Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

SIX-WEEK COURSE FOR CHINESE-AMERICAN PARENTS TO INTEGRATE
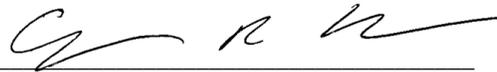THE CHURCH INTO THEIR MIDADOLESCENTS' SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

Written by

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SIX-WEEK COURSE FOR CHINESE-AMERICAN PARENTS TO INTEGRATE
THE CHURCH INTO THEIR MIDADOLESCENTS' SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

HUILING (ALLISON HU) YANG
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ABSTRACT

Six-Week Course for Chinese-American Parents to Integrate the Church into Their Midadolescents' Spiritual Development
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According to Fuller Youth Institute, about forty to 50 percent of children who graduate from youth groups will fail to maintain their faith in college. The National Study of Youth and Religion indicates that by the time they become emerging adults, only 5 percent count as devoted to their religion. In light of these statistics, churches must rethink strategies to foster long-lasting faith in adolescents. This project aims to develop a six-week course to equip Chinese-American parents and church adults to integrate the Church into the spiritual development of their midadolescents.

Part One of this project explores the ministry context of midadolescents. Starting by acknowledging youth in crises, this part includes various statistics, temptations, and other serious junctures of defining issues, as well as the systematic abandonment occurring in society, culture, and family relations. By considering adolescents' rapid changes in physical and psychological development, churches can better engage with their spiritual development. The changes include stress in prominent parental influences, and the critical importance of social capital in adolescents' lives.

Part Two of this project focuses on becoming mature Christians. Starting from the theological foundations of authentic disciples of Christ, the discussion further explores a deeper understanding of spiritual formation while seeking to connect churches' praxis and practical theology through youth ministry. This also includes ministering from specific cultural perspectives and empowering the next generation through church community.

The final part develops a practical ministry strategy to implement the courses. The Church as an extended family needs to foster a relational church family perception. This includes learning from the early Church, implementing the strategy of adoptive youth ministry, and organizing a youth mentorship program. The six courses for parents and church adults are composed of three parts: midadolescence's special needs, the building of relationships, and spiritual formation in youth.

Content Reader: Dr. Chap Clark

Words: 299

To my husband, Robert Yang, who always stands by and supports me
To my three grown children, Amanda, Jonathan, and Michelle, whose cheerful spirits
continuously encourage me
To my prayer partners, whose unwavering faith in prayer sustains me
To my organization and colleagues who believe in me
To my family in Christ who give me opportunities to serve and grow in Christ

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INTRODUCTION

A pastor of a successful Chinese church with an international ministry never thought he would hear those words. Anna, the pastor's daughter, after a few years into college, came back home and told her father: "Dad, I am not sure I believe in God anymore." The pastor's daughter doubted nearly everything he had tried to instill in her for eighteen years. "I now realize that I didn't do a good job showing her why Christianity is true," the pastor lamented. "Now, it might be too late."[1]

Churches and parents love to see the next generation prosper in the abundant promises of Jesus Christ and become the salt and light of this world. However, it is alarming that, according to the Fuller Youth Institute, about 40 to 50 percent of children who graduate from a church fellowship or youth group fail to maintain their faith in college.[2] Though children and youth ministries flourish and a wide variety of outreach and mission programs are propagated, Christians should be aware that the battle on the home front is not looking well.

The target focus age group of this project is midadolescence, which pertains to ages fifteen to twenty. In this period of time, teenagers are still living at home and are rapidly changing in their development. It is a critical time for parents and churches to instill lasting influence on their faith before they leave home. The purpose of this project

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[1] Anonymous, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, December 20, 2010.

[2] Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 214.

is to create a six-week course for Chinese-American Christian parents to integrate the church into their midadolescents' spiritual development.

Part One of this project explores the developmental context of midadolescents through different areas of their lives so that parents and churches can gain knowledge and wisdom about how to interact with teenagers. Part Two of this project explores the definition of authentic disciples of Christ and disciplines that can facilitate the process of becoming mature Christians. Part Three evaluates what churches can do to help and comes up with six specific courses for both churches and parents to implement. With the help of the Holy Spirit, churches and parents can more effectively help midadolescents grow in their trajectory to becoming mature Christians.

Since the phenomenon of extended adolescence is widely accepted, today's youth have more years and more challenges to face than their parents' generations. Therefore the ministry context starts by acknowledging youth in crises. This includes various statistics on temptations and lures on the Internet, drug and alcohol abuse, and other serious junctures such as teen pregnancy, suicide rate, and cyber bullying as defining issues of youth.

Moreover, even though American parents are engaged in a form of childrearing more intensive than ever before in history, the majority of the activities are adult-driven and adult-controlled programs, taking place in systems and institutions that are primarily concerned with adults' agendas, needs, and dreams.[3] The relationship between parents and children becomes performance oriented, which makes youth feel both physical and

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[3] Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 30.

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psychological isolation from their parents.[4] This is the reason Chap Clark stresses in *Hurt 2.0* that this "systemic pressure" on American children is unhealthy. Clark writes, "Even with the best of intentions, the way we raise, train, and even parent our children today exhibits attitudes and behaviors that are simply subtle forms of parental abandonment."[5] When a parent's love is experienced as conditional on achievement, children are at risk for serious emotional problems.[6] Hence, adolescents are experiencing systematic abandonment coming from society, culture, and family relations. There are truly more stresses and cries for help from today's adolescents.

Adolescence is a period of rapid changes in physical and psychological development. There are different focuses of needs in different stages of adolescence. During these stages, the three major socioemotional tasks of youth—exploring identity, accomplishing autonomy, and finding belonging—are constantly on the minds of the youths.[7]

In these essential tasks, parents are significant parts of adolescents' lives, and parental influences on their emotional, social, and spiritual development are prominent. Nonetheless, churches and parents also need to understand the critical importance of social capital in adolescents' lives. A social context that can provide the appropriate

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[4] Suniya S. Luthar and Shawn J. Latendresse, "Children of the Affluent: Challenges to Well-Being," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 14 (2005): 49.

[5] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 31.

[6] Sidney J. Blatt, "The Destructiveness of Perfectionism," *American Psychologist* 50, no. 12 (1995): 1012.

[7] John W. Santrock, *Life-Span Development,* 12th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 383.

amount of support to adolescents from parents, teachers, coaches, and other responsible adults can greatly help adolescents transition into adulthood.[8]

Part Two of this project defines the elements of authentic discipleship of Christ. The Bible indicates that the making of disciples is to see the evidence of progressive maturation beyond conversion. Three indications of walking with Christ are to have the following: sensibility and flexibility to the surrounding culture, relational warmth and meaningful connection within the Christian community, and an awareness of the needs of evangelical opportunities and actions of service to the community.

Furthermore, spiritual formation is a deliberate process, and should be demonstrated in daily Christian life. The next aim of the project is to discuss the different ways to practice spiritual discipline. Dallas Willard writes in his book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, that there are two major spiritual disciplines that the Bible indicates Christians should follow.[9] However, when implementing these disciplines and other ministry programs to pursue spiritual maturity, churches will need to be aware of the difference between an open system organism and a closed system organization.[10]

Traditionally, churches have youth ministries that run various programs to target adolescents' needs. However, those ministry activities somehow seem disconnected with the churches' praxis. Youth ministry needs to connect with churches' praxis and practical

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[8] Ronald E. Dahl and Linda Patia Spear, eds., "Adolescent Brain Development: A Period of Vulnerabilities and Opportunities," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1021 (2004): 20.

[9] Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 158.

[10] Chap Clark, "Strategic Adoption: Developing a Holistic Ecclesiology," class lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, October 27, 2014.

theology. This section discusses the missional practices of church life and how to empower the next generation. Moreover, it is important to create an environment of learning so that the whole church community can participate. The Church is an extended relational family of God. Salvation is given by grace and Christians should respond with thanksgiving and love. This in turn manifests in service to God and others in the church community.

The final part of this project builds bridges and stands in the gap between church youth and adults to provide an environment where they can dialogue and collaborate with one another. By introducing family-based youth ministry to the church congregation, churches should let adults know their calling as God's people, as well as their shared responsibilities to facilitate adolescents' journey into mature Christian faith as an extended church family.[11] This includes the idea of family-based youth ministry and the power of the extended Christian family.

By organizing mentorship and mentorship training programs, church adults and youth can build long-term relationships. The training programs for mentors should include teaching about the role of a mentor, how to build up relationships, and how to instill Christian worldviews. After building bridges for church adults and adolescents, churches can begin to implement the courses. The six courses start out by providing knowledge to parents and church adults regarding youth in crisis as well as adolescents' special developmental needs. Then, the course will convey wisdom to parents and church adults on the topics of communication and ways of encouragement as well as helpful

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[11] Mark DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 175.

positive-discipline parenting guidelines so that teenagers will want to listen. The last two

classes are on the importance of adult modeling and social capital in adolescents' spiritual

formation and how to organize youth and church adult mentorship programs.[12] In the end,

this project seeks to strengthen midadolescents' commitment to Christ by using a six-

course parenting class to equip both parents and church adults, enabling better parenting

of adolescents and better incorporation of the church into the formation trajectory of

adolescents' faith.

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[12] Dahl and Spear, "Adolescent Brain Development," 20.

PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1

CULTURAL AND PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENTAL CONTEXT OF ADOLESCENCE

Joshua grew up in church and had been through the church nursery, Sunday school, and youth programs. Both of his parents went to church every Sunday and actively participated in church small groups. They devoted their lives to their children's education in order for them to have a better chance to improve their socioeconomic standing in the American culture. They are a typical and exemplary family of the Chinese immigrant Church who hope their offspring can build their lives on the solid foundation of faith in Christ. However, after Joshua went to college, things changed—he was no longer interested in faith. At first, he still joined a few Christian clubs to find friends. Gradually, he found a parade of excuses for not attending Sunday services. Sometimes out of annoyance at his parents' nagging, he would go to church only to fall asleep during the sermon. Eventually, he stopped going to church altogether.

Kathy was first brought to church because of her middle school friend's invitation. She was baptized during her freshman year of high school and had a wonderful testimony despite her parents' absence. She thrived in church youth group and eventually took on a leadership role. Nonetheless, after she entered college, she went through nearly the same

phase as Joshua, except her parents did not nag her. All too soon, she stopped going to church too.[1]

These similar stories are common in Chinese immigrant churches, as well as in global Chinese churches everywhere; church adults are desperate and do not know what went wrong. Even worse, church leaders do not know what to do to help. Unfortunately, this is a universal problem not only Chinese churches suffer; American churches are also losing their young adults.

According to the National Study of Youth and Religion, approximately 70 percent of American teenagers commit to living their lives for God. However, by the time they become emerging adults, age twenty to late twenties, only 5 percent are still devoted to their religion.[2] In light of these alarming statistics, church leaders and parents must rethink strategies in order to foster a long-lasting faith in the next generation.

Most people would agree that growing up in today's world is far different from growing up even three decades ago. Clark states that adolescence is a "fundamentally different thing" than before.[3] In contemporary society, many changes in cultural values and family structure have led to a lack of attention to the developmental, societal, and relational needs of children and youth. This in turn means that young people are on their own in their journey toward adulthood. As youths attempt to fend for themselves on the way to opportunities and freedoms, they often face a sense of isolation and vulnerability.

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[1] Anonymous, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, October 11, 2012.

[2] Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Soul in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 255-259.

[3] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 7.

There are many challenges facing modern adolescents: extended adolescence, distinctive challenges, pressures from daily life, unique brain development, and cultural stresses.

The Phenomenon of Extended Adolescence

The end point of adolescence has been creeping upward in many ways and for many years.[4] The most obvious change is that schooling extends far beyond twelfth grade. Financial dependence on parents lasts longer. Exposure to real employment is delayed.[5] According to Joseph and Claudia Allen, almost half of all men and women in the United States between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four live with one or both parents, and as many as 60 percent are still receiving financial support from them after the college years have passed.[6]

Most people tend to use the term teenagers to refer to adolescents, primarily in reference to persons between thirteen and nineteen years of age. Traditionally speaking, adolescence starts at puberty and ends at the beginning of college or of a career. However, children are currently starting puberty at a younger age and ending at a much later stage.[7]

The beginning of adolescence is relatively easy to define; usually it begins at the start of puberty. Nonetheless, consider that at the beginning of the twentieth century, the

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[4] Joseph Allen and Claudia Worrell Allen, *Escaping the Endless Adolescence: How We Can Help Our Teenagers Grow Up Before They Grow Old* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2009), 11.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., 13.

[7] Arch Hart and Catherine Hart Weber, *Stressed or Depressed: A Practical and Inspirational Guide for Parents of Hurting Teens* (Brentwood, TN: Integrity Publishers, 2005), 21.

age of puberty was close to seventeen years of age.[8] Usually immediately afterward, the person would have been ready for marriage and entered into adulthood, gaining adult status. Therefore, there were at most a couple of years between childhood and adulthood.

Today, the onset of puberty occurs at approximately the age of ten. The peak rate of pubertal change occurs at eleven and a half years for girls and thirteen and a half years for boys.[9] The reasons for the early start of puberty range from growth hormones in food to toxins in the environment to subtle genetic shifts.[10] However, there is no definitive explanation.

Nonetheless, the end point of adolescence has been creeping upward in many ways and for many years.[11] The criteria for the end of adolescence are more difficult to determine because the end is not physical but psychosocial.[12] Adulthood is a culture-affirmed identification that someone is responsible for his or her own choices and has an interdependent relationship in the community. According to Jeffrey Arnett, there are three top criteria for adulthood—accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent.[13] Therefore, instead of chronological factors, the end of adolescence is the time approaching adult status.[14] Moreover, nearly

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Santrock, *Life-Span Development*, 357.

[10] Hart and Weber, *Stressed or Depressed,* 21.

[11] Allen and Allen, *Escaping Endless Adolescence,* 15.

[12] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 11.

[13] Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood: A Cultural Approach,* 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2010), 13.

[14] Ibid., 2.

everyone who ventures to define the end of adolescence today states that it is typically

somewhere in the mid- to late twenties or even up to thirty years of age.[15] This pushes

today's adolescence period into lasting between fifteen to twenty years.

The reasons for the prolonged phase of adolescence are even more complex. One

of the reasons is the extended education needed to eke out a living in society that rewards

higher education.[16] Moreover, the direct and indirect impact of the evolving postmodern

culture of the twentieth century plays a definite role. In David Elkind's book, *Ties That

Stress*, he points how out many elements of the postmodern era's culture contribute to the

increases of the stress of children and youth.[17]

For example, the postmodern culture emphasizes adulthood development and at

the same time celebrates the notions of perceived "childhood competence" and "teenage

sophistication." The idea of "childhood competence" views children as competent

individuals, and "teenage sophistication" views adolescents as sophisticated in

knowledge and judgment to the degree that they do not need as-significant levels of adult

guidance. Those views underplay and minimize the developmental needs of children and

youth.[18] Namely, changes in the postmodern perspective of family ties, family values,

and the view of children and adolescents all contribute to the shrinking of childhood,

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[15] Hart and Weber, *Stressed or Depressed,* 21.

[16] Santrock, *Life-Span Development*, 386.

[17] David Elkind, *Ties That Stress: The New Family Imbalance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1-14.

[18] Ibid., 191.

normality, and spaces for children and youth.[19] Consequently, today's young people lack

the relational nurture, guidance, security, and protection necessary to grow into adulthood.

Because of these various contributing factors from society and culture, the end of

adolescence and beginning of adulthood have been prolonged.

Due to the lengthening of adolescence, it is helpful and clarifying to sketch out

different stages for different periods of adolescence in order to have specific focuses.

From the onset of puberty to about fourteen to fifteen years of age is called early

adolescence.[20] According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,

midadolescence generally corresponds to ages fifteen through eighteen.[21] From nineteen

to mid- or late twenties is late adolescence. Lastly, the period from the mid-twenties until

achievement of adult status is called emerging adulthood.[22] This project focuses on the

phase of midadolescence, when most Christian teens still live at home and go to church

regularly.

In this crucial and unique period of youth development, there are three major

matters.[23] The first is newfound freedom from parental authority. New discoveries,

adventures, and even risks may arise. The second is the difficulty of seeing college and

career as the hope for an immediately secure future, since today's adolescence can cover

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[19] Ibid., 189-200.

[20] Chap Clark, "Psychosocial and Spiritual Development of Adolescents," class lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, October 31, 2013.

[21] U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Teenagers (15-17 Years of Age)*, accessed February 26, 2014, http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/adolescence2.html.

[22] Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 8.

[23] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 19.

fifteen years. The third challenge is that even though high school age students can use abstract thinking, they are unable to integrate the multiple selves in different roles and relationships of their lives into one united self.[24] New freedom, no foreseeable hope, and an inability to integrate self-roles—these three matters combined result in major disasters waiting to happen around the many corners on the path to adulthood.

Defining Issues for Today's Adolescents

Children and adolescents in this postmodern world face more adversities than ever before. The ubiquitous temptation of improper Internet sites, the addictive draw of social networking, computer games, drug and alcohol abuse, and the comparison of material possessions among peers are contemporary issues that previous generations never encountered on such a large scale. There are also the pressures related to academic performance, parental expectations, and extracurricular activities. All of the above present unprecedented perils to children and adolescents.

Temptations on the Internet

According to a national survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation, today, children between the ages of eight and eighteen devote an average of seven hours and thirty-eight minutes to using entertainment media across a typical day, totaling an average of more than fifty-three hours a week.[25] When children spend so much time on the Internet, they

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[24] Ibid., 19 and 50.

[25] The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Program of the Study of Media and Health, "Generation M2: Media in the Lives of Eight- to Eighteen-year-olds" (2010), https://kaiserfamilyfoundation. files. wordpress.com/2013/01/8010.pdf (accessed Jan 23, 2013).

are less likely to engage in the physical and social environment. Consequently, this will hinder their overall developmental wellbeing.

During those almost eight hours a day of screen time, media that contradict Christian beliefs and morally inappropriate content are just five seconds away, waiting to lure curious youth into a web of traps. The violence and sexual suggestions in computer games, television series, and movies are becoming more and more overt and explicit. It is easy to imagine what pornographic websites can do to children and adolescents given that even mature adults are easily addicted to them. In fact, statistics show that 42 percent of youth Internet users had been exposed to online pornography in 2005.[26] As the years go on, that number is more likely to increase than to decrease.

All the while, Christian parents and churches are trying to raise children in accordance with God's will so that "When he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6).[27] When parents spend only little to no time with their teenagers, media obviously has a more overwhelming influence on the youth in comparison. It has indeed become an enormous challenge to raise children to become faithful servants of God.

<center>Drug and Alcohol Abuse</center>

Statistical data concerning teenage drug and alcohol abuse are hardly optimistic either. An estimated 1.8 million youths aged twelve and older are current users of

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[26] Janis Wolak, Kimberly Mitchell, and David Finkelhor, "Unwanted and Wanted Exposure to Online Pornography in a National Sample of Youth Internet Users," *Journal of American Academy of Pediatrics* (February 2007), http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/search?fulltext=internet+pornography& submit=yes&x=30&y=12 (accessed March 2, 2015).

[27] All Scripture quoted is from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.

cocaine.[28] More than 60 percent of teenagers said that drugs were sold, used, or kept at their school.[29] According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that among high school students, during the past thirty days, 39% drank some amount of alcohol, 22% binge drank, 8% drove after drinking alcohol, and 24% rode with a driver who had been drinking alcohol.[30] All the evidence indicates that teens are at high risk.

Other Serious Junctures

The extraordinary increase in the number of sexually engaged adolescents gives evidence of demands to become sexually active.[31] The push to lower the age for statutory rape and for providing sex education and distributing condoms in schools reflects and reinforces the perception of early sex.[32] The number of teenage pregnancies is another alarming line of evidence that our youths are in a crisis. It is estimated that nearly three-quarters of a million teen girls between fifteen and nineteen become pregnant each year.[33]

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[28] U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – U.S. 2011* (June 8, 2012), accessed March 1, 2013, http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss61 04a1.htm.

[29] The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, "National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XVII: Teens" (August 2012), accessed March 1, 2013, http://www.casacolumbia.org/upload/2012/20120822teensurvey.pdf.

[30] U.S. CDC, *Youth Risk Behavior*.

[31] Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 155.

[32] Ibid., 157.

[33] U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *National Vital Statistics Reports, Vol. 61 No. 1* (August 28, 2012), accessed March 1, 2013, http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/ data/nvsr/nvsr61/nvsr61_ 01.pdf.

Suicide was the third leading cause of death among young adults in the United States.[34] In a survey of both the public and private school systems grades nine through twelve, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 16% of students were seriously considering suicide, 13% had a plan for committing suicide, and 8% had attempted suicide in the last year.[35] These are all alarming statistics that cannot be ignored.

As Internet social media has become a necessity for children and youth, this makes possible sharing information and news in the quickest time frame imaginable. However, this also makes cyber bullying, in parallel, a major issue. A 2007 report by the National Crime Prevention Council found that 22 percent of middle school students had experienced cyber bullying, while among high school students the rate jumped to 78 percent.[36] Some of the youth could not take the pressure of cyber bullying, which resulted in their emotional stress. Furthermore, in today's culture, academic ability and an aptitude for studying are regarded as "uncool" and make the "nerd" vulnerable to bullying and social exclusion.[37]

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[34] U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Injury Prevention and Control: Division of Violence Prevention* (March 10, 2015), accessed November 9, 2015, http://www.cdc.gov/Violence Prevention/suicide/youth_suicide.html.

[35] U.S. CDC, *Youth Risk Behavior*, 11.

[36] National Crime Prevention Council, "Teens and Cyberbullying" (February 28, 2007), accessed March 1, 2013, http://www.ncpc.org/resources/files/pdf/bullying/Teens%20and%20Cyberbullying%20 Research%20Study.pdf.

[37] Jeffrey Jensen Arnett et al., *Debating Emerging Adulthood: Stage or Process?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 69.

Pressure from Daily Life

In the past, upper-middle-class families were usually considered a low-risk demographic. Yet recent research findings paint another picture. "For as many as one in five of these affluent youth . . . high substance use, coexisting with depression, anxiety, and both behavioral and academic problems, was sustained up to the age of eighteen years," claim Suniya Luthar and Shawn Latendresse in "Children of the Affluent."[38] Madeline Levine, in her book, *The Price of Privilege*, finds that many of her adolescent patients suffer from emotional disorders: addictions, anxiety disorders, depression, eating disorders, and assorted self-destructive behaviors.[39]

For current middle-class families, children usually have many activities on their plates. Even after school, they are juggling their time between sports practices, music lessons, drama rehearsals, church youth programs, pre-SAT reviews, and all sorts of competitive activities. The heavy workload often comes primarily because parents believe those activities may put their children at an advantage when applying for college as well as set their children up for success later in life. However, this inevitably creates ever more pressure to perform in adolescents.

Unique Brain Development in Adolescence

During childhood, the brain is like a sponge that soaks up everything. Laura Berk points out in her book, *Child Development*, that brain growth spurts from infancy into

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[38] Luthar and Latendresse, "Children of the Affluent," 51.

[39] Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), 3.

adolescence. During that sensitive period, appropriate stimulation is required for optimal development.[40] However, during adolescence, in order to enhance the neurons' connectivity, pushing for new integration in the brain is necessary.[41] In a process called synaptic pruning, new neural connections are made and the old or unused ones are trimmed off.[42] The process of pruning the unused circuits allows the brain to work more efficiently. At the same time, emotional responses, which occur in the sub-cortical region of the brain, are intensified; therefore life has more zest during this period.[43] However, this process also makes the brain become less flexible and less amenable to change.[44]

During this brain-pruning period, daily stress will increase the pruning process. Teenagers' stress can come from all directions; there may be physical, emotional, social, psychological, parental, and academic stress. Too much stress results in too much pruning. Too much pruning of neural circuits may lead to inadequate connectivity in the remaining circuitry. This could result in insufficient regulation in the brain. There are many parts of the brain that regulate problem-solving and emotions; if their development does not go well, teenagers tend to simply react with their emotional gut responses.[45]

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[40] Laura E. Berk, *Child Development*, 3rd ed. (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1989), 207.

[41] Daniel J. Siegel, "The Whole Brain Child: Four Disempowering Myths," *Mindsight Digital Journal* no. 3, October 2013: 90-minute video.

[42] Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 86.

[43] Daniel J. Siegel, *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2015), 67.

[44] Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 87.

[45] Hart and Weber, *Stressed or Depressed*, 29.

Consequently, adolescents become vulnerable to addiction, hyper-rational thinking, and impulsive behaviors.

In addition to charging up adolescents' emotional signals, their changing brains also have a drive to pursue new things and to establish innovative approaches. In *Stressed or Depressed*, Arch Hart and Catherine Weber point out that some of the key players in adolescents' behavior are the prefrontal cortex and the neurotransmitter dopamine.[46] Teenagers tend to be dopamine-depleted in their brain reward system. To compensate, they seek more stimulating activities.[47]

In "The Whole Brain Child," Daniel Siegel argues that the elements of the essence of adolescence, emotional spark, social engagement, novelty-seeking, and creative exploration, are not about immaturity; rather, they are necessary to maintain adolescent brain growth.[48] As young people are involved in risk-taking and reward- or novelty-seeking, there may be critical developmental changes in brain pathways controlling emotional expression, cognition, and attention functions during this time.[49] With this new knowledge, adults can see adolescents' behavior with more compassionate and appreciative points of view.

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[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 30.

[48] Siegel, "The Whole Brain Child."

[49] A. E. Kelley, T. Schochet, and C. F. Landry, "Risk Taking and Novelty Seeking in Adolescence: Introduction to Part I," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1021 (2004): 28.

Stresses of Youth from Culture Context

When any stress, good or bad, is prolonged, excessive, and intense, a teen is at risk for problems.[50] According to Hart and Weber, many of today's teens are in states of extraordinary stress. In fact, they contend that many teenagers are on the verge of going over the edge and crossing into the depressed realm.[51] Adolescence is a period of extreme transitions in physical, emotional, psychological, and social growth. During this unique transitional period, adolescents need time to adjust to their new phase of life. Sadly, in today's culture, most adults perceive adolescence as a time coextensive with adulthood, meaning they perceive adolescents as sophisticated, leading many adults to neglect teenagers.[52]

Stress from Freedom

For postmodern adolescents, there are increasing freedoms to choose from: having sex, using drugs, or watching pornography. Yet, those freedoms can be frightening and anxiety inducing, and definitely have negative impact in creating stress for unprepared adolescents. Adolescents abuse drug and alcohol to reduce stress just as adults do. Consequently, the increased number of abusers among young people indicates the power of the stressors they are experiencing.

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[50] Hart and Weber, *Stressed or Depressed*, 33.

[51] Ibid., 36.

[52] Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 154.

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Eating disorders are another dysfunctional reaction to the new freedoms encountered by postmodern adolescents.[53] Eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia are results of extreme anxieties and concerns, an abnormal response in attempting to gain control over themselves and others.[54] For those who choose to engage in sexual activities, there are consequences such as teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases to face.[55] For those who watch pornography, there is the battle of addiction to fight. All in all, many young people are unprepared to exercise sound judgment when facing the decisions of these freedoms.

Stress from Family Relations

With the divorce rate remaining steadily high during these past couple of decades, children who grow up in single-parent households and/or step-families are becoming accepted with no stigma attached.[56] Having no stigma attached is not necessarily a bad thing for the benefit of reflecting the children's innocence in contributing to the situation. Yet, adolescents still need both parents' support as much as possible. The dissolution of marriage renders negative children's behavior and emotional well-being.[57] In a United

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[53] Santrock, *Life-Span Development*, 370.

[54] National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders, "Eating Disorders Statistics," http://www.anad.org/get-information/about-eating-disorders/eating-disorders-statistics/ (accessed August 24, 2015).

[55] Santrock, *Life-Span Development*, 363.

[56] U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "National Marriage and Divorce Rate Trends in United States, 2000-2011," accessed February 16th, 2015, http://www. cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/marriage_divorce_tables.htm.

[57] U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Family Structure and Children's Health in the United States: Findings from the National Health Interview Survey, 2001-2007," Vital and Health Statistics, Series 10, No. 246, 2010, 23-27, http://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/6031 (accessed November 9, 2015).

States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2010 report, children aged four

through seventeen living in non-traditional families such as single parent, unmarried

biological or adoptive, blended, cohabiting, or extended families, have more worries and

severe emotional or behavioral difficulties.[58]

This is not to say that traditional families with both biological parents are superior

to other types of families. If the parents are indifferent to the child or have abrasive

parent-youth relationships, the child is less likely to have a high level of self-regard.[59] In

addition, the conflicts and discord between father and mother also bring stress and

anxiety to adolescents. When adolescents handle these stresses from family by repression

and denial, unresolved hurt feelings can cause delayed pain and suffering.[60] Consequently,

in order to cope, adolescents may engage in dysfunctional behaviors such as substance

abuse, running away, delinquent behaviors, and even suicide.[61]

Stress from Fear of Failure

The postmodern American schools' overemphasis on grades combined with the

commonly large classroom size creates an anonymous and impersonal environment for

young people. When the stress from academic demands of school is too high, teenagers

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[58] Ibid., 26.

[59] Merton P. Strommen, *Five Cries of Youth: New and Revised Edition of the Widely Acclaimed Book about High School Youth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 29.

[60] Elkind, *All Grown Up and No Place to Go: Teenagers in Crisis* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1998), 225.

[61] Anne C. Fletcher, Laurence Steinberg, and Meeshay Williams-Wheeler, "Parental Influences on Adolescent Problem Behavior: Revisiting Stattin and Kerr," Child Development 75, no. 3 (May/June 2004): 781.

become angry or frightened. Angry adolescents are more likely to break the law, resulting in delinquent and even antisocial behavior. In 2010, 4,828 young people aged ten to twenty-four were victims of homicide—an average of thirteen victims each day.[62] Youth violence results in considerable physical and emotional consequences for young people.

Unlike previous generations, adolescents who graduate from high school still have a long way to go in order to achieve financial independence. For postmodern adolescents, there is higher education to obtain, and even then, they are far from a secure future.[63] With societal stress, family disunity, academic problems, and future uncertainty, a large number of adolescents suffer a feeling of worthlessness and a lack of self-confidence.

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[62] U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Injury Prevention and Control: Division of Violence Prevention*, accessed February 19, 2015, http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/yv-datasheet-a.pdf.

[63] United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Education Level and Jobs: Opportunities by State," http://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2014/article/education-level-and-jobs.htm (Accessed August 24, 2015).

CHAPTER 2

EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENTAL CONTEXT OF
ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence is a period of rapid changes in physical and psychological
development. It is also a critical period in spiritual development. Churches and parents
need to have a sound understanding of both areas in order to effectively facilitate their
youths' healthy growth.

Emotional Development

There are incredible psychological developments during adolescence. From the
beginning of life, according to Eric Erikson's theory, infants develop trust versus mistrust
depending on their relationship with their major care givers.[1] Urie Bronfenbrenner,
author of *The Ecology of Human Development*, believes that environmental
interconnections can directly affect psychological growth.[2] John Santrock, in his book,
Life-Span Development, also states that secure attachment developed during infancy is an

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[1] Erik H. Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed: A Review* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1982), 32.

[2] Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 8.

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important foundation for healthy socioemotional development in the years that follow.[3]

Even though the sense of trust during infancy is the foundation for attachment, the years that follow in adolescence are also important. Much research confirms that the same attachment theory also applies to adolescents.

Attachment Development

Ainsworth proposes four different attachment situations in her study on attachment theory. There are "securely attached," "insecure avoidant," "insecure resistant," and "insecure disorganized" babies.[4] Ainsworth argues that secure attachment in the first year of life provides an important foundation for psychological development later in life. Santrock supports the importance of secure attachment in infancy because he believes that it reflects a positive parent-infant relationship.[5]

Adolescents' Attachment Need

Based on the infant attachment theory, researchers also find that securely attached adolescents reach many favorable outcomes.[6] The studies include various aspects of adolescents' well-being, including less problem behavior such as juvenile delinquency and drug abuse, and better peer as well as romantic relationships.[7] Research findings

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[3] Santrock, *Life-Span Development*, 195.

[4] Ibid., 194.

[5] Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 189.

[6] Joseph P. Allen et al., "Attachment and Adolescent Psychological Function," *Child Development* 69, no. 5 (October 1998): 1416.

confirm that if children, both in infancy and adolescence, feel close to their parents and have confidence in their parents' love and concern, they are likely able to develop a healthy sense of autonomy from parents as they grow up.[8]

Even though researchers have in recent years qualified the claim that secure attachment is the foundation of all later relationships by additionally considering the temperament and behavior of the child, no one denies the importance of secure attachment in adolescents.[9] This means that even though adolescents have the physique and abilities to take care of their everyday routine, they still very much need emotional support. Therefore, church leaders and parents have to pay attention in this area.

Stages of Adolescence

The rapid changes in the physiology and psychology of adolescents give rise to different focuses of needs in different stages. During these stages, the three major tasks of exploring identity, accomplishing autonomy, and finding belonging are foremost in their lives.[10] Church leaders and parents can reclaim tremendous influence on youths' emotional, social, and spiritual development in this period. Finally, churches and parents need to understand the critical importance of social capital in adolescents' lives.

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[7] Glenn I. Roisman et al., "The Coherence of Dyadic Behavior Across Parent-Child and Romantic Relationships as Mediated by the Internalized Representation of Experience," *Attachment & Human Development* 3, no. 2 (September 2001): 168.

[8] Joseph P. Allen et al., "Longitudinal Assessment of Autonomy and Relatedness in Adolescent-Family Interactions as Predictors of Adolescent Ego Development and Self-Esteem," *Child Development* 65 (1994): 188.

[9] Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 190.

[10] Santrock, *Life-Span Development*, 383.

As mentioned before, the beginning point of adolescence is usually the onset of puberty, which occurs around the ages of ten to eleven years. However, the end of adolescence is not so clearly defined. Clark observes, "Nearly everyone today who ventures to define when adolescence ends states that it is somewhere in the middle to late twenties."[11] By this estimate, there are fifteen to twenty years between the start and end of adolescence.

Early Adolescence

The onset of puberty typically occurs about two years earlier for girls than for boys.[12] Therefore, the early adolescent years are around eleven to fourteen years of age. During this time, girls not only become physically taller than boys of the same age, they also have much higher relational intuition.[13]

In the transition from elementary school to middle school, children face many challenges at the same time. Inner challenges include puberty, related concerns about body image, and changes in brain development. Outside challenges include social relations, increased responsibility at school and in the home, and a more impersonal school structure.

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[11] Clark, *Hurt 2*.0, 11.

[12] Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 35.

[13] Clark, "Psychosocial and Spiritual Development of Adolescents."

Midadolescence

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, midadolescence

generally corresponds to ages fifteen through eighteen.[14] By midadolescence, teenagers

face more new difficulties in addition to their early adolescent challenges. In this crucial

and unique period, there are three major matters.[15] The first is newfound freedom from

parental authority. New discoveries, adventures, and even risks may arise. The second is

the difficulty of seeing college and career as the hope for an immediately secure future.

The third challenge is that even though high school age students can use abstract thinking,

they are unable to integrate the multiple selves in different roles and relationships of their

lives into one united self.[16] Since this is the last stage during which most adolescents still

live at home, churches and parents should utilize this precious period of time by

understanding, caring for, mentoring, and guiding them, in order to facilitate youths'

smooth transition into emerging adulthood.

Emerging Adulthood

Somewhere between the ages of eighteen to twenty-five is the period of emerging

adulthood.[17] There are five characteristics in this period: exploring identity, feeling

unstable, focusing on the self, feeling in-between, and exploring possibilities.[18] Even

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[14] U.S. CDC, *Teenagers (15-17 Years of Age)*.

[15] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 19.

[16] Ibid., 19 and 50.

[17] Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 8.

[18] Ibid.

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though youths have already started exploring their identity during midadolescence, few have already found their identities.

Exploring various possibilities in love and work, understanding capabilities and limitations, and defining beliefs and values all continue to take place during emerging adulthood. This is a peak time of instability in young adults' lives as they move from place to place for education or independence, a time of self-focus to learn to stand alone, and a time of feeling in-between when they are no longer children but not yet fully adults. Still, most of these emerging adults have an optimistic view of the future and have high hopes and expectations. They have not yet been tested in real life, and there are challenges yet to come.[19] During this time of uncertainty, better equipping during midadolescence would highly increase their possibility of abiding in the Christian faith.

Three Major Tasks of Adolescence

In order to better help adolescents cleave to the Christian faith, churches and parents must have a better understanding of the needs of today's youth. There are three basic tasks that are considered central to the psychological health of adolescents: exploring identity, accomplishing autonomy, and finding interpersonal relationships.[20] Santrock describes these tasks as the first three socioemotional developments in adolescence.[21] Each of those tasks requires adults to provide enough scaffolding for adolescents to reach positive outcomes.

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[19] Ibid., 8-9.

[20] Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 8.

[21] Santrock, *Life-Span Development,* 384-397.

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Identity Exploration

Eric Erikson states in his analysis of *The Life Cycle Completed* that the fifth developmental stage, adolescence, can either ascertain identity or confuse identity.[22] Erikson sees adolescence as the time when identity issues are most prominent and most crucial to lifelong development.[23] The development of identity, as Clark puts it, "is an internal quest to embrace one's unique sense of self while interfacing with a socially mediated and communally affirmed portrayal of who one is."[24]

However, this is not to say that identity formation is completed during youth. In reality, identity formation neither begins nor ends during adolescence. As Santrock asserts, "The formation of identity begins with the appearance of attachment, the development of the sense of self, and the emergence of independence in infancy. The process reaches its final phase with a life review and integration in old age."[25]

Regardless of the start or end, identity development during adolescence, especially late adolescence, is still irrefutably important. This is the first time an individual's physical, cognitive, and socioemotional development advances to the point that she or he can synthesize the past and construct the future. Eriksonian researcher James Marcia, in his article, "Development and Validation of Ego-Identity Status," writes that during adolescence, youths may face crisis and commitment. When facing crises,

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[22] Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed*, 32.

[23] Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 160.

[24] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 169.

[25] Santrock, *Life-Span Development*, 386.

adolescents have the opportunity to explore alternatives. When committed, adolescents show personal investment in identity. The outcomes have four statuses to resolve identity crisis: identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity achievement.[26]

Identity diffusion is when the youth is not yet exploring choices nor has any commitment. The individual is undecided in occupational or ideological choices and shows little interest in these matters.[27] Identity foreclosure happens when the individual has made a commitment of choice but has not yet experienced a crisis. This is most likely to happen in authoritarian parenting types of families where parents make decisions for their children before the children have had any chance to explore different approaches on their own.[28] Identity moratorium is when the individual explores different possibilities but has not yet made a commitment.[29]

The last status, identity achievement, is when the individual has explored the choices and has made a commitment.[30] Young people in the identity moratorium and identity achievement statuses are notably related to a variety of favorable aspects of development, such as self-direction, cooperation, and good problem-solving.[31] It is worth noting that when a family serves as a secure base from which teenagers can confidently

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[26] James E. Marcia, "Development and Validation of Ego-Identity Status," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 3, no. 5 (1966): 555.

[27] Santrock, *Life-Span Development*, 387.

[28] Ibid., 388.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 387.

[31] Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 162.

move into the wider world, identity development is enhanced.[32] Even so, the key changes

in identity are more likely to take place in emerging adulthood (eighteen to twenty-five

years of age) or later than adolescence.[33]

Nonetheless, the first three identity statuses are undesired because there is not yet

a cohesive inner identity. James Cote, in his book, *Arrested Adulthood*, writes that a

person who has no sense of inner identity is likely to exhibit the following traits:

> In habitual conflict with his or her parents; inhabiting a sibling house with other
> confused and angry half-adults; socialized to be other-directed; prone to
> narcissism and excessive pleasure-seeking; skilled at impression management and
> chameleon-like identity changes but unable to make a passage from youth to
> adulthood and therefore unable to find a direction in life that would lead to
> maturity.[34]

This description is truly a vivid portrait of many postmodern families across the globe.

Accomplishing Autonomy

The second task for adolescents is accomplishing autonomy. Autonomy is the

ability to make a difference, choose a life path, and operate as an agent in the service of

society. According to Clark, the key word at the heart of autonomy is power.[35] When an

adolescent pushes for autonomy, parents usually have difficulty adjusting. Most parents

want to remain in control and hold the power, and so expect their teenagers to comply. In

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[32] Berk, *Child Development*, 452.

[33] Santrock, *Life-Span Development*, 387.

[34] James Cote, *Arrested Adulthood: The Changing Nature of Maturity and Identity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2000), 41.

[35] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 175.

other words, parents underestimate their teenager's desire for autonomy. This increases

parent-adolescent conflicts and consequently decreases their relationship bonding.

In fact, according to Levine, when a parent is over-involved and over-intrusive in

the adolescent's life, it is a typical indication that the parent's own needs are not being

adequately met.[36] Wise parents should relinquish control in areas where they know their

adolescent can make reasonable decisions. At the same time, they should offer guidance

where they know the adolescent's knowledge is more limited.[37] Balancing freedom and

control is crucial when parenting adolescents.

Berk believes that autonomy is an important developmental task of adolescence

that is closely related to the quest for identity.[38] Parents can foster autonomy by gradually

relaxing control according to the adolescent's readiness for more freedom without

threatening the parent-child bond.[39] In *The Construction of the Self*, Susan Harter also

stresses that the combination of both connectedness and autonomy can foster the most

constructive self.[40]

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[36] Levine, *The Price of Privilege,* 141.

[37] Santrock, *Life-Span Development*, 391.

[38] Berk, *Child Development*, 567.

[39] Ibid., 568.

[40] Susan Harter, *The Construction of the Self: A Developmental Perspective* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999), 291.

Finding Belonging

The third task of adolescence is finding belonging. As Clark observes, belonging

is one of the basic innate human needs.[41] During adolescence, peers play powerful roles

and assume more important positions than parents in meeting teenagers' social needs.

Siegel identifies social engagement as an essential part of adolescence. He believes that

social relationships are a primary source of self-identity.[42]

Adolescents will intentionally create groups of two to twelve individuals, called

cliques, to exclude others.[43] In cliques that average five to six persons, they usually

develop dress codes, ways of speaking, and behaviors that separate them from others.[44]

Because midadolescents sense an emotional and relational starvation, they band together

in a way that satisfies their longing to connect with others.

However, since midadolescents are prone to self-centeredness, this social network

during adolescence does not provide the unconditional inclusion and authentic belonging

that the youths crave.[45] In the end, many adolescents who don't have healthy connections

with parents and mature adults may turn to sexual relationships.[46] Hence, parents and

church families are indispensable when it comes to adolescents accomplishing these three

major tasks.

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[41] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 183.

[42] Siegel, "The Whole Brain Child."

[43] Santrock, *Life-Span Development*, 395.

[44] Berk, *Child Development*, 614.

[45] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 183.

[46] Allen and Allen, *Escaping Endless Adolescence*, 159.

Systemic Abandonment

As David Elkind states in the beginning of his book, *All Grown Up and No Place to Go*, "There is little or no place for adolescents in American society today—not in our homes, not in our schools, and not in society at large."[47] He points out that at home, parents treat youth as equals, so there is no emotional support. In high school, there is little adult guidance and direction in activities. In society, there are few places offered for young people to hang out.[48] In another words, American society has basically left its children behind. This systemic abandonment of adolescents happens widely. As Luthar and Latendresse conclude, adolescents feel both physical and psychological isolation from adults.[49]

External Abandonment

Even though today's adolescents are seemingly busier than ever before with activities, these structured activities and programs are adult-driven and adult-controlled with adult's agendas and needs.[50] For example, the school system has become increasingly industrialized and product-oriented.[51] Teachers are more concerned about the testing results than about individual students' aptitudes. The creativity and innovation

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[47] Elkind, *All Grown Up and No Place to Go*, 3.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Luthar and Latendresse, "Children of the Affluent," 49.

[50] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 30.

[51] David Elkind, *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 49.

of teaching is shifted to producing higher standardized machine scores. Young people are treated as products that are worth only as much as they score on a test or competition.

It is not only teachers who look for performance. Sports coaches, drama instructors, music tutors, and sadly even church leaders are all looking for competitive outcomes in order to promote their own agenda. When adolescents comprehend this fact, the awareness understandably leads to frustration, anger, and rebellion. Even the seemingly most-adapted adolescents who know what to put up with and how to perform still suffer isolation and loneliness because of society's emphasis on performance.

Adolescents' emotional needs, their longing to be cared for and to be taken seriously, are neglected. Postmodern young people are often left without the social envelope of security and protection that shielded earlier generations. When today's adolescents search for identity, they find themselves in an amorphous and unpredictable environment because adults are not present for them.[52] The society as a whole replaces emotional support and genuine appreciation of a person's uniqueness with an emphasis on outcomes and results. Adolescents are abandoned by the external environment.

Internal Abandonment

Adolescents are busier than ever before because parents are engaged in a form of childrearing more intensive than ever before in history. However, as Levine points out, parents can be over-involved in the wrong things, and under-involved in the right things,

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[52] Patricia Hersch, *A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), 19.

both at the same time.[53] This may reflect the hurried nature of the modern family life, when time together is often spent rushing to the next activity or commitment. This kind of achievement pressure often comes from parents who are over-involved in how well their children perform and inadequately involved in monitoring their children's psychological wellbeing.[54]

Extracurricular sports and music practices are the norm in today's middle-class American families. Many parents regard chauffeuring children to attend different activities as evident demonstration of devotion to their children's future successes. Yet, those activities usually serve adults' agenda and do not really take children's interests into consideration. Not to mention, involvement of this sort usually feeds parental ego and grants bragging rights.[55]

Jessica is a senior in high school and studied piano from five years of age. She did not like to play piano but had to practice it out of fear of argument with her parents. Even though she had passed the highest level of the Certificate of Merit from the Music Teachers Association of California, which is the highest honor a music student can receive in California, she found no joy. She felt that she has been playing piano for her parents' bragging rights and self-agenda. She felt angry and lonely all the time. One day, she just decided that she hated piano and never wanted to touch it again. She even developed nausea whenever she walked past a piano.[56] This is a classic illustration of

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[53] Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 28.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Elkind, *The Hurried Child,* 40 and 58.

[56] Anonymous, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, July 12, 2013.

how parents can be over-involved in the wrong thing and under-involved in the right thing.

Furthermore, contemporary family ties have been rapidly collapsing. With discordant, dysfunctional, and divorced families becoming widespread, parents are under stress with their own struggles and conflicts. When people are under stress, they become self-centered: their main concern is themselves. Parents who are wrapped up in their own issues have no extra energy for their children. David Elkind points out in *The Hurried Child* that children become objects or symbols to parents so they are easier to deal with.[57] A child becomes a dancer, a sports player, a piano player, or a student—clear-cut symbols that can free parents from the energy-consuming task of knowing the child as a whole person.[58]

The material stuff and extracurricular advantages parents push on their children say more about the parents' own needs than their children's.[59] Clark writes, "Even with the best of intentions, the way we raise, train, and even parent our children today exhibits attitudes and behaviors that are simply subtle forms of parental abandonment."[60] When a parent's love is experienced as conditional on achievement, children are at risk for serious emotional problems such as depression and suicidal ideation.[61]

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[57] Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, 28.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Levine, *The Price of Privilege,* 94.

[60] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 31.

[61] Blatt, "The Destructiveness of Perfectionism," 1008.

Holding high standards for offspring is not a problem, but humiliating and disparaging them when they fail to meet expectations is. More often than not, when the parents' expectations exceed the child's current ability, parents usually become very critical. This not only creates tension in the parent/child relationship but also decreases the child's healthy sense of self.

Levine writes that a young child's sense of self is formed largely by the opinions of his or her parents.[62] If parents continue to press on towards their own agendas and despise their child's abilities and interests, the long-term effects on the child's emotional health could be devastating. This performance-oriented conditional love could result in psychological unhealthiness that will often show up during adolescence or later adulthood.[63]

Being sincerely appreciated for one's God-given strengths as well as weaknesses is a universal longing. Many Christians come to Christ after learning that Jesus loves sinners and that he does not show favoritism (Romans 2:11). No matter whether the person is talented enough or capable enough, Jesus loves all. When his people are helpless, God shields, cares for, and guards them from the elements. God loves each one as the apple of his eye (Deuteronomy 32:10). From these promises in Scripture, Christians gain immeasurable comfort and security. Even so, many Christian parents fail to see the similarity in the relationship between God with his people and parents with

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[62] Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 64.

[63] Terri Apter, *The Myth of Maturity: What Teenagers Need From Parents to Become Adults* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2001), 154.

their children. Therefore, many parents render conditional acceptance to their children, exhibiting a subtle form of abandonment.

Parental Influence on Teens' Spiritual Formation

Besides emotional support, Christian parents need to know that when it comes to the religious formation of their children, parents matter the most.[64] While grandparents, other relatives, mentors, and youth ministers are also influential, parents are by far the most important predictors of teenagers' religious lives, especially during midadolescence.[65] Adolescents with newfound intellectual abilities are formidable opponents in any argument. Their size, strength, and physical maturity wipe out any previous physical inequalities. Even so, parents need to keep in mind that adolescents still care about their parents.[66]

When teenagers are not as compliant as they were before, asking parents to trust in Christ is easier said than done. Nevertheless, in order to further the characteristic of autonomy in adolescence, parents need to balance freedom and control. It may even be wise to allow adolescents to stumble at times so that the children have opportunities to learn from their experiences and right their wrongs.[67] Some parents, afraid of losing control, tighten their grip even more; in the end, they risk embittering and discouraging their children (Colossians 3:21).

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[64] Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 18.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, 211.

[67] Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 8.

Parents who want to remain a positive influence in their adolescent's life will need to learn to say yes when they can and say no when they must. Allowing adolescents to make their own choices in areas that are not so risky or dangerous will help them learn to be responsible for their own choices and at the same time learn from their mistakes. If parents always reject the requests of their teenagers in matters big and small, when the youths are truly tempted, they will not bother asking their parents' permission or guidance anymore because they already know the answer to their request is another refusal and chastisement.

Parents who put their children into the care of the Lord through prayer act in faith. It is confidence in what we hope for and an assurance of what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1). Christian parents can be confident that Jesus Christ loves their adolescents well enough to die on the cross for them. What parents can do is "not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6).

Parents Need to Walk on the Path of Maturity in Christ First

In the New Testament, when people brought little children to Jesus, the disciples rebuked them. Yet, Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (Mark 10:13-15). "Do not hinder them" means not only not doing something that might prevent the children from coming to Jesus, but also doing something that would promote their opportunities to

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truly know Jesus. Hence, the calling of a parent is making sure children have the best and clearest opportunity to get up close and personal with their Creator.[68]

When parents are honest with themselves, they will find their shortcomings in setting examples of faith. Parents inevitably need to continue to grow in Christ because it is only by growing into the maturity of faith that Christians can gain wisdom (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7, 9:10). Adolescents and emerging adults do not need perfect parents, but parents that are real and possess a vital faith in action. Having parents who practice a robust faith increases the chances of teens remaining in faith.[69] By promoting family faith practices such as engaging youth in family prayer, Bible reading, and family devotions to nurture their children's faith, parents can demonstrate faith as a way of life.

This by no means suggests that parents should not make any mistakes in front of their children. In fact, parents who make mistakes and humbly admit as well as repent from those mistakes give vivid evidence of walking with the Lord. The greatest gift parents can give to their children is letting them see their struggling and wrestling to live a lifetime of trust in God.[70] Ultimately, Christian parents can trust that "They will not labor in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants with them" (Isaiah 65:23).

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[68] Chap Clark and Dee Clark, *Disconnected: Parenting Teens in a MySpace World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 31.

[69] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 213.

[70] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 46.

Importance of Social Capital on Adolescents

God created humans to be social beings. This fact is especially apparent during adolescence. In their book, *Sticky Faith*, Kara Powell and Chap Clark note that high school seniors crave support from adults in their congregations.[71] The teens felt most welcomed and valued when adults showed an interest in them.[72] According to Allen and Allen, it is foolish to place the entire burden on parents to address teens' needs for adult relationships. The authors of *Escaping the Endless Adolescence* believe that connections with adults outside the family can be among the most inspiring connections teens make in their lives.[73]

Communal Experience

In contemporary American culture, many teenagers are busy juggling different activities such as sports, music, dance, drama, and standardized test preparation. These adult-driven and adult-controlled programs are primarily concerned with adults' own agendas. Accordingly, the society as a whole has become less interested in individual nurture and more interested in institutional perpetuation.[74] Consequently, Clark writes, "Youth have suffered the loss of the safe relationships and intimate settings that served as the primary nurturing community."[75]

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[71] Ibid., 98.

[72] Ibid., 99.

[73] Allen and Allen, *Escaping Endless Adolescence*, 160.

[74] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 34.

[75] Ibid.

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Stanley Grenz, author of *Created for Community*, stresses that the Church is a fellowshipping people, a community.[76] A church is more than a loosely related group of people. Grenz believes that churches are where Christians share a fundamental vertical loyal commitment to Jesus Christ and a horizontal commitment to fellow believers.[77] Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ draws us out of our isolation and alienation and knits us together into oneness to be the contemporary expression of the one Church of Jesus Christ.[78] In this way, churches are to function as communities that bring glory to God.

A real community is composed of physical proximity, shared concerns, real consequences, and common responsibilities. Sherry Turkle, in her book, *Alone Together*, observes that the members of a community help each other in the most practical ways.[79] She feels that today's young people have a special vulnerability; although always connected through electronic devices, they feel deprived of attention.[80] This situation can be resolved with communal experience opportunities provided by church adults to youth. When adults become involved in youth's life with no hidden agenda, they fulfill the youth's need for authentic belonging and can greatly help them transition into

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[76] Stanley J. Grenz, *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 213.

[77] Ibid., 214.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 238.

[80] Ibid., 294.

adulthood.[81] When teenagers feel welcome in the kingdom of God, it will be easier for them to develop their identity as children of God.

Function of Social Capital in Adolescence

A social context that can provide the appropriate amount of support to adolescents is called social scaffolding.[82] In *Disconnected*, Chap Clark and Dee Clark point out that the most effective thing parents can do to foster spiritual maturity in their children is to integrate them into adult relationships in the body of Christ.[83] This social scaffolding is an invaluable asset to adolescents and is equivalent to their social capital. When adolescents as well as emerging adults have enough social capital in church, they have enough assets to build a secure attachment with trustworthy adults. Eventually, this will enable adolescents to develop a healthy sense of self.

Furthermore, when considering the mass forms of education today, most students follow the crowd as a default. Combined with the absence of well-structured guidance, the students must put forth considerable personal effort if they are to develop fully.[84] For young people in Western societies, identity formation usually involves a psychosocial moratorium that continues through emerging adulthood.[85] When adolescents face crises

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[81] Dahl and Spear, "Adolescent Brain Development," 20.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 151.

[84] Cote, *Arrested Adulthood*, 41.

[85] Santrock, *Life-Span Development*, 172.

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concerning faith or life decisions, those who integrate well with church adults can get

prompt support.

Social capital in the church becomes necessary social scaffolding for youth to

move from identity diffusion and foreclosure into identity moratorium or even identity

achievement. During this critical time, by walking alongside young people, adults can

intervene and have a positive impact in adolescents' formation of faith. Since not all

teenagers are fortunate enough to have a consonant parent-child relationship, adolescents

integrating with church adults who sincerely care is the answer.[86]

Adults in roles such as mentors, coaches, teachers, and youth leaders can provide

a supportive environment in which adolescents can recognize their own voice and

power.[87] Mature adults acting as an extended family in Christ can apply love and caring

in both large and small ways. As a youth is known and cared for by church adults, he or

she will be drawn into the larger body of Christ via the adults.[88] This would create the

sticky web of supporting relationships that adolescents need to stay in the Church and

grow in faith.[89]

Even so, potential mentors in churches seemed to be afraid of teenagers.[90] These

adults' reluctance to work with youth is not about lack of confidence in interacting with

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[86] Chap Clark and Steve Rabey, *When Kids Hurt: Help for Adults Navigating the Adolescent Maze* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 180.

[87] Clark, *Hurt 2.0,* 176.

[88] Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark, and Dave Rahn, eds., *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically About Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001), 121.

[89] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 101.

[90] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 121.

adolescents; it is about lack of confidence in their own faith formation as well as inexperience in bringing up the subject of faith with youth.[91] In fact, church adults do not have to show expertise in doctrine or make Bible stories interesting. Rather, they only need to foster authentic relationships with adolescents and invite teenagers to live the faith alongside them. It is not how hard church leaders press young people to love God, but how much adults show adolescents what love is.[92]

In addition, there are benefits for competent adult volunteers to invest in adolescents' lives. First, when a Christian trusts and obeys God's command to love one another other, he or she will follow the command through actions (John 13:34). Whoever cannot love their brothers and sisters, "whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen" (1 John 4:20). The Bible also teaches Christians to love those they might not feel comfortable with: "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them" (Luke 6:32). Therefore, to invest time and love into adolescents' lives is faith in action, a demonstration of obedience which in turn pleases God.

Second, when interacting with teenagers, there will come times when the adult's patience wears thin. But the Apostle Paul reminds us, "In all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Romans 8:28). Mentoring teenagers becomes a time to learn wisdom, kindness, love, and patience.

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[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid., 120.

Third, adults can learn from adolescents. When adults spend time with youth, the influence goes both ways. The four essential elements of adolescence discussed earlier, emotional spark, social engagement, novelty-seeking, and creative exploration, are things adults need to hang on to and nurture in their own lives as well.[93]

However, before the project goes into the implementation stage of incorporating church adults into adolescents' spiritual growth, there is a need to explore the biblical meaning of mature Christians. This would ensure the trajectory of the six-week course of parenting is in accord with the praxis and telos of God's kingdom. Therefore, Part Two of this project covers subjects related to becoming mature Christians.

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[93] Siegel, "The Whole Brain Child."

PART TWO

BECOMING MATURE CHRISTIANS

CHAPTER 3

AUTHENTIC DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

In Christian Smith and Melinda Denton's *Soul Searching*, the authors summarize

the research results of the National Study of Youth and Religion from 2001 to 2005 and

interpret the contemporary United States teenagers' view of religion as "Moralistic

Therapeutic Deism."[1] In the summary, the authors point out five characteristics of this

view:

> 1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on
> earth.
> 2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible
> and by most world religions.
> 3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
> 4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is
> needed to resolve a problem.
> 5. Good people go to heaven when they die.[2]

This view of faith teaches that feeling good about oneself is an essential aspect of

living. There is no repentance from sin, no Trinity, and no personal relationship between

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[1] Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162-171.

[2] Ibid., 163.

God and believers. God actually becomes a combination of Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist.[3]

In *The Juvenilization of American Christianity*, author Thomas Bergler also points out that the historical and cultural trend of America's churches resulted in widespread spiritual immaturity in both youth and adults.[4] In the end, the churches are filled with Christians overly identified with emotional comfort who think that the purpose of God and the Christian faith is to help them feel better. Moreover, far too many Christians are inarticulate, indifferent, or confused about their theological beliefs.[5]

Therefore, in order to clarify the ultimate purpose of Christian life, Part Two of this project starts by looking into the biblical meaning of authentic disciples of Christ. In the gospel of John, Jesus says to his disciples that he is the true vine and the disciples are the branches (John 15:5). Branches need to abide in the vine in order to bear much fruit (John 15:8). Jesus then commands his disciples to love each other as he loves them (John 15:12). Here, Jesus is talking about loving each other in the context of the Church family. In chapter 17, Jesus prays for his disciples that as the heavenly Father sent Jesus into the world, he sends them into the world. Further into the chapter, after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, he told his disciples, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21).

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[3] Ibid., 165.

[4] Thomas E. Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 4.

[5] Ibid., 225.

At the end of the gospel of Matthew, Jesus entrusts the great commission to the eleven disciples, commanding them, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). In these scriptures, there is a recurring theme and climax of the idea of authentic disciples of Christ: disciples who walk authentically with Christ within the context of a Christian Community that is empowered by the Holy Spirit to participate in the kingdom of God.[6] From this definition of authentic disciples of Christ, there are four elements that church leaders need to recognize: fostering discipleship, contextual authenticity, adopted community, and kingdom witness.

<div align="center">

Fostering Discipleship

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To become Christians, people have to hear "the word about Christ" (Romans 10:17). After one hears the Word, one has to respond to God's invitation for salvation, and later on take up a course of discipline in order to walk on the road of spiritual maturation. This process starts from the invitation of God.

As Henri Nouwen says in *Life of the Beloved*, the greatest trap in life is not success, popularity, or power, but rather self-rejection.[7] Nouwen believes that self-rejection can manifest itself in arrogance or low self-esteem. It is also the greatest enemy

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[6] Chap Clark, "Strategic Adoption: Developing a Holistic Ecclesiology," class lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, October 28, 2014.

[7] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2002), 31.

of the spiritual life.[8] Levine also asserts that a person's sense of lovability is the core of all healthy self-development.[9] Harter states that negative self-evaluation is highly related to depression.[10] Furthermore, depression is the most common mental health disorder in the United States among teens and adults.[11]

Nouwen explains that humans are God's beloved children. In Matthew 3:16-17, "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'" In the same way, the relationship that Jesus has with God the Father is reflected in the relationship between humans and God. Christians as well as non-believers are God's beloved children. Nouwen believes that in this secular world, people are always looking for someone or something to convince them of their belovedness.[12] In reality, people need to turn toward God's unconditional love in order to fight self-rejection and discover belovedness.

However, a created person does not have the capacity to find the infinite God. It is the Creator who paves the way and finds us. In *Following Jesus*, N. T. Wright reiterates that God sent his own son to be both priest and sacrifice. The sacrifice of Jesus was the

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[8] Ibid., 33.

[9] Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 64.

[10] Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 197.

[11] TeenHelp.com, "Teen Depression Statistics," http://www.teenhelp.com/teen-depression/depression-statistics.html (accessed February 28, 2014).

[12] Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, 33.

moment when the human race, in the person of a single man, offered itself fully to the creator.[13] Hence, people who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. The Apostle Paul writes that Jesus Christ is our peace, who has made God and human "one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2:13-14). This relationship between humans and God is made possible by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[14] As Dietrich Bonhoeffer observes in *The Cost of Discipleship*, "Jesus stands between us and God, and for that very reason he stands between us and all other men and things. He is the Mediator, not only between God and man, but between man and man, between man and reality."[15] However, the same Mediator who makes us individuals is also the founder of a new fellowship. Jesus divides, but he also unites. Christ's followers become members of the community of the cross, the people of the Mediator, the people under the cross.[16]

Gospel of Grace or Sin Management

Even so, in light of many of today's Christians' and adolescents ' view of faith, Christianity is thought to be essentially concerned only with how to deal with sin: wrongdoing or wrong-being and its effects.[17] The gospel of grace has become the

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[13] N.T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 10.

[14] John R. Tyson, ed., *Invitation to Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1.

[15] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone Rockefeller Center, 1995), 95.

[16] Ibid., 101.

[17] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 41.

"gospels of sin management." Willard points out that no matter the interpretation of salvation, whether of the right, evangelical and conservative churches of North America, or of the left, the liberal Christian churches, both exhibit the same type of conceptual disconnection to the personal integrity of believers. The right camp focuses on forgiveness of the individual's sins, and the left camp focus on removal of social sin.[18] Both views lack a coherent direction for personal transformation toward abundance and obedience with a corresponding redemption of ordinary life.[19]

According to Willard, instead of substituting ritual behavior for divine vitality and personal integrity or being content with an isolated string of "experiences" to transform character, he believes the effective bridge from faith to life is to invite Jesus to be the teacher of our lives.[20] When one does not seriously consider Jesus as one's teacher on how to live, one cannot think of oneself, in moment-to-moment existence, as his student or disciple. Churches should strive to make the teaching of Jesus part of believers' daily lives and workplaces. Faith is a divine transformation of our life that shapes how we engage with life's trials and joys.[21] Scharen, in his book, *Faith as a Way of Life*, points out the following:

> A major stumbling block to receiving God's gift of faith is that we too often make faith a means, a tool to use in achieving effective resolution to organizational problems or to achieve self-enhancement. Faith and even the fundamental

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[18] Ibid., 42-55.

[19] Ibid., 41.

[20] Ibid., 55.

[21] Christian Scharen, *Faith as a Way of Life: A Vision for Pastoral Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 2.

commitment to a church becomes a self-maximizing means to life success . . . What has dropped out is God's active work claiming us as "chosen" and "beloved." Without such vital divine presence that transforms our lives and orients our living towards a good beyond ourselves, we are left with a thin faith aimed at helping us to improve our circumstances or at least feel better about them.[22]

Nurture Beyond Conversion

To have an effective bridge between faith and life, church leaders and Christian parents also need to focus on nurturing beyond conversion. Teaching basic truths of the gospel, applying the Christian way of life, discerning false teaching, connecting to the body of Christ, and displaying godly character are all part of the journey toward spiritual maturity. This means adolescents need mature adults to mentor them and hold them accountable. Just as spiritual babies are hungry for spiritual milk in order to grow in salvation, new believers need spiritual fathers and mothers to nurture them in the process toward maturity (1 Peter 2:2).

In *From Here to Maturity*, Thomas Bergler believes that spiritual maturity is the gateway to a deep, powerful, and experiential relationship with Christ. He states that after a normal period of training and maturing, Christian should enter into spiritual maturity and grow into holiness.[23] Bergler suggests that being a spiritually mature person is basic to Christianity, and is attainable to all Christians and adolescents.[24] Therefore, spiritual babies should all develop into spiritual adults. After reaching spiritual adulthood,

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[22] Ibid., 38-39.

[23] Thomas E. Bergler, *From Here to Maturity: Overcoming the Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 49.

[24] Ibid., 55.

Christians still need to continue to grow over time into Christlikeness with the help of the Holy Spirit and the Church family (Hebrews 5:14).

James Wilhoit, in his book, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered*, points out that Christian spiritual formation refers to the intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.[25] In this statement there are six corollaries: Christian spiritual formation (1) is intentional, (2) is communal, (3) requires multi-dimensional church engagement, (4) is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, (5) is for the glory of God and the service of others, and (6) has as its means and end the imitation of Christ.[26]

Therefore, the process of spiritual formation is to believe the good news and trust Christ Jesus. It is not trying to be a good person or trying to perform certain activities. It is to learn the truth, not to seek experiences. It is to practice loving and serving in the community, not to practice self-definition and self-direction.[27]

Contextual Authenticity

When Jesus called his disciples to follow him, he called them to spiritual transformation. In the gospel of Mark, Jesus called Simon Peter: "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). A dynamic training process is definitely required to transform a fisherman into a fisher of men. Moreover, this experience of transformation is radical to the point that Jesus declared: "If anyone would come after me,

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[25] James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ Through Community* (Rand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 23.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Bergler, *From Here to Maturity*, 53.

he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it" (Luke 9:23-24). Essentially, Jesus is saying: hang onto your life and you will lose it; lose your life and you will find true life in him. Therefore, the good news of the kingdom of God is not a self-help process. Rather, it is to submit oneself to a death and gain a resurrected life through Jesus Christ.[28]

The life of an authentic disciple of Christ is visible and evident. As the scripture says, a good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit (Matthew 7:17). Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them (Matthew 7: 20). People who bear good fruit demonstrate contextual authenticity toward spiritual maturity. People who fail to display the qualities of maturity are either spiritual infants or are slipping back into immature ways.

<center>Fruits of the Spirit</center>

One of the more obvious indications of walking with Jesus is to bear the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22). At first glance, the fruits of the Spirit are primarily dealing with the inner self. Yet that is precisely what the scripture emphasizes: "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23). The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks (Luke 6:45). Dallas Willard, in his book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, writes that the most

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[28] Ibid., 29.

exalted outcome of submersion in the risen Christ is the transformation of the inner self into Christ-likeness.[29]

Consequently, a person's character produces outward signs. Life walking with Jesus is not just a matter of not doing what is wrong, but a matter of doing what is good. Christian daily life should be a gentle but firm noncooperation with things that are wrong, together with a sensitive, nonofficious, nonintrusive, nonobsequious service to others.[30] This should be the Christian's behavior in interaction with the church community and the world. Mature Christians live out their faith.

Clear Awareness of Surroundings

The Christian Church exists for the purpose of being transformed in Christ's presence so they can discern and do the will of God.[31] In first Corinthians, the Apostle Paul described how he shares the blessing of the gospel. "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1Corinthians 9:22). Another observable measure of contextual authenticity is to have a clear awareness of surroundings.

The triune God is still involved in the world; churches need to be aware of what God is doing and participate in his work.[32] Besides having a current knowledge of today's

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[29] Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 280.

[30] Ibid., 285.

[31] Ruth Haley Barton, *Life Together in Christ: Experiencing Transformation in Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 28.

[32] Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 111.

culture, knowing how to serve and impact the needs of both church families and non-church neighborhoods is vital to the Church's future. In *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, Robert Webber states that there are at least seven changes in culture that Christians may affirm and engage in.[33] These areas include the following: post-Christian culture, shift to subjectivity, participatory communication, globalization, terrorism, and technology.[34] He believes that even though Christians reject the ideologies of culture, Christians must still find ways to make connections with this culture. Therefore, for Christians, the display of adaptability, flexibility, and good communication are all part of contextual authenticity.

Adopted Community

When human beings come together for a shared cause, even with the best of intentions, anything can happen: good, bad, or ugly. Even Christian groups are not spared from this disturbing fact. A church can split, a small group can fall apart, a denomination can splinter because of theological differences, pastors can fail to live what they preach—the list can go on and on. Ruth Haley Barton, in her book, *Life Together in Christ*, asserts that the reason things fall apart or relationships fail to satisfy in Church community is that we labor under the mistaken idea that the group's primary concern is people.[35] Yet genuine Christian community is not and never can be about believers. It is about the transforming presence of Christ, all he will do in and through and for each of us.[36]

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[33] Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith-Forming Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 132.

[34] Ibid., 135.

[35] Barton, *Life Together in Christ*, 21.

[36] Ibid. , 22.

Therefore, when identifying the authentic disciple of Christ in Church community, we need to have God's will in mind. Transforming Christian community is not something we create or bring about by human effort. The community already exists in Christ at the cosmic level (Colossians 1:15-20).[37] Dietrich Bonhoeffer states in *Life Together* that Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.[38] The basis of all spiritual reality is the manifest Word of God in Jesus Christ. The basis of all human reality is the human mind with all its dark, turbid urges and desires. The community of the Spirit is the fellowship of those who are called by Christ; human community of the spirit is the fellowship of devout souls.[39]

In the gospel of John, we learn, "To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household" (Ephesians 2:19). This means that because of Jesus, Christians are now family in Christ as an adopted community. In this context, the members of the community are invited to follow its tradition, question its authority,

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[37] Ibid., 32.

[38] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1954), 30.

[39] Ibid., 31.

engage in personal development, search for options, realize paradoxes, and commit to life together.[40]

Genuine Support and Connection

Jesus commands his disciples to love each other as he has loved them: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). In fact, there are many direct mentions of "love one another" in the New Testament (John 13:34-35, 15:12, 15:17; 1 Thessalonians 3:12, 4:9; Hebrews 10:24; 1 Peter 1:22, 3:8, 4:8; 1 John 3:11, 3:23, 4:7, 4:11-12; 2 John 1:5). In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus uses a parable to illustrate practical service in God's kingdom when he says, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (Matthew 26:35-36). This kind of love is expressed through genuine, practical support in daily living.

However, it is not enough to just do the deeds. There is a deeper sinful nature in humanity that people are prone to act out, as we see in the gospel of Luke: "An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest" (Luke 9:46). When Christian community comes together with this thought, there immediately emerges a seed of discord. As Bonhoeffer points out, from the first moment a human meets another person, he or she is looking for a strategic position he or she can assume and hold

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[40] Elizabeth Code-Frazier, S. Steve Kang, and Gary A. Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 88.

against that person.[41] This is a struggle of human self-justification. Bonhoeffer points out, self-justification and judging others go together, just as justification by grace and serving others go together.[42]

It is important to know that all of God's work to conform us to the image of Christ happens so that we might become what God created us to be in our relationship with God and with others, as Robert Mulholland, Jr. says in *Invitation to a Journey*.[43] The author states that wherever there is something in our lives that does not conform to the image of Christ, there is a place where we are incapable of being all that God wants us to be with others; there is a place where our life with others is hindered and limited and restricted in its effectiveness and in its fullness; there is a place where our life will tend to be disruptive and even destructive to others. The points of our unlikeness to Christ are areas of our lives where we are lord and not Christ: areas where our agenda, our will, our desire, and our purposes rule.[44]

Hence, Bonhoeffer suggests that in order to glorify Christ in Christian community, we must be reminded of the importance of holding our tongue, meekness, listening, helpfulness, bearing, proclaiming, and authority.[45] These disciplines are to be used in our encounters in Christian community; they help us to act not according to human wisdom

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[41] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 90.

[42] Ibid., 91.

[43] M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 41.

[44] Ibid., 42.

[45] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 91-109.

and conceit, but by the Word of the Good Shepherd in order to have meaningful connection in God's people. In turn, each individual cell of the body of Christ has unique gifts that exist for the welfare of the entire body.

Intergenerational Relationship

For most local churches, youth ministry is usually separate from the main congregation. The youth ministry's adolescents do not know what the grown-ups are up to; the adults do not know what those youngsters are fussing about. Each side looks at the other with misunderstanding and impatient attitudes. However, Apostle Paul urges believers, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Christian maturity should neither stigmatize adolescents nor let adults off the hook. The community of faith should build an intergenerational relationship that can foster spiritual maturity in both groups.[46]

Adults need children and adolescents to draw out their committed love and provide concrete opportunities to care for others. Adolescents can help adults reconnect with the passion of life devoted to Christ. On the other side, young people need adults in their lives who are teaching and modeling an attractive spiritual maturity.[47] Churches with a high commitment to youth and helping them mature turn out to be good at helping everyone mature. In this way, the whole building of Christ is jointed together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord (Ephesians 2:21).

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[46] Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity*, 226.

[47] Ibid., 229.

Smith and Denton cite the following statistics from the National Study of Youth and Religion: 54 percent of all U.S. teens and 61 percent of U.S. teens who attend religious services enjoy having adults other than their parents to talk to and support them.[48] In another words, the majority of religious U.S. teens have no non-parental adult cross-generational relationships to reinforce religious faith and practices. Thomas Reynolds, in his book, *Vulnerable Communion*, writes, "Home is a communal place of orientation in which we fit comfortably, grow roots and reside safely. Its welcome is constituted by relationships formed within a specific social network that nurtures familiarity and preserves trust. We desire to be recognized and accepted, woven together with others."[49] Hence, churches need to encourage, create, and reinforce intergenerational relationship.

Kingdom Witness

In today's postmodern world, Christians are dealing with a paradoxical situation in which the world is secular, yet longs for a supernatural spirituality.[50] This means even though many people are secular, they are influenced by the persuasive spirituality of today's society. When considering this paradox, postmodern-era Christians can learn from the early churches. According to Webber, two out of three principles of evangelism to learn from the ancient Christians are about reaching out to the community.[51] Therefore,

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[48] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 61.

[49] Thomas E. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), 52.

[50] Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 56.

[51] Ibid., 57.

building an intentional community and immersing the unchurched in the experience of the reality of the faith is evangelism in the post-Christian world.[52] To minister to this world, Christians need to assert the countercultural nature of Christianity and seek points of contact with people.

Community of Serving Others

In the gospel of Luke, an expert in the law wanted to test Jesus on the topic of how to inherit eternal life. Jesus answers: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Luke 10:27). Jesus then tells the parable of the good Samaritan. In the story, there is an injured person and three other men who pass by him: a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan. Both of the Jews, the priest and the Levite, are too busy to slow down and do not offer any help. It is the Samaritan who takes the time and resources to help out the unfortunate man. Jesus states that the one who shows mercy is the one who obeys the command of "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10: 25-37). To love God and love others because God first loved us is always central to Christianity.

Christians in community are to spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24). Each one should use whatever gift he or she has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms (1 Peter 4: 10). Nouwen writes that Christians are chosen, blessed, and broken so as to be given.[53] He believes that

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[52] Ibid., 61-63.

[53] Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, 105.

human beings' greatest fulfillment lies in giving ourselves to others. Good deeds that flow out from love are suitable for authentic disciples of Christ to put into practice.

Wilhoit states that our Creator designed us to live and grow in relationship with him and in human community. Other people are one of the most important sources of God's grace in our lives. Christians need to seek out spiritually enriching relationships of love and service. For this reason, true spiritual formation must cultivate not just knowledge or skills but service of God through responsible action.[54] Therefore, Christian community is a community that serves others.

Evangelical Practice

In addition, churches need to aware of the conditions of the surrounding neighborhood and participate in the social concerns of the community. Leaders should not be afraid to change for the sake of engaging with the shifts in today's culture as long as such changes do not affect the nature of the faith. This way, the existence of the Church is a witness of the salvation of God in this world.

Jesus says to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matthew 9:37-38). The workers must go out to the harvest field to reap the harvest. Christians need to go where people are already hanging out and be prepared to have conversations with them about the great love of our lives. This would require churches to shift efforts from

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[54] Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered*, 179.

growing churches into transforming communities.[55] In other words, churches must go beyond serving their own needs to see to the kingdom's needs.

Jesus set the example by coming to this world and going to where people already gather. Churches as well need to partner with God in his redemptive mission in the world by taking the gospel to the streets. Effective twenty-first century evangelism will require the action of love.[56] In the book of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul reminds us that Christians are to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Churches do have the truth; however, Christians have to earn the privilege of sharing the gospel by demonstrating practical loving service in the community.

According to Soong-Chan Rah, author of *The Next Evangelicalism*, a balanced evangelical position gives proper attention to both evangelism and social concerns.[57] He thinks the problem with the church growth movement is that it prioritized personal evangelism over the understanding of the power of the gospel to transform neighborhoods and communities.[58] Therefore, in order to stand firm in a crooked and depraved generation, authentic disciples of Christ are to have all the characteristics of fostering discipleship, contextual authenticity, adopted community, and kingdom witness.

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[55] Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 42.

[56] Ibid., 38.

[57] Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 97.

[58] Ibid., 95.

CHAPTER 4

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Bergler writes, "Spiritual maturity is the foundational level of spiritual formation

of the human heart resulting in thoughts, feelings, and choices that display basic

competence in the Christian life."[1] He believes that only people who experience God's

transformation in all three dimensions of the mind, the feeling, and the will can achieve

the competencies of a mature Christian as taught in the New Testament.[2] Wilhoit also

believes that spiritual formation does not take place primarily in small groups and Sunday

school classes. Instead, it mostly takes place in the well-lived and everyday events of

life.[3] The heart of spiritual formation is to teach and train people to follow the wisdom

and instructions of Christ through the enabling power of his grace.[4]

In this chapter, the focus is on the components and process of spiritual maturity

and spiritual formation. Part of this focus is the difference between an open system

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[1] Bergler, *From Here to Maturity*, 54.

[2] Ibid., 55.

[3] Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered*, 38.

[4] Ibid., 39.

organism and a closed system organization. Awareness of this difference is important for churches and Christian leaders to continue be transformed by the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2).

Spiritual Maturity

The heart of the Christian faith is to be in union with Christ.[5] When in union with Christ, Christians no longer live according to the law of sin and death, but according to the law of the Spirit.[6] For this reason, believers are buried with Jesus through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, believers too may live a new life (Romans 6:4). The Apostle Paul states that "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come; the old has gone, the new is here" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Furthermore, when Paul says, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me," he indicates that the Christian faith is not simply a state of mind or a belief that has no practical consequences for daily living (Galatians 2:20). Christian faith, then, is God's gift not just of salvation and new life, but of a whole new way of life in Christ.

Faith as a Way of Life

Just as Willard observes, when Christians pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," we pray for God's kingdom to take over at all points in the personal, social, and political order where it is now excluded.[7] With this prayer,

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[5] Tyson, *Invitation to Christian Spirituality*, 27.

[6] Ibid., 28.

[7] Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 26.

Christians are invoking the kingdom, as in faith we are acting it out, into the real world of our daily existence.[8] Faith becomes a divine transformation of Christians' lives.

Today, many people compartmentalize each sphere of life, and each sphere operates according to its own logic and value. Faith has its own tidy sphere on Sundays and in one's soul, but the spheres of work, family, politics, and others are each oriented by their own values.[9] Therefore, shifting gears and changing personalities become inevitable when people move from one context to another.

When a person gives allegiance to various sphere-centered values, in a sense, the person makes them gods.[10] For example, when parents value their children's academics more than their children's daily spiritual nurture, the parents are giving their allegiance to academics and make it a god that rules over this certain sphere. When a person shops, the love of a bargain rules. When a person eats, the love of taste rules. When in business, paying less and earning more rules. When in politics, favoring one's own party rules. The list can go on and on. "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" (Matthew 6: 24). Christians need to see faith as a way of life; otherwise, we are in danger of becoming polytheists.

As Steven Garber, the author of *The Fabric of Faithfulness*, points out, true believers want a faith that is coherent. Truth cannot be something that we hold to

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[8] Ibid., 27.

[9] Scharen, *Faith as a Way of Life*, 15.

[10] Ibid., 16.

theoretically with no real-life consequence. Knowing and doing, hearing and obeying are integrally connected for people whose convictions are truly and deeply Christian.[11] Christian convictions should shape us explicitly and implicitly in what we believe and how we live in order to weave together a fabric of faithfulness.[12]

Besides compartmentalizing different areas of life into separate spheres, American youth as well as American adults are nearly without exception shaped by a culture of individualism.[13] "We Americans like to think of ourselves as 'rugged individualists'—in the image of the lone cowboy riding toward the setting sun, opening the frontier," says Robert Putnam in his book, *Our Kids*.[14] This pervasive view also informs a number of issues related to religion. "Whatever is fine, if that's what a person wants" has become widely accepted. Religion is presumed to be something that individuals choose, a personal preference. People view themselves as autonomous mediators or arbitrators of all outside influences and become allergic to outside influences.[15] In turn, people may think of religion as something one chooses to use, not something one devotes oneself to or gives away one's life for.

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[11] Steven Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 190.

[12] Ibid., 174-190.

[13] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 143.

[14] Robert D. Putnam, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 206.

[15] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 144.

The consequence of individualism is to embrace a strong ethos that forswears judging any ideas or people that may be different.[16] The typical bywords for American adolescents are "Who am I to judge?" "If that's what they choose, whatever," "Each person decides for himself," and "If it works for them, fine." In the end, when it comes to the view of God, "There is no right answer" is the conclusion of individualism.[17]

According to the research of the National Study of Youth and Religion, the American religious individualism of youth as well as adults espouses relativistic and subjective views. The concluded voices among contemporary adolescents are the following: each individual deserves a faith that fits his or her singular self, the individual is the authority over religion and not vice versa, and religious beliefs are ultimately interchangeable insofar as what matters to the individual's comfort.[18] Too often, Christian adolescents do not know the basic truths of the gospel. They simply either ignore or are ignorant about the scriptural truth that salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved (Acts 4: 12).

Therefore, facing cultural obstacles such as compartmentalization of life to the individualism view of religion, church leaders need to take on a stronger role in order to ride against the tides of postmodern culture and lead believers on the road to spiritual maturity.

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., 145.

[18] Ibid., 147.

Spiritual Maturity is Attainable

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from

yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:9-

10). Unfortunately, the gospel of salvation by grace can be misused to justify low

expectations for spiritual transformation.[19] Yet, as the New Testament indicates in many

areas, spiritual maturity is attainable (1 Corinthians 2:6; Ephesians 4:13, 15; Philippians

3:15; Colossians 1:28, 4:12; Hebrews 5:14; James 1:4). The Apostle Paul invokes the

word "mature" in Philippians 3: 15: "All of us who are mature should take such a view of

things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you."

There are several conclusions can be drawn from Paul's main point in this chapter.

First, Paul assumed that at least some of his readers were already spiritually mature.

Second, "mature" in this verse does not mean "perfect" since he already said in previous

verses that he does not consider himself perfect (v. 12). Third, a mature follower of Christ

understands the gospel well enough to avoid both "work righteousness" and low

expectations for spiritual transformation in Christ.[20]

In the book of Hebrews, the author points out that after a reasonable period of

time, Christians should grow from spiritual infancy to spiritual adulthood to maturity.

> We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to
> learn. In fact, though by this time you are ought to be teachers, you need someone
> to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk,
> not solid food. Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted
> with teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by

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[19] Bergler, *From Here to Maturity,* 30.

[20] Ibid., 31.

constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:11-14)

In contrast, spiritual infants are still learning the basic teachings about God; mature Christians know the foundational Christian teachings well enough to explain to others. Nonetheless, mature Christians have not finished growing; they are now ready to grow closer to Christ and become more like him as they press on toward the goal of perfect communion with Christ (Philippians 3:12-14). The general trajectory of growing into Christ-likeness is an upward path that starts from spiritual birth through spiritual maturity. However, spiritual maturity is the base camp from which the ascent of the mountain of holiness can begin. Figure 4.1 below illustrates this concept clearly.[21]
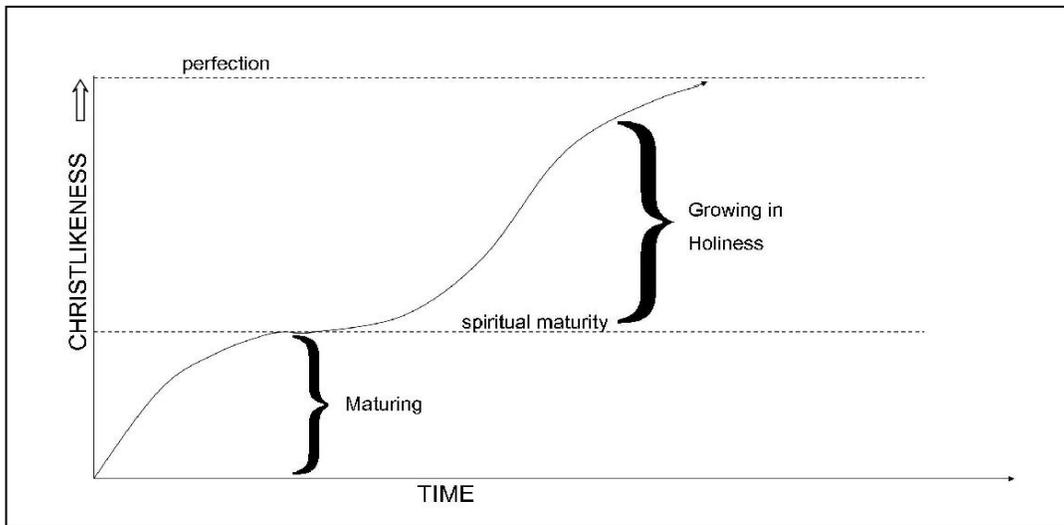

Figure 4.1

In this sense, Christian adults are not the only ones who need to grow to spiritual maturity; adolescents can grow to spiritual maturity too. With the basic truths of the

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[21] Ibid., 49.

gospel so they can have discernment, connect to the body of Christ and serve others,

adolescents can grow into the likeness of Christ.

Spiritual Disciplines

Wilhoit defines Christian spiritual formation as the intentional communal process

of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the

power of the Holy Spirit.[22] God is the one who took the initiative to send his only

begotten son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for the human race and invite individuals to

accept his love (John 3:16). Consequently, people do not choose to believe in God; rather,

the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent God chose them (John 15:16). From the

invitation of God comes the human response.

Jesus invites believers to take on his easy yoke: "Take my yoke upon you and

learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:29-30). These passages contain

both the command and the means of change. Spiritual disciplines are Jesus-endorsed

spiritual practices that foster positive spiritual change and enable us to become the kind

of people who genuinely desire to carry out these commands.[23] To learn from and imitate

Christ is both the fundamental means and the glorious end of Christian formation.

The four gospels show that Jesus' devotional life consisted of private acts, small

group practices, and large group meetings. Christ demonstrated his faith as a relationship

with both God and people. Just as human relationships are marked by well-developed

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[22] Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered*, 23.

[23] Ibid., 39.

patterns of interacting, our relationships with Christ should be marked by rich, diverse, and consistent patterns.[24] Thus, by implementing spiritual disciplines, Christians can do what could never be done through willpower alone. As Gary McIntosh and Daniel Reeves write in *Thriving Churches in the Twenty-First Century*, there is a huge spiritual void in the life of average church members. For the body of Christ to have enough spiritual energy to reproduce, every Christian must be intentionally encouraged to take responsibility for his or her own spiritual development.[25]

Willard uses a baseball player as a vivid illustration of the importance of spiritual disciplines.[26] Willard observes that when young people idolize an outstanding baseball player, they want to try to behave exactly as their favorite baseball star does. Fans might want to walk and dress like this famous athlete. But in the end, they cannot perform like the star, because people do not see what the athlete does behind the scenes to perform a certain way. It is the daily disciplines and exercises that prepare the athlete's mind and body to achieve his excellence.

In the same way, the Apostle Paul teaches in Galatians, "Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life" (Galatians 6:8). Christians practicing spiritual disciplines are like farmers doing their duty. A farmer's job is to prepare the soil, get rid of the weeds and rocks, mix in fertilizer, plant the seeds, kill all the harmful pests, and water

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[24] Ibid., 40.

[25] Gary L. Mcintosh and R. Daniel Reeves, *Thriving Churches in the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2006), 75.

[26] Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 3.

regularly. After doing all that, the farmer must leave the rest up to natural forces. With the right timing, the harvest will come about.

However, spiritual disciplines alone cannot provide spiritual growth. Only by God's grace do Christians grow spiritually. Paul also states that "Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow" (1 Corinthians 3:7). God's grace is unearned and un-earnable; however, Christians must consciously take up a chosen course of action to sow and to water.[27] By doing that, we can grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

<center>The Practice of Spiritual Discipline</center>

Spiritual disciplines are any means of preparing and disposing our soul to rid itself of all its disordered affections and then, after their removal, of seeking and finding God's will in the ordering of our life for the salvation of our soul.[28] There have been many spiritual disciplines throughout the course of Christian history. Some are well-known, such as reading Scripture. Others may not usually be thought of as disciplines, such as keeping a spiritual diary. Willard makes a very helpful division for readers to remember. One is the discipline of abstinence; the other is the discipline of engagement.[29] One is to have self-control; the other is to engage in action.

In the category of abstinence, Christians are to abstain to some degree for some time from the satisfaction of what are generally regarded as normal desires. Nothing is

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[27] Tyson, *Invitation to Christian Spirituality*, 447.

[28] Ibid., 250.

[29] Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 158.

wrong with these normal desires for things such as food, sleep, and companionship. Still, the abstinence is to remind Christians that they belong to God. The Apostle Paul shares, "I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:27). According to Willard, there are at least seven important disciplines of abstinence: solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, and sacrifice.[30] Each discipline has different benefits to the spiritual life.

The Apostle Paul says in the book of Galatians, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life" (Galatians 6:7-8). Spiritual disciplines are a way of sowing to please the Spirit. The disciplines are God's way of getting us into the ground; they put us where He can work within us and transform us. In other words, God has ordained the disciplines of the spiritual life as the means by which we are placed where He can bless us.[31]

On the other hand, the disciplines of abstinence must be counterbalanced and supplemented by disciplines of engagement. This balance is similar to exhalation and inhalation in Christians' spiritual lives.[32] Willard suggests eight disciplines of engagement: study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and

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[30] Ibid., 159-175.

[31] Tyson, *Invitation to Christian Spirituality*, 447.

[32] Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 175.

submission.[33] Most Christians understand that the study of Scripture and the prayer life are vital to the spiritual walk. But celebration, service, and fellowship are also good reminders that God wants his children to go into the crowd and engage in loving each other.

However, it is important to understand that these spiritual disciplines are an inward and spiritual reality, and the inner attitude of the heart is far more crucial than the mechanics for coming into the reality of the spiritual life.[34] If one relies on willpower to practice these disciplines, these disciplines will not help to deal with the deeply ingrained habits of sin. The needed change within us comes by God's work. The disciplines of the spiritual life are a means of receiving his grace. The disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.[35]

Both of these spiritual discipline types are important for balance in spiritual life, and they require equal attention. If the development of spiritual practices is left to individual preference, people generally gravitate to those spiritual activities that nurture each person's preferred pattern of being and doing.[36] The shadow side of our preference pattern will languish unattended and un-nurtured.

In *A Public Faith*, Miroslav Volf categorizes two kinds of sins in the Christian tradition: sins of omission and sins of commission. One is failing to do what should be

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[33] Ibid., 175-190.

[34] Tyson, *Invitation to Christian Spirituality*, 447.

[35] Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 180.

[36] Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 57.

done; the other is doing what should not be done.[37] Volf believes that Christian faith is "either a way of life or a parody of itself."[38] Therefore, proper faith should set Christians on a journey, guide them along the way, and give meaning to each step. As Sharon Parks puts it in *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, faith orients one's sense of purpose and is manifested in action.[39] Spiritual disciplines prepare believers to embrace this kind of faith.

The Nature of the Spiritual Disciplines

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Philippians 2:12-13). Here Apostle Paul seems to give contradictory teachings: "Work out your own salvation" and "God is at work in you." In fact, he was making the point that both sides of the equation are essential for balanced spiritual disciplines.[40]

Total Obedience

Bonhoeffer believes that it is only through single-minded obedience to Christ's word can a human become liberated to believe.[41] He thinks that only the one who believes is obedient, and only the one who is obedient believes. When trying to maintain spiritual disciplines, sooner or later most people are going to fail. Later on, feeling guilty

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[37] Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2011), 12.

[38] Ibid., 16.

[39] Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 36.

[40] Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 103.

[41] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 83.

and remorseful, one may begin to build up discipline again. In this way, spiritual discipline may become a rollercoaster experience similar to yo-yo dieting.

According to Mulholland, the reason may be because the discipline is not genuine. He thinks that many Christians have been trying a do-it-yourself operation, a form of works-righteousness. A genuine spiritual discipline is a discipline of loving obedience offered to God with no strings attached.[42] There are no conditions, no time limits, and no personal expectations of what we want. Just simply offer the discipline to God and let God work in us.

Another important note is that spiritual disciplines are performed out of love, the love of God. As the Apostle Paul so powerfully put it, "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have no love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:3). According to Willard, a discipline of the spiritual life cannot be identified, either for acceptance or rejection, merely by the externals of the associated action.[43] The outward manifestation and inward motivation must both be right.

<div align="center">It Is Warfare</div>

When a person starts offering the spiritual discipline to God, one will discover there is warfare inside. Scripture teaches, "But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness" (Romans 8:10). The dead body wants to continue to express itself in the old, destructive behaviors when one is practicing spiritual discipline. "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit,

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[42] Ibid., 131.

[43] Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 135.

and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want" (Galatians 5:17). Arrogance, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lasciviousness along with many other sins are not phantoms or jokes, but tough realities whose dreadful effects can be viewed hour by hour.[44]

When Christians start walking by the Spirit, a war breaks out. Those old harmful habits, damaging perspectives, destructive ways of relating to others, and unhealthy modes of reacting and responding to the world are deep desires of our sinful nature (Galatians 5:19-20). The promise of deliverance from the dead body is through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 7:25).

Still, when Christians continue to offer the discipline to God, that discipline becomes a means of grace through which God works and moves to transform faithful followers of Christ into the his own image. In the end, often surpassing our imagination, the discipline is no longer a discipline. It is now the natural outflow of new life in Christ. God accomplishes it through the discipline Christians offer up to him.

It is possible, however, to turn spiritual discipline into another set of soul-killing laws. Law-bound disciplines breathe death. Jesus taught in the book of Matthew that we must go beyond the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees (Matthew 5:20). This is seen in how much our lives demonstrate the work of God upon the heart.

The reason the Apostle Paul taught us to "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling" is that it is in human nature to take credit for the results. The temptation to

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[44] Ibid., 191.

work out our righteousness lurks at the heart of all genuine spiritual disciplines.[45] However, genuine spiritual disciplines are difficult and costly. As Bonhoeffer says, Christian faith is costly because it costs a person's life, and it is grace because it gives a person the only true life.[46] Therefore, costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a person will gladly go and sell all that one has (Matthew 13:44). It is the pearl of great price, for which the merchant will sell all his goods to buy (Matthew 13:45-46). It is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, and the door at which a person must knock.[47]

For all this reasons, Christians need brothers and sisters in Christ to support and keep them accountable in the process. This is what Paul means when he exhorts Christians, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). When God begins to work with the deep-down brokenness of a life, there is no way one can go through the process alone.[48] Thus, the next chapter of this project focuses on the communal aspect of spiritual formation.

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[45] Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 134.

[46] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 45.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 132.

CHAPTER 5

GROWING THROUGH CHURCH COMMUNITY

Bonhoeffer writes: "Christ's own work rests with the people of Israel, but the whole earth is committed to the disciples."[1] Indeed, Jesus Christ came to this world and the Word became flesh. However, he was limited to his physical presence on the earth. But he commissioned his disciples: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus Christ wanted his disciples to be his witness to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

To be a good witness for Christ, one should not only grow into maturity as the previous chapter discusses, but also have a clear vision of church praxis and the theology of ministry in order to grow into the fullness of Christ. In this chapter, the first section focuses on the practice of various youth ministry programs and examines those activities' alignment with churches' praxis. The second section of this chapter, the discussion, looks at the missional practice of church life in light of postmodern cultural perspectives,

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[1] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 116.

including the megatrends of today's youth culture and ways to empower the next generation. The final section of this chapter focuses on ways to create an environment of learning so that the whole church community can participate. Church is an extended relational family of God. Christians are brought into the family of God because of the grace of salvation. Out of thanksgiving, Christians respond by loving God and people. This in turn manifests in service to God and others.

Church and Ministries

Stuart Cummings-Bond described the relationship between churches and their youth ministries as the "one-eared Mickey Mouse" (see fig. 5.1).[2] According to Ron Hunter in *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*, one of the greatest problems in this relationship is the way churches and youth pastors tend to isolate the youth group from the main congregation.[3] Churches segregate youth ministry from adult activities, creating a contradictory and misunderstanding environment. The youth ministry sits in the peripheral of the congregation due to the desire to find their own identity, and the adults feel more comfortable when the group they least identify with functions at some distance. Voddie Baucham, Jr., who advocates the family church in his book, *Family Driven Faith*, makes an interesting observation that a typical youth ministry mission statement has

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[2] Stuart Cummings-Bond, "The One-Eared Mickey Mouse," *Youthworker Journal* (Fall 1989): 76.

[3] Chap Clark et al., *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century: Five Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 136.

absolutely no mention of parents and/or church volunteers.[4] The identity of totally

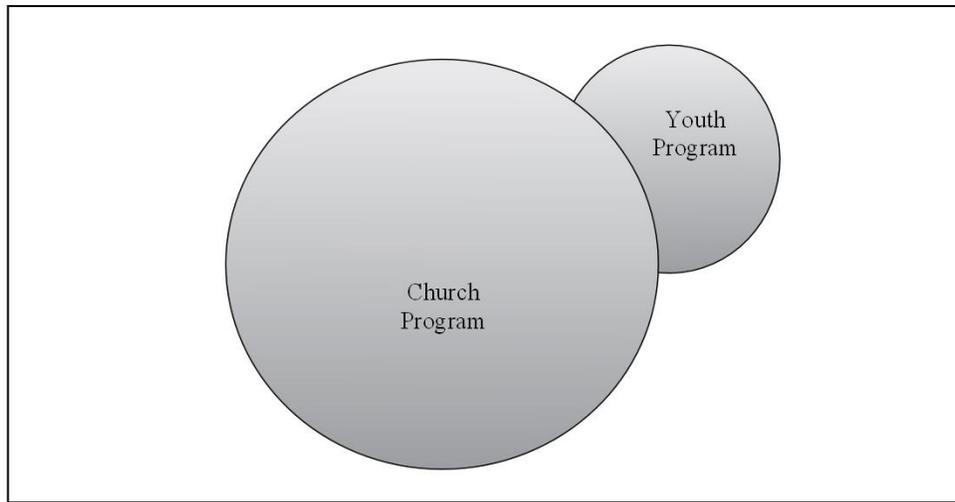separated youth groups can create a "cool versus the un-cool" environment.[5]

Figure 5.1

Churches' Praxis and Practical Theology of Youth Ministry

In *The Shape of Practical* Theology, Ray Anderson affirms that each act of

ministry will be interpreted by others as revealing something about the nature and

purpose of God.[6] The ongoing ministry of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit

constitutes the praxis of God's mission to the world through the Church and its ministry.[7]

In *From Bedlam to Shalom*, John Swinton defines "praxis" as an action that not only

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[4] Voddie Baucham, Jr., *Family Driven Faith: Doing What it Takes to Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk with God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 178.

[5] Clark et al., *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*, 136.

[6] Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry With Theology Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 30.

[7] Ibid., 31.

seeks to achieve particular ends but also reflects on the means of the action in the light of belief.[8] Therefore, praxis is an act that includes the telos within the action itself.[9]

In this way, the praxis of Christ's ministry was completed in his resurrection and continued through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The praxis of Christian churches is thus to engage in the hermeneutic task of interpreting the Word of Christ in the context of the work of Christ. Therefore, as Anderson concludes, practical theology is an ongoing pursuit of competence through critical theological refection.[10]

Thus, as Chap Clark writes in his essay, "Youth Ministry as Practical Theology," the goal of practical theology is as follows:

> The goal of our teaching must be to equip our students in a clear and easily translatable method that can enable them to guide the believing community where they are called to serve in making kingdom-driven decisions and choices as they live in a complex and changing world, regardless of background, denomination, or tradition. This is an essential aspect of locating youth ministry education as an expression of the discipline of practical theology.[11]

As the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, we have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14). "The Word became flesh" is more than an act of moral condescension and obedience. It is an act of self-emptying, *kenosis*.[12] This self-emptying is a primarily with

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[8] John Swinton, *From Bedlam to Shalom: Towards a Practical Theology of Human Nature, Interpersonal Relationships and Mental Health Care* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 11.

[9] Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 49.

[10] Ibid., 53.

[11] Chap Clark, "Youth Ministry as Practical Theology," *Journal of Youth Ministry 7,* no. 1 (2008):14.

[12] Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 114.

regard to his relation to the Father. The community that exists as the life of the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father, in the Spirit, is the community that becomes the reconciling community of salvation history.[13] Therefore, the Church is an incarnational community.

As part of an incarnational community, all church ministries, including youth ministry, must make sure they are reflecting the Word and work of Christ that bring glory to God. In light of this, youth ministry's purpose is no longer to increase the number of students or to bring in the coolest fad, but to build the whole church. For the main church body of adults, youth ministry is no longer a sideshow that makes them uncomfortable, but a group of people to which adults are eager to witness and serve as family of Christ.

As Brian Cosby states, faithfulness to God is always more important than success in ministry.[14] Success-oriented ministry will necessarily fall into pragmatism, "whatever works best," and will lead to a number of problematic conclusions. These can include a preoccupation with inventing the most attractive show and experience on earth, a constant fear of failure, a focus on celebrity worship leaders or skit guys, and an elevation of fashionable Christianity over truth.[15]

Faithful service in Christ is intended for the entire Church community. Each person in God's kingdom is a called and gifted contributor to the health and growth of the whole faith community. God's people are called to unity, to love and serve one another

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[13] Ibid., 115.

[14] Clark et al., *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*, 41.

[15] Ibid., 42.

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(Galatians 5:13), and to be a "chosen people" (1 Peter 2:9). Ephesians 4:12 entreats

leaders to "equip people for works of service." Everyone is a partner in the discipleship,

nurture, training and sending ministry of the body of any person, including the young.

Therefore, churches need to commit as well as partner with different ministries as one

body of Christ.

Missional Practices of Church Life

In addition to churches' praxis and practical theology of ministry, to grow into

healthy church community, churches need to bridge the teen worldview and Christian

truth. The God-ordained mission of the Church throughout all time has been to fulfill the

Great Commission of Jesus to "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:18-20).

The Great Commission applies to the cross-cultural mission field of the emerging

postmodern generations. Christians are called to live out faith in the postmodern world as

cross-cultural missionaries.[16] In today's fast-changing world, ministering to youth is

indeed a cross-cultural mission. As Walt Mueller notes in *Engaging the Soul of Youth*

Culture, there are three crucial steps for the cross-cultural mission. The first is to know

the unchanging Word. The second is to know young people and their rapidly changing

culture. The third is to take the unchanging Word to young people who are growing up in

a rapidly changing culture. The first step and the third step are familiar to most churches.

However, for the mission to be effective, the second step is essential. In the same way, to

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[16] Walt Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture: Bridging Teen Worldview and Christian Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 45.

effectively minister to the young generation in this postmodern world, churches need to understand their unique values, attitudes, and behaviors.[17]

Ministry from Cultural Perspectives

Christians must learn to read the signs of the times. This is culture literacy: how to "read" and "write" culture.[18] Christians must learn to read culture, being involved in critical engagement and not merely passive consumption. But we should also learn how to write culture: how to make our own mark in our everyday world as an active participant.[19] Cultural forces shape the values, attitudes, and behaviors of students living in today's world. According to Walt Mueller, one of the speakers of the National Youth Workers Convention 2015, the five youth culture megatrends are the following: the me, the moment, the marketing, the much, and the mess.[20] Churches need to recognize these trends in order to guide youth through these forces and help them realize their created purpose and live life to the glory of God.

In the postmodern context, many people attempt to explore life as expressions of ideology, culturally dominant values, and popular stereotypes.[21] The postmodern

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[17] Ibid., 83.

[18] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman, eds., *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 18.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Mueller, "5 Youth Culture Megatrends," (The annual meeting of the National Youth Workers Convention, San Diego, CA, October 10, 2015).

[21] Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 126.

generation is self-focused to the point that it can be labeled as narcissistic.[22] People living

in the postmodern world are living in an age of self-entitlement. From social media that is

inundated with self-absorption to the popularity of selfie pictures, evidence can be found

of this in all aspects of life.

Even though human beings have always had the potential for selfishness and

greed, today's social conditions bring out this sense of entitlement in youth and everyone

else.[23] Mueller lists several narcissistic traits of today's youth: me-centered universe, self

as supreme authority, view of oneself as smarter or more beautiful than others, view of

oneself as better than others, focus on self over others, accumulation of an imaginary

audience, and thinking oneself above the rules or making his/her own rules. This kind of

self-absorbency fortifies the cycle of performance. People perform a certain way for

others to interpret, and adjust their performance in order to maintain facets of illusion of

self.[24]

This self-focus extends to the view of faith, hence the Moralistic Therapeutic

Deism mentioned in the previous chapter. Moreover, postmodernism sees Christianity's

assertion of truth as a play for power because Christians think they alone have spiritual

truth. Most people holding this worldview reject Christianity not because of the claims of

Christ, but because Christians claim this faith is universally true. Postmodernists cannot

get beyond Christianity's exclusivity.[25] Religion in today's postmodern world has become

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[22] Mueller, "5 Youth Culture Megatrends."

[23] Cote, *Arrested Adulthood*, 93.

[24] Mueller, "5 Youth Culture Megatrends."

[25] Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 75.

a matter of personal taste and individual choice that combines elements of Christianity, New Age religions, neo-paganism, the occult, pop psychology, and mysticism in new and unique ways.[26]

Today's youth culture is living in the moment. Young people do not think too much ahead, have tunnel vision, lack of wisdom, and lack of integrity.[27] Their compartmentalized self leads them to do things that are dangerous, such as the following: texting while driving, sexual spontaneity, improper social media posts, and prescription drug abuse. These impulsive and thrill-seeking activities are associated with several major areas of the brain across the prefrontal cortex.[28] These parts of the brain, in turn responsible for judgment and risk-assessment ability, do not fully come online until sometime in the twenties, according to Allen and Allen.

Youth of today are the most media-saturated generation of all time. In a survey published in 2010, the Kaiser Family Foundation discovered that on average, children aged eleven to eighteen years old were exposed to the most media, up to nearly twelve hours in a typical day.[29] The significance of this media saturation is shaping what and how the youth think.[30] As Mueller puts it, for those without positive input from parents and other adults, media is a surrogate parent that shapes their worldview.

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[26] Ibid., 77.

[27] Mueller, "5 Youth Culture Megatrends."

[28] Allen and Allen, *Escaping the Endless Adolescence*, 40.

[29] Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, "Generation M2."

[30] Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 96.

Moreover, marketers have increased their efforts to target the youth. Combined

with the fact that emerging generations have a higher amount of discretionary income

than prior generations, young people have more money and more choices and are

influenced by marketing more than prior generations. Producers of recreational drugs

such as cocaine, crack, and marijuana, beer companies, manufacturers of expensive

clothes and shoes—all are examples of businesses that exploit the spiritual and emotional

vulnerability of young people to increase their profits.[31] Nevertheless, the majority of

young people are content with mass consumerism and materialistic and self-fulfillment-

oriented lifestyles.[32] The greater the emerging generations' spiritual emptiness, the more

they are prone to fill the void with material goods.[33]

Another postmodern culture trend in youth is "the much." There is too much stuff

going on in today's teenagers' lives. They are inundated with information, activities,

distractions, pressure, and negative parental input.[34] Every aspect of the lives of today's

youth, from clothes to food to cars to lifestyles, is filled with a growing number of

options. The problem with having these many options is that these youths are not likely to

develop loyalty to any one product, behavior, or idea. It is inevitable that today's

emerging generations constantly change their values and behaviors.[35]

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[31] Cheryl J. Sanders, *Ministry at the Margins: The Prophetic Mission of Women, Youth, & the Poor* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), 80.

[32] Christian Smith, Kari Christoffersen, Hilary Davidson, and Patricia Snell Herzog, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 107.

[33] Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 103.

[34] Mueller, "5 Youth Culture Megatrends."

[35] Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 99.

Today's youth have inherited a relationally broken world, Mueller observes. To further the anguish, much of the brokenness comes from family relationships. According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one fifth of first marriages end within five years, and one third end within ten years in 2001.[36] The divorce rate of first marriages has been nearly 50 percent for the past couple of decades.[37] Less than half (46 percent) of U.S. kids younger than eighteen years of age are living in a home with two married heterosexual parents in their first marriage.[38] This means most of today's children have a single-parent family, two married parents with one or both remarried, or no parent at home. Though the long-term fallout of this family mess is yet to be fully realized, one thing we can be sure of is that many children will struggle with understanding love, sexuality, commitment, marriage, parenting, and other relational issues.

Empowering the Next Generation

Culture has been created by God and given to humanity to use and enjoy.[39] God made humans in his own image and gave them the responsibility to enjoy, care for, and develop all he had made (Genesis 1:26-7, 2:15). Nonetheless, in the book of Romans, Apostle Paul pointed out that since the creation was subjected to frustration because of

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[36] U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "First Marriage Dissolution, Divorce, and Remarriage: United States," http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/ad/ad323.pdf (accessed October 30, 2015).

[37] U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "National Marriage and Divorce Rate Trends," http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/marriage_divorce_tables.htm (accessed October 30, 2015).

[38] Pew Research Center, "Less than Half of U.S. Kids Today Live in a 'Traditional' Family," http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/22/less-than-half-of-u-s-kids-today-live-in-a-traditional-family/ (accessed October 30, 2015).

[39] Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 113.

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the Fall, the creation now hopes for liberation from its bondage to decay (Romans 8:20-21). Culture functions like a map or a mirror that directs and reflects. Culture is always moving and never neutral.[40] As C.S. Lewis says in *Christian Reflections*, there is no neutral ground in the universe: every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan.[41] Therefore, understanding culture is foundational to engaging and ministering to the emerging generations.

This is especially important for church leaders and youth workers. Mueller believes church leaders and youth workers must commit to be a student of the Word, to be a person of prayer, to live an integrated faith, and to be a student of culture in order to have an effective youth ministry.[42] Using popular culture as a communication tool, understanding cultural differences as well as biases, being intent on building relationships with the postmodern generation—all are means of empowering the next generation.

However, in order to fulfill the churches' divinely ordained mission as the body of Christ and effectively reach out cross-culturally to the postmodern generations, the Church must facilitate a sense of community by ceasing to separate the body of Christ along generational lines.[43] When removing teenagers from the opportunity to worship with the older, wiser, and more spiritually gifted members of the congregation, the

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[40] Ibid., 119-127.

[41] C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), 33.

[42] Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 175-184.

[43] Ibid., 193.

Church robs the body of Christ of its ability to function properly.[44] Therefore, church

community cannot be separate from youth ministry. In fact, according to Bergler, youth

ministry can be an effective ministry that helps the whole church mature.[45]

Church as Spiritual Community

As the Bible says in 1 John, Christians ought to love one another, as we have

experienced the love of God:

> Dear Friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who
> loves has been born of God and knows God, because God is love. This is how
> God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that
> we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved
> us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so
> loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we
> love one another, God lives in us and his love made complete in us. (1 John 4:7-
> 12)

The Church is an extended relational family of God. Salvation is given through Jesus

Christ by grace, and Christians are called to respond with love to one another. As

Nouwen says, "Our greatest fulfillment lies in giving ourselves to others."[46] The

corporate life of the Church, immediately following Pentecost, was a communal life with

a domestic character. This commitment to one another as brothers and sisters in a new

community of love and faith captures exactly the import of Jesus' own teaching.[47] "'Who

are my mother and my brothers?' he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle

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[44] Ibid.

[45] Bergler, *From Here to Maturity*, 81-112.

[46] Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, 106.

[47] Ray S. Anderson and Dennis B. Guernsey, *On Being Family: A Social Theology of the Family* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 144.

around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother'" (Mark 3:33-35).

As Ray Anderson and Dennis Guernsey observe in *On Being Family*, new family relations are created between those who were once strangers and unrelated. From a theological perspective, the individual's new personal identity as one who has experienced the salvation of God is formed through a common existence in Christ's body. As a consequence, failure to love a brother or sister is to break fellowship with Christ himself (1 John 4:20).[48]

For the Sake of Others

All of God's work to conform us to the image of Christ has as its sole purpose that Christians might become what God created us to be in relationship with God and with others.[49] However, the unconditional and unlimited love is, as Henri Nouwen calls it in *In the Name of Jesus*, God's first love.[50] "Let us love," he says, "because God loved us first" (1 John 4:19). The love that often leaves us doubtful, frustrated, angry, and resentful is the second love.[51]

Nouwen calls the second love the limited, broken, and fragile love of humans. Namely, the affirmation, affection, sympathy, encouragement, and support people receive

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[48] Ibid., 145.

[49] Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 40.

[50] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 38.

[51] Ibid.

from parents, teachers, spouses, and friends are part of the second love. The second love is only a broken reflection of the first love.[52] The first love is offered to Christians by God through Jesus who has no shadows. Therefore, to live a life that is not dominated by human desire, one must be safely anchored in the knowledge of God's first love.[53]

Bonhoeffer believes Christianity means community through and in Jesus Christ.[54] He goes on to explain the three aspects of this. First, a Christian needs others because of Jesus Christ. Second, a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. Third, as new people in Christ, Christians have been chosen from eternity, accepted in time, and united for eternity.[55]

Because of salvation in Christ, Christians no longer live for themselves. Christians have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness (Romans 6:18). The death and life of Christians are not determined by our own resources; rather, we find both only in the Word that comes to us from outside ourselves, in God's Word to us.[56] Bonhoeffer writes, "God has put this Word into the mouth of others in order that it may be communicated to us. When one person is struck by the Word, he speaks it to others. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him."[57]

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[52] Ibid., 40.

[53] Ibid., 42.

[54] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 21.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., 22.

[57] Ibid., 23.

Wilhoit points out that most of the deeply forming events of our lives occur in the midst of relationships. Those seeking to foster spiritual formation in churches need to encourage interpersonal connecting, but there must also be an emphasis on learning to follow Jesus' wisdom in relationships.[58] How good and pleasant it is when the church family lives together in unity (Psalm 133: 1). Unity can only come through Jesus Christ. Among humans there is strife.[59] Without Christ there is discord between God and humans and between one human and another. Christ is our peace (Ephesians 2:14). Christians can live and serve with one another in peace only through the one Mediator. Otherwise, the way is blocked by sinful human nature.

Bonhoeffer further points out that many times an entire Christian community has broken down because it had sprung from a wish dream.[60] A wish dream comes out of human love and directs the other person for his or her own sake. On the other hand, spiritual love loves a person for Christ's sake. It comes from Jesus and serves him alone. As Barton says, Christian community is not and never can be about us. It is about the transforming presence of Christ—all he will do in and through and for each of us.[61] Christian community is not an ideal which Christians must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which Christians may participate.

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit

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[58] Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered*, 191.

[59] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 39.

[60] Ibid., 26.

[61] Barton, *Life Together in Christ*, 22.

into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many (1 Corinthians 12:12-14).

In the book of Corinthians, the Apostle Paul emphasizes both the vital reality of the community of faith as a living organism, the body of Christ, and the uniqueness of each individual member of that community. Paul's emphasis is on the interdependence of the individual members of the community of faith.[62] Therefore, the holistic spirituality of the individual is essential to the spiritual health of the community, and the health of the community is essential to the spiritual wholeness of the individual.[63]

The Challenge to Love

Christians have the privilege of living among other Christians.[64] However, it is not easy to love; it is a challenge to love. Before Jesus commissioned Peter to be a shepherd, he asked him, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" Again Jesus said, "Do you truly love me?" The third time he said to him, "Do you love me?" (John 21:15-17).

The question is not any of the following: How many people take you seriously? How much are you going to accomplish? Can you show some results? But rather, it is this: Are you in love with Jesus?[65] After asking Peter three times, "Do you love me?"

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[62] Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 50.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 17.

[65] Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 37.

Jesus says, "Feed my lambs, take care of my sheep, feed my sheep." Having been assured of Peter's love, Jesus gives him the task of ministry.

In *Intimacy*, Henri Nouwen points out two forms of existing: the form of power and taking versus the form of love and forgiving. The form of power and taking leads to destruction; the form of love and forgiving leads to creation.[66] The form of love takes courage and is based on the mutuality of the confession of our total self to each other. In this form, people are free to declare not only "My strength is your strength," but also "Your pain is my pain, your weakness is my weakness, your sin is my sin." It is in this intimate fellowship of the weak that love is born.[67]

Love is truthfulness, tenderness, and total disarmament. It means openness, vulnerability, availability, and confession. It is very risky to be honest, because someone may not respond with love, and may even take us by our weak spot and turn it against us. Nonetheless, Christians can love because Jesus loved us first. As the Apostle John says:

> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life . . . This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all . . . But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:1, 5, 7)

The core message of Christianity is exactly the message of the possibility of transcending the power and taking form of our human existence into the loving and forgiving form. Christ challenges us to face our fellow Christians without fear. We can enter with him into the fellowship of the weak, knowing that it will not bring destruction

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[66] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Intimacy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1969), 24.

[67] Ibid., 29.

but creation, new energy, new life, and in the end a new world that purifies us from all

sin.

PART THREE

WHAT CHURCHES CAN DO

CHAPTER 6

BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN CHURCH ADULTS AND ADOLESCENTS

Young people in the Church are the most valuable disciples of Christ for the future. But churches run different programs and activities for different age groups, inevitably separating adults from adolescents in almost every way. This leaves virtually no chance for the congregation's adults and youth to build healthy intergenerational relationships. In the end, when the youth grow old enough to decide for themselves whether to attend church, they do not feel that they are connected to and belong in the Church.

Based on the research of the National Study of Youth and Religion, only 8 percent of teenagers can be described as highly devoted.[1] The low percentage of highly devoted faith in American teenagers is a warning sign for churches to rethink the impact of youth programs and activities. How to cultivate true discipleship in adolescents becomes a question that churches cannot ignore.

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[1] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 110.

Learning From the Early Church

By investigating the early churches' activities in the New Testament, present-day churches might find some light to help improve the current situation with today's adolescents. In the book of Acts, the early Church participated in at least four activities: they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. As a result, the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47).

Teaching

Some churches today think that since adolescents bore easily, they should skip the teaching of the Word and go directly into social activities. Yet faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ (Romans 10:14). The Bible is relevant for today and for tomorrow (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Churches need to take up the responsibility of teaching young people the truth and living according to the truth. Otherwise, young people will have nowhere to turn to for moral judgment. In *Lost in Transition*, author Christian Smith points out that moral individualism and relativism is widespread among emerging adults. He stresses that the adult world of American culture and society has done an awful job when it comes to moral education and formation.[2]

Parental faith is an important indicator for adolescents' and emerging adults' religious walk.[3] However, faith is not directly inherited; ultimately, people need to make their own decision of faith. There is no guarantee that children who grow up in Sunday

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[2] Smith, Christoffersen, Davidson, and Herzog, *Lost in Transition*, 60-61.

[3] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 18.

school and youth programs will remain in the Christian faith for the rest of their lives. Churches need to implement innovative ways to teach the same unchanging truth to youth.

Adolescents are in a period of novelty-seeking and creative exploration. Church leaders can include youth in the development of Sunday school and youth group Bible study material. Asking for their thoughts, valuing their input, and letting them be part of the curriculum developing process will not only benefit youth but adults as well, by allowing adults to once again use the creative part of their brains. In addition, when youth feel valued and respected by adults, their sense of identity and belonging can be elevated. As Nakkula and Toshalis point out in *Understanding Youth*, an interactive learning process is a win-win situation, helping to bring changes in both directions.[4]

Mueller stresses that the way disciples are made involves three steps: going, baptizing and teaching.[5] The next generation must be taught all three essential elements of the faith by the current generation. If not, the Church will struggle to remain effective in its calling.[6]

Fellowship

God created people as relational beings. Even he himself is a triune God (Matthew 28:19). Another thing contemporary churches can learn from the early Church

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[4] Michael J. Nakkula and Eric Toshalis, *Understanding Youth: Adolescent Development for Educators* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2006), 14.

[5] Chap Clark, ed., *Adoptive Youth Ministry: Integrating Emerging Generations into the Family of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 304.

[6] Ibid., 305.

is having fellowship with brothers and sisters both young and old in Christ. In today's

culture, people value individual space and privacy in many areas of life. It is not easy,

even in church, to build up any real caring relationships with one another. In *The Roots of*

Prosocial Behavior in Children, Nancy Eisenberg and Paul Mussen stress the importance

of individuals who in motivations and behavior show greater concern for others and are

willing to devote considerable effort and energy to promoting the well-being of others;

these individuals improve the quality of life for the whole society.[7] Christians are called

to love one another deeply and be the testimony of Christ. When there is no time for

fellowship, there is no way to love one another.

With today's technology, the world seems to be shrinking; people can connect to

any information they desire. But people feel lonelier than ever before. In "Social Isolation

in America," McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears found that during the last two

decades, people who said they had no one to discuss matters with have more than

doubled to nearly 25 percent.[8] Turkle observes that people "brag about many friends on

Facebook, yet Americans say they have fewer friends than before."[9] This is a time when

churches need to rethink how to connect believers as well as adolescents into the true

fellowship of Christ. The responsibility again falls on the shoulders of churches. Through

the pulpit and Sunday school, leaders need to educate the congregation about the

importance of fellowship.

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[7] Nancy Eisenberg and Paul H. Mussen, *The Roots of Prosocial Behavior in Children* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 158.

[8] Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and Matthew E. Brashears, "Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks over Two Decades," *American Sociological Review* 71 (June 2006): 371.

[9] Turkle, *Alone Together*, 280.

Breaking Bread

During the time of the New Testament, churchgoers did many activities together (Acts 2:44). When they were together, they had time to mingle and express their caring to one another. It was a time of sharing and helping other believers in Christ. Breaking bread was a common theme in the early Church, but it is rarely found in today's American churches.

Nouwen stresses that in the expression "breaking bread together," the breaking and the giving are so clearly one.[10] When people eat together, they are vulnerable to one another because around the table people cannot wear weapons of any sort. Eating from the same bread and drinking from the same cup calls us to live in unity and peace. People sometimes comment, "That was a very nurturing conversation. That was a refreshing time." Nouwen believes that is the expression of humans' deepest desire: to give ourselves to one another as a source of physical, emotional, and spiritual growth.[11]

The majority of America's Chinese immigrant churches, unlike most mainstream American churches, offer lunch right after Sunday service. This provides opportunities for brothers and sisters to be better acquainted. Today's American churches may start by encouraging congregations to have small group meetings during weekdays in addition to Sunday service. Of course, one of the suggested activities of the meetings can be having a meal together after Bible study.

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[10] Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, 110.

[11] Ibid., 111.

Prayer

After Jesus ascended to heaven, believers joined together in prayer constantly (Acts 1:14). The fellowship of believers in the early Church took prayer seriously. As the Apostle Paul indicates in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." He also mentions on many other occasions the importance of prayer (Romans 12:12; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 4:2; 1 Timothy 2:1, 2:8; 1 Peter 4:7). Willard defines prayer as conversing and communicating with God, a way of co-laboring with God to accomplish good things and advance his Kingdom purposes.[12]

All of these early-Church model activities took place in communal settings, which meant believers had plenty of time to share their lives' joyful events as well as troubling matters. This social network provided fundamental support for growth in faith. As Chapter 3 of this project stresses, social capital is extremely important to adolescents; young people need church adults and adults need young people. The Apostle Paul exhorts the older men and women to have influence over the younger (Titus 2:2-8). Peter also instructs the younger men to be subject to the shepherding of their elders (1 Peter 5:5). Jay Sedwick states in his essay, "Teaching Adoptive Ministry," that with all the influence parents have, God gives us siblings in his earthly body to mutually care for and nurture one another. The Church community is one of the best contexts where this can happen.[13]

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[12] Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 184.

[13] Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 307.

Strategy of Adoptive Youth Ministry

In *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, Chap Clark points out the three issues of today's youth ministry: the struggle of long-term effectiveness, the negative view of the Church, and dramatic changes in the world. He proposes adoptive youth ministry.[14] Merriam-Webster defines the word "adopt" as to take, by choice, a child of other parents as one's own child. In Scripture, the adoption concept is mentioned several times; Christians are all adopted into God's household through Jesus Christ (Romans 8:15, 23, 9:4; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5). Therefore, Christians are to live out this reality of the faith community as the family of God.

Adoption as Ministry

Adoptive ministry means that while in the house of God, those who are mature must take the lead to care for those who are vulnerable.[15] This way, those who are not in the inner circle of the gathering can feel included, empowered, and grow into well-established life and faith. Consequently, adoptive ministry should include the elderly, the single parent, the divorced, the outcast, the hurting, the lonely, the lost, and the broken.[16]

Chapter 2 of this project stresses the importance of social capital in adolescents' lives. The adoptive youth ministry answers to the needs of youth to have a faith community's support and nurture in order to grow into faith. However, for the Church to become a family—which in terms of health, means our life together needs to be

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[14] Ibid., 3

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

experienced as an open system, or essentially as an organism—we must be open to thinking differently about how to operate as a community.[17]

However, as Lee Bolman and Terren Deal observe in *Reframing Organizations*, changing old patterns and mindsets is difficult and risky. It can lead to analysis paralysis, confusion, and further erosion of confidence and effectiveness.[18] When a fixed idea is challenged, people's default response is to become nervous. In another words, when outside forces and voices are perceived as threats to the integrity of the community's reason for being, the community becomes a closed system. On the other hand, an open system is like a living organism that is willing to change. Thus, the youth ministry must move from a closed system to an open system that is willing to change in order to envision ideas from different settings and contexts.[19]

Revisiting the Church Youth Program

In *Almost Christian*, Kenda Creasy Dean lists five things that the community of faith should give to youth. The community should teach and help students to articulate their beliefs, feel a sense of belonging in the faith community, pursue greater purpose, have hope in God, and grow in faith that bears fruit.[20] To accomplish all that, parents need all the help the Church can offer in order to meet those needs of adolescents.

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[17] Ibid., 15.

[18] Lee G. Bolman and Terren E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 5th ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 38.

[19] Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 13-15.

[20] Dean, *Almost Christian*, 69-81.

Many churches' youth ministries recognize the important of parental and church adult participation. Still, creating an environment of intergenerational relationships without actually enabling deep, lasting, intimate, and intentional connectedness will have little sustainable impact.[21] Therefore, the Church needs to revisit and reimagine youth ministry.

Clark lists five strategies that can redirect youth ministry. Starting from outreach, evangelism is less about "making converts" than about serving others and witnessing.[22] In Scripture, Jesus teaches that when the Son of man comes in his glory, he will separate the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:31-46). Those who serve the least of his brothers, they did for him. Therefore, serving others and witnessing God's love become a priority. The second strategy is the welcoming level. This level seeks to create an environment where people feel welcome. Youth ministry, women's ministry, and senior ministry are in the welcoming level because most people need to feel safe with their peers. This level is a segue to adoption.

The third level is the engaging level. According to Clark, this is where most ministries fall short. Instead of promoting private faith as the end goal, leadership should engage the individual toward a deeper, more intimate familial expression and experience of faith.[23] The fourth level is diverse relationship. At this level, the church should connect people to the broader faith family of siblings, both young and old. The fifth level is then

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[21] Ibid., 18.

[22] Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 19.

[23] Ibid., 20.

the adoption level, where an intentional recognition of the reality of the family of God is stressed on all occasions through many different forms, namely in speech, in writing, and in attitude.[24]

Church as family demands intentional intergenerational vision and strategy. Cheryl Crawford suggests in her essay, "Thinking Long Term," that church leaders should encourage parents to begin to embrace the concept of "church as family" when children are young.[25] This way, other church adults' voices are granted the right to be heard with little debate. Churches should encourage parents to invite the Sunday school teacher to family dinners or gatherings. Church staff and congregational contact with students through regular texts, emails, letters, and phone calls can maintain the bonds. By adopting all members of the church into the family of God, the local church provides the necessary support for our youth.

In *Accelerate*, Richard Ross identifies three ways that youth ministry can extend the faith lessons from home: give youth significant roles at church, facilitate challenging missions and internships, and surround students with intergenerational relationships.[26] Here is another piece of evidence that the goal of youth ministry is no longer to have a strong youth program, but to have the whole church involved in one another's lives.

Mark DeVries, in his book, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, contends that there is no such thing as successful youth ministry that isolates teenagers from the community of

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 189.

[26] Richard Ross, *Accelerate: Parenting Teenagers Toward Adulthood* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2013), 113-119.

faith. He thinks the top priority is to empower parents. The second priority is to equip the extended family of the local church.[27] Churches need to be intentionally and systematically equipping both parents and church adults regarding the importance of social capital in students and their responsibilities as the extended family of God.

Another aspect that needs to be revisited in the Church program, including youth ministry, is the role of leadership. Nouwen considers the most important quality of Christian leadership to be not power and control, but powerlessness and humility in which the suffering servant of God, Jesus Christ, is made manifest.[28] Human beings have been tempted to replace love with power because power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love. When Jesus asks, "Do you love me?" (John 21:15) The disciples ask, "Can we sit at your right hand and your left hand in your Kingdom?" (Matthew 20:21) Much Christian leadership is exercised by people who do not know how to develop healthy, intimate relationships and have opted for power and control instead.[29]

Nouwen points out three temptations of leadership: the desire to be relevant, the desire for popularity, and the desire for power. Leaders constantly try to make themselves look and feel better than they truly are. Eventually, these desires create chaos within a leadership team and ministry environment. Nouwen believes that the future of Christian leadership should move from desire for relevance to a life of prayer, from desire for

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[27] DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 103-106.

[28] Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 82.

[29] Ibid., 79.

popularity to communal and mutual ministry, and from desire for power to critical discernment of God's leading.[30]

We live in a world that is constantly trying to convince us that the burden is on us to prove that we are worthy of being loved. To overcome those deceitful desires, Christians must discover their true identity by listening to the Holy Spirit from within. Nouwen believes that salvation that comes from God through Jesus Christ is the greatest assurance to Christians that we are God's beloved children.[31] The switch from living life as a painful test in which one must prove that one deserves to be loved to living life as an unceasing "yes" to the truth of belovedness, is a God-given opportunity to have a spiritual life that radically changes everything.[32] Youth pastors need to revisit their inner motivations and make them right in order to become effective instruments in God's kingdom.

Organizing the Church Adoptive Mentorship Program

With the definition and strategies of adoptive youth ministry discussed, the next step is to implement this ministry in the church setting. This starts from support from the pulpit, followed by strategies to find volunteers, and lastly holding training programs for parents and church adult mentors; these will ensure better church involvement in an adoptive youth ministry.

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[30] Ibid., 91-92.

[31] Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, 29-39.

[32] Ibid., 133.

Support from the Pulpit

Leadership needs to mention the idea of adoptive youth ministry rhetorically, both verbally and in print, in order to move their church toward a willingness to change. An attitude change across an entire faith community needs conviction from the top down. Therefore, support from the senior pastor is crucial.

In Deuteronomy 6, the entire faith community of Israel is commanded to instruct and reinforce biblical teaching to the next generation.

> 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. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deuteronomy 6:4-7)

The word *shema* is the Hebrew word for summons: "Hear, O Israel," come listen to the Word of God. To the Hebrew people, the *Shema* is not limited to parents but also includes the entire community.[33] Each person is a called and gifted contributor to the health and growth of the whole church. According to Clark, everyone is a partner in the discipleship, nurture, training, and sending ministry of the body of Christ. The community of faith, not just the staff or leaders, must function as nurturing partners with parents. Youth ministry still matters and is indeed a vital entry point for children and adolescents. However, it is not enough. Adolescents need church adults to extend their welcoming arms and be the relational bridge into familial connection in the Christian community.

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[33] Clark et al., *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*, 170.

Strategies to Find Volunteers

When looking for volunteers for adoptive mentorship of adolescents, two qualities are important: authentic love for Jesus and like for people.[34] This will ensure the person's ability to address inevitable challenges and resolve relational difficulties. Bill Macphee stresses in his essay "Adoptive leadership" that liking people, not just kids, is noteworthy.[35] An adoptive mentor volunteer not only works with youth, but also must view everyone in the church body as a potential contributor of service in support of adolescents. Therefore, liking people both young and old is an important quality in mentors.

Mentoring is an intentional and appropriately reciprocal relationship between two individuals. Parks states that mentors provide five crucial forms of gifts: recognition, support, challenge, inspiration, and accountability.[36] She points out that there is a giving of self on the part of the mentor, intent and response on the part of the protégé, and vulnerability experienced by both that transcends the other categories of relationship. Therefore, good mentors play a vital role in stewarding the promise of a worthy future.

Church leaders need to take good care of the volunteer mentors because they need support, encouragement, and resources. Volunteers often worry about their effectiveness: their fit, skill, and relational capacity with kids.[37] Church leaders, as servant leaders, should develop people rather than use people. As Christian leaders, we care not only for

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[34] Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 284.

[35] Ibid., 283.

[36] Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 167.

[37] Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 285.

what the volunteer produces or gives to us but also for him or her as a unique and valuable person.[38] Therefore, church leaders must ensure that volunteers have the means to accomplish the task by supplying them with resources and training them with skills for effective service.[39] This can include current information about adolescents, youth culture, parenting methods, personal spiritual development, and ongoing support.[40]

It is helpful to put together a volunteer packet for applicants who are interested in adoptive mentorship. The packet could include a welcome letter, an overview of students' needs, the purpose statement and values of this ministry, general job descriptions, the application, and a request for references and background check.[41] The final step is a face-to-face interview to ensure adequate and clear communication.

Role of the Volunteer Mentor

Joe White and Jim Weidmann, in their book, *Spiritual Mentoring of Teens*, write that mentors guide, encourage, and teach through modeling.[42] When it comes to guiding teenagers spiritually, mentors are role models. Sometimes people feel reluctant and fear that they have nothing to share. Below is a brief questionnaire from *Spiritual Mentoring of Teens* for mentors to think about.

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Houston Heflin, *Youth Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Youth Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), 114.

[40] Ibid., 115.

[41] Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 286.

[42] Joe White and Jim Weidmann, eds., *Spiritual Mentoring of Teens: Building Your Child's Faith Through the Adolescent Years* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 70.

- Do you know even a little more about any aspect of the Christian life than youth does?
- Have you learned anything from a spiritual mistake?
- Have you made even a tiny bit of progress since beginning your relationship with God?[43]

If a potential volunteer mentor says yes to all of the above, he or she is meant to be a mentor. However, there are seven qualities of effective mentoring. These seven qualities spell out the word "CONNECT."[44] Consistent: as a mentor, one will need to be committed to develop a deeper relationship. Open: A mentor needs to be authentic and honest, willing to take some risks to discuss topics that one has never discussed before. Nurture: Both the mentor and the teen will be nurtured as they spend time in the process. Notice: Spend more time listening than talking; take notice of how the adolescents feel and how they display their emotions. Encourage: By affirming and believing in and supporting the teen, a mentor can encourage the youth. Care: Demonstrate love by being patient, understanding, forgiving, and nonjudgmental. Mentoring is more about care than it is about imparting information. Finally there is T for Talk: Praying to God is vital for effective mentoring.[45]

Relationship is everything in mentoring; without relationship, mentoring is merely a nice idea, say White and Weidmann.[46] Being a spiritual mentor to a teenager does not require a perfect relationship. Nonetheless, the relationship must be genuine, caring, and

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[43] Ibid., 80.

[44] Tim Smith, *Life Skills for Girls* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook, 2000), 12-13.

[45] Ibid.

[46] White and Weidmann, eds., *Spiritual Mentoring of Teens*, 84.

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reciprocating without personal agenda. The *Spiritual Mentoring of Teens* offers some

relationship-building reminders. Mentors need to recall the feelings, pressures, and

dreams of their own adolescence in order to have more compassion on today's teens.

Mentoring does not have to be all serious business. Mentors and adolescents can have fun

together. Fun activities to do together can include playing sports, cooking, making crafts,

hiking, and participating in mission trips. Ask teenagers what they like to do, and have

fun together.

Building bridges between church adults and adolescents is biblical. The early-

Church model shows their communal experiences for today's Christian to learn from. All

Christians are adopted into the household of God. Once someone is adopted into a family,

that person becomes a permanent member of that family. Therefore, church adults need

to support children as they enter into adolescence and emerging adulthood. By organizing

a church volunteer mentorship program, church adults can have a reciprocal meaningful

relationship that lasts. This way, churches can better ensure that their youth will grow in

faith and will not turn from it.

CHAPTER 7

SIX COURSES TO EQUIP PARENTS AND CHURCH ADULTS

After building bridges between church adults and adolescents, churches can begin

to hold the six-week course for parents to integrate the local church into their

midadolescents' spiritual development. The course starts out by providing knowledge to

parents and church adults regarding youth in crisis as well as adolescents' special

developmental needs. Then, the course turns to relationship building. This includes

methods of sound communication, ways of encouragement, and positive-discipline

guidelines. The last two classes are on the importance of modeling and social capital in

adolescents' spiritual formation. When parents and church adults complete the course,

they are better equipped to facilitate midadolescents' spiritual development.

Adolescents' Special Needs

In *When Kids Hurt* by Chap Clark and Steve Rabey, the authors state that parents

need to grasp three key concepts: the reality of lengthened adolescence, the phenomenon

of layered and underground living, and the perception that adolescents are on their own

and must figure out how to live.[1] In light of these truths, adults need to be informed and aware of today's adolescents' special needs in order to support youth to successfully transition into adulthood. Church adults also need to know the landscape of the world beneath the youth.[2] Because youth feel separate from the adults' world and are simultaneously pushed by an external performance-driven culture, they are driven beneath the observable surface and into the underground would.[3] The postmodern cultural forces shape the head and heart of today's adolescents, encompassing various areas of life including peer relationships, school, sports, sex, partying, gaming, and social networking. Churches need to inform and help adults understand the crises youths face today.

The ministry challenge is made even more difficult by the fact that many tenets of postmodernism conflict with the foundational tenets of biblical Christianity.[4] Church leaders and parents must develop a deep and detailed understanding of the adolescent world, the values, attitudes, and behaviors of youth. This understanding is a necessary prerequisite to effective communication and contextualization of the gospel message.[5]

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[1] Clark and Rabey, *When Kids Hurt*, 186.

[2] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 57.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 44.

[5] Ibid., 45.

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Youth in Crisis

In order to raise awareness of crisis in today's youth, the course starts by

presenting the defining issues of adolescents. It presents the alarming statistical data of

internet usage, drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy, suicide rate, and other serious

junctures that are mentioned in Chapter 1 of this project. The course reminds adults that

postmodern adolescents are challenged by more adversities than ever before.

Marv Penner points out in his essay, "Welcoming Wounded and Broken

Adolescents into the Family of God," that when young people enter early adolescence,

they begin to intuitively sense the need to establish themselves as individuals apart from

the ties to their family of origin.[6] Nonetheless, as the brain is still developing, they cannot

yet reflectively consider their life in relationship to others.[7] The brain changes during the

early teen years, and each of these changes is necessary to create the important shifts that

happen during adolescence.[8] These changes have both positive qualities and negative

possibilities; according to Siegel, they offer both risk and opportunity for young

individuals and the adults walking with them.[9]

Furthermore, the process of discovering one's selves during adolescence begins by

pushing back on the parent-child relationship in order to create some distance. Many

disconcerted parents react by holding on tighter to their children; this conceivably creates

tension and makes the process of finding identity more difficult. Penner further states that

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[6] Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 45.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Siegel, *Brainstorm*, 7.

[9] Ibid., 9.

the pain of adolescence comes from all different areas of life and is very real. Ignoring and belittling the pain of young people is not an option.[10] As Walt Mueller says in his book, *99 Thoughts for Parents of Teenagers*, adults need to hang in there with adolescents and love them despite their emotional highs and lows over what to adults seems like trivial stuff.[11] The adults' job is to realize that the adolescents are not yet adults.

The pain that youth experiences could include painful family breakup, tragic loss of a close one, sexual abuse, public humiliation, bullying, heartbreak, struggles with weight or complexion, or emotionally absent parents. The list of pain caused by others can go on and on. However, pain can be caused by young people's wrong choices too.

When young people choose the wrong friends, form destructive relationships, use drugs and alcohol, quit school, play excessive video games, or become addicted to pornography, painful outcomes are to be expected. But even though the pain young people experience from these activities result from their own choices, very often people make bad choices because of bad experiences or circumstances.[12] What they truly need is to have parents and church adults who they can trust in order to make better advised choices. Walt Mueller notes in his book, *The Space Between*, that adults should intentionally be prophetic in relationships with teens and look for opportunities to speak

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[10] Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 49.

[11] Walt Mueller, *99 Thoughts for Parents of Teenagers: The Truth on Raising Teenagers from Parents Who Have Been There* (Simplyyouthministry.com: Group.com, 2011), 22.

[12] Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 47.

biblical truth into their lives.[13] Adults should show how God's Word and the Christian

faith speaks and relates to all of life. In effect, churches are called to stand as islands of

safety in the midst of the cultural chaos that young people must navigate today.

Adolescents' Developmental Needs

Adding to the cultural chaos, adolescents have special developmental needs.

Levine states that adolescent kids are very aware of the proliferation of selves and are

concerned over "Who is the real me?"[14] It is still just beyond their reach to integrate

opposing characteristics, and that makes for a very unsettled sense of self in teenagers. As

mention in Chapter 2, they are exploring identity. Teens begin to understand that

different characteristics may become more or less evident in different situations.

A common dilemma for girls can be the wish to perform well in school but at the

same time they may wish not to be seen as a "brain" by boys they are interested in.[15] The

struggle for boys is often to hide their more sensitive feelings, fearing that they might be

ostracized by the macho culture of high school boys.[16] Clark states that the defining

developmental characteristic of midadolescence is the ability to draw on abstract and

complex processes of thinking and logic within each layer. Nonetheless, midadolescents

are not yet able to do this.[17]

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[13] Walt Mueller, *The Space Between: A Parent's Guide to Teenage Development* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 107.

[14] Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 120.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 51.

Mueller notes that new research and scientific advances show that the brain is an organ that grows and transitions during adolescence. The limbic system is affected in ways that can intensify aggressive emotions.[18] The prefrontal cortex of the brain that controls impulses, planning, organizing, prioritizing, judging future consequences, making complex assessments, self-control, and emotional regulation is the last part to develop.[19] However, as Siegel points out in *Brainstorm*, instead of viewing the adolescent stage of brain development as merely a process of maturation, it is actually more accurate to see it as a vital and necessary time of great importance that should be not just survived through but cultivated well.[20] Once adults have this knowledge, they can better nurture youth.

As for the physical changes, most teenagers are preoccupied and curious about the many physical changes that take place in a relatively short period of time.[21] Adults have gone through these same changes, but puberty has become even more difficult for today's teenagers to handle due to the rapidly changing cultural pressure, expectations, and standards for physical appearance.[22] The unrealistic standards of physical beauty perpetuated by media make it extremely difficult for young people to accept their own physical appearance. Adults need to offer teenagers a godly perspective on the inward

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[18] Mueller, *The Space Between*, 63.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Siegel, *Brainstorm*, 75.

[21] Santrock, *Life-Span Development*, 358.

[22] Mueller, *The Space Between*, 40.

qualities of godliness. When they are sensitive and affirming as teenagers' bodies change, parents and church adults can serve as a buffer in the midst of the type of ridicule that could tarnish a child's self-image.

One aspect of teenagers' social life is the tension between the desire to stand out as individuals and a reluctance to stand out so far that they open themselves up to ridicule.[23] Even though the need to accomplish autonomy is great, the need to be affiliated with their peers is a real longing too. Young adolescents conform more to peer standards than children do.[24] Church adults and parents need to be sensitive to the overwhelming nature of the peer pressure today's teenagers face. In this postmodern world, the you-decide-for-yourself-what's-right-and-wrong-world, peer pressure typically takes the form of an unspoken expectation to participate in behavior that today's culture believes is normal, right, and expected.[25]

Mood swings are another feature of adolescents' lives. A shift from the highest of highs to the lowest of lows can occur suddenly and then end just as quickly, or last for several days. Many of these mood swings are directly related to the physical and social changes taking place.[26] Teenagers' emotions are very real to them. Many feelings stem from a preoccupation with self and the accompanying fear of rejection. Of course, being sensitive and understanding to their emotions is key.

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[23] Ibid., 51.

[24] Santrock, *Life-Span Development*, 395.

[25] Mueller, *The Space Between*, 52.

[26] Ibid., 74.

Building Relationship

Many parents have great expectations for their children and provide various opportunities for learning experiences. However, their children's performance may not necessarily live up to expectations. More often than not, parental expectations will exceed the children's current ability. When this happens, parents usually become very critical toward their adolescents. This not only creates tension in the relationship but also decreases adolescents' willingness to follow any well-intended advice.

A young child's sense of self is formed largely by the opinions of his or her parents, according to Levine.[27] If mothers and fathers continue to press on towards their own agendas despise their child's abilities and interests, the long-term effects on the child's emotional health could be devastating. The performance-oriented conditional love given to children could result in psychological unhealthiness that will often show up during adolescence or later adulthood.[28]

Being sincerely appreciated for one's God-given strengths as well as weaknesses is a universal longing. Many Christians come to know Christ after having heard or read that Jesus loves sinners and that he does not show favoritism (Romans 2:11). No matter whether the person is talented enough or capable enough, Jesus loves all. God loves each one as the apple of his eye (Deuteronomy 32:10). From this promise in Scripture, Christians gain immeasurable comfort. Christian parents and church adults need to reflect this love of the Heavenly Father—to love and appreciate their children apart from

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[27] Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 64.

[28] Apter, *The Myth of Maturity*, 154.

performance. The psalmist in Scripture says, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). All children are fearfully and wonderfully made. Therefore as faithful servants of God, parents need to treasure their children as gifts from God and value their whole being.

Most parents love their child's strengths but have a hard time accepting a child's weakness. Nonetheless, since children are blessings from the Creator, parents need to see them through the eyes of God. Some characteristics such as sociability, a regular consistent schedule, a mild temperament, a high attention span, and a strong adaptability to the environment make parenting much easier.[29] Other traits such as over-sensitivity, a weaker affinity for social interactions, or emotional moodiness undoubtedly make parenting more difficult.

But if parents and church adults can truly appreciate individual differences and earnestly adapt, working with the child's inborn traits rather than try to change them, the child is being sincerely appreciated. By truly appreciating a young child's God-given traits, parents and church adults can help build up the child's healthy sense of self. This sense of lovability is the core of all healthy self-development.[30]

The Apostle Paul always gives thanks to the Lord for the congregations to which he writes (Philippians 1:3; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:3; Philemon 4). In the book of Romans, Paul begins the letter with thanksgiving to God: "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you" (Romans

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[29] Alexander Thomas, Stella Chess, and Herbert G. Birch, "The Origin of Personality," *Scientific American* (1970): 104.

[30] Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 64.

1:8). "I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus," he writes in 1 Corinthian 1:4. Again, in Ephesians 1:16: "I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers." Paul gives thanks to God not because the churches were already perfect. In fact, as can be seen from these letters, these churches still possessed a multitude of problems and were indeed in need of much improvement. Yet Paul saw that God had good plans for the churches, and the churches were walking toward God's plans.

Besides giving thanks to God on behalf of the churches, he also thanks God in many letters for the blessing he received from those churches (2 Corinthians 11:9; Philippians 2:30, 4:18). In the same way, parents and church adults need to see their young people from God's point of view. Parents and church adults should count the blessings received from the children in order to have sincere appreciation, even if they still have much need of improvement.

As Levine points out, adults need to cultivate warmth to protect young people's emotional development.[31] Warmth is the quality of involvement, understanding, acceptance, and love that adults communicate on different levels and ways as their children grow. The good kind of warmth is to accept and understand children.[32] This is especially important when communicating with teenagers. In adolescence, if parents and church adults demand compliance and obedience, there are foreseeable conflicts waiting to happen.

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[31] Ibid., 132.

[32] Ibid., 133.

Communication and Encouragement

Ted Tripp write in his book, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, that communication must be multifaceted and richly textured; it must include encouragement, correction, rebuke, entreaty, instruction, warning, teaching, and prayer.[33] Apostle Paul says in 1 Thessalonians, "We urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone" (1 Thessalonians 5:10). The point is that differing conditions in the hearer require differing forms of appropriate speaking.

With various types of communication, encouragements inspire and give hope and courage to the person who hears them. Honest praise comes from the heart and extends to actions and words. Therefore, the one who speaks encouragement not only needs to express it with positive body and facial expressions but also provide a detailed description of the specific areas that are appreciated.

Most of the time, parents will only provide a generic word of encouragement such as, "You are a great helper." The sentence itself does not have enough detail for the receiver to understand what exactly has been appreciated. A better way to word the encouragement is to accompany it with several supporting points that indicate the effort and character. Adults can indicate how the child has shown initiative in helping by remembering to do his or her assigned part of the house chores, or doing the chore with a pleasant attitude. In this way, the child will easily understand what qualities of their work are valued and will respond with increased frequency of these commendable actions later on.

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[33] Ted Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart: Revised and Updated* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2005), 81.

Another important consideration is the objective of the encouragement. It is much easier to praise someone with things that are visible such as accomplishments, appearance, and behavior. Examples include a child who wins an award in a competition, a youth that dresses appropriately, or an adolescent who cleans up her own room. These are all external things that can be observed quite easily, and most parents can praise their children in these areas without much difficulty.

The harder part comes when the child or youth has no outstanding accomplishments or behaviors to impress their parents. In these situations, parents usually become critical. Yet, this is the time when proper encouragement has immense potential to impact a child's life. As Levine writes, "The most critical aspect of learning [is] effort and improvement."[34] If parents and church adults restrict their encouragement to only distinguish goals, children and youth will have far fewer opportunities to be encouraged. By encouraging the youth's efforts, rather than achievements, parents can help the teen find value in improvement.[35]

If a child has devoted sincere efforts yet still falls short of expectations, parents should acknowledge the effort and focus on the improvement no matter how small it may be. For example, if a child exerts good effort and still loses a sports game, adults should find the inner qualities of the child and express genuine praise. Instead of finding fault with the child, adults should work to see past the outward results and look into the inward characters they have identified in the child, such as perseverance, courage under pressure,

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[34] Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 143.

[35] Don Dinkmeyer and Gary D. Mickay, *Parenting Teenagers: Systematic Training for Effective Parenting of Teens*, (Circle Pine, MI: American Guidance Service, 1990), 68.

and unwavering passions. This way a child will not be discouraged by a failure to perform but will know that they are appreciated, accepted, and loved.

On the other hand, if a teenager only offers minimal effort, adults should not give any praise even if the youth is successful in their endeavor. Instead, adults should caution them that building up their character is more important than performance. Do not fear rejection from adolescents. As Mueller says, adults sometimes go against our better judgment and say yes when we should be saying no.[36] This will give children a realistic sense of self, not an inflated sense of self. According to Levine, accomplishments are not necessarily reflective of and have a very limited relationship to a healthy self-esteem.[37] When adults give proper encouragement to their youth, they not only build up youth's inner strength and character but also trusting relationships.

One of the top complaints of adolescents to adults is that they do not listen. Communication is a two-way street involving both listening and speaking. However, for most people, the tendency is to speak more and listen less, especially when it comes to communicating with teenagers. Hart and Weber advise that the best parenting style to nurture adolescents' emotional development is to listen with empathy and reflect back their feelings.[38] Good communication requires a large portion of reflective and active listening.[39] John Gottman and Joan DeClaire, in *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*, explain that listening means far more than collecting data with your ears. They stress

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[36] Mueller, *99 Thoughts for Parents of Teenagers*, 36.

[37] Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 141.

[38] Hart and Weber, *Stressed or Depressed*, 180-182.

[39] Dinkmeyer and Mickay, *Parenting Teenagers*, 88.

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empathetic listening, which includes using the eyes, imagination, words, and heart.[40] This

means using the eyes to watch body language, facial expressions, and gestures; to use

imagination to see the situation from the other's perspective; to use words to reflect back;

and to use the heart to feel the other's feelings.[41]

The definition of active listening is to be actively involved in the listening process.

To repeat, paraphrase, or summarize the meaning of what is spoken are very good

methods to clarify the message and let the person who spoke have a chance to correct any

misunderstanding. This also reassures the speaker that someone is trying to understand

what they aim to communicate. On top of the factual content, understanding the feelings

and emotions being conveyed is a significant part of listening.[42] Another active listening

method is to use open-ended questions to help the speaker continue to share. For example:

"What happened next?" "Do you mean . . . ?" "What is next?" Active listening ends

when the speaker feels that they have fully expressed and articulated their thoughts.

Active listening makes people feel comfortable and understood. Teenagers desperately

want to be understood. If church adults and parents are skillful active listeners, they can

establish more open and effective relationships with their adolescents.[43]

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[40] John Gottman and Joan DeClaire, *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child: The Heart of Parenting* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1997), 94.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., 95-99.

Positive-Discipline Methods

Scripture teaches in Hebrews 12:5-6, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and punishes everyone he accepts as a son." The author, inspired by the Holy Spirit, points out that even the Lord disciplines the ones whom he loves; surely the same truth would apply for earthly parents. Children do not naturally have self-control; they are not born with an understanding of their boundaries and limits. Adults need to learn how to discipline properly so that children can benefit from it.

The concept of parenting styles has been significantly shaped by Diana Baumrind, who proposed the original triadic configuration of authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative styles.[44] In response to a young child's failure to comply with a demand, most parents instinctively yell at to their children. Naturally, young children comply out of a fear of getting into trouble. Some parents misuse their authority and power, becoming authoritarians.[45] This type of parenting is "more demanding of their children than [it is] responsive to their needs."[46] Children who grow up in these homes tend to have a low self-esteem, poor social skills, lowered curiosity, high rates of depression, and a higher level of aggression.[47]

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[44] Diana Baumrind, "Authoritarian vs. Authoritative Parental Control," *Adolescence 3* (1968), 255-272.

[45] Levine, *The Price of Privilege,* 129.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Bruce L. Baker and Tracy L. Heller, "Preschool Children with Externalizing Behaviors: Experience of Fathers and Mothers," *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 24(4) (1996), 530.

On the opposite end, another type of parenting is termed "permissive." Permissive parents, though having a warm relationship with their children, are reluctant to exercise control over them.[48] Being permissive parents to teenagers is tantamount to granting them a license to misbehave. Children raised by permissive parents grow up to be more manipulative, have lower academic achievement, and have higher rates of substance abuse than those raised under other parenting styles.[49]

According to Elkind, a new consensus has emerged with contemporary studies that the "authoritative" parenting style is the most effective and successful mode.[50] These parents are both demanding and responsive at the same time.[51] They provide a balance of being warm and involved, while also being firm by establishing boundaries, limits, and expectations.[52] Levine states that children growing up in these homes are most likely to have a healthy sense of self, lead independent lives, maintain loving interpersonal relationships, and enjoy a sense of competence.[53]

Hart and Weber also believe the same: "Among teens, authoritative parenting instills and increases the characteristics that promote resilience. These teens do better scholastically and socially. They cope better with stress and approach problems with a

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[48] Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 130.

[49] Ibid., 131.

[50] Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 98.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Hart and Weber, *Stressed or Depressed*, 155.

[53] Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 132.

sense of curiosity and purpose. They develop a healthier theology of God and a more realistic view of his love and nature."[54]

Of course, parenting young children is easier compared to parenting youth. Adults that use an authoritarian or permissive style of parenting do not realized the importance of parenting style when children are young because they are reasonably obedient and compliant during those years. As a result, adults usually neglect or do not comprehend the significance of early influence in a child's life. Nonetheless, the prime time to train potential abilities, build up moral character, and form a healthy sense of self is during those tender young years.[55] Philip Cowan and Carolyn Cowan's research in *Parenting and the Child's World* draws a similar conclusion, confirming that parents have a direct impact on children's academic achievement and behavior problems at school.[56]

Parenting is much like multiplication in mathematics. When positive intentions are multiplied by a negative method, the result is negative. When positive intentions are multiplied by a good method, the result is similarly positive. As the Bible reminds us, a man reaps what he sows (Galatians 6:7). In the book of Hosea, they sow the wind and reap the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7). It is the law of nature ordained by God that a person will

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[54] Hart and Weber, *Stressed or Depressed*, 155.

[55] Daniel Goleman, *EQ: Emotional Intelligence* (Taipei, Taiwan: China Times Publishing, 1996), 220.

[56] Philip A. Cowan and Carolyn Pape Cowan, "What an Intervention Design Reveals About How Parents Affect Their Children's Academic Achievement and Behavior Problems," in *Parenting and the Child's World: Influences on Academic, Intellectual, and Social-Emotional Development,* eds. John G. Borkowski, Sharon Landesman Ramey, and Marie Bristol-Power (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 94.

always reap more than he or she sows. Therefore, it is important for parents to learn appropriate parenting knowledge and skills from early on.

Spiritual Formation

Postmodern cultural emphasis on pluralism, diversity, and tolerance has created an environment in which many people think that to be wise and broad-minded is to embrace and combine elements of different spiritualities into one's own personal belief system.[57] Therefore, when youths start to question the Christian faith while investigating other faith systems, adults should not feel threatened, because this might be the very thing God uses to reinforce and strengthen their faith. Allow teenagers to think for themselves and openly discuss their questions while challenging their changing values and behaviors with the truth. Since adolescents are developing intellectual capacity, adults should lead them to think more deeply about theological concepts.

Teenagers go through this spiritual transition in different ways and to varying degrees. Some teens will continue to cruise along the path of spiritual growth without any prolonged doubts or questions. A few will reject the Christian faith and grasp another belief system. Others will dabble with different worldviews, act, question, and talk as though they have outgrown their childhood faith. Throughout all this, God calls on Christian parents and church adults to continue to pray hard for them and continue to love them and live out our faith before them.[58]

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[57] Mueller, *The Space Between*, 84.

[58] Ibid., 85-87.

The Authenticity of Faith and Modeling

Mueller suggests that church adults first need to be models to youth and be all what one would desire youth to be.[59] That is, Christian adults should live and apply the Word to all areas of life as a testimony to teenagers. When Christian adults say our God is a living and true God, our lives should reflect this belief. Parents and church adults' attitudes, values, and behaviors are passed down by example. Voddie Baucham, Jr., the author of *Family Shepherds*, points out that much of the wickedness adults so despise in our children is merely a reflection of the wickedness they have learned from us.[60] Church adults and parents are "examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). Therefore, we should integrate faith into every nook and cranny of our lives. Young people with their watchful eyes can see right through whether one is living up to what one preaches.

Authenticity of faith starts from one's own expression of temperament and behaviors. When confronted with life's difficulties, one's reaction shows and teaches a lot about one's commitment to God. When everything goes smoothly, it is easy to say that Christians need to have joy, faith, and hope. Only when trials come, it is time to build up character. As the Scripture says, "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Romans 5:3-5).

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[59] Ibid., 103.

[60] Voddie Baucham, Jr., *Family Shepherds: Calling and Equipping Men to Lead Their Homes* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 129.

When adversity comes, mature Christians take confidence and comfort in God's promise that the Lord know the plans he has for us, plans to prosper us and not to harm us, plans to give us hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11). Godly character only forms in hardship and perseverance. It is a decision to trust God's goodness. In the end, character builds up to the point that Christians can join the prophet Habakkuk and say: "Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my savior" (Habakkuk 3:17-18). God is in control of everything. The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord is enthroned as King forever (Psalm 29:10).

Therefore, parents and church adults should frequently evaluate their own spiritual health and vitality. Mueller provides some questions adults can ask themselves.[61] Do I love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength through action? Do I trust God for guidance and wisdom through daily and future planning? Do I spend time praying, reading and studying the Bible? Do I integrate faith into relationship, vocation, decision, the use of leisure time, and so forth? Do I demonstrate care for family, friends, and neighbors? Basically, teenagers help adults face the reality of their spiritual maturity.

Importance of Social Capital

Smith and Denton write that the importance of faith for teenagers fairly closely tracks the importance of faith for their parents.[62] Even though they consider the overall

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[61] Mueller, *The Space Between,* 105.

[62] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 57.

positive association between parents and youth, Smith and Denton still admit the fit is not perfect. Other influences in the lives of youth are playing significant roles too. Therefore, the parents' faith does not guarantee or absolutely determine the child's faith. In fact, sometimes in specific instances, things turn out otherwise.

As Chapter 2 of this project affirms, social capital is very important to adolescents. The last emphasis of the six-course class is the potential significant influence of church adults on youth. Not all teenagers have devoted Christian parents; some parents may not even be believers. Besides, even devoted Christian parents need help from the extended family of God to raise godly children. As Bonhoeffer says, Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. Communal life is the "roses and lilies" of the Christian life.[63]

According to the National Study of Youth and Religion data, 54 percent of all U.S. teens and 61 percent of U.S. teens who attend religious services would enjoy adult supportive relationships.[64] The authors conclude that the majority of religious U.S. teens do not have non-parental adult relationships with fellow religious congregants who they can rely on for help in life. Still, according to the findings of the survey, religious organizations appear to help foster cross-generational relational ties and also reinforce the religious faith and practices of teens.[65] Hence, Smith and Snell conclude that religious

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[63] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 21.

[64] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 61.

[65] Ibid.

congregations appear to be important sites for U.S. teenagers to make significant contact with adults other than family members.

Putnam points out the importance of adults outside the nuclear family.[66] Mentoring can help at-risk kids develop healthy relations with adults (including parents), and in turn achieve significant gains in academic and psychosocial outcomes: school attendance, school performance, self-worth, and reduced substance abuse.[67] In another influential book Putnam wrote, *Bowling Alone*, he stresses that social capital benefits not only individuals but also communities in at least three ways.[68] First, social capital allows individuals to resolve collective problems more easily. Second, social capital allows communities to advance smoothly. Third, social capital improves our lot by widening our awareness of the many ways in which our fates are linked. Putnam argues the following:

> Social capital also operates through psychological and biological processes to improve individuals' lives. Mounting evidence suggests that people whose lives are rich in social capital cope better with traumas and fight illness more effectively. Social capital appears to be a complement, if not a substitute, for Prozac, sleeping pills, antacids, vitamin C, and other drugs we buy at the corner pharmacy. "Call me in the morning" might actually be better medical advice than "Take two aspirin" as a cure for what ails us.[69]

Parents as well as church adults who want the best for their youth and are willing to come alongside of young people and put God's commands into action should all know the benefit of social capital to adolescents. Even more, when it comes to building a strong

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[66] Putnam, *Our Kids*, 213.

[67] Ibid., 214.

[68] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Touchstone Book, 2000), 288.

[69] Ibid., 289.

mature faith, adults' modeling and demonstration of loving acceptance speak a much

louder message than mere lectures. The kingdom of God is a relational realm shaped by

the creatively self-giving and available love manifested in and proclaimed by Jesus

Christ.[70]

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[70] Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*, 220.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

From the overwhelming evidence presented in the earlier chapters, from both scientific research data and personal stories, it is imperative for churches to recognize the epidemic of young people leaving the evangelical Church.[1] Even though parents are in the central role of building children's faith, they need all the help and support they can get.[2] Parenting is a lifelong dedication to loving, supporting, and encouraging growth in children. It is a huge commitment and requires the help and support of both the Church and other adults.[3] Therefore, this project intends to develop a six-week course to equip parents and church adults to integrate the Church into the parenting of midadolescents in their spiritual development.

As Allen and Allen observe, what used to occur during the teenage years is now happening far later. Twenty-five is becoming the new fifteen. This phenomenon is not just delaying our kids' maturity; it is changing who they become.[4] Therefore, Chapter 1 of this project begins by understanding the ministry context of adolescence, laying out some details of the culture and physical development of adolescence. In the culture aspect, the phenomenon of extended adolescence in postmodern culture is first assessed.[5]

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[1] Smith and Snell, *Soul in Transition*, 255-259.

[2] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 23, 93-122.

[3] Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 189.

[4] Allen and Allen, *Escaping the Endless Adolescence*, 17.

[5] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 11.

This is followed by exploring some of the most pressing issues of postmodern adolescents. These issues include temptations of improper websites, social media, excessive computer games, drug and alcohol abuse, as well as pressure that relates to academic performance, parental expectations, and extracurricular activities. All these issues present unprecedented perils in adolescents' lives. The dramatic physical development during adolescence adds to their stress and influences their behaviors as well. However, much of adolescents' behavior stems from their unique brain development. As Siegel writes, the brain changes of adolescence offer both risk and opportunity.[6] This is helpful for adults to apprehend in order to properly guide teenagers.

In Chapter 2, the focus is on the emotional and spiritual developmental context of adolescence in the Church. By understanding teenagers' emotional needs in different stages, adults can better aid their healthy emotional growth. Santrock describes three major tasks of adolescence: exploring identity, accomplishing autonomy, and finding interpersonal relationships.[7] Each of those tasks requires adults to provide enough scaffolding for adolescents to reach positive outcomes. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy to recognize that today's youth are living in a systemic abandonment environment.[8] There are two sources of abandonment, external and internal, according to Clark; both contribute to the feeling of abandonment. [9]

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[6] Siegel, *Brainstorm*, 9.

[7] Santrock, *Life-Span Development*, 384-397.

[8] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 28.

[9] Ibid.

As to the adolescent's spiritual formation, the importance of parental influence is central. Parents need to walk on the path of maturity in Christ first in order to be an example to youth. However, the influence of social capital in the church family cannot be ignored. The function of social capital in church can be of enormous help for adolescents in spiritual formation.[10] Since not all teenagers are fortunate enough to have consonant parent-child relationships, adolescents integrating with church adults who sincerely care is the answer.[11]

The second part of this project focuses on becoming mature Christians. Chapter 3 defines authentic discipleship of Christ through four elements: fostering discipleship, contextual authenticity, adopted community, and kingdom witness.[12] To have an effective bridge from faith to life, church adults and Christian parents need to emphasize nurturing beyond conversion. This means adolescents need mature spiritual fathers and mothers to nurture them into the process of maturity (1 Peter 2:2). The life of an authentic disciple of Christ is visible and demonstrates contextual authenticity with a sensitive, nonofficious, nonintrusive, nonobsequious service to others.[13]

Furthermore, Bonhoeffer states that Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.[14] Therefore, genuine support and connection in the family of God evidences

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[10] Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 151.

[11] Dean, Clark, and Rahn, eds., *Starting Right*, 121.

[12] Clark, "Strategic Adoption," class lecture, October 28, 2014.

[13] Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 285.

[14] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 30.

authenticity. However, to minister to this world, Christians need to assert the countercultural nature of Christianity and seek points of contact with unchurched people.[15] Just as Nouwen says, Christians are chosen, blessed, and broken so as to be given.[16]

Chapter 4 focuses on the components and process of spiritual maturity and formation. Bergler believes only people who experience God's transformation in the mind, the feeling, and the will can achieve the competencies of a mature Christian as taught in the New Testament.[17] Nevertheless, spiritual maturity is attainable and is the base camp from which the ascent of the mountain of holiness can begin. Using Willard's practice of spiritual disciplines of abstinence and engagement benefits and balances spiritual life.[18] Genuine spiritual discipline is difficult and costly. As Bonhoeffer says, Christian faith is costly because it costs a person's life, and it is grace because it gives a person the only true life.[19]

Traditionally, churches have youth ministries that run various programs to target adolescents' needs. Those ministry activities somehow seem disconnected from the churches' praxis. Chapter 5 discusses the missional practices and ways to empower the emerging generations. The Great Commission of Jesus in Matthew 28 applies to the

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[15] Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism*, 61-63.

[16] Nouwen, *Life of The Beloved*, 105.

[17] Bergler, *From Here to Maturity*, 54.

[18] Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 158-190.

[19] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 45.

cross-cultural mission field of the emerging postmodern generations.[20] Churches are an extended big family of God: the holistic spirituality of the individual is essential for the spiritual health of the community, and the health of the community is essential for the spiritual wholeness of the individual.[21]

The final part of this project provides practical strategies for churches to implement what has been discussed during previous chapters and to elaborate on the six-course content. Chapter 6 focuses on strategies learned from the early Church. This includes fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer that all took place in a communal setting.[22] By taking Chap Clark's idea of adoptive youth ministry further, churches can organize mentorship programs that build bridges between church adults and adolescents.[23] Moreover, the strategies to find volunteers and the role of mentors are also discussed in the chapter.

The last chapter of this project addresses the six courses in three categories: adolescents' special needs, building relationship, and spiritual formation. There are two courses on adolescents' special needs: youth in crisis and adolescents' developmental needs. Building relationship has two courses: sound communication and positive-discipline guidelines. The last category has two courses on the importance of modeling and social capital in adolescents' spiritual formation. Church adults and parents with

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[20] Mueller, *The Soul of Youth Culture*, 45.

[21] Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 50.

[22] Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 307.

[23] Ibid., 15-20.

proper equipping in both knowledge and in wisdom can better facilitate the growth of

young people into mature faith so that when they are grown they will not turn from it.

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