K.H. Rengstorf, in his landmark

129. Ibid., 38.

130. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 39.

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, explained that, “The almost technical sense of the word, which implies a direct dependence of the one under instruction upon an authority superior in knowledge, and which emphasizes the fact that this relation cannot be dissolved, controls the whole usage.”¹³¹ To be a disciple was to enter into a personal relationship with a master where more than facts and information were being conveyed; a disciple was trained to not only learn from his master but to become like him.

Michael J. Wilkins, in his book *Following the Master*, explored the Greek foundations for discipleship. He explained, "From its very earliest use, *mathétés* was not simply a learner or a pupil in an academic setting. Herodotus, in whose writings the noun occurs for the first time in written Greek, uses the term to indicate a person who made a significant, personal, life commitment.”¹³² Discipleship has never been a purely intellectual exercise; it has always been intensely personal.

A disciple’s credibility was inextricably linked to his master. Perhaps the most well-known non-biblical example is that of Socrates and Plato. Considering that Socrates was put to death in 399 BC for “corrupting the youth,” it is evident that his primary audience were youth, not adults. Socrates’ emphasis on educating the younger generations is reflected through Plato and the broader Socratic legacy. Everything credited to Socrates has been preserved and transmitted through the writings of Plato, Euclid, and other disciples who passed his teachings down through their essays. Socrates’ students were committed not only to his ideas but also to

131. K.H. Rengstorf, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard H. Kittel. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: (WM. B. Eerdmans 1967), 412.

132. Michael J. Wilkins. *Following the Master: Discipleship in the Steps of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1992), 75.

his character. Socrates has continued to inspire future philosophers and yet, when Socrates is quoted or referenced, it is not Socrates but, in fact, Plato or another disciple who recorded their master's teachings.¹³³

Rabbinic Patterns of Discipleship

There is no doubt that Israel placed great emphasis on passing the faith from one generation to the next. The commitment to this goal is recorded in the *Mishna*, a collection of oral traditions taught by the Rabbis but only written down in the early third century according to McGarry.¹³⁴ The teachings of the Mishna reflect standard Jewish practices and teachings that were taught and passed from generation to generation, especially in the first and second century.¹³⁵

McGarry explains that, in the Jewish world, Rabbinic tradition is built around the passing on of wisdom and insight surrounding the Law of Moses and how to live in accordance with it. These teachings were taught through oral tradition from one generation to the next and from rabbi to disciple. Not all students, however, would continue in their training to become rabbis or teachers themselves. For instance, he further indicates that the school of Shammai was more challenging to enter than the school of Hillel, although all rabbis were known to reject unworthy students.¹³⁶ To study under a rabbi was a highly sought after honor, such that it may have been

133. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 39.

134. Ibid.

135. Joshua Kulp, "Avot, Chapter 5, Mishnah 21," *USCJ Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem*, May 2, 2014, <http://learn.conservativeyeshiva.org/avoth-chapter-five-mishnah-twenty-one/>. Accessed April 3, 2020.

136. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 40.

considered as a higher priority than the commandment to honor one's parents.¹³⁷ Keritot 6:9 records, "If the son acquired merit [by sitting and studying] before the master, the master takes precedence over the father under all circumstances."¹³⁸ Peah 1:1 provides a list of matters in the life of the utmost priority, including honoring one's father and mother, and then concludes, "But the study of Torah is as important as all of them together."¹³⁹ This teaching of the Mishna is likely the root cause of Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees in Matthew 15:1-9 because some Pharisees were putting this into practice in a way that overrode the commands of God.¹⁴⁰

According to McGarry, Rabbis typically did not accept payment for their teaching, though it was commonly encouraged for the faithful to show hospitality to itinerant rabbis and their disciples. The itinerant rabbi would move from town to town, sometimes for only a few days and other times for weeks and would teach to whatever sized crowd would come to hear him. While the crowds enjoyed the rabbi's public teachings, the disciples were encouraged to ask questions, for "a shy person [will not] learn" (Avot 2:5). Disciples would often be given more detailed explanations and interpretations in private, such as Jesus' explanation of the Parable of the Sower to His disciples in Matthew 13:16-23. Not only did a rabbi's disciples make the

137. Ibid.

138. Joshua Kulp, "Keritot, Chapter 6, Mishnah 9," *USCJ Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem*, <http://learn.conservativeyeshiva.org/author/joshkulp/page/60/>. Accessed April 3, 2020.

139. Joshua Kulp, "Peah, Chapter 1, Mishnah 1," *USCJ Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem*, May 2, 2014, <http://learn.conservativeyeshiva.org/peah-chapter-one-mishnah-one/>. Accessed April 3, 2020.

140. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 41.

necessary sacrifice to follow him for these private interpretations, "he learned in an efficient way how the master translated religious law into daily practice."¹⁴¹

How Youthful Were the Apostles?

Much has been written about the Apostles yet, surprisingly, little attention has been given to their ages when they became Jesus' disciples. For example, Theologian A.B. Bruce's *The Training of the Twelve*¹⁴² and John MacArthur's *Twelve Ordinary Men*¹⁴³ provided great insight into the lives and character of each of the Apostles but fail to address their ages. This type of oversight regarding their age is quite common because there is not much explicit detail in Scripture that shines a light on this question. Instead, implicit evidence is required to discern a probable age range.¹⁴⁴

McGarry indicated that Luke 3:23 clearly states that Jesus was "about 30 years of age" when He began His public ministry. This view is in line with common Rabbinic practice, which stated that Rabbis might take on disciples at 30 years of age.¹⁴⁵ Considering this fact, it would be doubtful for Jesus, especially as a young Rabbi, to take on disciples who were older than Him. David Macleod also noted that Christianity has always been a movement primarily driven by

141. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 42.

142. Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (Edinburg, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1911; reprinted by Kregel Publications, 2000), 2 – 6.

143. John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 2007). 28 - 38.

144. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 43.

145. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 44.

young people, stating: "Most of the apostles were probably still in their twenties when they went to join Jesus."¹⁴⁶ Macleod pointed to the Apostle's youth by highlighting such passages where Jesus refers to them as "children" (τέκνα, tekna), "little children" (τεκνία, teknia), and "my dear children" (παιδία, paidia) (Mark 10:24, John 13:33, John 21:5).¹⁴⁷

In McGarry's view, this practice would have been highly offensive to refer to one's peers or elders as children, which makes it nearly sure that Jesus was addressing people younger than Himself. Again, considering the teaching of Avot 5:1¹⁴⁸ regarding the age at which young men would become disciples of a rabbi, it is most probable that the disciples were in their late teens through early twenties. Additionally, McGarry posited that the behavior of the disciples (wanting Jesus to call down fire on those who rejected Him, arguing about who will be the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven, and being generally dull toward the more nuanced teachings of Jesus) seems like the immaturity that would correspond with the disciples as adolescents.¹⁴⁹

Furthermore, he contended that most Evangelical scholars agree the Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation under the terrorizing reign of Emperor Domitian (AD 95-96). This date places the writing of Revelation nearly 70 years after the death of Jesus, which took place after three years

146. David J. Macleod, "The Year of Public Favor, Part 4: The Twelve Apostles (Matthew 10:1–4; Mark 3:13–19; Luke 6:12–16) 1" in *Eumaeus Journal*, 13 (2004): 27, 55-56.

147. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 45.

148. *Pirkei Avot* is among the most well-known of all writings in Rabbinic Judaism. *Pirkei Avot* is so-named, according to the great commentator Rashi (11th century France), because it contains the "sayings" of the first "fathers" of Judaism. Formerly known simply as Avot (literally, "fathers" or "ancestors"), it is one of the sixty-three tractates found in the Mishnah, the code of Jewish law compiled in the early third century C.E. <https://reformjudaism.org/pirkei-avot>. Accessed November 18, 2019.

149. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 46.

of public ministry and would require John to be 100 years old if he was thirty when he began following Jesus. A younger age for John, who is widely considered the youngest of the apostles, would place him at 15 years old when he became a disciple and at 85 years old when he wrote Revelation. Considering that John and James (who were brothers) were also Jesus' cousins, this young age becomes increasingly credible since their mother, Salome, was entrusting young John to his responsible older cousin, Jesus.¹⁵⁰

The Apostle Peter, on the other hand, was continually the default leader of the apostles. The most fundamental reason for this view would be that he was the oldest. The Synoptic Gospels all give an account of Jesus coming to Peter's house where He heals Peter's mother-in-law of a fever.¹⁵¹ Peter is the only disciple who is explicitly mentioned as being married. In Matthew 17:24-27, when Peter asks Jesus how they will pay the Temple Tax required for all Jewish men over the age of 20, Jesus miraculously provides the appropriate amount, but only for Himself and Peter. It is unwise to conclude by arguments from silence (other disciples could have been married and over the age of 20 but were not mentioned in that account), but Peter was consistently portrayed in the Gospels as the oldest and most senior disciple.¹⁵²

For McGarry, some other apostles were called to become disciples because they would be growing into adulthood. Matthew was a tax collector and had his tax booth. Andrew and Simon

150. This is a standard view but not universal. Evidence is found in Matthew 27:55-56, Mark 15:40, and John 19:25. This family relationship also sheds light on the bold request made by James and John's mother (Jesus' aunt) in Matthew 20:21, that her sons (Jesus' cousins) would be given special honor when Jesus enters into His kingdom as well as Jesus' request in John 19:25-27 that John would take care of His mother, Mary.

151. Matthew 8:14-15, Mark 1:29-31, Luke 4:38-41.

152. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 46.

Peter were disciples of John the Baptist before they followed Jesus. The other Simon is consistently referred to as "Simon the Zealot," which points to his involvement in a movement that sought Israel's liberation from Roman rule. Aside from the accounts of their calling to follow Jesus, we are not given much detail about their stages of life. Other apostles are introduced into the storyline of the Gospels with no background given. The silence regarding the marital status of all the apostles except Peter is noteworthy since Avot 5:1 expected most Jewish men to begin pursuing marriage at eighteen years old.¹⁵³

Given what is known about contemporary Rabbinic practices and the above-mentioned circumstantial evidence, McGarry noted that it seems most probable that the apostles were young adults ranging from 15 years old to late twenties. However, he was quick to warn it would be dishonest to label Jesus as "the first youth pastor," but it is undeniable that Jesus focused His ministry to the next generation and called them to leave their families to follow Him.¹⁵⁴ In modern times, the disciples would have all been labeled "young adults," and it is essential to acknowledge that even in Jesus' day, these men were still considered relatively young. The band of disciples represents Jesus' drive to build up young leaders who would carry the message of the gospel after He ascended into heaven (see John 14). Donald MacLeod observed that "God does use the young, and, in fact, many pioneer ventures and efforts that break out of established ministries and churches are spearheaded by the young. The ministry of Jesus was just such a pioneer effort."¹⁵⁵

153. Ibid.

154. Ibid., 47.

155. Macleod, "The Year of Public Favor, Part 4, 55-56.

Youth Discipleship Beyond the Gospels

Occasionally, the New Testament references households in ways that helpfully shed light upon the continuity regarding family discipleship upon the permanency of family discipleship in the Old Covenant and the New. McGarry believes that understanding the meaning of "household" was most relevant concerning interpretations of household baptisms and spiritual leadership in the home.¹⁵⁶ He explained that the Greek οἶκος (oikos) is typically translated as "house" or "home" because it points to a physical building where a family lives (or the temple, which may be considered the "house of God"). But there are instances when it is used symbolically of the household or family.

McGarry pointed out that "household" is a broad and symbolic translation for οἶκος in many circumstances. Paul especially wrote in Ephesians 2:19, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (NIV). In this passage, the family is used as Paul's metaphor of choice when describing Christians' new identity. However, οἶκος is not only used about Christians.¹⁵⁷ He further explained that the Jewish people are in mind when Jesus talks about the "house of Israel" (Matthew 10:6, 15:24) and other Scriptures use οἶκος in a way that is representative of a group of people (Acts 7:10; Hebrews 3:6). He argued that the symbolic, corporate identity in mind in this passage where οἶκος is used in the singular form (Matthew 10:6, 15:24; Acts 7:10; Ephesians 2:19) and in plural (1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Peter 4:17), thus translation and interpretation remain

156. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 48.

157. *Ibid.*, 49.

somewhat vague and depend primarily on exegetical context rather than lexical form. The grammatical structure *οἰκία* generally points to a more literal family.¹⁵⁸

With this broader understanding of *οἶκος* in the New Testament, McGarry believed it is worth remembering that the biblical view of family and household was much broader than the modern conception of the nuclear family. Instead, there was an emphasis on corporate identity rather than individual identity.¹⁵⁹ Household baptisms (Acts 16:31, 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:16) are important to consider. However, because of the emphasis of this study, the emphasis remains on implications regarding ministry to the next generation rather than any attempt to settle the baptism debate. Regardless of one's view on infant baptism or believer's baptism, it is the ordinance or sacrament to mark the entrance into the Church. Those who hold to believer's baptism view it as a public declaration of one's conversion and rebirth as a child of God: an outward demonstration of what has happened spiritually.¹⁶⁰

Youth Discipleship in the Early Church

According to McGarry, paedo-Baptists believe circumcision has been replaced by baptism as the sign of the covenant, and therefore, infants receive the mark of baptism as an expression of their identity as a child of the covenant. In both views, baptism is symbolic of one's identity as a child of God. He indicated that the reason this point is relevant is that, whether or not these households were a biological family (children included) or a broader representation of

158. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 49.

159. Ibid.

160. Ibid.

one's clan, these references highlight the ongoing call to family discipleship in the new covenant. When the head of the household was converted, it marked a change for the entire home because he understood his spiritual responsibility for those under his authority.¹⁶¹

Unfortunately, many pastors today give themselves to careful preaching of the Word but delegate discipleship of the next generation entirely to volunteers or younger pastors. Titus 2:1-7 makes it clear that intergenerational discipleship must be a priority among mature Christians. When younger Christians are not discipled and are overlooked by the older believers, there should be no surprise when the church's reputation suffers among nonbelievers.¹⁶² McGarry supports this view by pointing out that pastors have many responsibilities, and it seems like every pastoral leadership book wants to add one more onto their plate, but it is undoubtedly unbiblical and foolish to overlook the important task of discipling the next generation. Even where a church has a staff of full-time youth ministers, the church's pastors and elders are the spiritual leaders of the church, including the young.¹⁶³ McGarry admonishes that, even though the leadership of the younger generations may be delegated and entrusted to someone else, the pastor must not be absent and disconnected from the children and youth in the church.

Theologian Dayton Hartman wrote that the Church has primarily diminished "being a disciple" to making a profession of faith and receiving baptism. After that, one is on his own. American rugged individualism has led believers to act as if they do not need one another. But the early church demanded more. The initial discipleship process for new converts included a

161. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 49.

162. *Ibid.*, 50.

163. *Ibid.*, 51

regimented three-year plan for growing new believers in the grace and knowledge of Jesus (*Apostolic Tradition* 17.1).¹⁶⁴ New converts—called catechumens—regularly heard biblical preaching, received basic theological training, and renounced their sinful practices.¹⁶⁵

Hartman explained that the early Christians wrote several letters and tracts on discipleship. In his theological study on discipleship, *Following the Master*, Michael Wilkins demonstrated that the first Christians understood disciples to be those actively growing in the faith and consistently increasing in the knowledge of the gospel.¹⁶⁶ For example, Clement of Rome, who wrote near the end of the first century, referred to Christians as those who follow Jesus in the way of truth.¹⁶⁷ This view should not take place in isolation, but in the community of Christ through mutual submission and meaningful relationships.¹⁶⁸

Polycarp's exhortations in his *Epistle to the Philippians* are similar.¹⁶⁹ He called his readers to renounce sin, to pursue Christ, and to exemplify obedience of Christ. *The Epistle to*

164. Dayton Hartman, "Discipleship in the Early Church" in Center for Baptist Renewal (Center for Baptist Renewal, August 7, 2017) <http://www.centerforbaptistrenewal.com/blog/2017/8/4/discipleship-in-the-early-church>. Accessed August 30, 2019.

165. Ibid.

166. Ibid.

167. 1 Clement 14:1; 35:5; 40:4; 35:5

168. Hartman, "Discipleship in the Early Church, 330.

169. Polycarp lived from 64–150 AD and was a noted and respected bishop of Smyrna, one of only two churches not admonished by Jesus in the seven letters found in Revelation 2 and 3. He was burned at the stake in A.D. 150 or shortly thereafter at the ripe age of 86. The story of his martyrdom is impressive for his courage, wit, and kindness, and it is recounted in my Christian Martyrs page, in <https://www.christian-history.org/polycarps-philippian-epistle.html> Accessed September 12, 2019.

Diognetus also reminded early Christians that disciples in Christ should consistently grow in truth and the fruits of the Holy Spirit. While disciples must depend on God's Word and Spirit for this growth, they should also humbly listen to those who are more spiritually mature. These early Christian authors recognized that believers need one another. United to Christ, disciples grow together as Christ's members.¹⁷⁰

Review of Related Contemporary Literature

Kinnaman, in his previous book, *Unchristian*, written with Gabe Lyons,¹⁷¹ highlighted and brought into focus the reasons why young non-Christians reject the Christian faith and explored the changing reputation of Christians, especially evangelicals, in our society.¹⁷² That book focused on the perceptions and priorities of young non-Christians, or outsiders, as we called them.¹⁷³

Kinnaman's second book, *You Lost Me*, the research data on which most of the present study is based, is about young insiders. At its heart is the irreverent, blunt, and often painful personal stories of young Christians—or young adults who once thought of themselves as Christians—who have left the church and sometimes the faith.¹⁷⁴ In the vibrant and volatile story of the next generation, a new spiritual narrative is bubbling up. Through the lens of this project,

170. Hartman, "Discipleship in the Early Church, 330.

171. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons. *Unchristian: What a New Generation Thinks about Christianity-- and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2012), 10.

172. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 11.

173. Most of the work in this Literature Review was initially submitted as part of the final paper to Contextual Engagement II for Dr. Bob Houlihan during the Spring semester 2019.

174. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 12.

Kinnaman understood and agreed with some, though not all, of the youth's grievances. Yes, the church should be concerned about some of the attitudes and behaviors encountered in the next generation of Christians, yet Kinnaman also found reasons to hope in the best of what they have to offer.¹⁷⁵

In *Faith for Exiles*, Kinnaman and Mark Matlock,¹⁷⁶ his coauthor, got to know that one in 10 young Christians for whom they have coined the term “resilient disciples” from a numbers point of view, stay actively engaged in the church community. Kinnaman said, “10 percent of young Christians amounts to just under four million 18 to 29-year-olds in the U.S. who follow Jesus and are resiliently faithful. In spite of the tensions they feel between church and everyday life, they keep showing up.”¹⁷⁷

Another Issacharian—“from the tribe of Issachar who knew the signs of the time”—on the issue of youth dropout is theologian James Emery White. In his book *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World*, White stated, “This is not another pop-sociological book about a particular generation. This is a book about the most significant cultural challenge facing the Western church that just so happens to be reflected in a new

175. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 12.

176. David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019).

177. *Ibid.*, 34.

generation.”¹⁷⁸ White’s work towards the goal of youth evangelism offered a hopeful complement to his earlier works: *Serious Times*¹⁷⁹ and *The Rise of the None*.¹⁸⁰

The Fuller Youth Institute Research Team led by Kara Powell, in their groundbreaking research book, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* confirmed the escalating youth dropout rate.¹⁸¹ Powell and her team said that. “Looking at the data sometimes it might feel like the sky is falling, but there is hope.” Their research revealed that growing young could energize an entire congregation. As one navigates the waters of developing young, the church’s other priorities (like effective evangelism, dynamic worship services, robust service and missions, and authentic community) will gain momentum. They contended that, if church’s overall hope and prayer are to have a vibrant congregation, there is arguably no better starting place than the contagious passion of teenagers and young adults.¹⁸²

George Barna, in *Futurecast: What Today’s Trends Mean for Tomorrow’s World*, made a stunning revelation that estimates that the total number of ordained clergies serving in churches range from 500,000 to 700,000 people—less than one-half of one percent of the adult population. He then revealed that the Barna Group studies showed that, while one-fourth of Protestant congregations have a paid, full-time worship pastor, one-fifth have a youth pastor (someone who

178. White, *Meet Generation Z*, 11.

179. James Emery White, *Serious Times: Making Your Life Matter in an Urgent Day* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

180. James Emery White, *The Rise of the None* (Chicago, IL: Baker Books, 2014).

181. Powell, *Growing Young*, 204-208.

182. *Ibid.*, 299-301.

works primarily with teens). One out of ten churches (or fewer) have a full-time pastor for children or junior high students, and one out of ten have a pastor directing Christian education or discipleship activities.¹⁸³ Apparently, the Barna survey helps determine whether the church is putting its money where its priorities are.

Since this research was based on the assumption that the youth dropout problem is invariably a discipleship problem, James K.A. Smith, in his book *You Are What You Love. The Spiritual Power of Habit*, agreed that instead of reducing Christianity to a set of ideas—or worse, a collection of "don'ts"—introducing young people to ancient disciplines of prayer, meditation, discernment, fasting, and worship invited young people into the ancient practices of the faith.¹⁸⁴

Countless volumes have been written about Paul's life, theology, leadership, and mentorship; however, little has been written about the Pauline concept of discipleship. The closest one written about Pauline model of discipleship is the work of theologian Ryan Lokkesmoe in *Paul and His Team: What the Early Church Can Teach Us About Leadership and Influence*. Lokkesmoe argues that the leadership lessons of Paul and his team had always been available to us, but they are hiding in plain sight, camouflaged throughout the New Testament. They are not readily observable because they are obscured by the historical gap between their world and today.

Theologian N.T. Wright's biography of *Paul*¹⁸⁵ offers the detailed historical and theological study of Paul's letters. He gave the exact historical and socio-cultural circumstances

183. George Barna, *Futurecast: What Today's Trends Mean for Tomorrow's World* (Carol Stream, IL: Barna Books, 2011). 23.

184. Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 153.

185. N.T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2018). 34.

that surrounded Paul from his early upbringing in Tarsus, his apprenticeship with Gamaliel as a Pharisee, his persecution of the church, his conversion on the road to Damascus, and his missionary journeys to his death in Rome. Wright's work is a helpful guide to understanding what made Paul tick.¹⁸⁶

One cannot talk about discipleship without taking into consideration Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book, *The Cost of Discipleship*. His work brought the reality of the call of Jesus for His true disciples to take up the cross and follow Him. Bonhoeffer's seemingly sole cry like a voice in the wilderness of Nazi Germany to the Church to fight and resist the evil regime, which ultimately claimed his life is a real lesson for the 21st century Church.¹⁸⁷

Andrew Root, associate professor at Luther Seminary, in an article for *Faith and Leadership* magazine, entitled "Take it from Bonhoeffer—there is no 'Christian youth!'," indicated that, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer pointed out long ago, youth ministry is not about setting aside a special place for young people in the church but about moving them into the center of the church community.¹⁸⁸ In *Bonhoeffer As Youth Worker*, Root contended that Bonhoeffer's eight theses have a lot to teach Christians today, especially as the church struggles with how to help young people hold on to their faith during the transition from adolescence to adulthood.¹⁸⁹

186. Wright, *Paul*, 34.

187. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London, England: SCM Press, 2015). 234.

188. Andrew Root, "Take It from Bonhoeffer -- There Is No 'Christian Youth,'" in *Faith and Leadership*, September 8, 2014. <https://www.faithandleadership.com/andrew-root-take-it-bonhoeffer-there-no-christian-youth>. Accessed August 30, 2019.

189. Andrew Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker: A Theological Vision for Discipleship and Life Together* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 78.

McGarry addressed the massive question of whether youth ministry is scriptural. He presented a biblical, historical, and theological foundation for youth ministry.¹⁹⁰ His book *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, however, is not intended to be a handbook or a new ministry paradigm. Instead, the emphasis of the book is on presenting a clear and straightforward but thoroughly biblical framework for thinking about youth ministry as the church's expression of partnership with the family for co-evangelizing and co-discipling the next generation.¹⁹¹

By exploring the Old Testament's calling to pass on the faith to the next generation, McGarry gave a clear example that, while parents were the primary disciple-makers of their children, the entire community was implicitly responsible.¹⁹² As regards the New Testament, he showed examples through Jesus' ministry to the apostles (who were all unmarried men except for Peter) and in specific commands about the older believers' training, the younger within the family of faith.¹⁹³ McGarry's book has been an invaluable resource utilized in this study to address Old and New Testament historical, theological, and ecclesiological positions on youth discipleship.

Socio-Cultural Context

In his recently published book, *Faith for Exiles*, Kinnaman confessed,

I am not just a worried father; I have professional reasons for my concern. In my work as a social researcher, I've interviewed tens of thousands of tweens, teenagers, and young adults. Using a variety of quantitative and qualitative research methods, my company,

190. Michael McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry: Teenagers in the Life of the Church* (Nashville, TN: Randall House, 2019).

191. Ibid.

192. Ibid., 4.

193. Ibid., 5.

Barna Group, examines the spiritual journeys of young people. A lot of what we hear is distressing. It's a concern shared by my coauthor, Mark Matlock, who has spoken to nearly a million teenagers and parents and written dozens of books about growing mature and lasting faith. And like me, he is a father to young adults and teens.¹⁹⁴

Both Kinnaman and Matlock have been working with and for the sake of young people and the church for more than twenty years. So, they had been thinking for quite a while about how to grow young disciples—and, at the same time, they were parenting young disciples. A big data point that kept them up at night was what they discovered in their recent research. As stated, previously in *You Lost Me*, the church had a dropout problem. At the time they collected data for that project, 59 percent of young adults with a Christian background told them they had dropped out of church involvement—some for an extended period, some for good.¹⁹⁵

In less than a decade, the proportion of 18 to 29-year-old dropouts had increased. Today, nearly two-thirds of all young adults who were once regular churchgoers have dropped out at one time or another to 64 percent, as shown in figure 1 in the appendix. Kinnaman and Matlock contended that today's society is notably and insidiously faith repellent. There is no doubt that God's people have weathered hostile seasons in the past; church history reminds us that living faithfully has never been easy. But the research shows that resilient faith is tougher to grow today using the cultivation methods we relied on throughout the 21st century.¹⁹⁶

In *Faith for Exiles*, Kinnaman and his co-author, Matlock, got to know the one in 10 young Christians for whom they have coined the term “resilient disciples.” “From a numbers

194. Kinnaman, *Faith for Exiles*, 14-15.

195. Ibid.

196. Ibid.

point of view, 10 percent of young Christians amounts to just under four million 18 to 29-year-olds in the U.S. who follow Jesus and are resiliently faithful, in spite of the tensions they feel between church and everyday life, they keep showing up.”¹⁹⁷

Digital Babylon

Kinnaman introduced the reader to “Digital Babylon” by telling the story of an advertisement from a few years ago in which a young adolescent boy asked, “Google, what is ‘glossophobia’?” A warm female voice gently informed him, “Speech anxiety is the fear of public speaking.” He clicked “explore more” on his Nexus tablet and launched the audio of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s first inaugural speech on the steps of the US Capitol, which soars over an inspiring video montage of Google coaching the young man’s preparations to give an address in class.¹⁹⁸

One can tell the young man’s speech is a big success because his classmates burst into applause—and because an attractive girl shyly smiles at him. Surprised and sheepish, he smiles back. Jump cut to the ubiquitous Google search bar. “How do I ask...” the boy types, “... a girl out,” the drop-down bar suggested because his trusty Google device can see into the comfortable places of his tender heart and wants to be his ever-present, all-seeing, secret-keeping BFF (best friend forever). Kinnaman revealed that many people today turn to their devices to help them make sense of the world. Young people, especially, use the screens in their pockets as counselors, entertainers, instructors, even sex educators.¹⁹⁹

197. Kinnaman, *Faith for Exiles*, 15.

198. *Ibid.*, 17.

199. *Ibid.*

Kinnaman asked the proverbial question “Why build up the courage to have what will likely be an awkward conversation with a parent, pastor, or teacher when you can just ask your phone and no one else will be the wiser?”²⁰⁰ When it comes to technology, the path of least resistance is not scorn-worthy because it is easy, and at the same time praiseworthy because it is efficient. Google searches are attractive benefits, mostly, of life in the modern world. Who has not found their life improved by access to the right information at the right time? Watch a step-by-step tutorial on repairing your dishwasher. Listen to your favorite song. Discover a new recipe. Shop for your friend's birthday gift right now, before you forget.²⁰¹

The virtual possibilities are virtually endless. Screens are portals to more rabbit holes than Alice could visit in many thousands of lifetimes—and a few even lead somewhere helpful. Kinnaman pointed out, “yes, there is the rub: instant access to information, but that is not wisdom.” In a 1965 sermon, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. could have been talking about our present moment when he asked, “How much of our modern life can be summarized in that arresting dictum of the poet Thoreau, ‘Improved means to an unimproved end?’ We have allowed our technology to outdistance our theology, and for this reason, we find ourselves caught up with many problems.”²⁰²

200. Ibid.,18.

201. Ibid., 19.

202. Martin Luther King Jr., from a sermon delivered at Temple Israel of Hollywood, February 26, 1965, in <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlktempleisraelhollywood.htm>. Accessed September 20, 2019,

The question is how do we find the rabbit hole that leads to real, worthwhile wisdom for living well and following Jesus in an accelerated, sophisticated culture? By *accelerated*, Kinnaman meant everything moves faster: the news cycles, the speed of information, the pace of life, the rate of change. This age is the screen age, after all. Digital tools, devices, and content drive our perceptions and experiences of reality. They offer an illusion of total control and a mirage of complete access to the world.²⁰³ As Andy Crouch wrote in *The Tech-Wise Family*, technology makes things easy everywhere.²⁰⁴

By *complex*, Kinnaman referred to the fact that everyday life feels increasingly complicated and uncertain. There is difficulty in predicting the relationship between cause and effect, to understand what outcomes (intended and unintended) will result from a given course of action, or even get a complete picture of all the variables involved. In his previous book *You Lost Me*, he identified three trends shaping young people and our culture more broadly: *Access*—which, thanks to “Wi-Fi everywhere,” is exponentially more amplified today. *Alienation*—from institutions and traditions that give structure and meaning to our lives. *Authority*—which, like institutions and traditions, is increasingly viewed with suspicion.²⁰⁵ In the years since that book came out, the Barna Group has adopted a phrase to describe our accelerated, sophisticated culture that is marked by phenomenal *access*, profound *alienation*, and a crisis of *authority* as “digital Babylon.”²⁰⁶

203. Kinnaman, *Faith for Exiles*, 19.

204. Andy Crouch and Barna Group teamed up to create *The Tech-Wise Family* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), which helpfully addresses many of the challenges of raising children in the digital era.

205. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 154.

206. Kinnaman, *Faith for Exiles*, 120.

Kinnaman explained that ancient Babylon was the pagan-but-spiritual, hyper-stimulated, multicultural, imperial crossroads that became the unwilling home of Judean exiles, including the prophet Daniel, in the sixth century BCE. But digital Babylon is not a physical place. It is the pagan-but-spiritual, hyper-stimulated, multicultural, imperial crossroads that is the virtual home of every person with Wi-Fi, a data plan, or—for most of us—both. Christians whose understanding of the world is framed by the Bible can think about our experience as living in a shift from Jerusalem to digital Babylon.

Kinnaman posited:

These are two of the ways human society is depicted in the Bible, and they endure today as helpful archetypes of civilization. The pages of Scripture and the annals of human history suggest that there are times when faith is at the center and times when faith is pushed to the margins. In digital Babylon, where information (and anything we could ever want or need) is instantly available at the godlike swipe of a finger, Almighty God has been squeezed to the margins. Those of us who long to keep him at the center of our lives always fight the centrifugal force of a world spinning us away from him.²⁰⁷

There is no doubt this transition—from faith at the center to faith at the margins—is happening in North America and other societies in the cultural West. The Barna Group data show widespread, top-to-bottom changes from a Christianized to a post-Christian culture. According to Kinnaman, the tension of displacement felt by many (primarily, but not only, white) Christians is that “at a formative time in their lives, they experienced a culture that was more Jerusalem-like.”²⁰⁸ Monotheistic Judeo-Christian faith was at the center, and it dominated with relatively homogenized, white-middle-class values and morals that unashamedly claimed to

207. Ibid.

208. Ibid., 21.

rely on the Bible for authority. The pace of change was comparatively slow, so there was more excellent continuity between generational knowledge and experience. Most everyone seemed to agree on what life was about—and in that sense, things felt sweet, simple, and straightforward.²⁰⁹

In digital Babylon, on the other hand, the Bible is one of many voices that interpret human experience; it is no longer viewed as the central authority over people and society. Today, if someone unironically drops “the Bible says” in a media interview, they sound as if they have just disembarked from a time machine.²¹⁰

Caught Between Cultures

The idol in a Jerusalem-like culture is false piety; people want to appear devout, to look spiritual. Kinnaman revealed that 25 years ago, US researchers like those at Barna were more likely than today to contend with religious "social desirability bias"—a desire on the part of survey respondents to be perceived as more spiritually engaged than they are. That is because there was higher societal pressure to present oneself as a person of faith—even to an anonymous interviewer. That pressure has all but evaporated. It exists now only in pockets of Christian subculture. He disclosed, “From a researcher’s point of view, this is excellent news. From a Christian point of view, it’s a mixed bag.”²¹¹

Those who make claims like "There's nothing new about the dropout problem" or "Young people will return to church when they get married or have kids" perceive culture as a mere

209. Kinnaman, *Faith for Exiles*, 21.

210. *Ibid.*

211. *Ibid.*, 22.

backdrop that makes no impact on the thoughts, feelings, relationships, and choices of the characters. The society we inhabit—the prevailing attitudes, the collective values, the assumptions about human purpose and flourishing, even the tools we use—is more like a character in, than the setting of our lives.²¹² There is a big difference, for example, between growing up in some areas of the country and growing up in others in terms of how that socializes us toward or against faith. In other words, culture acts on our stories and our perceptions of our stories.²¹³

Scripture is bursting with vivid characterizations of cities and societies. Jerusalem. Babylon. Sodom. Egypt. Canaan. Galilee. Rome. Laodicea. Nineveh. At the end of the short book of the Bible named for Jonah, God asked the prophet a rhetorical question: “Shouldn’t I feel sorry for such a great city?” (4:11). Nineveh was not a painted canvas background or a cardboard veneer against which Jonah discerned, resisted, and is reconciled to his prophetic calling; God cared for every single one of the 120,000-odd Ninevites and the Assyrian culture they gave birth to. He wants to redeem whole neighborhoods, cities, and societies because they are filled with people made in his image, which together create a unique way of being in God’s story: a culture.²¹⁴

Kinnaman pointed out that the power of digital tools and the content they deliver are incredible, and we are the first generation of humans who cannot rely on the earned wisdom of past ages to help us live with these rapid technological changes. Instead of older adults and

212. Roger Valci at Valley Christian Center in Dublin, California, eloquently expresses these ideas.

213. Kinnaman, *Faith for Exiles*, 23.

214. *Ibid.*, 23.

traditions, many young people turn to friends and algorithms. Digital Babylon moves at the pace of fiber optics, and the idol is fitting in and being up to speed.²¹⁵ Screens promise more connectedness, but, as researcher Jean Twenge has shown, loneliness, depression, and anxiety among teens have risen alongside widespread adoption of the smartphone.²¹⁶

He concluded that this is the “iSelf” era, and many young people are crippled by FOMO (the fear of missing out)—not to mention the fear of making the wrong choice, the fear of disappointing people close to them, and the fear of living a substandard life. Talk about anxiety! No wonder so many live depleted, shallow lives, huddled behind their screens consuming personalized content in a futile effort to fill the void.²¹⁷

Chapter Summary

To keep the project in perspective, a compelling case has been made for the historical, theological, and Biblical dimensions of youth discipleship. Though difficult to find the theological reasons to support the youth dropout from the church of the 21st century, it has been established that the problem cannot be merely dismissed as an eschatological fulfillment of end-time prophecy.

The study in this chapter has established that the command of Jesus to “go and make disciples” cannot be conveniently reduced to a six-week baptismal class, but a call to the

215. *Ibid.*, 25.

216. Jean Twenge, “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?” in *Atlantic*, September 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/has-the-smartphone-destroyed-a-generation/534198/>. Accessed April 25, 2018.

217. Kinnaman, *Faith for Exiles*, 26.

community to reignite a higher view of discipleship. Learning from Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others about the cost of discipleship will help the Christian community realize that baptism doesn't make one a disciple any more than throwing on a chef's hat makes one a chef. Discipleship is about understanding the cost of training in Christlikeness, daily self-denial, and a step-by-step journey towards the Cross—where the old is crucified, and the new is revealed in us. Discipleship is radical; it is hardcore; it is so much more than what our tradition has made it out to be.

A compelling case has been established that even though youth discipleship in the Old and New Testament was the responsibility of the fathers, the community of believers was equally responsible for training up the child to grow up in the fear of the Lord.

The contemporary related literature review has revealed that even though much has been written about the youth dropout problem and how to resolve the issue, none have attempted to apply the principles deduced from the Pauline model of discipleship to address the dropout problem.

The chapter concludes with the review of socio-cultural, and technological context in which the Gen Z are growing. Even though in his latest book *Faith for Exiles*, Kinnaman reported that, in less than a decade, the proportion of 18 to 29-year-old dropouts has increased to nearly two-thirds of all young adults who were once regular churchgoers have dropped out at one time or another to 64 percent. However, all hope is not lost. In the same book, Kinnaman and his coauthor, Mark Matlock, are confident that, from a numbers point of view, 10 percent of young Christians amounting to just under four million 18 to 29-year-olds in the U.S. who follow Jesus are resiliently faithful. The next chapter will highlight the research methodology employed to

reveal the detailed descriptive narrative of the dropout problem and the root causes of the disconnection, with an introduction to Paul and his discipleship model.

Chapter Three

Project Narrative – Research Methodology Used to Accomplish Goals

Copious qualitative and quantitative research has already been conducted on the youth dropout problem over the years by reputable research intuitions such as the Barna Group, the Pew Foundation, and the Fuller Youth Research Institute. There is, therefore, no need to "reinvent the wheels" by conducting similar research on the same youth dropout problem. What seems to be lacking is an honest attempt to resolve the research problem by using the basic principles derived from Paul's practice of discipleship in order to address the research assumption. The mixed research method was employed to analyze the existing research data using the Pauline concept of discipleship to address the youth dropout problem.

Kinnaman and his team compiled and analyzed the Barna Group database of hundreds of thousands of interviews conducted over a twenty-seven-year span to understand the generational dynamics of faith formation in the United States.²¹⁸ Additionally, they have completed eight new scientific national studies, including nearly 5,000 new interviews for the *You Lost Me* project alone. Their research was tailored to understand eighteen to twenty-nine year-olds, asking them to describe their experience of church and faith, what (if anything) has pushed them away, and what connective issue remains between them and Christianity.²¹⁹ As the intent of this project is to gather and evaluate the quantitative data, and align it with the qualitative data gathered from the literature review to reveal the root causes of the dropout problem, a review of the faith journeys of the next generation and the origins of their disengagement will be identified, since it is clear that they are not monochromatic, or one-size-fits-all, as every one of their stories matters.

218. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 28.

219. Ibid. 29.

The findings presented in the Fuller’s *Growing Young* emerged from the “Churches Engaging Young People” CEYP (pronounced as “keep”) Project, conducted from 2012 to 2015 by the Fuller Youth Institute (FYI) at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California. The goal of the project was to understand how and why exemplary churches are effectively engaged with teenagers and emerging adults. The project's goal was accomplished through research, beginning with a nomination process that identified churches that were perceived to be exemplary.²²⁰

The Fuller Research Team then studied these congregations in three stages. The first stage consisted of quantitative and qualitative online surveys of pastors and youth/young adult leaders, followed by the second stage of structured quantitative and qualitative phone interviews with church leaders and parishioners, and concluded with the third stage of church site visits that utilized ethnographic research methods.²²¹

Dr. Cameron Lee and Dr. James Furrow, both faculty members in Fuller Seminary's School of Psychology, oversaw the data analysis of the first stage. Two doctoral students utilized thematic analysis to code responses to the qualitative questions. Study of the quantitative data was conducted using statistical analysis software. Initial correlations were run between the eight church characteristics and church leaders’ ratings of spiritual vibrancy, faith maturity, attendance rates and involvement of young people, and other demographic data. Additional regression analyses were performed to understand better how particular variables interacted.²²² This project

220. Powell, *Growing Young*, 43.

221. *Ibid.* 7.

222. Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, “Churches Engaging Young People Project Overview and Research Method,” *Growing Young*, 2016, <https://churchesgrowingyoung.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Growing-Young-Research-Method-1.pdf>. Accessed September 16, 2019.

research intended to utilize their findings to discover the reasons for the "Disconnection" of the youth from the church and then utilize the Pauline concept of discipleship to facilitate the "Reconnection."

Though not glaringly exhibited in his letters and Luke's accounts, the epistemology of Paul's concept of discipleship is embedded in his association with his teammates. I will rely on N.T. Wright's autobiography of *Paul* for the detailed historical and socio-cultural backdrop of his letters.²²³ Ryan Lokkesmoe's book, *Paul and His Team: What the Early Church Can Teach Us About Leadership and Influence*, will help this study bring about a "Reconnection" of the youth to the church, drawing insights heavily from the Pauline concept of discipleship.²²⁴

The Dropout Problem

Based on the Barna Group research data, Kinnaman in his book *You Lost Me* invited the reader to meet the next generation. He posited:

As we get to know them together, there are three realities we need to keep in mind: 1. Teen church engagement remains robust, but many of the enthusiastic teens so typical in North American churches are not growing up to be faithful young adult disciples of Christ. 2. There are different kinds of dropouts, as well as committed young adults who never drop out at all. We need to take care not to lump an entire generation together because every story of disconnection requires a personal, tailor-made response. 3. The dropout problem is, at its core, a faith-development problem; to use religious language, it's a disciple-making problem. The church is not adequately preparing the next generation to follow Christ faithfully in a rapidly changing culture.²²⁵

223. N.T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2018).

224. Lokkesmoe, *Paul and His Team*, 36.

225. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 21.

Kinnaman’s observations concerning the youth of today are very compelling and therefore need further attention. Ironically, although he indicated that teenagers are some of the most religiously active Americans, Kinnaman insisted that American twentysomethings are the least religiously active.²²⁶

Over a period of five years, from 2004 to 2013, the research data indicated that the ages eighteen to twenty-nine are the black hole of church attendance; this age segment is missing in action (MIA) from most congregations. As shown in figure 2 below, the percentage of church attendees bottoms out during the beginning of adulthood. Overall, there is a forty-three percent drop-off between the teen and early adult years regarding church engagement. These numbers represent about eight million twentysomethings who were active churchgoers as teenagers but who will no longer be mainly engaged in a church by their thirtieth birthday.²²⁷

The problem is not that this generation has been less churched than the children before them; Kinnaman believes the problem was that much spiritual energy fades away during a crucial decade of life—the twenties.²²⁸ More than four out of five Americans under the age of eighteen will spend at least a part of their childhood, tween, or teenage years, attending a Christian congregation or parish. More than eight out of every ten adults remember attending Sunday school or some other religious training consistently before the age of twelve, though

226. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 22.

227. *Ibid.*, 23.

228. *Ibid.*, 24.

their participation during the teen years were less frequent. About seven out of ten Americans recall going to Sunday school or other religious programs for teens at least once a month.²²⁹

The situation has worsened because, in less than a decade, from 2011 to 2019, the proportion of eighteen to twenty-nine-year-old dropouts has increased. Today, 64 percent—nearly two-thirds—of all young adults who were once regular churchgoers have dropped out at one time or another.²³⁰ Indeed, God's people have weathered hostile seasons in the past; church history reminds one that living faithfully has never been easy. The Barna research shows that *resilient faith* is tougher to grow today using the cultivation methods relied on throughout the twentieth century.²³¹

In several Gallup surveys, Americans described themselves as Christians. Where—and when—does one think this allegiance begins?²³² Early in life, before adulthood. Adults identify themselves as Christians typically because they had formative experiences as a child or as a teenager that connected them to Christianity. Frank Newport in a Gallup News confirmed this

229. David Kinnaman. “New Research Explores the Long-Term Effect of Spiritual Activity among Children and Teens.” November 16, 2009.

<https://www.barna.com/research/new-research-explores-the-long-term-effect-of-spiritual-activity-among-children-and-teens/>. Accessed 11/30/19.

230. Barna Group. “Church Dropouts Have Risen to 64%-But What About Those Who Stay?” in *Barna.com*. September 4, 2019. <https://www.barna.com/research/resilient-disciples/>. Accessed September 20, 2019.

231. Kinnaman, *Faith for Exiles*, 14-15.

232. Gallup, Inc. “The Trend Line: Church Attendance Today Similar to 1940s” in *Gallup.com*. December 27, 2013. <https://news.gallup.com/video/175130/trend-line-church-attendance-today-similar-1940s.aspx>. Accessed September 20, 2019.

point when he reported that America remains a mostly Christian nation, although less so than in the past.

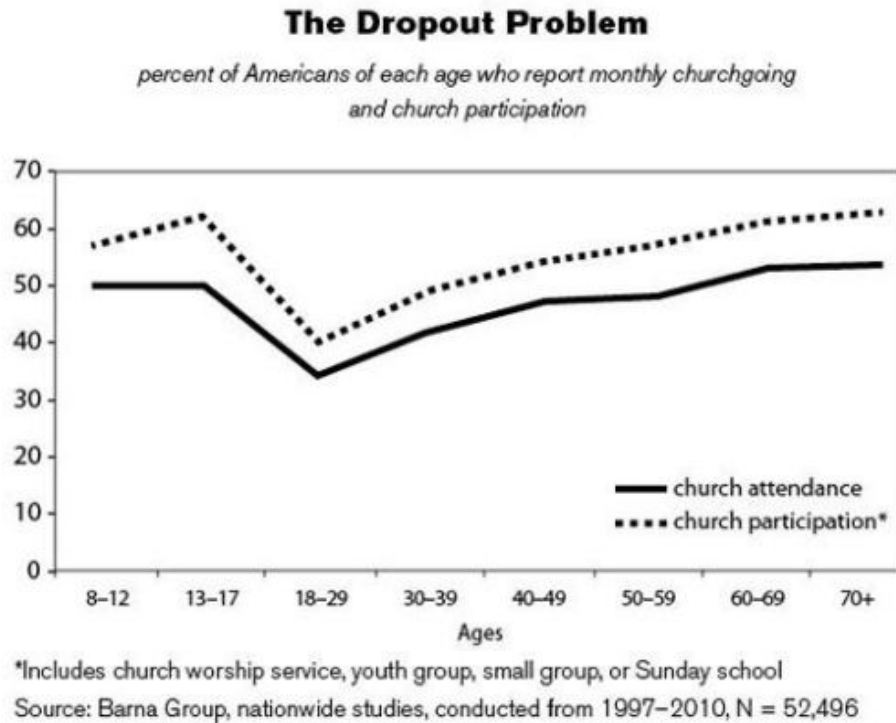


Figure 1. The Dropout Problem Chart 1997-2010.²³³

Seventy-four percent of Americans identify with a Christian religion, and 5% identify with a non-Christian religion.²³⁴ In a Barna Group study conducted in early 2011, a nationwide random sample of young adults with a Christian background were asked to describe their journey of faith. The interviewed population was made up of individuals who attended a Protestant or Catholic church or who identified at any time as a Christian before the age of eighteen, which

233. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 22.

234. Frank Newport. "Five Key Findings on Religion in the U.S." *Gallup.com*. December 23, 2016 in <http://news.gallup.com/poll/200186/five-key-findings-religion.aspx>. Accessed December 04, 2017.

included young people who were currently churched and those who were unchurched, as well as those who called themselves Christians and some who once did but no longer did so.²³⁵

The research confirmed previous data: 59 percent of young people with a Christian background reported that they had or have "dropped out of attending church, after going regularly." A majority (57 percent) said they are less active in the church today compared to when they were age fifteen. Nearly two-fifths (38 percent) said they had gone through a period when they significantly doubted their faith. Another one-third (32 percent) described a time when they felt like rejecting their parents' faith.²³⁶ Unfortunately as indicated earlier, the current data in 2019 show an increased dropout rate of 64 percent.²³⁷

Many of the perceptions of the young Catholics are similar to those of young Protestants; however, it has also been learned that Catholics struggle with particular aspects of their faith: one-fifth (21 percent) said, "the clergy abuse scandals have made me question my faith."²³⁸ One-eighth (13 percent) of young Catholics said they "had a mostly negative experience in a Catholic school." Two out of every five (40 percent) said, "the Catholic church's teachings on sexuality and birth control are out of date," while one-quarter of young Catholics (28 percent) said, "it

235. Barna Group. "6 Reasons Young People Leave Church. (Currents)" in *Leadership Win*. January 01, 2012 in <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-ebshost-com.seu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=33h&AN=33h-FFC6A5B9-99000451&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. Accessed December 1, 2017.

236. Ibid.

237. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 15.

238. P.M. Kline, R. McMackin, and E. Lezotte. "The Impact of the Clergy Abuse Scandal" 290-300, September 2008. <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-ebshost-com.seu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rzh&AN=105570104&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. Accessed December 10, 2019.

bothers me that the church does not ordain women as priests.”²³⁹ When it comes to perceptions of their parish and the Mass, one-third (34 percent), indicated that "Mass is supposed to be meaningful, but it feels like a boring obligation. One-fifth (22 percent) said, "they are confident that Jesus Christ speaks to them in a way that is personal and relevant to their circumstances."²⁴⁰

The Fuller Team discovered that congregations are aging. Powell indicated that those who study demographics believe the decline in overall church attendance is linked with young people’s religious practices, or lack thereof.²⁴¹ According to the 2015 US Census Bureau data, adults ages 18 to 29 comprised 17 percent percent of the adult population. Yet that same age group represents less than 10 percent of church attendees nationwide. Evangelical Protestant congregations have the highest concentration of young adults at 14 percent, followed by Catholic parishes at 10 percent, and mainline Protestant congregations at 6 percent.²⁴²

The past five years have brought major changes to the faith of young Latinos, one of the fastest-growing ethnicities in the USA. From 2010 to 2013, the number of 18 to 29-year-old Latinos who identified as Roman Catholics dropped from 60 percent to 45 percent, while those

239. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 18.

240. Ibid.

241. Powell, *Growing Young*, 198.

242. Adults ages 18-29 comprise 16.7 percent of the adult population according to a report from 2015 statistics released by the United States Census Bureau. Annual estimates of the resident population by single year of age and sex for the United States: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2015, in <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/growing-young/>. Accessed December 10, 2019.

who identified as “religiously unaffiliated” increased dramatically from 14 percent to 31 percent.²⁴³

Asian Americans, another fast-growing group within the United States, are experiencing their own faith struggles. While the “rise of the nones” cuts across ethnicities, Asian Americans are seven percent more likely to be “religiously unaffiliated” than the general population.²⁴⁴ The Fuller Team confirmed that across cultures, a major turning point for young people’s faith seems to be high school graduation. Multiple studies highlighted that 40 to 50 percent of youth group seniors—like the young people in the church—drift from God and the faith community after they graduate.²⁴⁵

The Fuller Team personalized the research by asking the reader to visualize a photograph of the young people in a congregation: “Now imagine holding a red pen and drawing an X through almost 50 percent of their faces. That many will fall away from the faith as young adults.”²⁴⁶ They pointed out that some—perhaps more than half—of those who drift from the church end up rejoining the faith community, generally when they get married and have children. Even so, the situation still leaves close to 50 percent adrift.²⁴⁷

243. Pew Research Center, “The Shifting Religious Identity of Latinos in the United States,” May 7, 2014 in <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/05/07/the-shifting-religious-identity-of-Latinos-in-the-united-states>. Accessed December 10, 2019.

244. Pew Research Center. “Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faiths,” July 19, 2012, in <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/07/19/asian-americans-a-mosaic-of-faiths-overview/>. Accessed December 10, 2019.

245. Ibid.

246. When the phrase “fall away” from the faith, is used, it does not necessarily mean that students have “lost” their salvation but rather that they have moved away from a faith that places Jesus at the center of all they are and do.

247. Powell, *Growing Young*, 227.

Even those who return have made significant life decisions about worldview, relationships, and vocation—all during an era when their faith was shoved aside. The consequences of those lasting decisions are often tough to erase. Powell stated, “As followers of Jesus, parents, and leaders who have been in student and pastoral ministry much of our adult lives, we aren’t satisfied with the shrinking and aging of congregations. We bet you aren’t either.”²⁴⁸

The interpretative conclusion drawn from all the data is that, after significant exposure to Christianity as teenagers and children, many young adults, whether raised Catholic or Protestant, are MIA from the pews and active commitment to Christ during their twenties. Even where individual churches and parishes are efficiently reaching young people, the number of twentysomething attendees is a mere drop in the bucket, considering the number of young people who reside in their local community. For, every congregation that is attracting a healthy proportion of Gen Z attendees, many more churches are struggling with how to connect to and remain relevant in the lives of young believers.²⁴⁹

Classification of Dropouts

One of the essential things deduced from the Barna Group study is that there is more than one way to drop out and more than one way to stay faithful. Every person goes on a unique journey related to his or her faith and spirituality, and every story matters.²⁵⁰ The reasons people

248. Powell, *Growing Young*, 228.

249. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 25.

250. *Ibid.*

drop out, as similar to each other as they may seem, are very real and very personal to those who experience them. The Christian community needs to bear this in mind.²⁵¹

At the same time, as much as every story is different and worthy of serious attention and care, there are patterns in the data that can help us make sense of the dropout problem. Lumping all young adult dropouts into one group will be unfair and at best misleading, as every one of them is at different stages of their faith journey. The Barna Team discovered in their research that there are three broad ways of being lost and have consequently classified dropouts as:

1. Nomads

These are young adults who have walked away from church engagement but still consider themselves Christians.²⁵² Kinnaman told the story of Doreen who is an example of a true story of a *nomad*. She grew up in an evangelical Protestant church. Her father, James, had worked for Christian organizations during Doreen's entire life and regularly teaches Sunday school. Both her parents have been committed churchgoers. Doreen described struggling with an anxiety disorder and never feeling that she fit in at church. Doreen explained, "The first strike against the church was the youth group, where I didn't fit in, and no effort was made to help me. The second strike was in college when the campus ministry I attended started talking about their quotas for getting people saved. The third strike was the judgment my parents received from their church friends about me. They told my parents that they did a bad job raising me." Despite

251. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 25.

252. Barna Group. "6 Reasons Young People Leave Church. (Currents)" in *Leadership Win* 2012, January 01, 2012. <https://seu.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-ebSCOhost.com.seu.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=33h&AN=33h-FFC6A5B9-99000451&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. Accessed December 1, 2017.

these negative experiences, Doreen fits the profile of a nomad because she prays and reads her Bible often. She concluded, “I never lost faith in Christ, but I have lost faith in the church.”²⁵³

From the data in figure 3 in the appendix, below are some interpretative characteristics of the nomadic mindset:

- A. Nomads still describe themselves as Christian. They have not disavowed Christianity but are no longer particularly committed to their faith or especially to churchgoing.
- B. They believe that personal involvement in a Christian community is optional.
- C. The importance of faith has faded.
- D. Most are not angry or hostile toward Christianity.
- E. Many are spiritual experimentalists.

It is important to note that about one-quarter (24 percent) of the interviewed young Christians in this category said they may be willing to return to church later in life, but it was not particularly urgent to them.²⁵⁴

2. Prodigals

These have lost their faith, describing themselves as “no longer Christian.”²⁵⁵ This second category of dropout consists of young people who leave their childhood or teen faith entirely. Kinnaman told the story of James who typified a prodigal, an ex-Christian. He grew up in the Catholic church, but his love for science and his razor-sharp wit— which was sometimes

253. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 26.

254. *Ibid.*, 64-65.

255. *Ibid.*, 68.

perceived as disrespect— regularly put him at odds with the parish leaders. After a period of searching and wrestling with his faith, he said, "I just stopped believing in those Christian stories." Time will tell if Alex will return to faith later in life. However, usually, the attitudes of prodigals seem closed to such outcomes.²⁵⁶

From figure 4, the characteristics of a prodigal mindset are;

- A. They feel varying levels of resentment towards Christians and Christianity. Many prodigals still have positive things to say about specific people (such as their parents), but the overall tenor of their perceptions is negative.
- B. They disavowed returning to church. They feel deeply wounded by their church experience and do not plan ever to go back.
- C. They have moved on from Christianity. The Prodigals describe themselves as “nones.”²⁵⁷

Prodigals typically say that they are done with Christianity; it just does not make sense to them. Their spiritual needs, such as they sense them, are being met elsewhere.²⁵⁸ Their regrets, if they have them, usually center on their parents. In other words, they recognize that their faith choices have made a significant impact on their parents, yet they feel as though they were compelled to de-convert. They feel as if they have broken out of constraints. Many prodigals think that the Christianity they experienced kept them stuck in a box or demanded that they

256. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 69.

257. *Ibid.*, 70.

258. *Ibid.*, 78.

become someone other than their true self. They experience leaving as freedom.²⁵⁹ Figure 4 in the appendix give a graphic summary of the characteristics of the prodigal.

3. Exiles

The young adults belonging to this group are still invested in their Christian faith but feel stuck (or lost) between culture and the church.²⁶⁰ Here is a true story of an exile told by Kinnaman. Nathan, the lead singer of a successful band, exemplifies an exile. Nathan's parents were, like Doreen's, were part of an evangelical church during his childhood years. Then his parents split up. "I was volatile toward church and faith for a long time, but way more so toward church than faith." In an interview with *Relevant Magazine*, Nathan described his "enormous cynicism toward all things of institutional Christianity."²⁶¹

Nathan and his bandmates stated, "we are all embarrassed by and ashamed of a lot of the [Christian] subculture we came from, but not necessarily ashamed or embarrassed by the beliefs we had." Nathan's faith is still intact and was largely saved by his association with other young artists who were honest about their struggles and willing to help each other heal. The magazine described Nathan and his band as "asking questions and resisting some aspects of their conservative upbringings— yet still searching for something more from their faith."²⁶²

259. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*. 78.

260. *Ibid.*, 79.

261. Kevin Selders. "No More Secrets for the Cold War Kids" in *Relevant Magazine* (January– February 2011): 56– 59.

262. *Ibid.*

One hallmark of the exiles is their feeling that their vocation (or professional calling) is disconnected from their church experience. Their Christian background has not prepared them to live and work efficiently in society. Their faith is "lost" from Monday through Friday. The Christianity they have learned does not meaningfully speak to the fields of fashion, finance, medicine, science, or media to which they are drawn.²⁶³

Kinnaman explained his use of the term “exile” as follows:

The word “exile” comes from the Old Testament biblical narrative, most notably the lives of Daniel, Ezekiel, and their fewer famous friends. These young Hebrews were, as you may know, taken captive or forced into political exile when the nation of Judah was overrun by the kingdom of Babylon, an event that occurred hundreds of years before the time of Christ. Secondly, the thought the metaphor of exiles works exceptionally well, given the modern-day North American parallels with Babylon. Our cultural backdrop of access, alienation, and authority isn't far removed from the spirit of Babylon nearly three millennia ago. At its worst, today's western culture is indulgent, distracted, idol-following, and hedonistic. The time and place may be different, but the tension of living in-but-not-of lives describes the challenge for the faithful both then and now.²⁶⁴

In a Pew Research study, that confirms Kinnaman’s quote above, it was discovered that two out of five (42 percent) 18 to 29-year-old Christians said they were “very concerned about my generation leaving the church.”²⁶⁵ A similar proportion (41 percent) described their desire for “a more traditional faith, rather than a hip version of Christianity.” And three out of every ten (30 percent) young Christians said they were “more excited about church than at any time in my life.”²⁶⁶

263. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 75.

264. Ibid.

265. Pew Research Center. "A Portrait of Generation Next" in Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project. January 09, 2007. <https://www.people-press.org/2007/01/09/a-portrait-of-generation-next/>. Accessed December 12, 2019.

266. Ibid., 27.

One must be encouraged by the new expressions of worship and community, such as the passion worship movement and Hillsong United, and the emphasis among some leaders to raise the theological and practical expectations of young people. Brett and Alex Harris, teenage twin brothers who wrote the book *Do Hard Things*,²⁶⁷ are an example of this countertrend, as is Pastor Kevin DeYoung, author of *Just Do Something*.²⁶⁸ These young adults and other young leaders are responding to the “failure to launch” that often defines this generation.²⁶⁹ They realized that the pressure of increased expectations has paralyzed many of their peers and are doing all they can to help.

Kinnaman pointed out that there are also significant questions raised by their research about the quality and vigor of faith among twentysomethings who do not drop out. Overall, knowledge of Scripture, doctrine, and church history is poor among most Christians, not just young adult believers. He believed that the cultural pressures faced uniquely by Gen Z make holding on to the Christian faith a problematic undertaking— if their faith is shallow, how can it survive? Are their theological views and commitment to Christ deep enough? Will they be a generation to be reckoned with or one that pushes their convictions to the sidelines? How much will cultural accommodation and acclimation define their faith? Will they capitulate to faith-

267. Alex Harris and Brett Harris. *Do Hard Things: A Teenage Rebellion against Low Expectations* (Sisters, CO: Multnomah, 2016).

268. Kevin DeYoung. *Just Do Something: A Liberating Approach to Finding God's Will* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014).

269. Other books that point to these countertrends include: Colleen Carroll. *The New Faithful: Why Young Adults Are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2002); Collin Hansen. *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); and Gabe Lyons. *The Next Christians: Seven Ways You Can Live the Gospel and Restore the World* (New York, NY: Random House, 2010).

killing cultural norms?²⁷⁰ These are all crucial questions that demanded answers by the Christian community.

The next generation is caught between two possible destinies— one moored by the power and depth of the Jesus-centered gospel and one anchored to a cheap, Americanized version of the historic faith that will snap at the slightest puff of wind. Without a clear path to pursue the right gospel, millions of young Christians will look back on their twenties as a series of lost opportunities for Christ.²⁷¹

Hope for The Next Generation

The Fuller Research Team and the Barna Group both believe there is hope for the next generation. Powell, in the book *Growing Young*, told the story of Stephen—who goes by “Stretch” —and how he received his first set of car keys when he was 16. Stretch’s town handed him a driver’s license, and his parents handed him the key to the family car. Heart pounding with excitement, he climbed behind the wheel and pulled out of his driveway for the first time on his own. Stretch could not believe the newfound freedom and responsibility he had been given. He took a step away from childhood and a step closer to adulthood.²⁷²

As Stretch pulled onto the street and began to accelerate, he faced an important and practical question: *Where should I go?* Within a moment, he knew the answer. Over the past several years, his church had become like a second home to him. There he felt known, accepted,

270. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 28.

271. *Ibid.*, 27.

272. Powell, *Growing Young*, 640.

and valued. So, naturally, he headed in that direction. As he drove into the parking lot, the church's childcare was wrapping up for the day. One of the coordinators who knew Stretch noticed him driving the car. Given a recent shortage of childcare workers and seeing that he now had transportation, she asked if he was interested in helping after school.

She was only halfway through the question before Stretch knew his answer. He would get to hang out at the church, spend time with kids, and on top of it all, he would get paid. *This day couldn't get any better!* Until a few minutes later, when she returned from the church office and handed him a key to the church. "If you're going to help us, there will be times when we'll need you to lock up," she explained.²⁷³

Stretch was staring so intently at the key that he barely heard her words. The pastor had this key. His Sunday school teacher had this key. Other adults who were mature—who had power—had this key. Now him? It was like he had been waiting on the sidelines during the big game and was now being called to step onto the playing field.²⁷⁴

Life was truly as good as it could be. Until it got even better. A week later, while Stretch was working in the childcare center, the youth pastor dropped by. "You know, Stretch," he said, "if you have your license and are already at the church, would you be willing to stock the soda machine for me? The job comes with all the Mountain Dew you can drink." Key to the car. Check. Key to the church. Check. Key to the soda machine. Check. Stretch knew he had arrived. Later that night, Stretch received the final "key" that forever changed the course of his life.

273. Ibid., 660.

274. Ibid.

Standing alone in the empty church, he heard God speak to him—not audibly but distinctly. “You like to be here, don’t you?” God asked. “Yes, I do,” Stretch answered. “Well, get comfortable, because you’re going to be here a lot.” From that day on, Stretch knew that both his future and his vocation were closely tied to church ministry. Leaders he deeply respected had entrusted him with *access* and *authority* by giving him keys, both literally and figuratively. In the several decades that followed, others continued to entrust him with the keys of leadership, and he has now been a youth pastor for over 20 years.²⁷⁵

Powell concluded the story with the remarks: “Today Stretch, his senior pastor, and the culture of Immanuel Church of the Nazarene exemplify a powerful kind of leadership pervasive in churches and parishes that grow young—a type of leadership that can unleash the limitless potential of young people and infuse an entire congregation with new life and energy.”²⁷⁶

The Fuller Youth Institute research revealed that today Churches that grow young are brimming with staff, volunteers, and parents who demonstrate *keychain leadership*. Whoever holds the keys has the power to let people in or to keep people out. Keys provide access to physical rooms, as well as to strategic meetings, significant decisions, and central roles or places of authority. The more power you have, the more keys you tend to possess.²⁷⁷

When the Fuller Group referred to keys, they meant the capabilities, power, and access of leaders that carry the potential to empower young people. By keychain leaders, they meant pastoral and congregational leaders who are acutely aware of the keys on their keychain;

275. Ibid., 661.

276. Ibid., 670.

277. Ibid., 672.

and intentional about entrusting and empowering all generations, including teenagers and emerging adults, with their own set of keys. Beyond simply launching a student leadership team, keychain leadership is a spirit and commitment demonstrated by both paid and volunteer leaders that permeate every area of the church.²⁷⁸

Like so many teenagers and emerging adults they studied, Stretch moved from being a satisfied participant to a contributing partner once keychain leaders gave him the right keys at the right time, and they knew it was not always that simple. Any believer on staff with a church as a senior pastor, executive pastor, associate pastor, family pastor, or youth pastor is doing incredible—and hard—work. Powell and her team knew because all three of them have served on pastoral staff for churches in California, Kentucky, and Michigan. In every church they served, they (like everyone else) were sometimes given and other times had to earn keys—both literally and metaphorically.

Paul in the Context of First and Twenty-first Centuries

In the introduction of nearly every biography, the authors noted that their subjects were products of their time. The impulse is a good one, as it is an effort to take context seriously. If one wants to understand someone's motives and the significance of their beliefs or actions, one has to consider them in light of the age and culture in which they acted. That is why so many biographies use “the life and times” in their titles. A person cannot be understood without also understanding their context.²⁷⁹

278. Ibid., 673.

279. E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Paul Behaving Badly: Was the Apostle a Racist, Chauvinist Jerk?* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016), 18.

It will benefit this project to examine a brief overview of Paul's life, highlighting a few elements.²⁸⁰ Where one was raised is important for it determines one's heart language and thus one's worldview. Based on the best reading of Acts 22:3, evangelical scholars think Paul was born in Tarsus but raised in Jerusalem. His perspective would be that of a Palestinian Jew, and a Judean, from a family of Pharisees (Acts 23:6). Paul received the highest level of education that traditional Jewish culture provided, studying under the premier rabbi of the time, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). He spoke Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, he was a rising star in Jerusalem, and led the movement opposing Christianity (Acts 22:4).²⁸¹

Having said that, Richards indicates it is unwise to draw too strong a distinction between Palestinian Judaism and the broader Greco-Roman culture. Using a modern analogy, many committed Christians in the 21st century church would assert they are not like the "pagan culture" of North America, which may be true. In some ways, it is not. They speak "American" (a dialect of English) and have a general American viewpoint on things such as money, politics ("freedom is worth fighting for"), marriage, careers, leisure, and a good life. Most of them have the same kind of education as other Americans. Likewise, Paul shared many things in common with the broader culture of his day. He spoke Greek. He used "pagan" money and transportation systems. He likely went to plays and city games.²⁸² He wrote letters like his contemporaries did. He used Greco-Roman rhetoric and quoted their philosophers (Acts 17:28). He was at home in a

280. For more background on the life of Paul see N.T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2018).

281. Richards, *Paul Behaving Badly*, 19.

282. Clearly, we cannot know Paul's daily calendar, but he does quote Greek playwrights (1 Cor. 15:33) and uses illustrations from the games (1 Cor. 9:24-26); Corinth had a theater and hosted the Isthmian Games.

typical Roman city, not just with the streets and city layout, but also with how government functioned. He was a Roman citizen and probably a member of the tentmakers trade guild.²⁸³

N.T. Wright wrote:

In Paul's day, "religion" consisted of God-related activities that, along with politics and community life, held a culture together and bound the members of that culture to its divinities and to one another. In the modern Western world, "religion" tends to mean God-related individual beliefs and practices that are supposedly separable from culture, politics, and community life. For Paul, "religion" was woven in with all of life; for the modern Western world, it is separated from it. So, when, in what is probably his earliest letter, Paul talks about "advancing in Judaism beyond any of his age," the word "Judaism" refers, not to a "religion," but to an activity: the zealous propagation and defense of the ancestral way of life.²⁸⁴

Paul was uniquely gifted and called by Christ; he was also a first-century Jewish citizen of the Roman Empire. One certainly should not expect him to act like a twenty-first-century American. Today, it is understood that Paul was not like a believer of the 21st century, therefore it is realistic to expect him to be a man of his time. Nonetheless, determining just what that means can be difficult.

Richards explains that the danger in calling people products of their time risks giving too much credit to the influence of a particular culture.²⁸⁵ One cannot assume that someone's historical context will explain away all his or her behavior. People absorb a great deal of the *zeitgeist* of their era, but they also are free to transcend it. For example, Adolf Hitler and Mahatma Gandhi were both men of their time—men of the same time. It goes without saying that they left quite different legacies behind them. After studying a person's historical context

283. Richards, *Paul Behaving Badly*, 19

284. N.T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2018), 3-4.

285. Richards, *Paul Behaving Badly*, 20

one may discover that they are even more enigmatic than one imagined.²⁸⁶ One may discover that Paul was not only out of sync with our time, but that he was also out of sync with his time. This research will show that historical context can explain a great deal about where a person's worldview begins, but it does not necessarily determine where that person's worldview will end.²⁸⁷

There are those who dislike Paul and view him as a product of his time with outdated and outmoded opinions, that whatever value Paul's viewpoint may have had, it has passed its expiration date. They deem him irrelevant and out of step with the times. However, there are others who think too highly of Paul. Western Christians tend to run straight to Paul when they want the "New Testament" answer to a tough question. They don't ask Jesus. They ask Paul.²⁸⁸

Richards remind believers that Paul was not the Son of God—instead his writings point to the Son of God. It is important to remember that while Paul, by divine inspiration, wrote the words of God, he was not himself the Word of God. Furthermore, Richards explains that, while Jesus is alive, biologically speaking, Paul is dead. But too often believers elevate Paul to a position of honor just short of where they set Jesus. One may believe that Paul's writings are inspired, but on the other hand, one will find it difficult to believe Paul's personality was inspired. One of the goals of this study is to humanize Paul—to remind the reader that he was a human being with all the foibles and potentials all humans carry. Therefore, Paul's model of discipleship as portrayed in his writings, though divinely inspired, does not mean his personal

286. Ibid.

287. Ibid.

288. Richards, *Paul Behaving Badly*, 21.

life and the way he related with his converts were equally divinely inspired.²⁸⁹ The reader will come to this realization as we now turn our attention to the Pauline model of discipleship.

The Pauline Model of Discipleship

Charles Monroe Sheldon considered Christ the supreme model of Christian behavior. That is why the Topeka pastor wrote the novel *In His Steps*, a story about a minister who challenges his congregants to judge all their actions by first asking themselves: “What would Jesus do?” The title is borrowed from Peter’s words: “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:21, NIV), and the book is one of the best-selling publications of all time. The subtitle became a popular catchphrase a century later (WWJD) and challenged a new generation of Christians to follow the example of Jesus.²⁹⁰

Jesus himself said, “Follow me,” so we expect our ministers and mentors to encourage us to be more like Jesus. All of us should be more like Jesus. Christians expect the disciples of Jesus to say, as Peter did, “Follow the example of Jesus,” but it takes a special kind of *chutzpah* for a disciple to say, “Follow my example.” Paul had *chutzpah*. “Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters,” he encouraged the Philippians (Philippians 3:17). At the very least, he claimed an intermediary role between Jesus and other Christians. “Follow my example,” Paul exhorted, “as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). The man who

289. Ibid., 20.

290. Charles M. Sheldon and Garrett Ward Sheldon. *In His Steps / What Would Jesus Do?* (New York, NY: Inspirational Press, 1998).

challenged the Romans to “not think of yourself more highly than you ought” (Romans 12:3) was now asking others to follow his example. It may be that Paul’s first-century readers had no problem with this instruction from their spiritual mentor. Maybe it did not sound brash to people then, but few modern Christians could summon the self-confidence to say these words about their own life: “Follow my example.” Coming from someone else, even from the pen of an apostle, the advice sounds arrogant.²⁹¹

"Follow my example," is the core message in the Pauline model of discipleship. Building a relationship with Christ through a relationship with him was Paul’s idea of effective discipleship. In a letter to the church in Galatia, Paul told the believer that God “set me apart from my mother’s womb” (Galatians 1:15). One might not blink at that statement, since it is typically assumed that all of believers are chosen in their mother’s womb, but that is not what Paul meant. The Bible only identifies a handful of people as set apart by God from before birth: Samson, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Jesus. God specially appointed all of them for a specific role in redemptive history, and I concur that Paul needs to be included in this list.²⁹²

Statements like these—*follow my example because I’m exceptional!*—have earned Paul a reputation for being kind of a jerk. The truth is, this self-appointment is just the beginning. Paul asserted his opinions, even when he was wrong. He bossed around churches and bulldozed other leaders. In 2014, the famed German scholar Gerd Lüdemann noted Paul’s “streak of arrogance and a tendency to vacillate,” and said Paul’s claims of “authority reinforced his sense of

291. Richards, *Paul Behaving Badly*, 24

292. Richards, *Paul Behaving Badly*, 25.

infallibility and often led him to bully any who disagreed.”²⁹³ While I do not think Paul ever vacillated, he did seem to bully. This description may bring to mind certain celebrity pastors who seem immune to rebuke, or leaders from one’s past who delivered their opinions from on high as if they were speaking the very words of God.

Elsewhere Paul cursed his opponents (Galatians 1:8). Some people try to rehabilitate Paul’s reputation by exclaiming, “I’m sure that’s not what he really meant.” However, that is what he meant. He repeated it just to make sure they got it: “I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!” (Galatians 1:9). Paul claimed to be superior to many of his contemporaries in keeping Torah (Galatians 1:14), claimed to speak in tongues more than all the Corinthians combined (1 Corinthians 14:18), and claimed to have worked harder than all the other apostles (1 Corinthians 15:10). Then he cursed some others in Corinth (1 Corinthians 16:22). Taken in total, his conduct had caused at least one modern Christian to claim, “No Christian genuinely seeking the righteousness of God should imitate a man like Paul.”²⁹⁴

So, why would one suggest that Paul’s call to “Follow my example” is the core of his discipleship model? The answer lies in the context of his calling to be the apostle to the Gentiles. In Acts 9:15, the Lord told Ananias His mission for Paul. "Go!" said the Lord. "This man is My

293. Gerd Lüdemann. “Paul, the Promoter of Christianity,” December 2014, in www.bibleinterp.com/articles/2014/12/lud388017.shtml. Accessed December 7, 2019,

294. Femi Aribisala. “Articles of Faith: Paul: The Hypocritical Pharisee” in *Premium Times*, June 16, 2013. www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/138853-article-of-faith-paul-the-hypocritical-pharisee-by-femi-aribisala.html. Accessed December 7, 2019,

chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles and their kings, and before the people of Israel.” Paul confirmed this mission during his defense before the crowd when he was arrested in Jerusalem in Acts 22:21: “Then He said to me, ‘Go! I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’” Paul understood his calling to send the gospel message to the Gentiles and intentionally organized his gospel outreach in fulfillment of that goal. Paul also understood that he was ministering to Gentiles who physically had not seen Jesus or knew anything about the God of Israel and His law or commandments. Paul therefore developed a unique model of discipleship that emphasized “heart knowledge” over “head knowledge.”

This study will now focus on the basic concepts of the Pauline model of discipleship.

1. The Concept of Relationship

Before they met Paul, the Gentiles were spiritual orphans. They were trapped in a fruitless way of life, far from God and wandering further. Paul understood that “in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4:15), and he took the role of spiritual father seriously. That is why he urged the Corinthians to “imitate me” (1 Corinthians 4:16). The Gentiles could not read a Gospel; those had not been written yet. The only way they would see Jesus was to look at Paul. Rodney Reeves stated the matter beautifully:

Essentially Paul was saying to his converts, “Want to know what the gospel looks like? You’re looking at it. My life displays the crucifixion of Christ. I am buried with Christ through baptism. Old things have passed away in my life; everything is becoming new because the Spirit of Jesus is in me. If you follow me, you’ll follow Jesus—that man you’ve never met but see in me.” So, when Paul said, “Imitate me,” he was not being presumptuous, or controlling, or pretentious. Rather, Paul was stating the obvious: he was the only way his converts would know the gospel. They did not have the Gospels in

written form... They needed someone to mentor them, to teach them, to help them live the gospel they believed. Paul was the man.”²⁹⁵

Clearly, Paul was skilled rhetorically and even wrote fierce letters, but in person he was gentle with his congregations as he established a relationship with them with honesty. In doing that, so gentle was he, his opponents accused him of being weak in person (2 Corinthians 10:10). Paul may have threatened to show up in person with fire and brimstone but instead he arrived with grace and compassion (2 Corinthians 10:1-2). Paul might rightly be accused of being heavy-handed with the Thessalonians, but one need to read the entire letter to understand why.²⁹⁶

Paul was also willing not to exercise his authority over them (1 Thessalonians 2:7). Look at how he spoke to them: “For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery . . . not to please mortals, but to please God . . . we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; nor did we seek praise . . . But we were gentle [a babe] among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. So deeply do we care for you . . . because you have become very dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:3-8 NRSV). Paul’s model of discipleship was based on relationship and not just head knowledge.²⁹⁷

2. The Concept of Love.

Consider, for example, Paul’s remarkable prayer for the Christians of Philippi in the opening section of his letter to them: “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more

295. Rodney Reeves. *Spirituality According to Paul: Imitating the Apostle of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 15-16.

296. Richards, *Paul Behaving Badly*, 27.

297. Richards, *Paul Behaving Badly*, 28.

and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:9–11).

Notice the sequence of Paul’s prayer here. If you read it too quickly, you might come away with the impression that Paul is primarily concerned about knowledge. Indeed, at a glance, given the human habits of the mind, one might think Paul is praying that the Christians in Philippi would deepen their knowledge so that they will know what to love. Smith encouraged the reader to look again. In fact, Paul’s prayer is the inverse: he prayed that their love might abound more and more because, in some sense, love is the condition for knowledge.²⁹⁸

It is not that “I know in order to love,” but rather: “I love in order to know.” And if we are going to discern “what is best”—what is “excellent,” what really matters, what is of ultimate importance—Paul tells us that the place to start is by attending to our loves. There is a very different model of the human person at work here. Instead of the rationalist, intellectualist model that implies “You are what you think,” Paul’s prayer hints at a very different conviction: “You are what you love.”²⁹⁹

What if, instead of starting from the assumption that human beings are thinking things, we started from the conviction that human beings are first and foremost lovers? What if you are defined not by what you know but by what you desire? What if the center and seat of the human person is found not in the heady regions of the intellect but in the gut-level regions of the heart? How would that change our approach to discipleship and Christian formation?³⁰⁰

298. Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 6.

299. Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 6.

300. *Ibid.*

Paul discovered this secret of love and built his discipleship around love. He urged the converts in Rome, “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:8-10 NIV).

To the believers in Corinth he wrote, “If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). Paul concluded by pointing out what he felt was the obvious to the Corinthians: “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

3. The Concept of Fathering.

With the lack of fathering within the church and family today, the church is witnessing a discipleship crisis. The lack of fathering and mentoring has yielded some of the most devastating results, one of which is the departure of the youth from faith and church. The role of a father should never be undervalued or underestimated. Paul recognized the most crucial role a father plays in the life of young people that he was quick to spiritually adopt most young adults he came into contact with as his spiritual sons. He started his letter to Timothy with the words “To

Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord” (Timothy 1:2 NIV).

The role of a father and mentor is significant, essential, and paramount to the development of our churches and children; especially the young men. Manhood is in a fight to survive as God created it to be. It will take men being men—finding their purpose and place through the word of God, being affirmed and mentored not only naturally, but spiritually by other experienced, proven men of God. Paul further told Timothy: “For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore, I urge you, imitate me. For this reason, I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church” (1 Corinthians 4:15-17 NKJV). Paul concluded: “Be on alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13 NASB). Men need to learn what it means to act like men. To do this the Church will not only need fathers, but will need to be fathered in what God desires for men.

4. The Concept of Mentorship.

Stacy E. Hoehl, writing for *The Journal of Biblical Perspectives on Leadership*, stated that mentoring relationships have received increasing amounts of attention from organizational leadership researchers and leadership practitioners alike. Mentoring relationships, in which a more experienced mentor works to advance the personal and professional growth of a less experienced protégé, have witnessed a noteworthy increase in use as a mechanism for leadership development. These mentorship relationships offer benefits to mentor, protégé, and organization

alike.³⁰¹ Paul saw the benefit of mentorship and implemented it as a guiding principle in discipling his young converts. Paul seem to have imbued most young adults he came in contact with such unique mentorship principles.

This study will now highlight how the four basic principles of the Pauline model of discipleship of: 1. Relationship, 2. Love, 3. Fathering and 4. Mentorship greatly influenced the life of Timothy, Titus, and Onesimus.

Paul as Mentor

There is no doubt that the Apostle Paul was a man with a marked past. Paul, then called Saul, directly oversaw the death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Paul's own conversion took place while he was actively seeking the imprisonment and death of Christians. He was the primary opponent of the gospel for the earliest Christians. Even with such an untrustworthy resume, Barnabas served as Paul's mentor and vouched for his genuine conversion when others were skeptical (Acts 9:27). Paul stands as the most prominent early Christian missionary, and while that is true, it is essential to recognize that Paul was initially sent out as Barnabas' assistant. In many ways, he was mentored and disciplined by Barnabas before their contentious split in Acts 15:39. Even though nothing is known of Barnabas' age, his influence as a mentor to Paul should not be overlooked in how it shaped Paul's commitment to passing the faith from generation to generation.³⁰²

301. Stacy E. Hoehl, "The Mentorship Relationship: An Exploration of Paul as a Loving Mentor to Timothy," *The Journal of Biblical Perspectives on Leadership*, 2011. https://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/jbpl/vol3no2/JBPL_Vol3No2_Hoehl_pp32-47.pdf. Accessed December 7, 2019.

302. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*. 51

When considering the men whom the Apostle Paul disciplined and mobilized for ministry, McGarry reminds believers that Paul was trained in the Rabbinic tradition. One can imagine that Paul would have selected disciples who would be labeled as “youth” or “young adults” today so that his mission to the Gentiles would continue long after his own death (and it did!).³⁰³

When Barnabas and Paul were sent out from Antioch for their first missionary journey, they were assisted by the young John Mark (Acts 12:25, 13:5), who eventually became a wedge between them. Even though John Mark’s age is not revealed in the passage, it seems obvious he was still a younger man and was presumably invited because he was Barnabas’ cousin (Colossians 4:10). Regarding John Mark’s contentious departure in Acts 13:13, theologian I. Howard Marshall observed: “We simply are not told why he returned to Jerusalem, but it is clear from Acts 15:38 that Paul regarded his defection as a serious matter, while Barnabas was prepared to make allowances for him.”³⁰⁴ This scenario seems like a situation most youth pastors have encountered: a young Christian who may not have been ready for the challenge is struggling, while older and more matured Christians disagree about how best to lead this young believer. Barnabas departed with John Mark to minister in his homeland of Cyprus, while Paul returned to Syria and Cilicia with Silas. In the end, this young man is the same John Mark who authored the Gospel of Mark, widely considered the earliest canonical gospel, and whom Paul wanted by his side as he neared his own death (2 Timothy 4:11).

Silas was one of the “leading men among the brothers” in the Jerusalem Church (Acts 15:22). New Testament scholars are not entirely clear if he was a Gentile or a Hellenistic Jew,

303. Ibid.

304. I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary* (Nottingham, England: Inter Varsity Press / IVP Academic, 2008).

but he is referred to as Silas (Greek) or Silvanus (Latin) but never a Hebrew name.³⁰⁵ While it is possible he was a Gentile Christian from Jerusalem, it is far more likely he was a Hellenized Jew who was a Roman citizen.³⁰⁶ From this background, Silas was positioned as a wise advocate between the Jewish believers and the Gentile Christians, which also helped explain why he was listed as one of the official representatives who would bring the report from the Council of Jerusalem to the church in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia (Acts 15:22-23). Silas joined Paul and Barnabas on their missionary journey where he made such a strong impression on Paul that he was chosen to remain with Paul while Barnabas and John Mark went their own way (Acts 15:40).³⁰⁷

Indeed, Acts 15:32 indicates that Silas and Judas (who was also appointed by the church in Jerusalem along with Silas) were prophets who were gifted preachers. Paul and Silas were ministry partners, and although age is never specified, their collaboration shows Paul's commitment to continue in others what Barnabas had done for him. Similarly, with Titus and Timothy, no spouse or family is mentioned, which would have been the expected course for a mature adult. According to McGarry, these men's status as unmarried does seem to indicate they were young men who were taken under Paul's tutelage as young ministers-in-training.³⁰⁸

Paul demonstrated a similar relationship with Titus as he did with Silas. Galatians 2:1 introduces Titus as a Gentile convert who became a mature Christian under Paul and Barnabas'

305. See 2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 Peter 5:12.

306. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, s.v. "Silas" in <https://www.biblestudytools.com/encyclopedias/isbe/silas.html>. Accessed December 7, 2019.

307. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, s.v. "Silas."

308. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 167.

ministry. Titus is explicitly said to have been an uncircumcised Gentile (Galatians 2:3), and yet he played a vital role in the early church, especially in Crete, where he was designated as the leading pastor (Titus 1:5). Galatians 2:1-3 gives the indication that he was a young man who was converted from Paul and Barnabas' ministry and was identified as someone who would be useful in their ongoing ministry. They also selected him for introduction to the Christians in Jerusalem as an example of God's work among the Gentiles. McGarry points out that, throughout Paul's letters, Titus appeared as a reliable companion and trustworthy partner in ministry. Titus, he further indicates, was certainly not raised in a Christian household, thus Paul and Barnabas' ministry efforts to him mirror the evangelism and discipleship many youth pastors exhibit toward non-Christian teenagers who are receptive of the gospel.³⁰⁹

Similarly, Timothy is portrayed as a young man who has been discipled by Paul and entrusted with significant ministry responsibilities. Paul famously referred to Timothy as "my true son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:3 NIV) and encouraged him, "let no one despise you for your youth" (1 Timothy 4:12 NIV). He is introduced in Acts 16:1-5 as "the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was Greek." Timothy's mother and grandmother were likely converted when Paul's first missionary journey brought him to Lystra, where he healed a crippled man and Paul and Barnabas were nicknamed Zeus and Hermes, only to have an angry mob turn the crowd against them (Acts 14:8-20). McGarry believes that, by the time Paul returned to Lystra in his second missionary journey, Timothy was most likely a teenager or in his early twenties and was well-respected for his faith. He added that it seemed reliable to discern he was not a child, since he was "well-spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium" (Acts

309. Ibid., 168.

16:2), but neither is he presented as a mature man since it would be unusual to introduce a grown man by first mentioning his parents.³¹⁰

Timothy

Timothy seems to have held a special place in Paul's heart. Paul first found him on his second journey either at Derbe or Lystra. His mother, Eunice, was already a believer; his father was a Greek. Timothy seems to have converted on Paul's first visit, for on his second he was already a disciple well reported of, and Paul more than once calls him his "son in the faith." He seems to have come in to take John Mark's place as the Apostle's "minister," and from that time to have been Paul's trusted attendant.³¹¹ When it was time for Paul and Barnabas to depart, Timothy was circumcised and brought with them as a new member of their ministry team. Timothy's father was likely deceased, presumably with Paul fulfilling a surrogate-father type of role that is common among young workers in today's church.³¹²

310. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 168.

311. Alexander Maclaren, "Paul and Timothy" in http://biblehub.com/library/maclaren/expositions_of_holy_scripture_b/paul_and_timothy.htm. Accessed April 25, 2018,

312. Although Timothy's mother was Jewish, he had not been circumcised according to Jewish custom. His Gentile father probably was opposed to the practice, and yet the text is silent regarding his father's opinion about Timothy's circumcision in verse 3. His father is never mentioned anywhere else in Scripture, although his mother and grandmother are referred to in 2 Timothy 1:5, which indicates that Paul never met Timothy's father.

Tradition has it that Timothy was about sixteen years old when he and his mother were converted to Christianity. Presumably, this conversion occurred during the Apostle Paul's visit to their home at Lystra. Paul had a close bond with Timothy as Paul addressed him as "my son Timothy" (1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Timothy 1:18; 2 Timothy 1:2). When Paul refers to Timothy's "youthfulness," one may picture a "youth" to be in their teenage years. However, Timothy was the leader of the church in Ephesus, which must have been quite large. The question then is: was a teenager leading a church of that size? Theologian John R.W. Stott, in his book *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, explained that the Greek term for "youth" is *neotes*, and in that culture, someone could be called a "youth" until they were forty years old.³¹³ According to church father Irenaeus, "Thirty was the first stage of a young man's age, and extends to forty, as all will admit."³¹⁴ Paul therefore must have started his mentorship relationship with Timothy right after his conversion and maintained the relationship up to the point he could be entrusted with the pastoring of a church. After a stay in Ephesus, and then going to Thessalonica and Berea, he went to Corinth. Thence, Paul went quickly up to Jerusalem and back to Antioch, from which he set out again to visit the churches and made a special stay in Ephesus.³¹⁵ While there, he planned a visit to Macedonia and Achaia, in preparation for going to Jerusalem, and finally to Rome. So, he sent Timothy and Erastus on ahead to Macedonia, which would of course include Philippi. After that visit to Macedonia and Greece, Paul returned to

313. John R.W. Stott. *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

313. Irenaeus II.22.5, quoted in Stott. *Guard the Truth*, 35.

315. McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 168.

Philippi, from which he sailed with Timothy. Timothy was probably with Paul all the way to Rome, and Timothy is mentioned as sharer in the imprisonment both there and in Colossians.³¹⁶

Before one can rightfully apply the principle of Paul's mentorship to its intended purpose, it is crucial to understand the role of Paul as a mentor. The role of an apostle like Paul was to be a spiritual father, mentor, and leader. One of the best examples of this role was the relationship between Paul and Timothy. Hoehl advanced:

The mentoring relationship that existed between Paul and Timothy is clearly depicted in the New Testament. A careful examination of this relationship as it progressed reveals Paul's approach to mentoring Timothy as a minister of the gospel. This approach includes carefully selecting and training as the right person for the job, equipping him for the task of ministry, empowering him for success, employing him for effectiveness, and communicating the value of their relationship.³¹⁷

There is no doubt that the mentor relationship has received increasing amounts of attention from both organizational leadership researchers and leadership practitioners alike. Successful mentor relationships result in benefit the mentor, the protégé, and the organization. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul recognized the value of developing Timothy into a more effective minister of the gospel. Today the youth of the church are also yearning for such mentor relationships. The mentor relationship principle of the Pauline discipleship model could be an effective method for addressing one of the main root causes of the youth dropout problem. As a spiritual father to Timothy, Paul demonstrated the following:

A. Instruction

316. Ibid.

317. Hoehl, "The Mentorship Relationship," 2.

N.T. Wright, in his biography of Paul, indicated that Timothy was from Lystra, where Paul had healed the crippled man and been mistaken for a Greek god. Paul was, by this time, in his late thirties or early forties (assuming he was born by AD 10 at the latest). Timothy, most likely in his late teens or early twenties, must have seemed like the son that Paul never had. Certainly, a bond of understanding and mutual trust developed between them of the sort that happened with few others.³¹⁸ When Timothy was in Ephesus, Paul gave him instructions about his work there (1 Timothy 1:3). Wright contends that Paul's instructions, as given in their essential content, were delivered in the first two centuries, and had no direct connection to Paul or Timothy.³¹⁹ However, it is generally agreed by NT scholars that Paul actually gave Timothy those instructions as a mentor to his protégé and as a father will give instructions to his son.

B. *Encouragement*

It seem that, over the years, Paul had learned the mentor's role of encouragement. Paul said, "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:15-16 NIV). He then encouraged and reminded Timothy of his calling: "Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith" 1 Timothy 1: 18-19).

318. N.T. Wright. *Paul: A Biography* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2018), 175.

319. *Ibid.*, 396.

C. *Affirmation*

Paul affirmed his spiritual sonship with Timothy when he said: “To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord,” and further charged his protégé to oppose false teachers. Paul instructed, “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer (1 Timothy 1:3).

Who were these false teachers in Ephesus? Wright indicates that Hymenaeus and Alexander are mentioned as blasphemers who have been “handed over to the Satan,” as Paul recommended doing with the incestuous man in 1 Corinthians. Hymenaeus then crops up in 2 Timothy 2:17, this time in company with Philetus, and this time over a more specific charge: “saying that the resurrection has already happened.”³²⁰ Paul was confident that young Timothy had been equipped well enough with the right doctrine to correct these false teachers.

D. *Empowerment*

In management, delegation of power (DOP) is also known as “delegation of authority” (DOA). It is one of the vital processes for any organization and is inevitable, along with the expansion and growth of the organization. Delegation means assigning certain responsibilities along with the necessary authority from the management of the organization to the employees. Delegation does not mean surrender of authority by the management. It only means transfer of certain responsibilities to the employees and giving them the required authority, which is

320. Wright, *Paul*, 396.

necessary for the discharge of the responsibility properly.³²¹ Paul must have been familiar with the management principle of delegation as far back as in the first century AD.

Paul appears to have delegated the pastoral responsibilities of the church in Ephesus to Timothy and was careful to grant him the needed authority to perform the role by empowering him to be successful. In 1 Timothy 4:11-13, Paul instructed: “Command and teach these things. Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.” In 2 Timothy 4:1-2, Paul gave Timothy the following charge: “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.”

E. *Multiplication*

Paul was aware that, for his ministry to have lasting effect on the community, he needed to adopt the principle of multiplication by encouraging his protégés to pass on his mentorship model to other capable men.³²² Paul therefore instructed Timothy, “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:1-2).

321. Satyendra K. Sarna, “Delegation of Powers” in IspatGuru, October 15, 2014, <https://www.ispatguru.com/delegation-of-power/>. Accessed February 6, 2020.

322. Terry LaMasters. "The Apostle Principle: Fathering and Mentoring" in *Forward Leader*, October 17, 2016. <http://forwardleader.org/2013/04/the-apostle-principle-fathering-and-mentoring/>. Accessed April 25, 2018.

In the relationship between Paul and Timothy, we see the role of an apostle at work. The apostle instructed, encouraged, affirmed, and empowered Timothy, living his life as an example to follow with the desire for his ‘son in the faith’ to fulfill his full potential in God.³²³

Timothy was accountable to Paul for oversight and correction if necessary. The relationship created an environment of safety, stability, and freedom in which the true loving nature of God was revealed. This example should be the environment that we desire in our churches and in our homes—achievable, as men reclaim what it means to be a man—defined by God operating in the Paul’s mentorship principles.³²⁴

Titus

Bible commentator D. Edmond Hiebert, in his commentary on Titus in the *Expositor’s Bible*, revealed that Titus was a convert of Paul.³²⁵ He was a Gentile convert from the early days in Antioch, perhaps one of those mentioned in Acts 11:25, 26:1. Titus was a son who brought much joy to his spiritual father in the faith. There is no greater joy than to know that one’s children are walking in the truth and being of service to the Lord.³²⁶ “To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior” (Titus 1:4).

323. LaMasters. "The Apostle Principle."

324. Ibid.

325. Frank Ely Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: with the New International Version of the Holy Bible, Introductory Articles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1979), 421.

326. Steve Morgan, “Paul and Titus Mentoring Relationship,” *Leader Impact*, May 1, 2010, accessed January 6, 2020, <https://leaderimpact.wordpress.com/2010/05/01/paul-and-titus-relationship/>.

New Testament scholar Thomas Constable stated: “Titus had been with Paul since the apostle's early ministry. He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their mission of mercy to the Jerusalem church when Paul was laboring in Antioch of Syria, Titus' home. This happened before Paul's first missionary journey” (Galatians 2:1; Acts 11:27-30). He was a Greek, uncircumcised believer who Paul and Barnabas used as testimony of changed life before the conference in Jerusalem. Paul’s selection of Titus to bring to this crucial meeting in Jerusalem spoke highly of the spiritual vitality, conviction and life change of this young convert.³²⁷

According to Wright, when Barnabas and Paul went to Jerusalem, they had one particular focal point. They had not gone alone. They had taken with them a young man, a non-Jew who had become an eager and much-loved follower of Jesus, a member of the fellowship in Antioch. His name was Titus. Did Barnabas and Paul realize that Titus was likely to become a test case? Did they realize they might be putting him in a difficult position?³²⁸

That, anyway, is how it turned out. The main leaders in Jerusalem, according to Paul, were happy with the line Antioch had been taking that non-Jewish believers were full members of the family. However, some other Jesus-followers in Jerusalem were not content. They realized that Titus was a Greek, a non-Jew. He had not been circumcised; he was not therefore a “proselyte,” a non-Jew who had fully converted (there were debates at the time as to whether even circumcision made someone a real Jew, but for most it would have been sufficient). They realized that Barnabas and Paul were insisting that Titus be treated on equal terms as a full

327. Thomas L Constable, “Notes on Titus,” *Plano Bible Chapel*, 2019, accessed January 6, 2020. <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/titus/titus.htm>.

328. Wright, *Paul*, 97.

member of the family, including sharing in the common meals. This group was horrified. “This is precisely the kind of pollution,” they said, “that the One God wants us to avoid!”³²⁹

The Jewish zealots argued that fraternizing with pagans was what had gotten their ancestors in trouble. If the One God who has raised Jesus is going to fulfill his promises and establish his kingdom on earth as in heaven, setting them free from all enemies and earthly ills, He certainly would not be doing so if the Jews compromised on purity! Either they stayed with two tables—one for Jewish Jesus-followers and one for Gentiles—or Titus would have to be circumcised and become a full Jew if Paul wanted him to be recognized as a full member of the Jesus family.

Paul stood firm. The problem was not so much the embarrassment and physical pain that circumcision would cause Titus. It was a point of theological principle, and as Paul declared later, a matter of “freedom”—a loaded word, a Passover word, the slogan for so much that Jews such as Paul had hoped and prayed for. With the new “Passover” of Jesus’s death and resurrection, a new sort of “freedom” had been born. This freedom would now be for all, Jew and Gentile alike, to share membership in the new world, the new family, the new messianic and spirit-led life. And if that was the new “freedom,” then anything that challenged it was a form of slavery. “These people want to enslave us,” Paul concluded. “They want to reverse the Passover moment, to take us back to Egypt. Titus was spared.”³³⁰

Wright argues that the three central Jerusalem leaders, James (the brother of Jesus), Peter, and John, were content. Their view carried weight; they were known as the “pillars.” For today’s

329. Wright, *Paul*, 98.

330. Wright, *Paul*, 98.

believer, that might be a dead metaphor. For those in Jerusalem with the Temple still standing, it was making a polemical claim. The early Jesus-followers, it seems, already understood themselves as an alternative Temple with these three as its “pillars”: a new heaven-and-earth society, living and worshipping right alongside the old Temple, making the latter redundant. What Stephen had said was coming true.³³¹ Paul would not compromise his conviction that Titus was fully qualified without circumcision to sit at the same table as his fellow Jewish believers. Paul acting as a mentor to Titus accorded him all the respect and affirmation he needed. On the other hand, one wonders why Paul insisted on the circumcision of Timothy, while at the same time advocating for Titus not to be circumcised.

Timothy Circumcised, Titus Left Uncircumcised.

Wright points out that Timothy was the son of a believing Jewish woman and a Greek father. So, said Luke, Paul circumcised him “because of the Jews in those regions, since they all knew that his father was Greek” (Acts 16:3). Paul’s action here may perplex many readers. When one cast his mind back to the time when Paul and Barnabas were going to Jerusalem with famine relief, and took Titus with them, despite intense pressure from the hardline Jerusalem activists who wanted to have Titus circumcised, Paul stood firm. Paul stressed this point when writing to the Galatians (Galatians 2:3-5). In his mission in Galatia and again in Antioch, Paul had stoutly resisted any suggestion that Gentile converts should be circumcised. He had gone to

331. Ibid., 99.

Jerusalem to argue for this principle and had won that, but now Paul had Timothy circumcised. Why? Is his behavior not inconsistent? What is Paul's justification?³³²

In this circumstance one will notice the tricky policy that Paul spelled out in 1 Corinthians 9. Everything depended on motivation. If someone said that Titus had to be circumcised because otherwise, *he won't be able to join the family at the table*, Paul would object, saying Titus is a believer who belonged there at the family table. Now, Paul wanted to take Timothy along with him in the next phase of his work, which meant continually visiting the synagogues. It seems unlikely that synagogue officials would go to the lengths of a physical check on whether newcomers had been circumcised, but Paul wanted to be able to assure any doubters that all the members of the team were in fact officially Jewish.³³³

Wright posited that this view was what Paul meant when he said, "I became like a Jew to the Jews, to win Jews. I became like someone under the law to the people who are under the law, even though I'm not myself under the law, so that I could win those under the law" (1 Corinthians 9:20). That is in itself an extraordinary statement. How could Paul become "like a Jew?" He was a Jew. The answer must be that, when seeking to work with Jewish communities or individuals, he would behave Jewishly, taking care to observe taboos for the sake of his work, not because he believed God required it of him to maintain his standing as part of the messianic family.³³⁴

Paul was treading a fine line, risking the charge of inconsistency at every turn. However, as with the foundational question of belonging to the Messiah's people, what counted for Paul

332. Wright, *Paul*, 175.

333. *Ibid.*, 175-176.

334. Wright, *Paul*, 176.

was the gospel itself. He wanted to be able to continue his practice of worshipping in the synagogue and taking every opportunity to expound Israel's story (Abraham, Exodus, David, then the unresolved "exile") with its new and shocking messianic conclusion, which explains why Timothy, along with the rest of the party, would have to be a *bona fide* Jew. Paul mentored each young man according to his unique circumstances. Each relationship was not cookie-cutter but was specifically tailored to bring out the maximum potential in these young men. The 21st century church can learn from this concept, which will undoubtedly help today's Church rethink the current mass production discipleship method adopted mostly by mega-churches.

The third protégé to whom Paul applied the principle of personal relationship mentorship in a unique circumstance is Onesimus.

Onesimus

The evidence for Paul's Ephesian imprisonment, which is not mentioned by Luke, is strong. In his letter to Philemon, Paul asks Philemon to "get a guest room ready" for him. Philemon lived in Colossae, about 125 miles inland from Ephesus on the river Lycus. According to Wright, though Paul was still in prison, by the time he wrote this letter he was hoping that, through the prayers of his friends, he would be released. When that happened, he was planning to pay Philemon a visit, not least, we may presume, to find out what had become of the former runaway slave Onesimus.³³⁵

As the weeks turned into months during the dark prison days, sometime in AD 55 or early AD 56, some of Paul's friends were able to come and help take care of him, and he had a

335. Wright, *Paul*, 239-240.

visitor, a frightened young man named Onesimus. Onesimus was a slave; he belonged to Philemon, a wealthy householder in the small city of Colossae, some 125 miles inland from Ephesus. He had run away, as slaves sometimes did, probably taking some money as he went. Onesimus knew the risk he was taking. Runaways were regularly punished with death; crucifixion (“to discourage the others,”³³⁶ of course) was common in such cases. Harboring or helping a runaway was also a serious crime. Onesimus had come to Paul, who himself recently faced despair and death and had seen Onesimus’s master Philemon come to faith on a visit to Ephesus. Paul found himself in a complicated situation that would have made a fascinating seminar in moral philosophy had not so much immediate danger been riding on it.³³⁷ What to do?

Wright revealed that the first thing Paul did was to share the gospel with Onesimus. The frightened slave, hearing the news of one who died the slave’s death out of sheer love—the same love that had made the world—was captivated by it. No doubt some converts, then as now, professed a quick faith in the hope of a quick reward, but Paul could see that the young man’s heart had truly been changed. He became like a son to Paul, eager to learn, eager to help (his name meant “useful,” and he was keen to live up to it). However, the situation could not last forever.³³⁸

Paul could simply have helped the young man move away from trouble. He could have instructed one of his friends to take him to Greece or even farther afield. What would Paul then say to Philemon the next time they met? How would it be if word got out that this subversive

336. Wright, *Paul*, 280.

337. *Ibid.*

338. *Ibid.*, 281.

jailbird, in addition to his other notorious antisocial behavior, had taken to sheltering runaway slaves? Moreover, when Paul reflected on the vocation he had been given, one of the best descriptions he could find was the word “reconciliation,” *katallagē*. The gospel was about the One God reconciling the world to himself, and also—as he had written to the Galatians less than a decade earlier—about Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female coming to be “all one in the Messiah, Jesus.” If this view was real—if it was not just a grandiose idea in his head—it had to work on the ground. Real Jews, real Greeks. Real men and women. Real slaves and real masters.³³⁹

Wright notes that slavery was of course revolting. Every believer knew that then. Believers today, however, know too well the terrible ways in which slavery was developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, until brave campaigners abolished it, often in the teeth of principled opposition that claimed, among other things, to be grounded in the Bible.³⁴⁰ In particular, today, when slavery is associated with racism one knows that, despite abolition, the practice has made its way back into the modern world. One wishes Paul had said, “Free them all! It is a wicked practice!”

That statement according to Wright would have been a futile gesture. Slavery in the ancient world did, more or less, everything that is done in our world by oil, gas, or electricity, as well as everything that is now accomplished through technology. Denouncing slavery would have been like denouncing electricity and the internal combustion engine. What is more, one must be reminded that slavery in Paul’s world had nothing to do with ethnic origin.³⁴¹ All one

339. Wright, *Paul*, 281.

340. *Ibid.*

341. Wright, *Paul*, 282.

had to do to become a slave was be on the losing side in battle or even to fail in business. Slaves were, of course, often exploited, and abused, treated like trash, but they could also become respected, cherished, and valued members of a family. Cicero's slave Tiro was his right-hand man and purportedly invented shorthand. Slavery was complex but omnipresent.³⁴²

Paul knew that the God of Israel had defined himself in action as the slave-freeing God. That is what the story of the Exodus was all about. Paul believed (and he believed that God believed) in ultimate freedom, a freedom of creation itself from the "slavery to decay," a freedom that would mean resurrection life for all God's children (Romans 8:21). As always, Paul's challenge was to bring this cosmic vision into the real world of compromised and perplexed humans. Paul, however, was determined to hit upon a plan to make Philemon and Onesimus a small working model of what Messiah-based freedom might look like in the Christian community.³⁴³

Wright recounted that Paul could not just write to Philemon and say, "By the way, Onesimus has come to me. Please give him his freedom and let him stay here."³⁴⁴ That was, one may suppose, what he wanted, but it would not address the real issue. It would merely encourage other slaves to come and try the same thing. Nor could he say, as the Roman letter writer Pliny

342. Wright, *Paul*, 282.

343. *Ibid.*

344. Wright, *Paul*, 283.

had said when writing to a friend in similar circumstances, “I have given him a good talking-to, and I want you to let him off this time.”³⁴⁵

Paul’s aim was higher and deeper. As Paul worked through the shock and horror of his own plight in prison, he meditated on the way in which God himself was present in the Messiah and reconciling the world to Himself. Now, perhaps, God would be present in him, Paul, reconciling these two-dear people through a high-risk pastoral strategy. Onesimus would go back to Philemon (accompanied, so it seems from Colossians 4:7–9, by Paul’s friend Tychicus) with a letter from Paul. The request was asking a lot from both of them. No doubt it was dangerous for Onesimus and extremely awkward for Philemon. Perhaps the letter would not only explain what ought to happen but help to bring it about.³⁴⁶

The letter is called a small masterpiece by Wright. Paul explained to Philemon that he was praying that their *koinōnia* (fellowship) will have its full, powerful effect, bringing them all together “into the king,” into the Messiah. “God was reconciling the world to himself in the Messiah,” Paul wrote later, “*not counting their transgressions against them, and entrusting us with the message of reconciliation*” (2 Corinthian 5:19). The message of reconciliation is then, at that point, reembodying God’s action. Paul stands between Philemon and Onesimus, joining them together in his own person and appeal. “Here,” he says (stretching out one arm), “is Onesimus, my son, my own heart, who has been looking after me here in prison, on your behalf as it were!” Stretching out the other arm to Philemon, he says, “Your love gives me so much

345. Pliny, Letters 9.21. Andrew Smith, “Pliny the Younger : Letters Translated by J.B.Firth (1900),” Pliny: Letters - Book 9:21, 1900, <http://www.attalus.org/old/pliny9.html>. Accessed April 4, 2020.

346. Wright, *Paul*, 283.

comfort. You are my partner in the gospel. You owe me, after all, your own very self. You have the chance now to refresh me, even here in prison.”³⁴⁷ Paul stands metaphorically between the two men, reaching out in the shape of the cross. “Oh, and by the way,” he says (“not counting their transgressions against them”), “if he has wronged you, put it down on my account. I will make it good.” Then Paul added, “One more thing. Get a guest room ready for me. Keep praying, and I will be out of here soon. Then I’ll be coming to visit.”³⁴⁸

This exercise would demand humility and trust on both sides. Onesimus was not going to set off to Colossae with a spring in his step, imagining everything was going to be easy. There had been reasons why he ran away, and those reasons, whatever they were, would have to be confronted. Philemon would be astonished and quite possibly angry to see him return; he would also realize the delicate balance both of what Paul had said and of what he was being asked to do. According to Wright, as a policy statement about slavery, the letter falls short of what one would want. As an experiment in a one-off, down-to-earth pastoral strategy, it is brilliant. Paul’s strategy seems to have worked. Fifty years later, the bishop of Ephesus was a man called Onesimus. The young slave, now an elderly Christian leader? Or a name already respected within the early community?³⁴⁹ No doubt, Paul even in prison employed his model of discipleship of relational, fatherly mentorship, in love to mentor the young man Onesimus to eventually become a bishop.

347. Ibid.

348. Wright, *Paul*, 283.

349. Ibid., 284.

Chapter Summary

With the availability of qualitative and quantitative research already conducted on the youth dropout problem over the years by reputable research intuitions, this study will concern itself with what seems to be lacking as an honest attempt to resolve the research problem. Having used the basic principles derived from Paul's concept of discipleship to address the research assumption, the mixed research method has been employed to analyze the existing research data to address the youth dropout problem.

The broad and detailed narrative of the youth dropout problem confirms that, in less than a decade, from 2011 to 2019, the dropout rate of 59% of Christian young adults has increased to 64%. It has been amply demonstrated that, as much as every story is different and worthy of serious attention and care, there are patterns in the research data that can help make sense of the dropout problem. Therefore, lumping all young adult dropouts into one group would be unfair and at best misleading, as every one of them is at different stages of their faith journey. The Barna team has therefore, rightly categorized them as Nomads, Prodigals, and Exiles.

Even though the Nomads still describe themselves as Christian, they have not disavowed Christianity but are no longer particularly committed to their faith or especially to churchgoing. They believe that personal involvement in a Christian community is optional. The importance of faith has faded, but most are not angry or hostile toward Christianity. However, many of them are now spiritual experimentalists. Prodigals, on the other hand, are the **dropouts** who feel varying levels of resentment towards Christians and Christianity. Many of these prodigals still have positive things to say about specific people (such as their parents), but the overall tenor of their perceptions is negative. They have disavowed returning to church. They feel deeply wounded by their church experience and do not plan ever to go back. They have moved on from

Christianity. The Prodigals, for their part, most commonly describe themselves as the “nones,” with no religious affiliation. Lastly, the Exiles are the group of young adults who are still invested in their Christian faith but feel stuck (or lost) between culture and the church. One hallmark of the Exiles is their feeling that their vocation (or professional calling) is disconnected from their church experience. Their Christian background has not prepared them to live and work efficiently in society. Although their faith is "lost" from Monday through Friday, they still consider themselves as followers of Christ and would like their faith to be relevant to their chosen vocations.

The description of the Pauline model of discipleship revealed that Paul’s statement “Follow my example” is the core statement of the Pauline model of discipleship, which entailed building a relationship with Christ through a relationship with him. In another letter, Paul told the Galatians that God “set me apart from my mother’s womb” (Galatians 1:15).

As portrayed in earlier chapters, the basic characteristics of Paul’s model of discipleship are based on relationship, fathering, love, and mentorship. There is no doubt that these four characteristics were demonstrated in Paul’s relationship with Timothy, Titus, and Onesimus.

In the next chapter, the researcher will evaluate, through detailed analysis of the data, the reasons given by youth for their disconnection from Church and faith, and demonstrate how the Pauline model of discipleship can be adopted to resolve the disconnection. This research will now evaluate and analyze the existing data to confirm the reasons given by the youth for their disconnection from the church in the next chapter.

Chapter Four

The Project Evaluation

In the evaluation of this project, the priority is not placed on quantitative measurements, but rather on qualitative evaluations related to the goals and objectives of the project.³⁵⁰ The fourfold emphasis required for this section therefore is:

- 1) Determine what the evaluation and or assessment data will be.
- 2) Base the evaluation on objective data that has been gathered.
- 3) Establish the assessment on the goals of the project.
- 4) Include all preliminary surveys and interview instruments where applicable.³⁵¹

Determination of Evaluation and Assessment Data

Since the primary goal of this study is to determine how effectively the Pauline concept of discipleship can be employed to resolve the youth dropout problem of the 21st century American Church, it stands to reason that a qualitative evaluation will be better utilized than a quantitative assessment. Therefore, the sources or causes for the disconnection of the youth from church need to be identified in order to evaluate how effective the application of the Pauline concept of discipleship can resolve the problem.

350. Southeastern University. "Doctoral Research Project Manual," 2016-2017. <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/jpvigil%40seu.edu?projector=1>. Accessed on April 4, 2019,

351. Ibid.

Reasons for the Disconnection

This research started by looking for a single “smoking gun” responsible for the disconnection of the youth from church. Instead, many reasons have been discovered. It was suspected that the research investigation would uncover one big reason that young adults disconnect from the church or walk away from their faith—maybe two or three. The research expectation was that it would uncover, for instance, that going away to college is a faith killer—but it turned out that is just not the case for most young people.

Instead of one or two big issues, the study discovered a wide range of perspectives, frustrations, and disillusionments that compel twentysomethings to disconnect. No single reason pushes a majority of young adults to drop out. Each person has his or her own set of unique and mundane reasons—that is, both deeply personal and rather pedestrian. Yet the everydayness of these reasons does not make them unimportant or uninteresting. Every nomad, prodigal, and exile had a story. And as stated before, every story matters.

Although the study explored the reasons many young adults disconnect, it is important to note that the research also examined primarily the young adults’ perspective of what has gone wrong. Kinnaman noted that “Research is not infallible, and it requires interpretation.”³⁵² Kinnaman also pointed out that most people are not fully cognizant of what, exactly, causes the young adults to leave church or faith, and part of the job of the researcher was to analyze all the responses and look for themes to emerge.³⁵³ Kinnaman admonished, however, that in doing so,

352. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 91.

353. *Ibid.*

researchers must use not only their professional expertise but also their spiritual discernment.³⁵⁴ Chapter four is the result of the researcher's best efforts in identifying the reasons young people disconnect and the recommendation of how the use of the Pauline concept of discipleship can be used by the body of Christ to respond in love to resolve the dropout problem.

Analysis of the Data and Project Results

Upon close examination of the research data and individual stories, six themes emerged that seem to capture the overall phenomenon of disconnection between the Church in general and the next generation in particular. Unlike previous generations, many young adults of today do not hesitate to burn the bridge that once connected them to their spiritual heritage. The research data from Barna revealed there are six broad words that can be used to describe the reasons young adults offer for dropping out. These are, Overprotective, Shallow, Anti-science, Repressive, Exclusive, and Doubtless.³⁵⁵

1. Overprotective

The impulses toward creativity and cultural engagement are some of the defining characteristics of Generation Z. Members of Gen Z are eager to be innovators who rethink the solutions to problems without being placed into the "box" of the traditional ways of doing things.

354. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 91.

355. Barna Group. "Three Spiritual Journeys of Millennial", June 3, 2013. <https://www.barna.com/research/three-spiritual-journeys-of-millennials/>. Accessed April 9, 2019,

For Gen Zs, creative expression is of inestimable value. To them, the Church is seen as creativity killers where risk-taking and being involved in culture are anathema.³⁵⁶

A lot of their upbringing was very fear-based to get the Gen Z to do something, as opposed to giving them logical reasons why they should or should not do something. That was how Nathan, a 24-year-old dropout, perceived his upbringing in a Christian home. One has probably heard about “helicopter parents” who hover over their children to keep them safe from every conceivable danger. They keep a vigilant eye on the little (and not-so-little) ones, protecting them, insulating them from the hots, colds, and sharp edges of life. Helicopter parents, according to Kinnaman, try to protect their child not only from physical danger but also from failure and negative consequences of every kind.³⁵⁷

Even churches go to great lengths to protect their congregants’ safety, whether by performing in-depth background checks on all prospective children’s ministry workers or carrying liability insurance in case anyone is injured on church property, which becomes necessary in case of a lawsuit. Protectiveness has become a way of life in the American culture—and an argument can be made that much of it is, on balance, a good thing. No one wants his or her child playing with a toy coated in harmful substances or mistreated by an unqualified childcare worker. In a culture obsessed with safety that has shaped two generations of Boomer and Buster parents who are deeply risk-averse when it comes to their kids, it should not surprise one.

Kinnaman wondered:

356. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 91.

357. *Ibid.*, 96.

Is it possible that our cultural fixation on safety and protectiveness has also had a profound effect on the church's ability to disciple the next generation of Christians? Are we preparing them for a life of risk, adventure, and service to God—a God who asks that they lay down their lives for his kingdom? Or are we churning out safe, compliant Christian kids who are either chomping at the bit to get free or huddling in the basement playing *World of Warcraft* for hours on end, terrified to step out of doors?³⁵⁸

The Barna Group, in an article entitled “Six Reasons Young Christians Leave the Church,” confirmed Kinnaman’s view by asserting that a few of the defining characteristics of today’s teens and young adults are their unprecedented access to ideas and worldviews, as well as their prodigious consumption of popular culture.³⁵⁹

As Christians, they express the desire for their faith in Christ to connect to the world they live in. However, much of their experience of Christianity feels stifling, fear-based and risk-averse. Analysis of the 2011 interviews of 1,296 young adults by the Barna Group, as shown in figure 5 in the appendix revealed that one-quarter of 18 to 29-year-olds said, “Christians demonize everything outside of the church” (23 percent indicated this “completely” or “mostly” describes their experience). Other perceptions in this category include “church ignoring the problems of the real world” (22 percent) and “my church is too concerned that movies, music, and video games are harmful” (18 percent).³⁶⁰

Here are some of the criticisms that young Christians and former Christians level at the church:

358. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 96.

359. Barna Group. “Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church,” September 27, 2011. <https://www.barna.com/research/six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church/>. Accessed January 8, 2020.

360. Ibid.

A. *Christians demonize everything outside of the church.*

The next generation feels as though many Christians characterize every non-Christian thing as bad. For example, they perceive that the church’s underlying message about non-Christians—adherents to other religions, atheists, and agnostics—is that these people are categorically evil.³⁶¹

B. *Christians are afraid of pop culture, especially its movies and music.*

Many young Christians complain that they have been conditioned to fear “the world.” The problem is that, as they explore “the world,” they come to believe (rightly or wrongly) that the world is not nearly as hopeless or awful as they have been told. They discover movies, music, and other art and media that sometimes describe the reality of human experience much better than the church does.

C. *Christians maintain a false separation of sacred and secular.*

Many of the interviews conducted by the Barna Team among young Christians focused on the false dichotomy they feel between the church world and the outside world. Their research showed that this generation does not see a divide between the *sacred* and the *secular*, at least not in the same way their parents do.³⁶²

D. *Christians do not want to deal with the complexity or reality of the world.*

To young Christians, the church can feel rigid and unreal. Christians’ black-and-white views seem not to reflect the world as it really is. “It is complicated” is a phrase the Barna Team heard a lot from young people. Often, the Team was impressed with their ability to make

361. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 97.

362. *Ibid.*, 98.

finely tuned arguments, to highlight shades of meaning and nuance—at least when it is something important to them. For these young people, matters concerning “the world,” relationships, and faith are rich and textured.³⁶³

Risks of Overprotectiveness

In analyzing the interview data, the Barna Team deduced that many young Christians felt overprotected. Millions of young believers perceived that the church has kept them fearful of and detached from the world—a world, mind you, that they are called by their faith in Christ to redeem. The study will now examine how this sadly ironic risk aversion is causing major disconnections.

Alternate Thrills

Kinnaman pointed out that one of the most significant consequences of being overprotected is that millions of young people look for excitement outside traditional boundaries.³⁶⁴ This alternative thrill may be pornography or sexual experimentation, drugs and other addictive substances, extreme thrill seeking (YouTube is fueled by high-octane, stupid human tricks), total immersion in video game universes, under- and overachievement, hyper exercise and eating disorders, and so on. Kinnaman believes that self-harm among teens and young adults is also connected to their longing to take risks. Some young people cut themselves *just to feel something*.³⁶⁵

363. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 91.

364. Ibid., 99.

365. Ibid.

A close examination of the data also revealed that risk-free Christianity also inspired the pursuit of other forms of spirituality. One out of every four young adults (27 percent) told the Barna Team that they “grew up a Christian, but since then have tried other faiths or spiritual practices.” They encountered one young woman, a *nomadic* Catholic, who is curious about *Baha’i*. “It just seems really different than what I got in catechism,” she said. “Jesus was taught as this miracle worker, but that was not my experience. This guy told me about the *Baha’i* faith. And while I kind of felt like he was trying to convert me, he described a spiritual adventure that was pretty appealing.”³⁶⁶

Some young people are driven to thrills because pop culture is constantly seeking to outdo the spectacle of *You’ve Never Seen Anything Like This*, every ad seems to promise. But the church must own up to the part it has played in passing on a faith that is yawn-worthy instead of Christ-worthy.

Failure to Launch

The culture of heightened expectations—as well as more significant economic and professional hurdles for young people to clear—is making it harder than ever to “launch,” to get going in life. The Barna interview data also revealed that most twentysomethings have not completed the major transitions that have come to define adulthood: leaving home, completing higher education, achieving financial independence, getting married and starting a family, and so on.³⁶⁷

366. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 99.

367. *Ibid.*, 100.

Although there are many socio-economic reasons for this delay (for instance, the increasingly common view that marriage should be postponed), Kinnaman believes that the Christian community is complicit in young adults' failure to launch. The Church has not provided a clear, compelling, prophetic voice to answer the issues that cause young people to stay "stuck." A few years ago, the Barna Group conducted research for a mainline denomination. They interviewed young people who were *de-churched* (former churchgoers) and discovered that one of the major reasons they had left the church was that their faith community had not been able to help them deal with the life issues they faced. Too often, the Christian community has not provided practical coaching on marriage, parenting, vocation, calling, and all the smaller choices emerging adults must make along the road to maturity.³⁶⁸

One bright young man they interviewed described how one of his high school teachers was shocked to discover that he was planning to attend a Christian college. "She told me I would forfeit tens of thousands of dollars in annual earning power by not choosing a 'higher profile' university. As I processed her advice, it never occurred to me that I should talk to anyone at my church about it."³⁶⁹

Loss of Creatives

Another consequence of overprotectiveness is the loss of many of the most talented, creative individuals from the church community. The perception—that the church is overprotective—is most common among young *exiles*, those who feel stuck between the safe,

368. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*. 100.

369. *Ibid.*

comfortable world of their church experience and the dangerous, all-encompassing faith they believe God requires. Exiles according to Kinnaman want to follow Jesus in a way that connects with the world they inhabit, partners with God outside the walls of the church, and to pursue Christianity without separating themselves from the world.³⁷⁰

Many of these exiles are also creative types—artists, musicians, entertainers, and filmmakers—who feel their calling is out of tune with their Christian upbringing. They think the church does not know what to do with creatives like them. Many of the church’s brightest talents have been asked to confine their gifts to the service of the Christian community. As a consequence, many young creatives have headed for the hills; it is no small coincidence that many of today’s hottest entertainers and artists left behind a churchgoing heritage. The church has a hard time preparing these young people for service to the world, while also keeping them grounded in and deeply connected to the body of Christ.³⁷¹

2. Shallow

In analyzing the research data, the most common perception among this group of Gen Z is that the Church is boring. About them, Kinnaman posited, “Easy platitudes, proof-texting, and formulaic slogans have anesthetized many young adults, leaving them with no idea of the gravity and power of following Christ.”³⁷² Sadly, only a few young Christian can connect their gifts,

370. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 100.

371. *Ibid.*, 101.

372. *Ibid.*, 91.

talents, and abilities to their faith, which means the Christianity they received does not inherently give them any sense of their calling.³⁷³

Kinnaman advanced:

The shallowness equation has two sides. On the one, we find young adults who have only a superficial understanding of the faith and of the Bible. The Christianity they believe is an inch deep. On the other, we find faith communities that convey a lot of information about God rather than discipling young believers to live wholly and deeply in the reality of God. Thus, the Christianity some churches pass on is a mile wide. Put the two together and you get a generation of young believers whose faith is an inch deep and a mile wide—too shallow to survive and too broad to make a difference.³⁷⁴

Let us start with the inch-deep side of the equation. The Barna research shows that most young people lack a deep understanding of their faith. The trend of biblical illiteracy, which is problematic among most age groups, has been on the increase since George Barna wrote his books on the younger generations, including *Baby Busters: The Disillusioned Generation*,³⁷⁵ *Generation Next*,³⁷⁶ and *Real Teens*.³⁷⁷ Other researchers have explored these challenges as well, including Kenda Creasy Dean, who shows in *Almost Christian*³⁷⁸ that most teenagers embrace

373. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 92.

374. *Ibid.*, 114-115.

375. George Barna. *Baby Busters: The Disillusioned Generation* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1994).

376. George Barna. *Generation Next: What You Need to Know About Today's Youth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1995).

377. George Barna. *Real Teens: A Contemporary Snapshot of Youth Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001).

378. Kenda Creasy Dean. *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010).

beliefs that are Christian on the surface—but once one digs a little deeper, one finds they are not quite orthodox.³⁷⁹

Perhaps the best description of this superficiality, according to Kinnaman, is found in Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton’s book *Soul Searching*.³⁸⁰ They labelled the religion of today’s young Americans as *moralistic therapeutic deism*, vividly described as follows: “God is something like a combination Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist: he is always on call, takes care of any problems that arise, professionally helps his people to feel better about themselves, and does not become too personally involved in the process.”³⁸¹

This inch-deep, not-quite-Christian understanding of God has been demonstrated in Barna Group studies as well. One project conducted in 1999 examined the views of teenagers who shared their faith in Christ regularly with others: “teen evangelists.” They found that the faith they were trying to spread was, in fact, more akin to moralistic therapeutic deism than to historic Christianity. Few of these youth evangelists could identify a single portion of the Bible as the basis of their faith in Christ.³⁸²

The type of shallow faith that most Christian young people embrace does not require the nurture of a faith community to thrive. Certainly, it is not a holistic way of life that demands one

379. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 114-115

380. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009).

381. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist. Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011).

382. Kinnaman conducted this study in 1999 on behalf of his colleague Mark Matlock, who at that time worked with Youth Specialties and Planet Wisdom.

die to oneself for the sake of Christ. Although it is indeed easier than following Jesus, Kinnaman believed this uniquely American take on faith among young Christians is a core reason so many of them are disengaging from church to become nomads or prodigals.³⁸³ Consider some of the perceptions young Christians maintain from the analysis of the interview data in figure 6 in the appendix. Nearly one-third (31 percent) described the church as boring. One-quarter indicated that faith is not relevant to their career or interests (24 percent), that the church does not prepare them for real life (23 percent), that the church does not help them find their purpose (23 percent), and that the Bible is not taught clearly or often enough (23 percent). One out of five young people (20 percent) expressed that God seems missing from their experience of church. These may not seem like large percentages, but they represent millions of young prodigals, nomads, and exiles.³⁸⁴

Mechanistic Mass Production Discipleship

After a decade and half of research into American faith, Kinnaman believed that the Christian church in the United States has a shallow faith problem because there is a discipleship problem. Moreover, diagnosing and treating shallow faith among young adults is urgent because there is a shallow faith problem among *all* adults as well.³⁸⁵

It has been suggested earlier in this study that the church in America has a mass-production approach to faith development. Taking cues from public education, among other

383. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 115-116.

384. *Ibid.*, 116.

385. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*.120.

sectors of society, the church seems to have created a conveyor belt of development that industrializes the soul formation of young people—who eventually become adults with inch-deep, mile-wide faith. The outcome is adult Christians who were not transformed by their faith as children, as teens, or as young adults. How can the church expect more after they turn forty?³⁸⁶

Some are tempted to believe that spiritual effectiveness is connected to the size of the institutions and the sophistication of its content, but nothing could be further from the truth. Can one imagine a human civilization with a more developed spiritual infrastructure than the United States today? The church has Christian camps by the handful, Christian media companies by the hundreds, Christian schools by the thousands (from daycare to graduate schools), local churches by the hundreds of thousands. Today, Christians in North America use the most advanced communication technology and media that have ever been known to humankind.

Does this infrastructure yield more and better discipleship automatically? The research says no. Colleges, publishers, camps, and schools are not bad things—and Kinnaman believes such institutions are absolutely vital for the future of the Western faith. In fact, one of the outcomes he hopes emerges from his book *You Lost Me* is action from institutional decision makers. One's efforts to rethink and reimagine the church, business, nonprofit, or denomination—cultivating a “new mind” for what to do and how to measure success—will bear significant fruit for the future of the next generation.³⁸⁷

386. Ibid., 121.

387. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 121.

Still, despite their size and reach, institutions can serve outcomes that are antithetical to genuine discipleship, especially to the approach found most often in the Scriptures. Yes, the Bible records instances of large events in which many made a commitment to follow Christ, and it is absolutely clear about the need for sound teaching, which can and should be delivered to groups large and small. However, compare the mentality of today's Western church to Jesus's work with his disciples, which was characterized by life-on-life mentoring and apprenticeship. Can the church really conclude that by embracing an industrialized, more-is-better approach, it has improved on the Lord's results?³⁸⁸

Quantity Over Quality

Another practice that contributes to shallow faith the research data exposed was the fact that many of the youth ministries fixate on numbers of attendees rather than measuring spiritual growth and transformation. Some youth ministries emphasize quantity over quality. Kinnaman described some of this research to his friend Jon Tyson, who is now a pastor in New York City. For many years, this Australian worked as a youth pastor in Nashville. Kinnaman disclosed that recently, as he explained Barna's research findings, some large youth groups actually harm young souls by taking the "factory" approach to faith development. "It is not wrong to have big youth groups, of course," Kinnaman explained. "Good ministry can result in big numbers. But it is really about the issues of apprenticeship. Are young people learning to live like Christ or just coming to see friends and hear an entertaining speaker?"³⁸⁹

388. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 101.

389. *Ibid.*

Kinnaman's friend, Jon, stared intently at him. Kinnaman thought for sure he had ticked Jon off, but then Jon said:

I've had to repent of focusing on myself and my own success. I have come to realize that I was subconsciously more concerned with how many teens were in the room rather than how many were becoming like Jesus. I have had people come to me since then and tell me that the largeness of our youth group ended up pushing them away from God. I couldn't believe it at first. But God has shown me that my own ambition for success actually hurt my ministry." Then he added: "Now I am focusing on going deep with a lot fewer young people."³⁹⁰

If one is like me and has found it difficult believing that size matters, consider the field of education. There is considerable evidence that class size is a major factor in the effectiveness of learning environments. That is, smaller classes increase the quality of education. Why would the church assume the same rules do not apply to the church's training of junior high and high school students? There is no doubt that there is some debate about this. Still, most small colleges promote small class sizes and teacher-student ratios as a benefit of these collegiate settings.

On the other hand, imagine that one is starting a new career. Would one prefer to attend a lecture series with hundreds of other new employees or to be mentored by a twenty-year veteran of your chosen industry? Yet somewhere along the line, many have decided "bigger is better." Big attendance numbers are chosen over young lives shaped in the "classroom" of deep-level discipleship. The truth is that it is much easier to put on events for large groups of kids than it is to mentor each and every one of them into a mature and holistic walk with God. If the churches are too big to provide that level of life-on-life focus, can the church grow the next generation of Jesus's disciples?³⁹¹ The answer is obvious and explains why the Church must rethink its youth

390. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 124-125.

391. *Ibid.*, 124.

discipleship methods in an effort to counter the youth's accusation of shallow faith as attention is turned to the next accusation.

3. Anti-science.

Millions of young Christians perceive Christianity to be in opposition to modern science.

Kinnaman disclosed:

Every week, I am contacted by young Christians who tell me that their faith cannot survive their interest in science. They feel the church has forced them into an either-or decision—they can either stay true to the Christian faith or become an intellectually honest scientist.” This observation aligns closely with Barna Group’s findings. But he continued, “That is a false choice, of course. And it is heartbreaking that we are not helping young Christians pursue their calling in science in a way that affirms both science and faith. It is not a simple task. Yet if we do not take this job seriously, I am afraid we are going to lose a generation of scientists and a generation of Christians.”³⁹²

No doubt, the issues of science are one of the significant points of disconnection between the next generation and Christianity. Frequently, churches’ efforts to make disciples among the next generation are a challenge facing all believers to live biblically in a culture immersed in science.

Clearly, it has become obvious that science has come to define the collective culture. Digital and mechanical technology, medical research and treatment, survey and conservation of the environment, study of the human brain and mind, genetics, physics, and discoveries about the universe—these areas of scientific inquiry, and so many more, shape people’s reality. Tools and methods developed by science significantly impact daily lives: the world would be all but unrecognizable to someone transplanted here from the early twentieth century. As observed

392. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 132.

earlier in this study, access, alienation, and authority, and the pace of change have dramatically increased. The amount of information available, the connectedness of human cultures, and the ways the world is now explored and understood are vastly different than at any point in human history.³⁹³

Today's teens and twentysomethings have been even more profoundly influenced by these developments than previous generations. From their earliest days, science and technology have had a hand in nearly every area of their lives—from food production and distribution to medical treatment, from computers at home and in the classroom, to easy and affordable air travel. Consider the following: American teens and young adults have always lived in a world with email, cell phones, fast food, plastic surgery, cars with airbags and antilock brakes, and digital music, video, and photography. One could go on, but one gets the idea.

Not only do the sciences have incredible reach, but information about science is also more readily accessible than ever before. Now teens and young adults have this morning's world-changing discovery at their fingertips and have science entertainment, such as *MythBusters* and the *Animal Planet* cable channel, available to them 24/7. All this access to (loosely) science-related content gives many young adults the feeling that they are quite well informed about scientific matters.³⁹⁴

Faith and Scientism

393. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 133.

394. *Ibid.*, 135-136.

Another reason young Christians acutely feel the antagonism between their religion and science is that there is animosity on both sides. Western science has often seen itself as an opponent of faith. Kinnaman called this opposition “scientism,” the assumption that science has cornered the market on knowledge, and something can only be true if it can be tested by scientific methods. Unfortunately, scientism’s epistemology (theory of knowledge) has come to dominate the culture. “True” has come to mean “verifiable in the lab.” For scientism, what is reasonably just is what is scientific.³⁹⁵

Kinnaman believed the number of atheists—many of whom affirm scientism—is disproportionately larger in higher education than in the culture at large, which means that many undergrads each year are unknowingly subjected to the false dichotomy of “faith versus reason.”³⁹⁶ Add to this view the fact that “big science,” like “big business,” struggles with corruption; more than a handful of research scientists have admitted to falsifying or skewing data in their favor at some point in their career. To add insult to injury, it is not uncommon for those in the academy who question the scientific party line to be ostracized, denied tenure, or even fired. On these and other grounds, the church has reason to feel antagonized by the scientific establishment.

In the Barna research among eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds with a Christian background, one-third (35 percent) suggested that Christians are too confident about knowing all the answers. In a related thread, one-fifth (20 percent) said they believe Christianity makes complex things too simple. Nearly three in ten (29 percent) said that churches are out of step

395. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 135-136.

396. *Ibid.*, 137.

with the scientific world of today, while one-quarter (25 percent) described Christianity as anti-science. One-quarter of those surveyed report that they are turned off by the creation-versus-evolution debate (23 percent), and one-fifth are disillusioned with Christianity because it is anti-intellectual (18 percent). It may not surprise one to learn that many prodigals—those who no longer identify as Christian—hold these opinions. However, a significant number of nomads and exiles embrace these notions too. Although these are not majority views among young Christians, neither are they fringe perspectives that can be easily dismissed.³⁹⁷

The ferocity with which some of the research respondents hold these views is likely influenced, at least in part, by the cultural power wielded by scientism. There is broad acceptance of the idea that science (or rather scientism) “tells it like it is.” Questioning this premise—as the church often does—is culturally hazardous. These factors do not negate the problem the church is called to address, however, and they do not absolve God’s people from acknowledging where the church have fallen short. The underlying sense of these perceptions is that many in the next generation do not see Christians as humble partners with today’s science-driven culture—and this researcher believe there is some truth for believers here.³⁹⁸

There is a challenge facing the Christian community as it relates to science—the disconnect between the faith and those who are particularly science-minded. The church is losing too many young scientists. Kinnaman suggested that, if the Christian community desires to equip young people to follow Jesus faithfully in the real world, the Church needs to understand the challenges facing young science-minded individuals. Those who have specific gifts, abilities, and

397. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 137.

398. *Ibid.*

passions in the realm of science appear to be some of the most likely to struggle with their faith. They have a difficult time connecting the claims of Christianity with scientific evidence and methods.³⁹⁹

Kinnaman have interviewed scores of teens and young adults who were pursuing careers in science, and he also had occasion to meet many parents of students gifted in these areas. In the majority of cases, there are a deep sense of conflict within these young people—and sometimes with their parents—about staying faithful, given their interests and capabilities. In Kinnaman’s observations, the nomad-scientist simply puts his or her faith involvement on the shelf, compartmentalizing spiritual pursuits away from career. The prodigal-scientist feels forced to choose his or her affinity for science over faith and may resent the church for “forcing” the choice. The exile-scientist attempts to reconcile competing narratives of a life of faith and the life of the mind.⁴⁰⁰ The church must do better in debunking the anti-science criticism by stewarding young Christian scientists.

With this conclusion, the study will next examine the next objection of “Repressive.”

4. Repressive

Sexuality is one of the greatest expressions of God’s creativity and of his intention for human flourishing. It is also confounding and confusing to teenagers and young adults on their spiritual journeys. Marriage and childbearing, if they happen, are coming later in life for most young adults—but sex is in the picture earlier than ever.

399. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 137-138.

400. *Ibid.*

“It just feels like the church’s teaching on sexuality is behind the times. My lifestyle may not be perfect, but you know... it’s just sex.” —Dennis

The quote above is how a young prodigal felt about the church’s stand on sex. Kinnaman revealed that among many of those young adults with a Christian background, the perception is that the church is out of step with the times. Many, though not all, view the church as repressive—controlling, joyless, and stern when it comes to sex, sexuality, and sexual expectations. On the other hand, many are also dissatisfied with the wider culture’s pressure on them to adopt lax sexual attitudes and behaviors. They feel torn between the false purity of traditionalism and the empty permissiveness of their peers.⁴⁰¹ Kinnaman suggested that the Christian community needs a “new mind” to engage the next generation in the arena of sexuality.

The researcher will briefly describe the sex situation in this chapter but do recognize at the onset that the subject of sexuality can be contentious and divisive because it is so personal. This researcher’s posture here—as in this research—is grounded on two desires: to clearly explain what the Barna Group have discovered in their research and to humbly call the Christian community to a new place of faithfulness in a changing world.

Kinnaman shared the story of his friend and co-author, Aly, who told him about a young Christian woman with whom she recently had lunch. Jenna told Aly that she went into marriage as a virgin three years ago with high hopes that sex would be perfect—because that is the picture her youth leaders and college pastor had painted:

It did not take too long to realize that sex is nothing like that. Sometimes it is incredible but sometimes it is hard work, just like the rest of the relationship. In fact, I ‘am learning it is all related... good sex does not happen in a vacuum. It is entwined with every part of my life. But I feel like my church and youth group compartmentalized everything, and so

401. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 149-150.

I did too. Here is your faith in this pigeonhole. Here is your education. Here is your work cubicle, and there is your family. Over there is sex, all by itself behind the curtain. I feel like becoming an adult is this painful process of decategorizing my life. There are no categories. There is just life.⁴⁰²

Kinnaman, shared another story of a young Christian man, Keith (not his real name), who had become addicted to online pornography as a teenager. Keith told Kinnaman that a thought had occurred to him:

What if this stuff wasn't just on a computer screen? What if I could really have sex right now? So, a few clicks later, he said, I had tracked someone down who lived nearby. I was ready for action. The resulting sexual addiction ran rampant for several years and involved dozens of hookups. I 'am in recovery now, but I will deal with the addiction for the rest of my life, just as recovering alcoholics and drug addicts do.⁴⁰³

Kinnaman revealed that one of the most unsettling things about Keith's story is that his sexual activities had, at first, no effect on his involvement in church and youth group. He said, "I stayed active. I still led worship and was involved in leadership. I just literally led a double life, between sex and church." These conversations reflect the broad issues at stake when we begin to talk about sex, the life of faith, and the next generation. They also suggest the complicated feelings young adults (and older generations) have about both sex and the church.⁴⁰⁴

While few young Christians admit that their sex life specifically caused them to dropout from church, many perceive the church and the faith to be repressive. One-fourth of young adults with a Christian background said they do not want to follow all the church's rules (25 percent).

402. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 150.

403. *Ibid.*, 151.

404. *Ibid.*, 152.

One-fifth described wanting more freedom in life and not finding it in church (21 percent). One-sixth indicated they have made mistakes and feel judged in church because of them (17 percent). And one-eighth said they feel as if they have to live a “double life” between their faith and their real life (12 percent). Two-fifths of young Catholics say the church is “out of date” on these matters (40 percent).⁴⁰⁵ Add it all up, and millions of young Christians feel torn between two ways of understanding and experiencing sex.

Christian teens and young adults are caught between two narratives about sexuality. The first is called *traditionalism* and the second *individualism*. Kinnaman stated he was indebted to Dale Kuehne’s *Sex and the iWorld: Rethinking Relationship beyond an Age of Individualism* for the framework sketched in his book *You Lost Me*, on youth sexuality.⁴⁰⁶

Traditionalist Sexuality

The traditionalist view can best be summed up this way: Sex? What sex? Kinnaman indicated, “I am not the first person to point out that, in the landmark 1950s television show *I Love Lucy*, Lucy and Ricky shared a master bedroom with a pair of twin beds. The fact that Little Ricky came into their lives after a few years only made this unlikely scenario all the more ridiculous. The morality police in Hollywood agreed that even a whiff of a suggestion that a married couple might have sex should be absolutely avoided.”⁴⁰⁷

405. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 152-153.

406. Dale S. Kuehne. *Sex and the iWorld: Rethinking Relationship beyond an Age of Individualism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

407. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 154.

Kinnaman pointed out that traditionalists are quite numerous among the elder generation (born before 1945). The traditionalist policy is to exclude sex and sexuality from polite conversation. Even if a person sleeps around, as a young man, one should never mention it. He tried to clearly distinguish between traditionalism (or traditionalist) and traditions. Christian traditions, such as chastity and fidelity, are significant features of spiritual and sexual wholeness emerging from an understanding of God’s revelation in the Bible.⁴⁰⁸

Traditionalism, on the other hand, is an ideology that sought to replace a thriving, grace-filled relationship with Christ with human-made rules and regulations. Unfortunately, traditionalist narratives about sexuality have mingled legalism with Christian tradition. As such, what many churches have taught about sex is steeped in traditionalism, not biblical tradition. For traditionalists, shame is the watchword when it comes to sexuality. There is something dirty about all sexual pleasure—even within marriage. Sex is so shameful that it would be best for everyone if sexual activity were confined to procreation, its most basic utilitarian function.⁴⁰⁹

The traditionalist focused on making babies, while affirming the Christian tradition of family and the biblical mandate to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28), had a dark side, especially for women. If sex should be limited to fulfilling one’s obligations—to obey the church, to marry and stay married as a social responsibility, to bear and rear children—there is little room for self-giving love, which requires the freedom of personal choice. Until the last fifty years in the West (and in many places around the world still today) the freedoms of women were

408. Ibid.

409. Ibid.

limited, if not by law, then by societal expectations. The traditionalist paradigm made sexual intercourse (at least for women) into a duty.⁴¹⁰

Kinnaman pointed out that anyone who does not comply with the rules written by traditionalists are outcasts. But when the Boomers came of age in the 1960s, they were sick and tired of traditionalism's "repressive" notions about sex. During that decade of social upheaval, Boomers attempted to replace the traditionalist narrative with something new—the individual's personal journey toward sexual fulfillment.⁴¹¹

Individualist Sexuality

The new narrative, which has come to define the broader Western culture, is that of the individualist, sex is about self. Pornography is the most blatant case in point. "You do not even need anyone else to enjoy it! Or if you want to use porn to 'get revved up' for a real-life sexual encounter, go for it! You be the judge. Your own intuition will tell you where to draw the line."⁴¹²

The rules of individualist sexual encounters are self-defined. The highest goals of sex are not just pleasure, but freedom and self-expression. At best, young adults' "rules" for sex are loose, self-driven, and self-oriented guidelines. These "new rules" are described by Mark Regnerus in *Forbidden Fruit*: "(a) do not be pressured or pressure someone else into sex, (b) do not sleep around for the sake of your own reputation, (c) the only person who can decide whether

410. Ibid., 155.

411. Ibid.

412. Ibid.

a sexual relationship is OK is you, and (d) sex should optimally only occur within the framework of a ‘long-term’ relationship: at least three months.”⁴¹³

The rapidly changing culture has been hard at work exposing the traditionalist narrative of its relevance. One way it does so is by identifying those who abstain from sex outside of marriage as hopeless relics from yesteryear. Sexual attitudes and practices have obviously become more cavalier—and those attitudes have become much more widespread—since the sexual revolution of the sixties and seventies. Individualism has sparked the concepts of casual sex, hooking up, friends with benefits, and one-night stands.⁴¹⁴

The unsustainable tension between the traditionalist and individualist views has led to profound cognitive and behavioral dissonance in the next generation of believers. Young Christians hold more conservative beliefs about sexuality than the broader culture (for example, that one should wait until marriage to have sex, that homosexuality is not consistent with Christian discipleship, and so on). Yet their sexual behavior is just as libertine as non-Christians in most ways. In other words, they think in traditionalist terms, but most young Christians act like individualists.⁴¹⁵

Based on his research, Kinnaman is worried that some of the Christian community’s teaching on abstinence focuses too much on the personal, individualist benefits of delaying sex until marriage. He is certainly not questioning the motives of those who urge the next generation toward sexual purity, but he does wonder if some of the methods reflect a mindset influenced by

413. Mark D. Regnerus. *Forbidden Fruit: Sex and Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 205.

414. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 158.

415. Regnerus, *Forbidden Fruit*, 208.

individualism. “Save yourself for marriage and have fantastic sex with one partner, the way it’s meant to be. Sex as God intended will blow your mind. Be safe; avoid the risks of STDs and an unwanted pregnancy. Think about your future.” Much of the abstinence messaging, however well intended, capitulates to culturally cultivated individualism: *sex is about me*.⁴¹⁶

Lauren Winner, in *Real Sex*, pointed to the gap in her own experience after coming to faith in Christ as a young woman:

I have, by now, read countless books and heard countless lectures on singleness, chastity, and refraining from premarital sex. Many of these lectures and books seem out of touch with reality. They seem naïve. They seem designed for people who get married right out of college. They seem theologically vacuous. Above all they seem dishonest. They seem dishonest because they make chastity sound easy. They make it sound instantly rewarding. They make it sound sweet and obvious... Somehow the tools we give people to live premarital chastity are not working as well as we might hope.⁴¹⁷

In the tension between traditionalism and individualism, could the church be missing a richer story, a truer narrative about sex? It seems that the way the Christian community communicates about and lives the truth of sexuality has produced a generation of confused souls.

The community of believers needs a new mind to cultivate a deeper, more holistic, more Christ-filled ethic of sexuality. Neither traditionalism nor individualism is working—nor are they biblical. Most believers sense this, but what can the church do? We need to discover the relational narrative of sexuality, as the study now examines the fifth criticism of *Exclusive*.

A. Exclusive

416. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 159.

417. Lauren F. Winner. *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005), 15.

Many in the Gen Z believe that Christians have an insider-outsider mentality that is always ready to lock the door to those who do not meet their standards. This view flies in the face of the Mosaics' collective values and reference points. *Tolerance* has been the cultural North Star for most of their upbringing. Inclusiveness, diversity, and political correctness are ideals that have shaped this generation. And these values are more than aspirations—multiculturalism already defines the experiences and friendships of many young adults. Whether or not the church likes this fact, believers must grapple with these generational realities and make sense of them if the Christian community is to relate well for the sake of the gospel.⁴¹⁸

Being excluded is tough to swallow for any generation, but it is especially tough for today's all-access, low-authority young people who would rather do just about anything than choose to end a relationship. Young Christians have had greater exposure to a wide range of theological and religious viewpoints than previous generations. They maintain more non-Christian friendships than any previous generation of Christian youth. They have more relationships than did their parents with those of various sexual orientations and identities. Contrasting with their being “for” all these relationships is the church, which appears to be against them.

Today the Christian community exists in society's vortex of discontinuously different thinking about the world and relationships. One of the sentiments uncovered in the Barna research was that many young Christians, particularly young exiles, feel “forced to choose between my faith and my friends.” In other words, many young Christians and ex-

418. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 171.

Christians feel as though the church makes them choose between faithfulness to friends and faithfulness to faith.⁴¹⁹

The specific comments uncovered in the Barna research included the widespread perception (38 percent) that churches are not accepting of gays and lesbians. Another common perception is that Christians (29 percent) are afraid of the beliefs of other faith groups. There is a reason why Christianity is perceived to be exclusive. One of our faith's central claims is that God's coming in Jesus was incomparably unique, a one-time event never to be matched or repeated. Jesus himself told the disciples, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).⁴²⁰

But what does the next generation believe about the claim of Jesus to be the only way to the Father? What do they believe about the necessity of salvation? Do their beliefs translate into personal faith sharing with others? If we look at the overall picture, eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds are more likely to believe in religious pluralism than the previous generation of Americans, which holds the view that there are many different paths to God. More specifically, they are likely to believe that most or all religions teach essentially the same spiritual truths. The research discovered that young nomads and prodigals are particularly focused on exclusion as an unpalatable aspect of Christianity.⁴²¹

Yet findings among exiles and other faithful young adults suggest that they are just as likely to believe in the exclusivity of Christ as were their grandparents. For instance, there are no

419. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 175.

420. *Ibid.*, 176.

421. *Ibid.*

differences between younger and older Christians when it comes to rejecting the following beliefs: “Can lead a meaningful life without accepting Jesus as Savior; Dead Christians and Muslims worshipped the same God; that the Bible, the Koran, the book of Mormon all different expressions off the same spiritual truths; and that it does not matter what religious faith one follow because be old teach the same lessons.”⁴²² Most young committed Christians have a great deal of theological consistency with their parents’ viewpoint on these issues. Aside from exiles and other committed believers, however, there is, among the wider population of young Christians and former Christians—the research found significantly more religious pluralism than among older generations.⁴²³

What, then, is the difference between young Christians and older believers? It is their context. The younger Christian community is “doing theology” in an environment different from the past not everyone within the community connects with the historic faith’s truth claims. This fact is causing younger Christians, especially exiles, to consider rethinking theology and practice in at least the area of evangelism and denominations. Younger Christians are less likely than Christians a decade ago to share their faith with others.⁴²⁴ They are reluctant to convince their friends to become a Christian. This view is an unfortunate response to the chasm between their

422. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*.176.

423. “What Americans Believe about Universalism and Pluralism,” *Barna Update* April 18, 2011, <https://www.barna.com/research/what-americans-believe-about-universalism-and-pluralism/> Accessed February 2, 2020.

424. “How Teenagers’ Faith Practices Are Changing,” *Barna Update*, July 12, 2010, <https://www.barna.com/research/how-teenagers-faith-practices-are-changing/> Accessed February 2, 2020.

beliefs and those of the broader culture, which says that it is offensive or even hateful to argue for a specific religion or truth claim.

For the most part, denominations are of less importance to younger generation than to older adults. Denominations are and will continue to be significant shipments of American religion, and millions of young people quite loyal to their popular “brand” of Christianity. As has been stated previously, institutions matter because they are the mediators of our collective culture; therefore, the appropriate reinvention of these institutions matters to the future. Similarly, theology matters—as do differences of theological opinions between various Christian traditions. While denominations will continue to be an important part of organizing and mobilizing churches and churchgoers, it has been discovered that young people (including younger pastors) do not want denominational differences to get in the way of Christianity’s broader story. They do not want to neglect the church’s mission just so they can live or die on a denomination hill.⁴²⁵ The church must do a better job helping young adults understand the scriptural teachings of exclusivity to enable them turn exclusivity to embracing, as the researcher now explores the last criticism of Doubtless.

B. Doubtless.

It may seem redundant to say that doubt causes people to struggle with faith, but it is important to remember that doubt is not the opposite of faith. Theologian and Pulitzer-nominated novelist Frederick Buechner once said, “Doubt is the ants in the pants of faith.”⁴²⁶ Often doubt

425. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 178.

426. Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1993), as quoted by Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 187.

acts as a powerful motivator towards a more complete and genuine spiritual life, and Barna's research confirms that not everyone who doubts walks away from faith. Still the same research shows also that doubt is a significant reason young adult disengage from church.⁴²⁷

Doubt comes in more than one flavor. This statement is the reason why it is time to reemphasize one of the most important themes of the research findings: every spiritual journey is unique. There is, therefore, the need to pay attention not just to macro trends but also individual stories, if the big picture of the next generation's relationship to the church and Christianity is to be captured.

Every Story Matters

In this modern evidence-based logic-oriented culture, one may picture what it means to be a doubter. Many Christians believe that people who experience doubts simply lack the proper evidence or depth of conviction. But doubt is a far more nuanced and slippery experience that shows personality, lack of fulfillment, notions of certainty, relational alienation, and even mental health.

Is the Christian community capable of holding doubt and faithfulness in tension, welcoming hard questions even as we press together towards answers? Or will the church continue to be seen as a place where doubters do not belong because certainty is the same as faith? Will the church push doubters to the margins in order to be people with *no doubts*?

427. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 187.

This study will now look at some common avenues of doubts, and then explore how the church might respond when someone's spiritual journey takes him or her down one of these roads.⁴²⁸

Intellectual Doubts

Beginning with doubters who struggle with evidentiary forms of doubt, who are not satisfied with rational proof that God exists, or that Jesus was resurrected. Kinnaman pointed out that most Christian teenagers and young adults are not racking their brains (or their souls) in an effort to bring logical consistency to their faith claims. However, these types of concerns do affect millions of teenagers (and older) Americans and should not be minimized.⁴²⁹

Kinnaman further revealed that they discovered in their interviews with eighteen-to twenty-nine-year-olds who have a Christian background that 23 percent have “significance intellectual doubts about their faith.” This situation may not be a majority, but remember, individual stories matter. About one in nine young Christians, or 11 percent, said that College experiences caused them to doubt their faith. Again, this is not a large percentage, but it represents tens of thousands of people.⁴³⁰

What are the implications? There is still an important part to be played by traditional apologetics in dealing with intellectual questions that stand in the way of faith commitment—though the *form* apologetics take must be adapted for the next generation. The Christian

428. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 187.

429. Ibid.

430. Ibid.,188.

community might see their shifting away from a focus on “experts” towards a more relational approach. One faith community in Oregon holds a weekly worship service that invites anyone to ask any question they have about faith. To fit with the uber-connected world of young people, the church accepts questions submitted via text and twitter. This exercise can of course be nerve wracking for the pastoral staff, who willingly put themselves on the spot to wrestle with people’s most pressing questions—but one can imagine it is worth it, and not just to those who get the answers they seek. The entire community gets to witness, on a weekly basis, what it looks like to wrestle with doubts, and to confess one’s questions without abandoning faith.⁴³¹

For those with strong faith convictions, it can be difficult to imagine how people struggle with unbelief or doubts. One of the qualitative interviews conducted by the Barna team with a young man named Matt helped the team understand the potential of intellectual questions. Matt said, “Sometimes I wish I could just push the believe button. I really do wish I could say yes to Christianity. But it does not work. I cannot get past some of the big questions about faith, about God, and about Christianity.” Most doubting young people could not understand God’s damnation of sinners, among other intellectual and theological questions. The research revealed that most young people who experience such doubts are commonly prodigals—those who decide not to be Christian any longer. Prodigals are the most likely to see they have one more “big questions” that they cannot get around, such as:

1. Why does God allow suffering? Or evil?
2. Is it not the fact that I was born into Christian family or society an accident or by geography? I could just as easily have been born Hindu or some other faith?
3. What should I believe about the Bible? Why?

431. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 188.

4. Do not all religions basically say the same thing? Why is Christianity so exclusive?

Of course, most people—not just prodigals—ask themselves these questions at some point along their faith journey. Yet, questioning does little to stop most people in the spiritual tracks. The research showed that as students enter their junior and senior years of high school and then to college, these types of doubts increase in significance and impacts. But even at their peak, it is not typically intellectual doubts that drive a wedge between young Christians and their beliefs. Nomads and exiles, for example, are likely to concede intellectual questions, but often find other kinds of doubts more undermining to their faith commitment.⁴³²

Institutional Doubts

A particular type of doubt experienced by the next generation is a form of institutional skepticism directed at present-day Christianity. These young adults may be frustrated by the classic philosophical questions, much like intellectual doubters. Still, they are also genuinely at odds with expressions of modern-day Christianity, which many will usually categorize as distortions or abuses of Christ's teachings. In other words, some young adults doubt God—but for others, “doubt” might best be described as a deep, visceral sense that the church today is not what it could be or ought to be. Many young Christians, just like millions of young non-Christians, have a negative perception of the church, particularly of evangelism in America. In his research project, Kinnaman was shocked to find so many young believers who harbor negative views of the Church.⁴³³

432. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 188.

433. *Ibid.*, 189.

The research uncovered that one out of five young people (21 percent) with a Christian background said, “I am a Christian, but the institutional church is a difficult place for me to live out my faith.” Exposure to some of the darkest parts of religious life can also sow seeds of doubts. Among young adults with a Catholic background, one-fifth reported: “The priest abuse scandals have made me question my faith.” Another doubt breaks my heart and has dire implications for the leadership of tomorrow’s church. Nearly one out of every eight young Christians (13 percent) said they “used to work at a church and became disillusioned.” The research did not show whether they were staff or volunteers. Still, either way, there are tens of thousands of twenty-somethings disconnected because of firsthand negative experiences serving in a congregation. How can the Christian community do a better job of monitoring the skills young people are having in leadership?⁴³⁴

Kinnaman concluded that the arena of institutional doubt is one place where we see the rise of exiles, young Christians who are seeking ways of following Jesus outside typical footpaths. He indicated that sometimes exiles make an effort to stay connected to the institutional church to speak prophetically to that broader Christian community, challenging them to reform and renew.⁴³⁵

Young Christians are accusing the Church of not being a place where they are free to express their doubts. They do not feel safe, admitting that faith doesn't always make sense. Additionally, many young people think and feel that the Church's response to doubt is trivial, and in fact focused as if people can be talked out of their doubts.⁴³⁶ How can the Christian

434. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 191.

435. *Ibid.*

436. *Ibid.*, 135-136.

community help this generation face their doubts squarely and integrate their questions into a healthy life of faith? Adopting the Pauline concept of discipleship may provide the Christian community a useful guide for helping the youth of today to face their doubts as they integrate their questions into a healthy life of faith.

Achieving the Research Goals

After establishing the underlining reasons for the disconnection of the youth from church, this research will now apply specific principles of the Pauline concept of discipleship to counteract the objections posed by the youth in order to reconnect them to the church. The evaluation is based on the objective data gathered from the research findings, individual stories, and the six themes that emerged and seemed to capture the overall phenomenon of disconnection between the church and the next generation.

Leaders of the faith community can no longer ignore, discredit, and discount the message of the next generation, "You lost me." There is a compelling need to prioritize the intergenerational relational discipleship concepts of Paul in the discipling of the youth of today. It is evident that, for the most part, the reconnections will not happen in the vacuum or by accident. These relational apprentice concepts of Paul must be catalyzed into the community of faith and, above all, modeled by leadership. Each reason given by the youth for dropping out of church must be challenged and countered with a relational concept of Paul's idea of discipleship.

Overprotective Turns to Discernment

Looking back at the central arguments of the researcher that the next generation is living through a period of compressed social, cultural, and technological change, there is no doubt that

the current environment invites them to live out their faith in sometimes new compromising ways. Kinnaman suggests that the widespread desire for a life in the mainstream is one of the consequences of monumental change. Could it be that the growing appetite for mainstream influence among the younger generation is the work of God—preparing them to bring restoration and renewal to the current culture? Kinnaman believed so; however, he cautioned that this hopeful potential in the next generation also comes with several challenges.⁴³⁷

An aspiration to influence culture begs the question of how to embody *in-but-not-of* faithfulness, and how to deal with the poison pill of cultural accommodation that pulls toward mainstream influence made available. Stated another way: “gaining credibility for its own sake is vanity; gaining credibility to participate in God’s work to redeem His world is the mission.”⁴³⁸ The concern here is that too many Gen Z Christians are so interested in pursuing the good, the true, and the beautiful, that they forget to acknowledge and draw near to the source of those pursuits—Jesus.⁴³⁹ Instead of overprotecting the youth by calling for the abandoning of all socio-cultural involvement, the Church must help the next generation live “in the world but not be of the world” (John 17:16), by turning overprotectiveness into discernment.

It has already been established that the overprotectiveness of the youth is a result of fear, as much of their upbringing was very fear-based in an attempt to get them to behave in a certain way, as opposed to giving them logical reasons why they should or should not do something. In applying the Pauline disciple principles of relationship and love, when the youth complain that

437. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 103.

438. *Ibid.*, 102.

439. *Ibid.*, 205-206.

the Church is overprotective, the Christian community must cast out fear by employing the Pauline principles of relationship and love to discerning the times and embracing the risks of cultural engagement.⁴⁴⁰

Paul admonished Timothy, “For this reason, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and self-control (2 Timothy 1:7 NIV). Because of the relationship Paul had established over the years with young Timothy, he was able to instruct him as to how he should handle the socio-cultural pressures of his time. Paul helped Timothy to discern that, “Of course, godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, so we cannot carry anything out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these” (1 Timothy 6:6-8 NIV). Paul encouraged Timothy to fan into flame the gift of the Spirit, which God had given him when he laid his hands on him. Among these gifts was the gift of discernment. Paul knew how much his young protégé would need discernment to be able to withstand the socio-cultural eruption of his day.

In Antioch, some Christians from a Jewish background were telling Gentiles that salvation demanded adherence to the law of Moses, which included requirements like circumcision, avoiding certain foods, observing the Sabbath, and participating in specific Jewish festivals. As you can imagine, new Gentile Christians found these requirements disorienting and burdensome.⁴⁴¹

440. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 206.

441. Lokkesmoe, *Paul and His Team*, 46.

These Jewish Christians were being overprotective of their Jewish customs and tradition and were doing all they could to import it into Christianity. The division between Jewish and Gentile Christians was an ongoing concern for Paul. The letter to the Galatians is Paul's most fiery letter, dealing bluntly with the issue. In Galatians 2:21, Paul said, "...If we could be made right with God by keeping the Law, then Christ died for nothing" (NIV). Paul is emphasizing that one is not saved because of his willingness to embrace Jewish religious practices. Paul made it clear that people are saved because of their faith in Christ, regardless of their background.⁴⁴²

In the same manner, sometimes like the Jewish Zealots, the Church has become overzealous in demanding the youth adhere to church traditions that may have little to do with their maturity in Christ, all in the name of protecting them from the present decaying culture. Paul knew the dangers that his young disciples would face trying to maneuver through the socio-cultural eruptions of his day without spiritual discernment. He, therefore, instructed Timothy to "fan the flames of such a crucial gift." The Christian community, like Paul, will do well to engage the youth in the area of fanning into flames the gift of the Spirit, especially the gift of discernment. Some examples of how discernment can counteract overprotectiveness are as follows.

These young Christ-followers contend with two opposing temptations. The first is *cultural withdrawal*. When the young Christians eradicated themselves from the surrounding culture, they neglect Jesus's calling to be "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). Christians have a healthy obligation to bless the world around them. The second temptation is *cultural accommodation*. A healthy desire to influence culture can turn too quickly into an unhealthy preoccupation with acceptance by mainstream culture. When this preoccupation happens, these

442. Lokkesmoe, *Paul and His Team*, 46.

young believers consume what the world has to offer and end up with lives no different from anyone else's.⁴⁴³

In the critical tension between cultural withdrawal and cultural accommodation, the Christian community needs new, better ways—a new mind—to equip a generation to live in but-not-of the world. This requirement may mean that leaders of the Christian community should allow young people to take more significant risks with discernment. Kinnaman believed it might mean trusting that their calling is different from older generations and requires them to live in a higher degree of tension than would make the Christian community comfortable. It certainly means the Christian community needs to facilitate transparent relationships and conversations as Paul did with his mentees so all can find the God-spaced ground between cultural withdrawal and accommodation.

There are several ways to turn overprotectiveness to discernment Here are some examples:

Overprotectiveness characterizes everything that is not as Christian as evil.

Discernment helps young people understand that non-Christians are not their enemies, but that there is fundamental brokenness in humans and an adversary who intends to derail believers in every possible way.⁴⁴⁴

Overprotectiveness makes strict rules about media consumption to “save the kids from smut.” It avoids watching, reading, and talking about current events and pop culture in the hope that they will just go away.

443. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 108.

444. *Ibid.*, 104.

Discernment "Take your Bible and take your newspaper and read both but interpret newspapers from your Bible," wrote theologian Karl Barth (we might update this to Bible and the Internet).⁴⁴⁵ Unless we choose to live in a secluded Christian community—which is a viable option for only a few—exposure to media-driven culture is inevitable. Rather than steering clear of secular films, music, websites, books and television shows, let's watch, listen, and read together and do "cultural exegesis as a faithful Christian community."⁴⁴⁶

Overprotectiveness discourages risk taking and uses fear to "protect" the next generation.

Discernment guides young people like Paul, to trust God fearlessly and follow Christ in the power of the Spirit, even at the risk of their lives, reputations, and worldly success.⁴⁴⁷

Overprotectiveness paints a false picture of reality that hurts young people much more in the long run than honesty would in the short term. Many teens and young adults have been told they can be, do, and have anything they want—only to find the "real world" not quite so obliging.

Discernment develops a robust theology of calling that recognizes each person's unique purpose and gifting as nothing less (or more) than what God has ordained. Understanding that the Holy Spirit has a plan for the next generation is more prominent than what they can dream for themselves and making it the business of the church to tune their hearts to hear His voice, not just ours.⁴⁴⁸

445. Anonymous. "Barth in Retirement" in Time Inc., May 31, 1963, <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,896838,00.html>. Accessed February 7, 2020.

446. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 104.

447. Ibid., 114.

448. Ibid.

This research advocates for the Christian community to apply discernment in determining which existing church traditions will allow our youth some freedom to be innovative while at the same time holding them to the right tenets of the Gospel Orthodoxy.

Shallow Turns to Apprenticeship

The second excuse given by the youth for abandoning their faith is that the Church is shallow. The shallowness equation has two sides. On the one hand, the youth have only a superficial understanding of the faith and the Bible. It appears the Christianity they believe is an inch deep. On the other side of the equation, is the faith communities that convey a lot of information about God rather than discipling young believers to live wholly and deeply in the reality of God. Thus, Christianity some churches pass on is a mile wide. Put the two together, and that results in a generation of young believers whose faith is an inch deep and a mile wide—too shallow to survive and too broad to make a difference.⁴⁴⁹

The community of believers must rethink what it means to “make disciples” (Matthew 28:19) in a context of massive, compounded cultural transformations (access, alienation, and skepticism of authority). The Church must change from an industrialized, mass-production, public-education approach and embrace the messy adventure of relationship. There is a need for a new set of ideas and practices based on apprenticeship. While in the Gospels Jesus had many followers at various times in His earthly ministry, He invested Himself fully in just twelve disciples who went on to change the world. The early Church, as shown in Acts, grew through both the public proclamation of the Good News and a network of relationships.

449. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 114.

In Paul's letter to the fledgling church in Corinth, one discovers a shining example of deep-level faith mentoring. "Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel" (1 Corinthians 4:15). Today the American church has thousands of "guardians in Christ" in the church culture, but there are few spiritual fathers and, for that matter, mothers. Yet, it is people with a commitment like Paul who make true disciples. Little wonder the core of Paul's model of discipleship consisted of relationship, love, fatherhood, and mentorship. Paul continues, "Therefore, I urge you, imitate me. For this reason, I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church" (1 Corinthians 4:16-17 NKJV). Paul understood that effective discipleship happened for the most part, in a relational, fatherly, mentorship, and apprenticeship fashion. This discipleship concept is what is seen being played out in his relationship with Timothy, Titus, and Onesimus.

This generation wants and needs truth, not soft spiritual nerve. According to the Barna research findings, churches too often provide lightweight teachings instead of rich knowledge that leads to wisdom. This generation is hungry for substantive answers to life's biggest questions, particularly in a time when there are innumerable ways to access information about what to do. What is missing and why the community must come in is to address the how and the why. Adopting the Pauline method of discipleship will give them the how and the why by challenging them not to remain in the shallow waters of mediocrity but, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Titus 2:15 KJV).

Dallas Willard, in *Knowing Christ Today*, suggested that there are two critical challenges for what and how the church teaches.⁴⁵⁰ First, the church must connect spiritual wisdom with real-world knowledge. Churches, Willard argued, have ceded the realm of knowledge to academics and institutions of higher education. Primarily, little effort is made to help the young disciples connect the dots between their vocation—whether in medicine, journalism, city planning, music, sales, computer programming, or any other occupation and their faith. Willard believes the church focus on matters of belief and commitment, which may be divorced from any impact these make on the whole of life. Willard illustrated the disconnect by pointing out that no one wants a brain surgeon who has merely a belief in or commitment to medicine. People want a surgeon with knowledge and experience in surgery! Likewise, Christians must connect their commitment to God with real-world knowledge and experience—and teach young people to do the same.⁴⁵¹

Second, Willard contends that the Church must teach through experience, reason, and authority—all are important to their apprenticeship efforts. Churches tend to emphasize one element over the others, and this leads to insufficient discipleship. For example, some churches rely too much on experience (events and activities) and not enough on the authority (the Bible) or reason (reflections and application). Others emphasize Bible teaching but do not connect the Word with experience or reason. The Church needs to be holistic in its approach to discipleship so that young people can think about and respond to the truth in various ways.⁴⁵²

450. Dallas Willard. *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2009).

451. *Ibid.*, 102.

452. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 105.

Finally, another way the church can cultivate apprenticeship-like training for the next generation, as Paul did go to the heart of apprenticeship—finding what people are gifted at are then called to do, and then do all you can to nurture that calling. Most young ministers and volunteers have some sense that this strategy is essential and do the best they can. But young people need a much clearer, definitive, objective, and directional approach to finding their calling in Christ’s body. This perspective is not likely to happen through a simple weekly message. It is a whole mindset that needs to permeate the faith communities.

It must be noted that callings may include science, math, medicine, business, congregational ministry, art, music, or any number of other vocations. Kinnaman suggests that the faith community’s guidance of vocation should take both learning style and spiritual giftedness into consideration. Additionally, he called for the church to reconsider the matrix of success. A woodworking artisan does not employ hundreds of protégés. He could hire any number of laborers to mass-produce furniture, but his goal is not thousands of cookie-cutter headboards or table. He aims to pass on the craft to the fine art apprentices who want to learn.⁴⁵³ In the same way, the Christian community must apply Paul’s concepts of discipleship: relationship, love, fatherhood, and mentorship, and adopt the youth in the church to individually apprentice them to Christian maturity.

Anti-science Turns to Stewardship

The idea that faith and science are not compatible is a myth that many young Christians have erroneously believed. As a result, when they see the most crucial roles science plays

453. Ibid., 104.

universally today in the world they inhabit—in medicine, personal technology, travel, care of the natural world, and other areas, they are tempted to believe the science myth. Furthermore, science seems accessible in many ways that the Church does not, especially as science appears to welcome questions and skepticism, while matters of faith are seen to be impenetrable. The Church must respond to today's scientific culture by stewarding young people's gifts and intellect.⁴⁵⁴

The concept of stewardship permeates Scriptures. According to God's Word, the believer's lives and our resources are gifts from God to be given back to Him in service to others. This generation must be taught that this gift to the church is to be used for God's purposes. What are some ways the church can care for these gifts, so young Christians are prepared for service in our science-obsessed culture?

Many students do not know how or where to bring up their questions about science within the Christian community. With some pastors making claims that intellectual questions are the enemy of faith—it is easy to see why. Kinnaman said he knew some leaders who believe they are providing space for evenhanded, open dialogue on scientific issues. But that is not always how it appears to students. Most of them want to work together toward an answer, rather than being told what to believe.⁴⁵⁵

One church in Oregon is creatively integrating science into its broader conversations about faith. The congregation's director of apologetics is an ornithologist who is a bird scientist. He specializes in the study of raptors and is a passionate advocate, as many in the Northwest are,

454. Ibid.

455. Ibid., 143.

for the environment—specifically for the natural habitats of birds of prey. He is also finishing a Master of Arts degree in Theology and serves his faith community by leading online and in-person discussions about the intersection of science and faith. Richard commented in a telephone conversation, "I have come to recognize that students need a place to ask questions about science, that we cannot expect them to ignore the issues of science all about us."⁴⁵⁶

Not every church has an ornithologist in the second row, ready to dialogue about scientific questions that are beyond the pastor's scope of knowledge, but what about the high school biology teacher who goes to a church down the road? Or the Community College Physics professor who sponsors an on-campus ministry? There are plenty of Christians in the scientific community who would love to serve the body of Christ with their gifts and knowledge, and there are many young adults who need a scientifically credible Christian mentor who will walk alongside them as they reason through competing truth claims.⁴⁵⁷

While high school and college years can be a time of awkwardness and confusion for many students, they are also a season when young adults take steps towards becoming who they are meant to be. Many young people have no meaningful interaction during high school and college with Christian adults who work in their field of choice. Christian young adults often do not connect their career choices with a sense of calling or vocation. Their faith and work decisions are separated, rather than holistically entwined.

What if the church made a concerted effort to identify scientific and mathematical inclinations in young people (as well as other skills and gifts), and then connected young believer

456. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 144.

457. *Ibid.*

with older Christians who are living out their faith in related careers? This Pauline apprenticeship style move could provide a dramatically different understanding of science and technology, not as adversaries of or disconnected from faith, but as domains where faith compels one to make a difference.

Barna's research suggested that students who see the world for themselves through a biblical lens are best prepared to face intellectual challenges. The best-prepared young Christians are encouraged to think for themselves, with Scripture as the viewfinder through which they interpret the world around them, including the world of science. And God's natural revelation, interpreted through the lens of their scientific aptitudes, helps them expand their understanding of God as well. They are taught how to think well, not merely what to think.⁴⁵⁸

In contrast, too many young believers are not given proper intellectual tools with which to interact with science. Scientists and others who oppose what the faith community believes may be made into straw men whose arguments, whether made in good faith or not, are ignored or rejected rather than dealt with honestly. Sometimes this happens because Christian leaders lack the expertise needed to tackle the topic. How could the typical youth worker, for instance, be prepared to deal with every question that come up, such as the ethical implications of egg donations?⁴⁵⁹

Kinnaman suggested that an excellent place to start this endeavor is with fellow believers. Many sincere, passionate Christians disagree on matters of science. Collegial and vigorous debate is a good thing for the Christian community, as the church seeks a prophetic voice with

458. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 144.

459. *Ibid.*, 145.

which to speak into the broader culture. Yet over and above the debates, the church should cultivate a spirit of Christian unity, purpose, and mission. He also admonished that it also means taking care not to toss around emotionally charged words and phrases that escalate tensions and divide Christ's body.⁴⁶⁰

For example, young-earth creationists may want to rethink accusations of apostasy when they talk with (or about) old-earth creationists, or with those who hold to theistic evolution. Likewise, Christians who believe evolution is God's chosen mechanism for creation must be cautious of intellectual condescension towards their sisters and brothers who think differently. The issues and debates are not unimportant, but the relationship in Christ is of paramount significance.⁴⁶¹

Some history lessons might be appropriate here. In 1687, when Sir Isaac Newton published *Principia*, his masterwork of classical mechanics that defined science's understanding of the physical universe for the next three centuries, he did so as a devout Christian. While some of his religious beliefs were outside the mainstream of orthodoxy—some historians believed Newton was anti-trinitarian; for instance—the Bible was his greatest passion, over and above science. He once said, "I have a fundamental belief in the Bible as the Word of God, written by those who were inspired. I study the Bible daily."⁴⁶² His curiosity about the world was deeply

460. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 146.

461. Ibid.

462. John Hudson Tiner. *Isaac Newton: Inventor, Scientist, and Teacher* (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1988).

entwined with his reverence for the Creator, whom he credited with the existence of the universe.⁴⁶³

Newton's mechanical model of the universe also helped broaden the divide between the community of faith and scientific community. The universe is held together by force of gravity, many later scientists came to believe, not by God. Yet Newton, along with many other fathers of the scientific revolution, was able to hold his discoveries in tension with faith, rather than replacing God with natural laws. Kinnaman suggests that the same posture is possible for believers today—that a sense of wonder and thoughtful inquiry can lead us to worship, rather than to deny God. God is honored when the God-given intellect is employed in the investigation of the universe, and what is discovered there invites one to give him glory.⁴⁶⁴ How can we recapture the curiosity and devotion that drove Newton—and so many other faith-filled scientists—and pass them on to the next generation?

As the Christian era dawned, Ruth M. Bancewicz, writing for the *Science and Belief* magazine, indicated how Paul described how creation revealed scientifically the evidence of the existence of God:

The apostle Paul wrote in the New Testament that creation wordlessly communicates something of God to everyone in it. Ancient Greek philosophers agreed: there is evidence for God in nature. The early Christian theologian Augustine gave a name to this revelation of God through creation: natural theology. In the Middle Ages Thomas Aquinas laid out his now famous 'five ways' argument for God from observations of nature. Different expressions of natural theology were studied and taught throughout the Christian church.⁴⁶⁵

463. Ibid.

464. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 146.

465. Ruth M. Bancewicz. "Apostle Paul" in *Science and Belief*, February 23, 2012. <https://scienceandbelief.org/tag/apostle-paul/>. Accessed February 11, 2020,

One's first encounter with God may be on a mountaintop or in a laboratory, but one also needs to experience God as he reveals Himself through the church, through Scripture and the person of Jesus Christ.

Paul was masterful in encouraging and empowering young people to fulfill their divine callings even in the field of science and medicine. Paul's companionship with Luke, the doctor, confirms his desire to see young men make exploits in the area of their callings. Encouraging and intentionally initiating vocational stewardship with young scientific minds of the Church will go a long way to defusing this myth of science being incompatible with Christianity.

The researcher will now focus on the criticism of *repressive*.

Repressive Turns to Relational

Most millennials see the call for integrity and sexual purity before marriage as stifling to their individualistic mindset; as a result, they perceive the church as repressive. The Body of Christ lives by a relational sexual ethic that rejects traditionalist and individualist narratives of sex. There is the need for a new mind to cultivate a more profound, more holistic, more Christ-filled ethic of sex. Neither traditionalism nor individualism are working—nor are they biblical. Most believers sense that but can do nothing about it. Believers need to rediscover the relational narrative of sexuality.⁴⁶⁶

“It just feels like the church's teachings on sexuality is behind the times. My lifestyle may not be perfect, but you know...it's just sex.” --Dennis

466. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 160.

Kinnaman revealed that sex is about selflessness, not primarily about self. It is about serving, not only about personal pleasure. It is about God's creativity intersecting human action, not our own identity and self-expression. Rather than saying that sex is a taboo (traditionalist) or that sex is about me (individualists), the relational approach to sexuality says, sex is good, and it is about us.⁴⁶⁷

The church needs to approach the issue of sexuality with utter humility. Because of sin, our relationships with God, each other, and the Christian community are broken. Jesus saved believers from sin by his death on the cross, sent His Spirit, and gave the church his written Word so that these relationships can be fully restored. Yet as one reads the Bible, one finds every kind of distortion of and troubles with sexuality, even among God's people. By humbly acknowledging one's shared brokenness, the church can deal with problems when they arise rather than sweeping them under the rug.

Gen Zs, embody a relational identity. While they are often narcissistic and thoroughly immersed in a culture of individualism, young adults show enormous capacity for and aspiration towards relational connection and "staying true" to family and peers. So, there is a great deal of hope that this generation is ready for a different, more biblical approach to sexuality. In other words, there is an excellent opportunity to help the next generation live a new narrative of sexual life—the relational story. The Christian community can begin doing two things: portraying sex as everybody's business and showing sex as God's business.⁴⁶⁸

467. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 160.

468. *Ibid.*

Christian young adults who are living with split selves, divided at a soul level between their pelvic urges and their saintly aspirations, need to be made whole. Eugene Peterson puts it masterfully in *The Message*: “If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comment for yourself. You might be needing forgiveness before the day’s out” (Galatians 6:1). When the church shows sex as God’s business, He will give the grace one needs to restore lives, families, and communities.

The Barna research shows the significant impact of fathers on the sexual formation of their children, particularly daughters. Is the Christian community providing tools and encouragement to parents that will help them to grow whole, sexually integrated kids? Are they connecting teens and young adults from single parents and blended homes with couples and families so they can learn (or relearn) patterns of healthy relationships? Portraying sex as God’s business also means that one’s sexual ethics are based on the revealed truth of God through the Bible.⁴⁶⁹ Adopting the Pauline discipleship concepts of fatherly, relational, and love will certainly help these young Christian have a healthy, biblical perspective of sex.

Paul admonished Timothy, saying: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12 NIV). He further recommends that Timothy should see "older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity" (1 Timothy 5:2 NIV). Here Paul is proposing a relational connection between Timothy and the female members of his congregation. The edge for sexual promiscuity diminishes when there is a family relational bonding within the community of the body of Christ.

469. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 160.

This hyper-relational generation is searching for the meaning of one of the ultimate expressions of human relationships, sex. These young people want to share their stories, and they are blunt, irreverent, and sometimes crude when they do. And in a no-privacy, socially networked world, this bare-all impulse tempts them to share anything with anyone who “clicks through.” But there is also the positive side, as Kinnaman indicated that his friend Mike Foster pointed out. Foster is the founder of People of the Second Chance. He posited “a lot of young people in this generation who are dealing with unfulfilled expectations. Life is not working out the way the American dream scripted it.” Foster puts the grace generation in a whole new light: “It is incredible what God can do once people reach a point where they do not care what you think of them.”⁴⁷⁰

Kinnaman told the story of a young woman her early twenties, called Amanda. He met her on a flight to Chicago. She did have several abortions during her teen years. She told Kinnaman how much those choices had hurt her and her mother because she said, “my mom always allowed pregnant teens into our home. If there is anyone on the planet who would have understood, it was my mom.” Now, as a twentysomething, Amanda is trying to use her experience for good. She has talked to four pregnant teens out of abortion and is determined to help other girls avoid the same choices that, still today, fill her with regret.⁴⁷¹

At the same time, Amanda believed strongly in second chances. “I have another friend who still chose to have an abortion. Even though I tried to help her consider giving away the baby for adoption, she did not accept that. That hurt, you know. But also though many of my

470. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 128.

471. *Ibid.*, 166.

Christian friends told me to cut off contact with my friend after she had the abortion, I could not do it. I still love her. I even accept her and still believe in her. I still believe in what God wants to do in her life.”⁴⁷²

In conclusion, it is stories like this that bolster my appreciation for the next generation—imperfect but eager to extend grace. The Christian community must, therefore, rethink its current failing youth discipleship method. There is the need to innovatively adopt the Pauline concept of relational, fatherly, love that will enable young Christian adults to develop a healthy, biblical perspective of sex, as the study now turns to the criticism of exclusion.

Exclusion Turns to Embrace

One of the reasons the youth give for leaving the church is Christianity's claim of Christ's exclusivity—the only way for salvation. Even though there seem to be limited to what this generation will accept and whom they will embrace, they have been shaped by a culture that esteems open-mindedness, acceptance, and tolerance. Therefore, Christianity's claim of exclusivity is a hard sell. They are often eager to find common ground if it means glossing over real differences.⁴⁷³

Kinnaman suggests that when the church accepts the terms of the debate—exclusion versus tolerance—they lose; when believers choose exclusion, the church circles the wagons and becomes a fortress-like, member-only organization overcome by a siege mentality. The church closes the door to everyone who looks scary or asks questions that make believers

472. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 166.

473. *Ibid.*, 160.

uncomfortable. When believers choose tolerance of every person and ideology, on the other hand, the church shrinks from sharing the very, very good news of God’s love, demonstrated like never before or seen in Christ, and from confronting sin and the suffering that is sin’s result. Exclusion lacks love; while the wrong kind of tolerance lacks courage.⁴⁷⁴

At the heart of the Christian story, however, is the Triune God’s rejection of both exclusivity and tolerance. The Creator was not content to exclude those who rejected him, but neither was he prepared to tolerate humanity’s hatefulness and sin. So, what did He do? He became one of humanity, one of the “other,” identifying with humanity to embrace humanity in solidarity, empathy, and selfless agape love—all the way to the cross.⁴⁷⁵

What will it look like if the Christian community do the same? How would the church be different if it were to reject exclusion as unacceptable and tolerance as not good enough? What would believers do differently when discipling young adults to help them cultivate Christlike empathy that identifies with the least, the last, and the lost? The Christian community might start by seeking the biblical view of Christ’s message and mission. An excellent place to begin this endeavor is with the story of Jesus told about the “other.” Jesus tells the story of a wealthy man who invites the dregs of society to his lavished banquet after the elite turn down his invitation (Luke 15:15-24). Then consider the tale of the shepherd who leaves ninety-nine of his sheep to seek the one that is lost (see Luke 15:1-7). Then consider the parable of the loving father who

474. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 180.

475. Miroslav Volf. *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon), 2019.

wants to reconcile with his wayward son (see Luke 15:11-32). In each of these stories—and by His actions—Jesus invites the believer to a glimpse of God’s heart for the outsider.⁴⁷⁶

The Apostle Paul’s writings to the fledgling early churches show similar compassion for those on the outside looking in. “God demonstrates His love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” Paul says to the church in Rome (Romans 5:8). Believers must not forget that we were all outsiders. Then to the church in the city of Corinth, Paul wrote:

When I wrote to you before, I told you not to associate with people who indulge in sexual sin. But I wasn’t talking about unbelievers who indulge in sexual sin, or are greedy, or cheat people, or worship idols. You would have to leave this world to avoid people like that. I meant that you are not to associate with anyone who claims to be a believer yet indulges in sexual sin, or is greedy, or worships idols, or is abusive, or is a drunkard, or cheats people. Don’t even eat with such people. It isn’t my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your responsibility to judge those inside the church who are sinning. God will judge those on the outside; but as the Scriptures say, “You must remove the evil person from among you.”⁴⁷⁷

Paul’s instructions are crystal clear but are tough to apply, even for the most devout and lifelong Christian. Most believers are more than happy to judge those who are not “one of them”! What would it look like for the church to take Paul’s admonition seriously and teach the young people to do the same?

“Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity,” Paul wrote to the young church in Colossae. “Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone” (Colossians 4:5-6 NLT). What an excellent snapshot of the believer’s responsibility as Christians! Such a livable piece of

476. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 181.

477. 1 Corinthians 5:9-13.

advice! Is the Christian community cultivating this gracious posture towards non-Christians and teaching young disciples to live wisely as well?⁴⁷⁸

The Church must demonstrate the exclusive nature of Christ by rekindling her empathy for "others." Paul declared: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile" (Romans 1:16 NIV). He was not ashamed of the exclusivity claim of the gospel. Though Paul was willing to embrace others and become whatever they were for the sake of their salvation. In 1 Corinthians 9:22, he declares, "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (NIV).

The researcher has highlighted how the spirit of embracing and understanding for all other religious views, but in love intentionally points them towards an eternal relationship with Christ that can counter-balance the youth's criticism of exclusiveness.

The researcher will now address the last reason the youth give for their disconnection, doubtless.

Doubting Turns to Doing

The final reason young people give for leaving the Church is the accusation that they are not permitted to express their doubts in Church. Young Christians, both those within and those without, are accusing the Church of being a place they are not free to express their doubts. They do not feel safe, admitting that faith doesn't always make sense. Additionally, many young

478. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 182.

people think and feel that the Church's response to doubt is trivial, and fact-focused as if people can be talked out of doubt.⁴⁷⁹

“The hell stuff—I never made peace with it. Human beings were capable of forgiving those who did them terrible wrongs, and we all agree that human beings were maggots compared to God, so what was his trouble again?”--John

Creating faith communities where doubts of all kinds can honestly, openly, and relationally be explored is one way to make the turn with the next generation. Another is allowing young adults to put feet to their faith; many of the most profound truths of Christianity become clear when the believer puts his or her faith into action; in so doing, believing makes sense. Sometimes the thing Christians can do with unbelief is to stop fixating on it and get busy for the sake of others. The Christian community must help young adults do something with their faith to contextualize their doubts within the church’s mission.⁴⁸⁰

Kinnaman told the story of how his father pastored church years ago and encouraged anyone in his congregation to participate in mission trip and service activities, regardless of whether the person was spiritual or not. Even non-Christians could participate. Of course, they had committed Christians leading and teaching on these trips and events, but they did not require a person to be a Christian to serve. “This decision caused a challenge,” he said, “because some church insiders thought people should know what they believe before being associated with the church. No one knew how to handle it when a young woman came up to one of the team leaders

479. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 197.

480. *Ibid.*

on outreach to Guatemala and said, ‘You know, I did not believe in God before the trip. But now I see what you are doing—what we are doing for these people. Now I want to follow Christ.’”⁴⁸¹

Paul admonished, "Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things" (Romans 14:1 NKJV). Here Paul is allowing room for the doubts of the weak in faith, especially over doubtful things. He is encouraging mature believers to help the weak to work through their doubts with them until they develop in faith.

The research has demonstrated how youth leaders can create an atmosphere for the infirm in faith to express their misgivings without being looked down on for doing so. Christian leaders must allow room for people to faithfully work through their doubts by doing acts of service with and for others.

In conclusion, there are millions of young adults rethinking church and faith who have doubts about their doubts. The church-like Paul must help them act in faith, allowing their doubts to be "ant in the pants" of their quest for God.⁴⁸²

The researcher will next consider how the research finding relates to the researcher’s current ministry context.

Synthesis Within Ministry Context

Having established the viability of applying the salient principles of Paul's concepts of discipleship to address the youth dropout problem, this research will now contextualize the finding to the researcher's current ministerial setting as discipleship pastor at ROLWC. As stated

481. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 197

482. *Ibid.*, 200.

in chapter one, there are several indications that the current discipleship methods used for the youth of ROLWC, and most churches today for that matter, have been primarily a didactic endeavor—as if becoming a disciple of Jesus is mostly an intellectual project, a matter of acquiring knowledge. Why is that? The reason, according to Smith, is because the church has unintentionally bought into Descartes's notion that "I think therefore I am."⁴⁸³ So, unfortunately, most of the current youth discipleship programs are geared toward head-knowledge. This researcher's goal is to apply the Pauline principles of discipleship innovatively to resolve the contemporary problem of youth dropout at ROLWC.

For example, a typical weekly program for the youth of ROLWC will be mainly Wednesday night youth fellowship from 7 pm to 8:30 pm. The service will usually begin with praises and worship led by the youth team, and then the youth pastor will give a sermon or teachings with little or no direct interaction with the youth. It appears most of the youth activities unintentionally seem to be geared towards head-knowledge.

There are several things which could help overcome this challenge, first, there must be an intentional campaign for a complete paradigm shift from the “I think, therefore I am” mentality to “I love therefore I do” mentality, beginning with the youth pastor to all the youth workers and volunteers. Second, ROLWC will immediately adopt the Pauline concept of discipleship of love, fatherly, mentorship, and apprenticeship to resolve the youth dropout problem.

ROLWC can learn a great deal from the lives of the earliest Christ-followers—a small group of ordinary people who, obedient to God's leading, propelled the spread of faith that now circles the globe.⁴⁸⁴ In *Paul and His Team*, Ryan Lokkesmoe provided a fascinating look into the

483. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 200.

484. Ryan Lokkesmoe. *Paul, and His Team: What the Early Church Can Teach Us About Leadership and Influence*, Kindle Edition (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers. 2017), 1.

hearts and actions of these pioneering believers, yielding valuable insights into how we, too, can be salt and light in a challenging world.⁴⁸⁵ On a personal note, this project has helped me understand why my three young adult sons behave the way they do and have equipped me to be a better father in mentoring them to be Christ-like.

Chapter Summary

Leaders of the faith community must prioritize and adopt intergenerational relationships, as seen in the Pauline model of discipleship. For the most part, these connections would not happen by accident. Leadership will need to catalyze them in their communities and model them in their own lives. This action will require leadership to challenge prevailing assumptions of “cool” ministry or chasten elder Christians focused on traditionalist preferences.

Perhaps one has noticed that the “turns” in addressing each of the criticisms leveled by the youth against the Church have a relational aspect.

Overprotection Turns to Discernment.

The faith community must cast out fear by discerning the times and embracing the risks of cultural engagement as Paul did.

Shallow Turns to Apprenticeship.

The faith community must leave shallow faith behind by apprenticing young people in the fine art of following Christ.

Anti-science –Turns to Stewardship.

485. Lokkesmoe. *Paul, and His Team*, 1.

Believers must respond to today's scientific culture by stewarding young people's gifts and intellect as Paul did with Timothy.

Repressive Turns to Relational.

The faith community must live by a relational sexual ethic that rejects traditionalist and individualist narratives of sex.

Exclusion Turns to Embrace.

The Church must demonstrate the exclusive nature of Christ by rekindling the believer's empathy for the "other."

Doubting Turns to Doing.

The faith community must faithfully work through the doubts of the young people by doing acts of services with and for others.

In conclusion, the relational element of the Pauline model of discipleship is so strong because relationship is central to disciple-making—and, as this project has shown, the dropout problem is the lack of effective discipleship. As the faith community must rediscover the centrality of relationship, this researcher believes the Church must be willing to reimagine the structures of discipleship. This researcher does not recommend an abandonment of that all existing structure that have been put in place, but as the church identifies systems that are not effective, leadership will be willing to give them up and replace them with intergenerational, one on one relational mentorship model that work with the youth of today.

Chapter 5.

The Project Conclusions

From the research findings, it is painfully obvious that the church in the West is struggling to connect with the next generation. There is no doubt the Christian community must deal with the immense technological, spiritual, and sociocultural changes that define these times—the changing nature of access, new questions about authority, and increasing relational and institutional alienation. Learning how to pass on a faith worth claiming is paramount in a modern context.⁴⁸⁶

Lessons Learned

Now that the Christian community has met the nomads, prodigals, and exiles and explored their perceptions of the church and Christianity, allow the researcher to share three things learned from studying the next generation:

1. The church needs to reconsider its discipleship methods innovatively, adopting the Pauline model of discipleship to foster reconnections.
2. The Christian community must rediscover Christian calling and vocation through the Pauline concept of mentorship apprenticeship.
3. The body of Christ must reprioritize wisdom over information as believers seek to know God.

486. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 201.

As submitted throughout this project, the Christian community needs a new mind--a new way of thinking, a new way of relating, a new vision of the believer's role in the world--to pass on the faith to this and future generations.⁴⁸⁷

As it turned out, this “new” mind is not so new. After countless interviews and conversations, the research revealed that the historical and traditional practices and orthodox and wisdom-laden ways of believing are what the next generation needs. This finding may sound like great news, and it is—but it is not a shortcut. Walking the ancient pathway of faith together in this new environment will not be easy. Yet this researcher believes that as the Christian community digs deeper into the historic Christian faith to nurture younger generations, the Pauline concept of discipleship will help renew the Western church. As recommended by Paul, young Jesus followers need older Christians to share the rich, fulfilling wine of faith, and the established Church needs new wineskins into which to pour the Church’s future.⁴⁸⁸

A closer summary of the three areas the researcher believes God is calling the church to renew its thinking will be appropriate at this point.

Rethinking Relationships

According to the research findings, the modern idea of generations seems to be overrated, and may even distort the vision of how the church is designed to function. While generational demographics will remain an essential way of approaching what researchers do as market research, the church must recapture the biblical concept of generation. While it is true that there

487. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 201.

488. *Ibid.*, 202.

are different age groups represented in the church, the Bible seems to indicate that everybody in the church at a particular time makes up a “generation,” a generation that is working together in its time to participate in God’s work.⁴⁸⁹ The rethinking of “generation” has been explained as:

Original assumption: The church exists to prepare the next generation to fulfill God’s purposes.

New thinking: The church is a partnership of generations fulfilling God’s purposes in their time.

What this means is that the Christian community is one of the few places on the earth where those who represent the full scope of human life, literally from the cradle to the grave, come together with singular motive and mission. The church is (or should be) a place of racial, gender, socioeconomic, and cultural reconciliation. The reason is that Jesus commanded that the believer’s love would be the telltale sign of devotion to him (John 13:35)—as well as a community where various age demographics genuinely love each other and work together with unity and respect.⁴⁹⁰

It must be noted that, as illustrated in the Pauline model of discipleship, flourishing intergenerational relationships should distinguish the church from other cultural institutions. The concept of dividing people into various segments based on their birth years is a very modern contrivance, emerging in part from the needs of the marketplace over the last hundred years. As goods were mass-produced, marketers sought new and effective ways to connect a given product

489. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 202.

490. *Ibid.*, 203.

or service to a specific niche or segment. Age (or generation) became one of those helpful “hooks”—a way to pitch, advertise, or attract a certain kind of buyer to one’s wares.⁴⁹¹

In a misguided abdication of the church’s prophetic calling, many churches have allowed themselves to become internally segregated by age. Most began with the worthwhile goal that their teaching is age-appropriate but went on to create a systematized method of discipleship akin to the instructional model of public schools, which requires each age-group to be its learning cohort.⁴⁹² However, doing so unintentionally contributes to the rising tide of alienation that defined these times. As a byproduct of this approach, the next generation’s enthusiasm and vitality have been separated from the wisdom and experience of their elders.⁴⁹³

To be clear, the researcher is not saying the church should suddenly do away with children’s Sunday School or programs for the youth. He is saying that programs need to be reevaluated and revamped where necessary to make intergenerational relationships a priority as Paul did in his discipleship methodology.⁴⁹⁴ Rather than being defined by segregated age groups, however practical they may seem, the church is called to connect the past (traditions and elders) with the future (the next generation). Christians are members of a living organism called the Church.

In the Scripture one will find the infinite variety and eternal cohesiveness of this organism described in mind-blowing detail:

491. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 203.

492. Ibid.

493. Ibid.

494. Ibid.

No, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to countless thousands of angels in a joyful gathering. You have come to the assembly of God's firstborn children, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God himself, who is the judge over all things. You have come to the spirits of the righteous ones in heaven who have now been made perfect. You have come to Jesus, the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness instead of crying out for vengeance like the blood of Abel.⁴⁹⁵

Like Paul, the writer of Hebrews emphasized that intergenerational relationships matter on earth because they are a snapshot of Zion (sometimes known as the New Jerusalem), a small but accurate picture of the majesty and diversity of God's people throughout the ages, who are citizens of the new reality God inaugurated in Jesus Christ. The church must recapture that sense of historical continuity, of a living, breathing body of Christ—of a divine assembly of the saints alive today and throughout the ages.

Vocational Rediscovery

The second thing learned through the process of this research is that the Christian community needs to rediscover the theology of vocation. There is confusion about this term, the use of which is often limited to trade or “vocational” education. But in the Christian tradition, vocation is a biblically robust, directive sense of God's calling, both individually and collectively. As Paul demonstrated with “Luke, the beloved physician...” (Colossians 4:14), the researcher believe vocation to be a clear mental picture of one's role as Christ-followers in the world, of what believers were put on earth to do as individuals and as a community. It is a

495. Hebrews 12:22-24, NLT.

centuries-old concept that has, for the most part, been lost in our modern expressions of Christianity.⁴⁹⁶

The most heartbreaking aspect of the Barna Group research finding on the issue of vocation is the utter lack of clarity that many young people have regarding what God is asking them to do with their lives.⁴⁹⁷ It is a modern tragedy. This belief is that, despite years of church-based experiences and countless hours of Bible-centered teachings, millions of the next-generation Christians have no idea that faith actually connects to their life's work. They have access to information, ideas, and people from around the world, but no clear vision for a life of meaning that makes sense of all that input.

There is no doubt that God is calling the church to cultivate a larger grander, more historical sense of our purpose as a body and as individuals. Kinnaman illustrated this idea by stating:

I think we are constantly building, tearing down, and rebuilding our youth and young adult's development regimes based on the fallacy that more is better. The more "disciples" we can cram in our programs, the better. The more seats we can fill, the better good we will do...right? We need new ways of measuring success. If you are in church ministry, one metric of success might be help young people make one or two relational connections, younger people make one or two relational connections, younger to older, that lead to significant mentoring bonds that will last for several years. These relationships would not be solely focused on spiritual growth but should integrate the pursuit of faith with the whole of life.⁴⁹⁸

Kinnaman seemed to be advocating the principles of the Pauline model of discipleship recommended for the solution of the youth dropout problem in this project. The church must

496. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 207.

497. Ibid.

498. Ibid., 208.

begin measuring things like the knowledge of love for Scripture of teens and young adults, their clarity about their gifts and vocation their willingness to listen to the voice of God and follow his direction, the fruits of the Spirit in their lives, and the depth and quality of their love and service to others. Paul admonished young adults and all believers, “So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16 NIV).

One may ask, how could the church ever measure those things? It is possible to make accurate assessments, not in a mechanical way, but from a place of relationship and apprenticeship. For example, a mentor knows intimate details about the progress of his or her protégé. Paul had a good knowledge of the spiritual and physical standings of his mentees at any given time so he could admonish Timothy. “Do not be too quick in the laying on of hands and thereby share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure” (1 Timothy 5:22 BSB). On the issue of Timothy’s health, he could advise, “Stop drinking only water and use a little wine instead, because of your stomach and your frequent ailments” (1 Timothy 5:23 BSB).

A practical, discerning parent has a pretty good sense of what’s working or not working in a child’s life. Jesus was in close enough contact with His disciples that He was able to shape the rough-hewn edges of their faith and ministry. In short, Jesus knows his followers. If churches are too large to cultivate this understanding, then the departments are likely too large to disciple as Jesus or Paul did.⁴⁹⁹

Even though one factor in the you-lost-me problem is that the church has tried to mass-produce disciples, this strategy does not mean that institutions are unimportant or should go away; nothing could be further from the truth. The reality is that the reinvention of colleges,

499. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 209.

schools, ministries, and local churches will play a significant role in helping the church as a whole develop a “new mindset.” Whether one influences a civic organization, ministry, church, business, or nonprofit, one’s wise and intentional choices can produce different and better outcomes for the next generation. The church, as a matter of urgency, needs new architects of faith formation within the established (and soon-to-be initiated) institutions.⁵⁰⁰

Older believers must adopt the Pauline concept of discipleship by becoming mentors who are committed to nurturing the faith and life of a young Christian. When a more mature believer spends time with a teen or young adult who is being mentored, do not just talk about the Bible (though that is important). Get together because of the enjoyment of each other’s company and friendship. Be attentive to what matters to the young adult. Help him, or her get into the right school or college. If possible, offer help with tuition. Be ready to guide decisions about gap years and dating relationships. The older believer must humbly share his or her struggles and wisdom. Avoid impatience and the intent to control. Help younger persons find God’s unique and empowering vision for his or her life.⁵⁰¹

To parents, cultivate your sense of vocation and calling. Your life should reverberate with rhythms of life in pursuit of God’s presence and mission. Sadly, many young people do not have a sense of vocation because millions of Christian parents have a vision of following Jesus that avoids anything more demanding than faithful church attendance. The children cannot “catch” what the parents do not already have.⁵⁰²

500. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 209.

501. *Ibid.*

502. *Ibid.*

Young people must take responsibility for their life and future. Whether prodigal, nomad, or exile—or some other journey—God is not done with their story. They should open their imaginative Spirit to a broader, historical vision of the church, the one depicted by the writer of Hebrews: an assembly of saints, past and present, of angels, of God, and Jesus Christ. Believers are called to be part of the assembly, empowered by the Spirit to work alongside other Christian sisters and brothers to serve and restore God’s word. Kinnaman posited, “following Jesus means finding a vocation.”⁵⁰³ It is the prayer of this researcher that these practical ideas will lead the Christian community, young and old, to see visions and dreams of the work believers can do together.

Wisdom Reprioritized

Finally, this research has revealed that the Christian community needs to reprioritize wisdom to live faithfully in a discontinuously different culture. Submerged as the believer is in a society that values fairness over justice, consuming over creating, fame over accomplishment, glamour over character, image over holiness, and entertainment over achievement, believers need a blueprint for what life is meant to be. How can the believer live in-but-not-of live-in the world that surrounds the Christian? In a culture skeptical of every kind of earthly authority, where information is dirt cheap and where institutions and leaders so often disappoint, we need God-given wisdom.⁵⁰⁴

503. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 210.

504. *Ibid.*

According to Kinnaman, wisdom is the spiritual, mental, and emotional ability to relate rightly to God, to others, and to the culture. The believer becomes wise as they seek Christ in the Scripture, in the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, in the practices and traditions of the church, and our service to others. As the believer comes to know and revere God—which, according to Proverbs 9:10, is the beginning of wisdom—He will make the believer wise. But this is often a painful process, as in Hannah’s story showed.⁵⁰⁵

Through the youth dropout research project, Kinnaman has interviewed many young adults who are not yet willing to submit their lives to Jesus or to commit fully to the church. As one young nomad, Hannah wrote:

It was not until five years leaving home that I finally found my way back to God. Those five years were life changing and devastating. I told the church that they lost me, that this was somehow their fault. But really, I lost myself. I lost the sense of who I was in Christ. I stopped seeing that it mattered. If I could not even find myself, how could the church leader? I might blame other people for the mistakes I made, the choices I made, the friends I made---but in the end, the only pronoun I was using was “I.” This was between me and God.⁵⁰⁶

Hannah may have seemed lost along her faith journey, but she is on the path towards wisdom, toward a right relationship with God, with others, and with the world. Anyone can learn from Hannah, even those who have been faithful. When the Holy Spirit speaks to a believer, and he or she read Jesus’s parable of the prodigal son, for example, the believer may see himself/herself in the rebel young brother or the hypocritical older sibling. If one identifies with the younger brother, ask God if it is time to “come to your senses” as the wayward son did (Luke

505. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 210.

506. *Ibid.*

15:17). If one is a nomad or a prodigal, one is urged to search his or her heart with the help of the Holy Spirit. Maybe it is time to return home.⁵⁰⁷

If a believer has experienced the ugly side of the Christian community, this researcher hopes that one will ask God to help one forgive those who hurt him/her—and those hurts from the past will no longer keep one from reconnecting with those who are stumbling along behind Jesus. These Christians, like everyone, are trying their best (but sometimes doing their worst) to follow him.

Perhaps, after some soul-searching, one may discover one's self in the older brother's story. Kinnaman has interviewed older churchgoers who lament the disrespect of the teens and young adults in their congregation but have never bothered to learn the names of those very same young people. Like the "older brother," one may find comfort in the rules and regulation of religion while inwardly nursing offense toward those who are accepted by the Father even when they fail to follow the rules.⁵⁰⁸ One must be honest with himself and release the resentment that has kept believers from celebrating God's children in the next generation. If a young believer identifies with the older brother, the young believer's faithfulness is to be commended, but only so long as it is not a roadblock to reconciliation. Will the believer let go of anxiety, fear, control, and impatience and enter joyfully into the feast God has prepared to welcome home his lost ones?

In this iconic parable, Jesus offers a glimpse of the Father's heart. Through his life, ministry, death, and resurrection, Jesus pulls back the curtain of heaven to show believers the very face of God. As we follow Christ, teach and study God's Word, live in the Spirit, and

507. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 210.

508. *Ibid.*

practice community with the saints, we will become the kind of disciples who make disciples. Wisdom empowers us to live faithfully in a changing culture.

Limitations of the Project

Much of the Pauline model of discipleship, as demonstrated through Scripture, is capable of addressing the youth dropout problem, and there are two significant limitations in this research, which could be the subject of future studies. First are the historical and socio-cultural similarities and dissimilarities between the first-century church, where the Pauline model of discipleship was implemented and the twenty-first century where this study seeks to apply its principles and concepts. The similarities and dissimilarities must be studied carefully to determine their impact on the successful implementation of the Pauline model of discipleship. Second, the actual implementation of the Pauline model of discipleship in addressing the youth dropout problem did not occur during the course of this research, which could be the subject of a future study.

Consideration for the Future

This researcher believes the first significant aspect of a successful evaluation of this study is demonstrated in the theological and hermeneutical soundness of the application of the Pauline discipleship concepts in addressing the youth dropout problem of the 21st-century North American church. Consequently, the second aspect will be upon completion of this doctoral project. The researcher will test the contextual evaluation of the effectiveness of the proposed solution of the dropout problem in the researcher's current position as the discipleship and prayer pastor. Therefore, it stands to reason that a further evaluation of the project in the future will be

done of its implementation and if or how adequately the proposed application of the Pauline concept of discipleship has resolved the youth dropout problem will be appropriate.

Impact of the Project on the Researcher's Life and Ministry

This researcher started this project with an initial goal of acquiring higher education in preparation for the fulfillment of his perceived calling to the training of the next generation of godly leaders for Africa. Little did the researcher anticipate that through this project, the Lord would compel him to reexamine his relationship with Christ in light of the researcher's preconceived bias and prejudices against the youth of today.

Before this project, this researcher did not comprehend that the story—the great struggle—of the emerging generation is learning how to live faithfully in a new context “to be in the world but not of the world” (John 17:11).⁵⁰⁹ As a result of this project, this researcher now wholeheartedly believes in the next generation. They are essential, and not just because of the cliché, “young people are leaders of tomorrow.” For the next generation, the lines between truth and error, between Christian influence and cultural accommodation are increasingly blurred.

While these factors are certainly challenging for every generation, this cultural moment is at once a singular opportunity and unique threat to the spiritual formation of tomorrow's church. Many young adults are living out the tension of in-but-not-of in ways that ought to be corrected or applauded, yet instead, they are often criticized or rejected as this researcher did before this project.

509. Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 21.

In the vibrant and volatile story of the next generation, a new spiritual narrative is bubbling up. Through the lens of this project, this researcher has come to understand and agrees with some, though not all, of the grievances of the next generation. Yes, believers should be concerned about some of the attitudes and behaviors encountered in the next generation of Christians. Yet, this researcher also finds reasons to hope in the best of what they have to offer.

From now on, this researcher will prioritize and adopt intergenerational relationships, as seen in the Pauline model of discipleship. For the most part, these connections would not happen by accident. The researcher will categorize them in the ROLWC community and model them in his own life. This action will require the researcher to challenge prevailing assumptions of deductive head knowledge discipleship to initiate a complete paradigm shift to the interpersonal relationship, mentorship-based discipleship.

Conclusion

God-centered relationships create faithful, mature disciples. This research project has hopefully provided ideas for forming meaningful relationships between older Christian leaders and young nomads, prodigals, and exiles. The researcher's prayer is that these practical ideas will start conversations in the Christian communities that will lead to reconciliation between generations and fearless disciples of every age, thereby resolving the youth dropout problem.

APPENDICES

The following tables are taken from: Barna Group. “Church Dropouts Have Risen to 64%-But What About Those Who Stay?” <https://www.barna.com/research/resilient-disciples/> Accessed September 20, 2019.

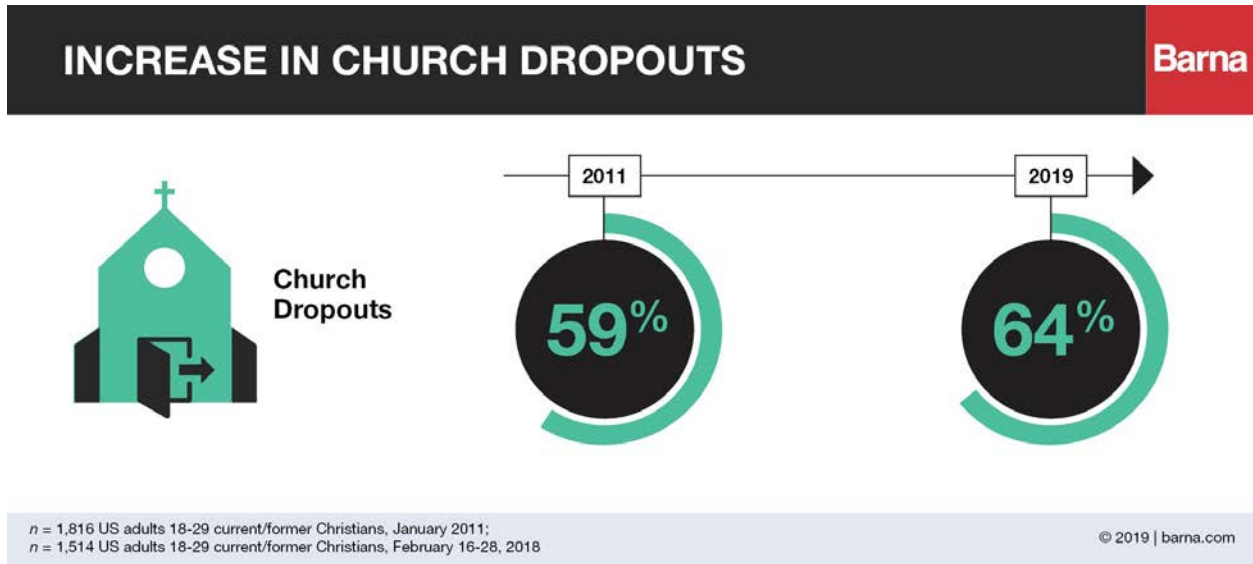


Figure 1. Church Dropouts Have Risen to 64%-But What About Those Who Stay?

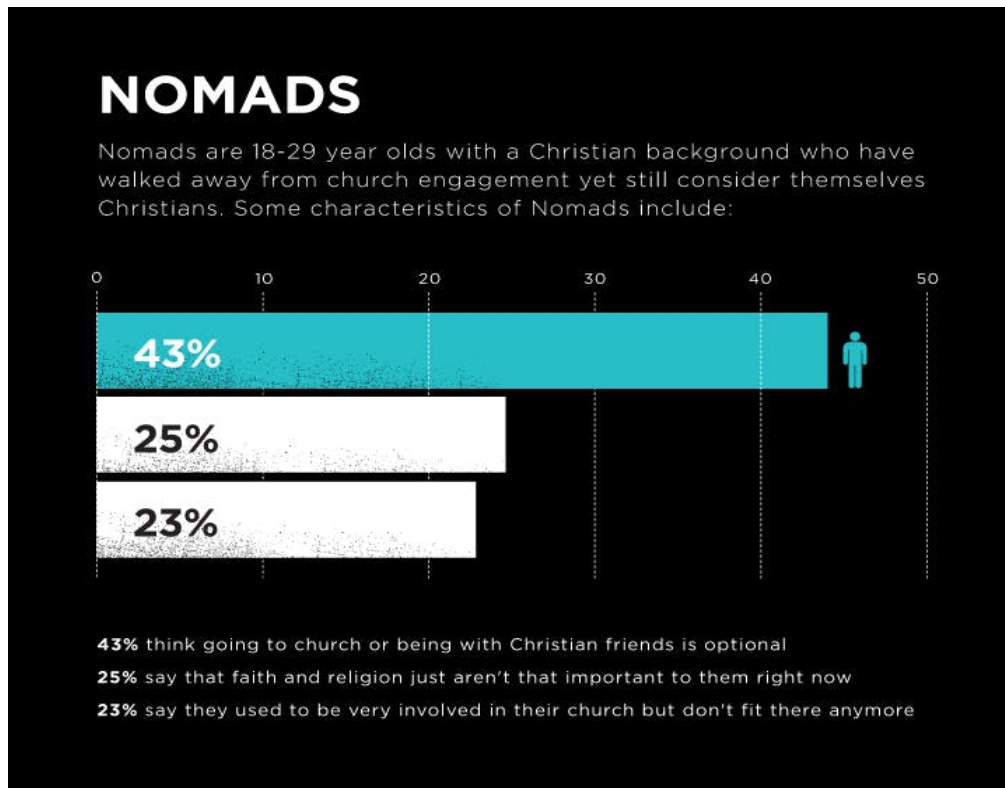


Figure 2. Nomads.

PRODIGALS

Prodigals are 18-29 year olds who have a Christian background but have lost their faith, describing themselves as "no longer Christian." Some characteristics of Prodigals include:

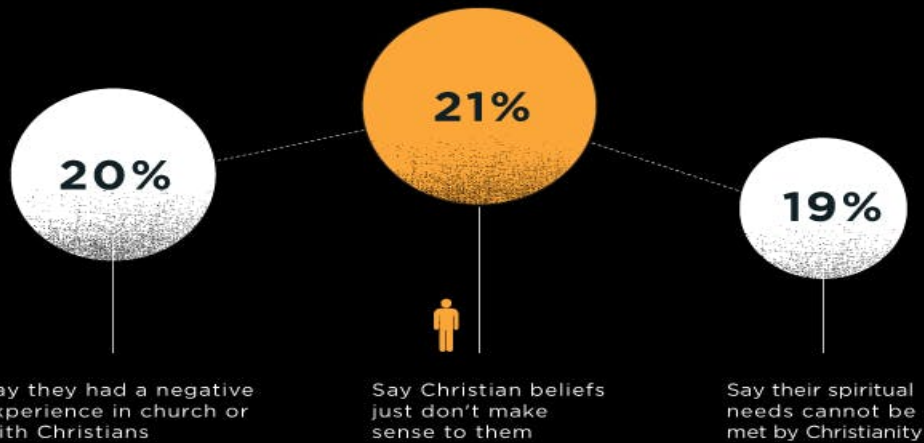


Figure 3. Prodigals

EXILES

Exiles are 18-29 year olds who have a Christian background and are still invested in their Christian faith but feel stuck (or lost) between culture and the church. Some characteristics of Exiles include:

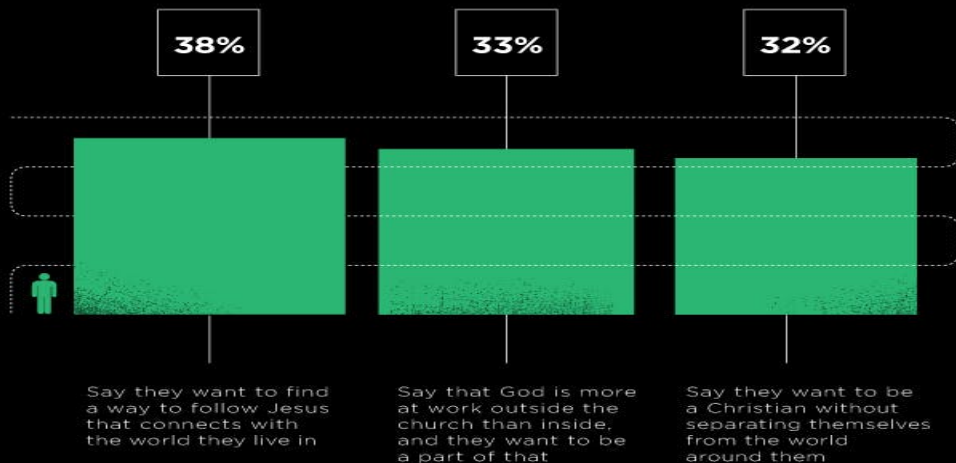


Figure 4. Exiles

Overprotective | In Their Own Words

Percentage of 18 to 29-year-olds who have a Christian background.

	Completely true to me	Completely or mostly true to me
Christians demonize everything outside of the church.	11%	23%
Church ignores the problems of the real world.	9%	22%
My church is too concerned that movies, music, and video games are harmful.	9%	18%
Church does not offer opportunities to artists and creative people.	5%	13%
I am involved in social causes that the church doesn't seem to care about.	6%	12%

Figure 5. Overprotective in Their Own Words.

Shallow | In Their Own Words

Percentage of 18-to 29-year-olds who have a Christian background.

	Completely True of me	Completely of mostly true of me
Church is boring.	16%	31%
Faith is not relevant to my career or my interests.	13%	24%
My church does not prepare me for real life.	9%	23%
My church does not help me find my purpose.	9%	23%
The Bible is not taught clearly or often enough.	7%	23%
God seems missing from my experience of church.	7%	20%

Figure 6. Shallow in Their Own Words.

Anti-science | In Their Own Words

Percentage of 18- to 29-year-olds who have a Christian background.

	Completely true of me.	Completely or mostly true to me.
Christians are too confident that they know all the answers.	17%	35%
Churches are out of step with the scientific world we live in.	12%	29%
Christianity is anti-science.	9%	25%
I have been turned off by the creation-versus-evolution debate.	11%	23%
Christianity makes complex things too simple.	9%	20%
Christianity is anti-intellectual.	8%	18%

Figure 7. Anti-science in Their Own Words.

Repressive | In Their Own Words

Percentage of 18- to 29-year-olds who have a Christian background.

	Completely true of me.	Completely or mostly true of me.
The church’s teachings on sexuality and birth control are out of date. *	23%	40%
I do want to follow all church rules	14%	25%
I want more freedom in life and cannot find it in church.	12%	21%
I have made mistakes and feel judged in church because of them.	8%	17%
I have to live a “double life” between my faith and my real life.	5%	12%
I am sexually active and now less interested in faith as a result.	5%	12%

*This question was only asked young adults with a Catholic background

Figure 8. Repressive in Their Own Words.

Exclusive | In Their Own Words

Percentage of 18- to 29-year-olds who have a Christian background.

	Completely true of me.	Completely of mostly true of me.
Churches are not accepting of gays and lesbians.	19%	38%
Christians are afraid of the beliefs of other faiths.	13%	29%
Church ignores the problems of the real world.	9%	22%
I feel forced to choose between my faith and my friends.	12%	29%
Church is like a country club, only for insiders.	8%	22%
I have never really been accepted by church people.	6%	14%

Figure 9. Exclusive in Their Own Words

Doubtless In Their Own Words

Percentage of 18 – 29-year-olds who have a Christian background.

	Completely true of me.	Completely or mostly true of me
I do not feel that I can ask my most pressing life questions in church.	14%	56%
I have significant intellectual doubts about faith.	12%	23%
My faith does not help with depression or other emotional problems.	10%	20%
I have had a crisis in life that has made me doubt faith.	9%	18%
The death of a loved one has caused me to doubt.	5%	12%
College experience cause me to question my faith,	5%	11%
I am not allowed to talk about my doubts in church.	5%	10%

Figure 10. “Doubtless in Their Own Words.

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