A Strategic Approach Equipping Parents to Raise Children to Become Healthy Adults by Age Twenty-Five

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A STRATEGIC APPROACH EQUIPPING PARENTS TO RAISE CHILDREN TO BECOME HEALTHY ADULTS BY AGE TWENTY-FIVE

Written by

JAMES KYOOJE LEE

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

Chap Clark

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Date Received: November 1, 2018
A STRATEGIC APPROACH EQUIPPING PARENTS TO RAISE CHILDREN TO BECOME HEALTHY ADULTS BY AGE TWENTY-FIVE

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

JAMES KYOOJE LEE
NOVEMBER 2018
ABSTRACT

A Strategic Approach Equipping Parents to Raise Children to Become Healthy Adults by Age Twenty-Five
James Kyooje Lee
Doctor of Ministry
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
2018

The goal of this final project is to create a parent seminar and strategy that would serve local churches, Christian schools, and families. Over the past few decades, major shifts and changes have taken place in the adolescent journey and the complicated transition into adulthood. Adolescence is starting earlier and ending later. A new demographic called emerging adulthood has developed, finding its way in between adolescence and adulthood. Many parents, schools, and ministries intuitively know growing up today is different but do not necessarily know what is at the root causes of so many changes. The journey of adolescence is further complicated by the systemic abandonment of youth by adults and their agendas.

This final project takes an in-depth look at the reasons why adolescence is taking so much longer. Because adolescence is extended, the natural by-product is the delaying of entering adulthood as defined by traditional markers. Keeping these dynamics in mind, the project not only explains the multitude of reasons behind the rapidly changing landscapes of adolescence and emerging adulthood, it also provides helpful strategies to assist parents, educators, youth pastors, coaches and executives. Adults today need to learn both the new markers of adulthood and the non-traditional order in which these markers are reached.

Ultimately, positive change will come from a true awareness of today’s landscape by an older generation of adults willing to come alongside young people and families. A final goal of this project is to provide a parenting seminar that can assist parents, schools, and churches across the country.

Content Reader: Chap Clark, PhD.

Words: 255
To my wife, Monica. Thank you for joining me on this long, long journey. Words cannot adequately express my gratitude for your love, patience, and tolerance of a messy dining room table of books, articles, and papers. To our children, Karissa, Micah, Merlande, Merline, and Shane. Thanks for letting Dad write, write, and write some more. To my Korean immigrant parents, JongWan and Yungja Lee: thank you for pushing me beyond what I thought was possible. And finally, to all the students and young adults I have worked with for over twenty-five years; thank you for letting me come alongside you during the tricky years of adolescence and emerging adulthood. You have taught me what it means to be a friend, teacher, coach, and pastor.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my former co-worker at Oaks Christian School, Dr. Jason McMaster, for introducing me to the book *Hurt*. Not long after, Dr. Chap Clark and Dr. Mindy Coates-Smith conducted a study of Oaks Christian students. Their study opened my eyes to the increasingly complex journey of adolescence and abandonment. Finally, my sincere thanks go to Shannon Whitehead for stretching my writing capabilities.
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PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

“When, why, and how did parenting and childhood change?”
-Julie Lythcott-Haims, How to Raise an Adult

At a recent dinner with friends, a new life insurance agent asked me what I knew about extended adolescence. When I inquired about his question, he told guests at the dinner table he had just concluded a national sales training program. He was proud of the fact he held a shocking piece of trivia no one at the table could possibly know. In this case, it was the fact that the average age a young person today becomes a full-fledged adult was now thirty years old.

Indeed, the journey from adolescence to adulthood has never been more complicated and lengthy. A recent study on the complicated road to adulthood concluded, “But as the chapters of this book clearly show, the end of adolescence has become a protracted affair. Entry into adulthood has become more ambiguous and generally occurs in a gradual, complex and less uniform fashion.”1 Researchers from a different national study insisted that today’s twentysomethings journey to adulthood is vastly different than the one completed by their parents or grandparents.2 The information for clients about their children’s road to adolescence is critical because they need to know how long their children will need financial assistance or live under their roofs. In fact, the number of “boomerang children” (children who move back in with their parents after receiving a

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2 Mary C. Waters et al., eds., Coming of Age in America: The Transition to Adulthood in the Twenty-First Century (Berkeley: University of California, 2011), 1.
college degree) is rapidly rising. According to the results of a Pew Research study on the living arrangements of 18-34-year-olds in the United States, “In 2014, for the first time in more than 130 years, adults ages 18 to 34 were slightly more likely to be living in their parents’ home than they were to be living with a spouse or partner in their own household.”

Certainly, many dinner table conversations among older Americans would include amazement at the higher age of attaining adulthood today, with past generations proudly boasting how their journeys to adulthood had concluded anywhere from eighteen to twenty-three years old. An extensive study conducted by the MacArthur Foundation found these Baby Boomer dinnertime opinions of the good old days to be accurate:

During its first stage of research, the Network documented that indeed the path into adulthood had not only lengthened but had become less direct. During the post-war years through the mid-1980s, the path into adulthood was quick and direct; by age 25 most young people had accomplished the traditional markers of adulthood. By the late 1990s, however, the path was neither direct nor fast. In the matter of just a few decades, “adulthood” was now delayed until about age 30 or 35. Notably, as the march into adulthood slowed and as traditional institutions such as the workplace were slow to adapt, parental support, both financial and emotional, began to extend well into their children’s mid-to late twenties.

Legitimate debate exists regarding what it means to be an adult in our culture today. According to the MacArthur study, for decades scholars listed these five accomplishments as signs of entering adulthood: finishing school, leaving home,

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beginning a career, marrying, and becoming a parent. Interestingly, today’s markers for adulthood have changed. At the 2017 Q Conference in Nashville, Tennessee, Barna Research Group President David Kinnaman explained, “What are the top goals of Twentysomethings today? 59 percent said financial independence. 52 percent want to finish their education. 51 percent mentioned the goal of starting their career. 40 percent desire to answer the question, ‘Who am I?’ And 31 percent want to be able to follow their dreams.” Conspicuously absent from these goals is the mention of marriage or having children. Settersten, Furtstenberg, and Rumbaut addressed this philosophical shift by saying, “At what point in life does a young person become an adult? Prior research on ‘emerging adulthood’ suggests that contemporary American youth now rely on individualistic criteria (i.e., indicators of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral maturity) to the exclusion of demographic transition markers.” In other words, multiple cultural forces currently work against an individual becoming an adult by age twenty-five, according to traditional markers. Even so, a twenty-five-year-old can demonstrate adult proficiencies without owing a home, being married, or starting a family. As Settersten, Furtstenberg, and Rumbaut confirm, “Young people do not necessarily follow a normative route of completing their education, going to work, establishing independent residencies, marriage and then childbearing in the context of marriage.”

5 Settersten, Jr., Furstenberg Jr., and Rumbaut, Frontier of Adulthood, 225.
7 Settersten, Jr., Furstenberg Jr., and Rumbaut, Frontier of Adulthood, 249.
8 Settersten, Jr., Furstenberg Jr., and Rumbaut, Frontier of Adulthood, 314.
Leaders from virtually every professional field ranging from education to medicine, finance, or sports now know it is taking longer for adolescents to become adults in the United States. Recent research by a pair of educators arrived at this conclusion:

Our research documents that many emerging adults are adrift, but so too are the societal institutions designed to support and guide their development, including the colleges and universities they attend. The graduates we studied uniformly had developed confidence and optimism in their future. What was often missing, however, was a sense of what it took to realize their goals, as well as the skills necessary for such achievement.⁹

While the causes of a delay into adulthood have been vigorously debated, research is gradually emerging to accurately identify some of the major contributors to American youths’ lengthened transition into adulthood. Many older adults hastily conclude millennials are simply spoiled, entitled, and lack commitment; a 2014 national survey revealed that 65 percent of Americans view millennials as being entitled, with 58 percent of millennials agreeing.¹⁰ With this apparent consensus, it is rare for older generations to ask hard questions about the causes for extended adolescence, and rarer for them to consider that they may bear some of the responsibility for the mindset of today’s youth in a world vastly different from when they were transitioning to adulthood.

In the midst of this culture of extended adolescence, it is helpful to ask what it is really like to be a teenager in America today. Older adults can benefit from trying to

⁹ Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, Aspiring Adults Adrift (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 133.

understand why today’s transition from adolescence to adulthood is so extended. Once this foundational question is better understood, older generations can move on to discovering the most effective ways of supporting young adults. Parents of elementary children can start early to train their children to have a better chance of growing up and assuming new markers for adulthood without significant delays well into their thirties.

This final project is dedicated to helping educate older generations while also placing considerable responsibility on them in order for adolescents to make successful transitions into the adult world. Chapter one will discuss the history of adolescence, today’s extended adolescence, and the birth of a new stage in life, emerging adulthood. Chapter two will look at the context and setting of an affluent private Christian college preparatory school called Oaks Christian School (OCS) in Westlake Village, California, and discuss whether it is an indication of the lives of affluent children in general. Chapter three will provide literary reviews for four books that deal with adolescent development, abandonment, extended adolescence, and emerging adulthood. Chapter four will take an extensive look at the ultimate goal of any youth ministry and ask what exactly the Bible and theology teach us about adoption, God’s kingdom, and healthy adolescent development. Finally, chapter five will reveal a new parent seminar for churches and schools specifically geared toward the successful transition of adolescence to adulthood by the age of twenty-five.
CHAPTER 1
THE LONG JOURNEY TO ADULTHOOD

The adolescent journey today in the United States is obviously different than in previous decades, and experts have sought to discover some of the root causes of these changes. Dr. Chap Clark defines adolescence this way: “Adolescence, then, is a psychosocial, independent search for a unique identity or separateness, with the end goals being a certain knowledge of who one is in relation to others, a willingness to take responsibility for who one is becoming, and a realized commitment to live with others in community.”¹ Hans Sebald describes adolescence by explaining, “The word ‘adolescence’ is derived from the Latin adolescere which means ‘to grow into maturity.’ Since reference to growth is nonspecific and could apply to physiological, psychological, or social growth, it is helpful to agree on a more specific meaning. Adolescence in the sociological sense refers to the experience of passing through a phase that lies between childhood and adulthood.”²


John W. Santrock points out adolescence starts with biology (puberty) and ends with culture.\(^3\) He asserts, “Within the sociohistorical context in mind, we define adolescence as the period of transition between childhood and adulthood that involves biological, cognitive, and socioemotional changes. A key task of adolescence is preparation for adulthood.”\(^4\) Adolescence starts with biological realities such as menarche among girls and the ability to ejaculate among boys. For the sake of context, it is worth noting the beginning of adolescence in the United States is not celebrated or formally recognized as in other cultures, which automatically puts children at a disadvantage. Instead, it is a silent journey into a long phase of life. Santrock contrasts the modern American way with that of another culture: “The Apache Native Americans of the American Southwest celebrate a girl’s entrance into puberty with a four-day ritual that includes special dress, daylong activities, and solemn spiritual ceremonies.”\(^5\) Although adolescence begins with biology, individual cultures determine when adolescents enter into adulthood, based upon a number of factors.

**Adolescence Throughout History**

It must be understood that for centuries, adolescence has existed in some form or fashion. The Western traditional definition of adolescence first arrived in the American landscape in the early twentieth century when Stanley G. Hall published his two-volume


\(^4\) Ibid., 16-17.

\(^5\) Ibid., 435
set called *Adolescence*. One school of thought is that adolescence did not exist at all in the Middle Ages. As Sebald asserts, “Prior to and throughout the Middle Ages, children passed directly into the adult world between five and seven. The ‘younger generation’ was hardly a recognizable concept.” Sebald adds that even medieval artists did not consider portraying children as distinct from adults: “Medieval artists appeared to be ignorant of what children even looked like, habitually portraying them as small adults. One twentieth-century painting illustrating Jesus’ injunction to ‘suffer the little children to come unto me’ shows Christ surrounded by a dozen undersized men.”

A radical second school of thought has recently emerged from author Crystal Kirgiss as she has impressively revealed that the Middle Ages and earlier were full of references of young people not quite children and not quite adults. She defines adolescence as “the stage of life following childhood and preceding adulthood, when a person is not still a child but not yet an adult.” By looking at the writings of dozens of authors including Aristotle and Ptolemy, Kirgiss cleverly reveals the life stage of adolescence has been a reality for centuries uncovering descriptions of youth such as “strong sensual passions” or “lacking discipline.” When Hall coined the term adolescence in America in the early twentieth century, the transitory phase was quite

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6 Ibid., 6.


8 Ibid.


short in duration. By the time an adolescent was sixteen or seventeen years old, he or she was expected to enter into the adult world, discover an occupation, get married, and start a family.

Van Gennep discusses how girls in Rome and Paris started puberty at a range of fourteen to fifteen years old. Girls in Rome could be married at age twelve and in Paris, age fifteen.\(^\text{11}\) At the beginning of the twentieth century, adolescence started at around fourteen to fifteen years old (the beginning of puberty) and ended at around age sixteen. Thus, adolescence lasted only one to two years. It was not yet required in the United States for children to be enrolled in secondary school, so children learned trade skills and practiced apprenticeships, quickly moving into adulthood as they learned lifelong skills and trades. But as the century passed, the time frame for adolescence failed to remain stable. It kept increasing. Not only was puberty starting earlier, but society was extending the length of adolescence due to industrialization.

By 1980, the age of puberty had dropped to under thirteen years old.\(^\text{12}\) Within seventy-five years the length of adolescence had increased from one to two years to five or six years. But in 2007, the average age of puberty declined to age thirteen.\(^\text{13}\) Instead of becoming adults at eighteen or nineteen, adolescence was now extended to people in their


mid-twenties, encompassing a span of twelve to thirteen years.\textsuperscript{14} According to Kirgiss, this is not anything new compared to the Middle Ages where adolescence could last to age twenty-eight.\textsuperscript{15} Today’s adolescent journey can be divided into two phases: early adolescence and midadolescence followed by a relatively new life stage called emerging adulthood. Clark argues that early adolescence begins from eleven to twelve years old and ends at fourteen to fifteen and midadolescence starts at fourteen to fifteen years old and ends at nineteen to twenty-one.\textsuperscript{16}

**Navigating the Tightrope: The Stages of Adolescence**

Clark’s tightrope illustration serves as a model of what adolescence looks like in today’s chaotic world.\textsuperscript{17} He describes two poles separated by a long tightrope. The left pole represents childhood, the tightrope represents the adolescent journey, and the right pole represents adulthood, the ultimate goal. The left pole is thick, strong, and firmly planted into a strong foundation, reflecting the care and nurture of children within society. However, due to the rapid expansion of social media, even childhood is no longer immune to sinister adult agendas.

\textsuperscript{14} Chap Clark and Dee Clark, *Disconnected: Parenting Teens in a MySpace World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 63.

\textsuperscript{15} Kirgiss, *In Search of Adolescence*, Kindle: Location 631.

\textsuperscript{16} Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 156.

\textsuperscript{17} Kendra Creasy Dean, Chap Clark, and Dave Rahn, eds., *Starting Right* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 50.
One study, for example, showed the average age of exposure to pornography is anywhere from eight to eleven years old.\textsuperscript{18} Lest we blame all loss of innocence on the internet, Sebald points out children have been exposed to more and more at earlier ages long before the rise of social media, writing “. . . the lifestyle of the young adolescent is becoming increasingly similar to that of the older boy and girl; everything that is typical for the middle adolescent is happening at a younger and younger age. This shift occurred quite dramatically in the sixties.”\textsuperscript{19}

To distinguish the characteristics of childhood and adolescence, Clark describes the childhood journey this way: “A child climbs this pole holding fast to the relationships and context of the family, relying on the family system to provide protection, security, and a sense of place. Throughout the first ten or eleven years of life, a child’s sense of self is grounded in familial relationships.”\textsuperscript{20} He emphasizes the importance of a child’s relationship with his or her family during this time span, explaining that “this phase necessitates a child experiencing the comfort of a committed and nurturing presence, a supportive environment where a child is encouraged to explore and to experiment, and a relational setting where appropriate independence is encouraged.”\textsuperscript{21}


\textsuperscript{19} Sebald, \textit{Adolescence}, 192.

\textsuperscript{20} Dean, Clark, and Rahn, eds., \textit{Starting Right}, 50.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
Unfortunately, the presence of a family to nurture and raise a child is no longer a given. More children than ever before in the history of the United States will spend part of their childhood in single-parent homes. In 2013, the Pew Research Center reported this alarming statistic: “Fewer than half (46 percent) of U.S. kids younger than 18 years of age are living in a home with two married heterosexual parents in their first marriage. This is a marked change from 1960, when 73 percent of children fit this description, and 1980, when 61 percent did . . .”\textsuperscript{22} To further parse the data, 34 percent of children are living with an unmarried parent, 4 percent are living with two cohabitating parents, 5 percent are living with grandparents, and 41 percent of births in the U.S. are now out-of-wedlock.\textsuperscript{23} As Santrock describes the increasingly complex nature of the adolescent journey, “In many ways, today’s adolescents inhabit an environment that is less stable than that of adolescents several decades ago. High divorce rates, high adolescent pregnancy rates, and increased geographic mobility of families contribute to the lack of stability. The rate of adolescent drug use in the United States is the highest in the industrialized world.”\textsuperscript{24}

Early Adolescence

With these statistics, American society is left to wonder how many of its children are truly ready for the transition to the tightrope walk of adolescence. As soon as puberty


\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{24} Santrock, Adolescence, 11.
begins, the former child starts to transition from the thick pole to the tightrope of adolescence and into the first stage of adolescence, early adolescence. Perhaps it is symbolic, but the first step on a tightrope is always wobbly and requires adjustments and balance.

Early adolescence starts at puberty and ends at around age fourteen or fifteen. Clark describes the stage this way: “An early adolescent is still far more child than adult. As a newcomer to individuation, the early adolescent is more concerned with issues of safety, support, stability, and ‘feel’ than about leaving parents behind in the search for meaningful peer friendships.” In other words, the connection with the family is critical even though the early adolescent shows signs of independence as well as carrying around a body that resembles an adult much more than a child. As he or she begins the process of answering a question of identity, early adolescents will try on different identities while remaining close to the family. Clark suggests this is why a young adolescent may be happy-go-lucky one day, pensive the next day, and moody the following week.

A particularly challenging aspect of the early adolescent years is the intimidating entrance into a new institution called middle school. If an early adolescent has a need for safety, support and stability, middle school can be a daunting institution to plant those strong and deep columns. Giving credence to the tension of middle school years, a recent

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25 Ibid., 53.

26 Dean, Clark, and Rahn, eds., Starting Right, 56.
study at Arizona State University revealed mothers of middle school students were more depressed and stressed than mothers of infants and adults.\textsuperscript{27}

In addition to the social and emotional challenges of early adolescence, the rapid rate of physical growth and development is remarkable compared to any other stage of a person’s life.\textsuperscript{28} This phenomenon is witnessed daily by teachers of middle schoolers, who helm classes of students whose outward physical appearance ranges from that of fourth graders to high school students.

\textbf{Midadolescence}

The next stage of adolescence is midadolescence, consisting of ages fourteen to fifteen through nineteen to twenty-one. Clark writes, “The most significant change you will notice [during this stage] is the shift from a concrete consciousness of the world around them to a more nuanced abstract awareness.”\textsuperscript{29} According to Halpern, Heckman, and Larson, midadolescence is when youths “become able to engage in multi-level thinking: they can differentiate evidence from fact, analyze experience, and consider the role of multiple causal factors. In middle adolescence young people become better able to


29 Clark and Clark, \textit{Disconnected}, 133.}
keep mixed emotions in mind and cope with seeming contradictions.”

This growth happens due to a shift in the brain that now allows the midadolescent to think in abstract terms for the very first time.

As a result of this new capacity to think, midadolescents can be particularly cynical on authority and the systems and structures within the control of adults. Perhaps this is a reason midadolescents become experts at arguing. As Levine comments, “Teenagers love to argue, and for good reason. It gives them multiple opportunities to sharpen their maturing cognitive skills. Give teens half a reason (or no reason at all) and they’re ready to engage in verbal battle.” Elkind adds insight on this occasional frustrating new ability, “Indeed, parents of teenagers often say to me, ‘But he (or she) is arguing for the sake of arguing.’ I tell them that they are entirely correct—that is just what the teenager is doing! It is not just the wish (to go out on a weeknight) that prompts teenagers to challenge their parents, but the need to argue for the sake of practicing these confrontational skills.”

On a different note, while some parents are caught up in constant arguments and debates, other so-called helicopter parents make the mistake of believing that when it

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31 Clark and Clark, Disconnected, 133.


33 David Elkind, All Grown Up and No Place to Go: Teenagers in Crisis (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 199, 38.
comes to school, their children are never wrong. This view produces the type of student who is ready at a second’s notice to argue with a teacher over a grade, debate with a dean over an earned detention, or battle a coach regarding a lack of playing time. When the student does not get what he or she wants, it prompts a call or text message to mom or dad, followed by a parental angry email to the head of school or principal advocating for their child. Of course, parents have no idea how harmful this is to the long-term development of their daughter or son.

Research has shown the negative effects of the helicopter parent beyond midadolescence:

The clearest difference between parental involvement and over-parenting were the results related to self-efficacy. Exploratory analyses revealed that parental involvement was positively related to students’ social self-efficacy but over-parenting was negatively related to students’ social self-efficacy and general self-efficacy. While parental involvement might be the extra boost that students need to build their own confidence and abilities, over-parenting appears to do the converse in creating a sense that one cannot accomplish things socially or in general on one’s own.34

A former Stanford dean when discouraging helicopter parents wrote, “Our job as a parent is to put ourselves out of a job.”35

Another extremely important marker when discussing midadolescence is their growing awareness of a phenomenon called abandonment. Abandonment is a post-


modern reality that refers to traditional society’s institutions and organizations once
dedicated to the development of children being hijacked by unhealthy adult agendas.
Clark describes it this way: “But as society in general moved from being a relatively
stable and cohesive adult community intent on caring for the needs of the young to a free-
for-all of independent and fragmented adults seeking their own survival, individual
adolescents found themselves in a deepening hole of systemic rejection.”36 In other
words, activities originally created for the welfare of children have been overtaken by
adults in order to meet their needs, even though parents may think they have their child’s
best interests in mind.

Youth sports serve as a painful example. While youth soccer was originally
created for children to have fun and learn the game, children are now playing two or three
games each weekend in a different city because the child is playing in a school league as
well as a travel league. The system is set up in such a way where parents are led to
believe this is what they must do in order for their child to have an opportunity of a
college athletic scholarship. One study, however, showed the more parents pay for sports
and instruction, the less children enjoy it.37 Even so, individual sports instruction has
become a big business. One newspaper reporter comments, “With the monetary value of
a scholarship on the rise with the soaring cost of higher education, some parents have
invested in personal coaches to provide that guidance. The private coaching industry

36 Clark, Hurt 2.0, 15.

37 Bob Cook, “Kids Feel Pressure When Parents Spend a lot on Sports,” Forbes Magazine, April
kids-feel-pressure-when-parents-spend-a-lot-on-sports/#7478d412131a.
boom has opened the door for those parents, which has in turn provided full-time careers for thousands. For some, the business has become quite lucrative.”

Children may not use the exact word abandonment to describe their situation or even know what it means, but as they begin to think abstractly, they start to see the unexplainable contradictions in life and how daunting the tightrope walk of adolescence is. They realize that although childhood is long gone, they are miles and miles away from being an adult. Their bodies are changing and the pressures to perform increase, but they do not yet have true independence or even the life skills for independence. Clark explains, “They know that their lives are filled with wild, unbridled, and often unexplainable contradictions, yet they can’t see a way out of the dark cave that they are in. This is the essence of midadolescence.”

During midadolescence, teenagers continue to pull away from the family to find their own identity and independence. Even though they may pull away, they still want their family to be available and close by. A good illustration of this is of a toddler at a park with dad close behind. The toddler is interested in exploring and does not want Dad to hold her hand, but as she proceeds in her exploration of the park, she frequently looks behind to make sure Dad is within reach in case something goes awry. Midadolescents are like the toddler in the park.


39 Clark and Clark, Disconnected, 140.
Clark characterizes a midadolescent this way: “Middle adolescents sense a need to be on their own, to discover who they are in relation to the world (i.e. peers), and to take responsibility for their own life.”\(^{40}\) Because the midadolescent seems to be pulling away from the family, this phase of adolescence can be the most volatile between the parent and child. This is particularly difficult for moms who wonder where their little boy or girl went. This is when the father is especially important because the father/child relationship already has some dynamics of independence woven into the relationship.

Dr. Meg Meeker reminds parents with adolescent children, “Most parents pull away from their teenage daughters, assuming they need more space and freedom. Actually, your teenage daughter needs you more than ever. So stick with her. If you don’t she’ll wonder why you left her.”\(^{41}\) In the popular parenting book *Sticky Faith*, Powell shares a story about a rough seventeen-year-old female student named Jin. She had decided to go on a mission trip with her school and was assigned a seat next to the campus pastor on the airplane. During the flight, Jin confessed she told her dad to stay out of her life and give her space. The dad, perhaps not knowing how to fight for his daughter, gave her exactly what she asked for. She finally admitted what she secretly desired was for her dad to do the exact opposite and fight for her.\(^{42}\) To further illustrate the attempt to create independence and space, Blos asserts, “Their shifting and

\(^{40}\) Ibid.


experimental nature is a sign that character has not yet formed, but it also indicates that social adaptation has transcended the confines of the family, its milieu and tradition.\textsuperscript{43}

According to Clark, the defining characteristic of the midadolescent is what he calls egocentric abstraction. To adults, it may come across as narcissism. Clark describes it this way:

The pain is so raw, the daunting nature of the lengthy task before them so discouraging, and the intense sense of aloofness and vulnerability so palpable that they only way a midadolescent can deal with their life experience so far is through egocentric abstraction. To be blunt, a midadolescent is somewhat aware that their life impacts others even as others impact them, but they do not have the resources or energy to care.\textsuperscript{44}

Santrock adds, “Adolescent egocentrism is the heightened self-consciousness of adolescents, which is reflected in their sense of personal uniqueness and invulnerability.”\textsuperscript{45} Midadolescence is an unstable section of the tightrope journey of adolescence where the child cannot necessarily see the safety net of parents, church, or other invested adults.

\textbf{Late Adolescence Is Now Emerging Adulthood}

The final stage of adolescence has taken on a new name: emerging adulthood. It is simply the end of the tightrope and can sometimes be the trickiest aspect of the journey. As Clark emphasizes, “An older adolescent (usually late teens to middle 20s or later) is


\textsuperscript{44} Clark and Clark, \textit{Disconnected}, 138

\textsuperscript{45} Santrock, \textit{Adolescence}, 124.
potentially ready to enter adulthood, but almost always still needs to be taught, led and
couraged to make the final leap into an adult role as a capable, responsible, and
interdependent person in the community." One great point of debate is why adolescents
have such difficulty transitioning into adulthood and making it to the second pole. Clark
argues systemic and environmental factors are at work preventing them from fully
entering the adult world:

Older adolescents stand on the threshold of making their mark on society and
community but are often held back by systemic and environmental factors –
parents who empower sloth and financial dependency, an educational system that
treats the undergraduate curriculum as barely adequate preparation for graduate
school, and media and advertising industries that make a far larger profit by
appealing to the young to stay young (and the old to fight aging), to name but a
few.  

Because of the effect of modern society on adolescents’ development, a new stage
has been added in the journey toward adulthood. University professor Jeffrey Arnett
christens this new stage as emerging adulthood. He contends,

My own research over the past decade has focused on development among young
people from their late teens through their mid-twenties in the United States and
Europe. I have concluded, on the basis of this research, that this period is not
really adolescence, but it is not really adulthood either, not even “young
adulthood.” In my view, the transition to adulthood has become so prolonged that
it constitutes a separate period of life course in industrialized societies, lasting
about as long as adolescence. This view is now widely held by other scholars as
well.  

Even adolescent expert John W. Santrock has acknowledged the existence of this new

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46 Dean, Clark, and Rahn, eds., 57.

47 Ibid.

(Boston: Prentice Hall, 2010), xii.
stage, saying

Recently, the transition from adolescence to adulthood has been referred to as emerging adulthood, approximately 18 to 25 years of age. Experimentation and exploration characterize the emerging adulthood. At this point in their development, many individuals are still exploring which career path they want to follow, what they want their identity to be, and which lifestyle they want to adopt (for example, single, cohabitating, or married).49

While the threshold from adolescence to emerging adulthood is somewhat blurry, there is no question young people are putting off long-term careers, marriage, children, and home ownership.

**Five Features of Emerging Adults**

Arnett and Fishel published a book for parents of emerging adults, insisting this stage in life is a time of identity explorations, instability, and self-focus, and one where emerging adults experience both a feeling of being in-between and a sense of possibilities.50 The first characteristic of emerging adulthood, what Arnett and Fishel call identity explorations, centers around the question, “Who am I?”51 Echoing traits of adolescence, this characteristic involves young adults taking advantage of the time to figure out what their life goals are regarding career and relationships. Strangely, it seems almost impossible for young adults to explore their identity while also holding down a steady full-time job.

49 Santrock, Adolescence, 19.


The second trait of emerging adulthood is a season of instability. While Arnett and Fishel recognize emerging adults demonstrate a great amount of instability and can change jobs or romances frequently, they also report the thirties are almost always more stable than the twenties.\textsuperscript{52} The third characteristic of emerging adulthood is an intense self-focus. Though often interpreted as selfishness, Arnett and Fishel insist, “It’s all part of learning to stand alone as a self-sufficient person—an important goal.”\textsuperscript{53}

The fourth characteristic of emerging adulthood, feeling somehow stuck in-between, again hearkens back to adolescence, while the final feature of emerging adulthood is more positive: the sense of possibilities one experiences when opportunity merges with optimism and idealism.\textsuperscript{54} It is helpful for both emerging adults and their parents to recognize that, similar to adolescence, emerging adulthood can be a time of conflicting emotions and inconsistent progress.

**Possible Reasons for Emerging Adulthood Stage**

Researchers have sought to understand why the journey to the other pole called adulthood is getting longer. One answer stems from major shifts occurring in the nation’s economy, which have caused young people have to attain more and more education. As

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{55} Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 15.
Arnett notes, “The economic institutions shaping our daily lives have also been transformed in basic ways. Our economy has shifted from an agricultural base to a manufacturing base and, then, to a service base.”\textsuperscript{55} The following statistics illustrate the seismic change that occurred during the twentieth century: In 1900, 41 percent of sixteen-year-old men and 46 percent of sixteen-year-old women attended school, lived in their parents’ home, and remained single and childless. In 1940, these percentages grew to 70 percent, and by 2000, they reached 90 percent.\textsuperscript{56} Once it was common for a high school education to be sufficient in order to find a decent paying job, get married, and start a family. However, in today’s information economy that has created global markets and economies, college and advanced degrees are more necessary than ever.

Setterson, Furstenberg, and Rumbaut note, “Education and training are more valuable than ever before because jobs are less permanent and work careers have become more fluid. The demand for education and training has increased relentlessly during the past four decades, as have the economic returns to education.”\textsuperscript{57} The authors ultimately conclude that education has extended into the late twenties and early thirties for a large portion of the population.

If millions of young Americans are indeed pursuing degrees beyond high school, a domino effect begins. Because college tuition is at an all-time high in the United States, graduates are finishing school with more debt than ever. A recent Pew Research center

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 15-16.

\textsuperscript{57} Settersten, Jr., Furstenberg Jr., and Rumbaut, Frontier of Adulthood, 39.
study reveals the reality of post-college sticker shock: “The new generation of college graduates also have their own economic burdens. They are entering adulthood with record levels of student debt: Two-thirds of recent bachelor’s degree recipients have outstanding student loans, with an average debt of about $27,000.”

To further exacerbate the plight of millennials, the jobs they are getting out of college pay 20 percent less than the jobs their parents secured when they finished college. Taylor of the Pew Research Center explains why:

Their difficult economic circumstances in part reflect the impact of the Great Recession (2007-2009) and in part the longer-term effects of globalization and rapid technological change on the American workforce. Median household income in the U.S. today remains below its 1999 peak, the longest stretch of stagnation in the modern era, and during that time income and wealth gaps have widened.

It seems logical if young people in America are staying in school longer, finishing college with more debt, and obtaining lower paying jobs, marriage may naturally be delayed. Pew concurs with this theory in its summary the current state of marriage:

The economic hardships of young adults may be one reason that so many have been slow to marry. The median age at first marriage is now the highest in modern history—29 for men and 27 for women. In contrast to the patterns of the past, when adults in all socio-economic groups married at roughly the same rate,

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marriage today is more prevalent among those with higher incomes and more education.61

One expert adds to this analysis by claiming if indeed people are waiting longer to get married, it also follows they are waiting longer to have children and are having fewer children than previous generations.62 In 2016, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported the mean age of women having their first child was a record high of 26.4 years old. The average age in 2000 was 25.63 By starting to give birth at a later age, women are having fewer children even as the chance for birth defects increases.64 Interestingly, these reports say nothing about millennials being soft, spoiled, entitled, or lazy. They simply have different economic realities than their parents or grandparents.

A national study on delaying adulthood according to traditional markers describes millennials’ situation this way:

An optimistic interpretation of our findings is that young adults have postponed the formation of independent households because they are accumulating more education than earlier generations did. By spending more time in school, they are delaying financial independence and temporarily giving up labor income, but they are improving their capacity to earn good wages in the future.65

61 Ibid.


64 Ibid.

Focusing on the cost of living and living arrangements in young adults, the authors of the study argue this trend of delaying traditional adulthood may be a lengthy one, explaining that between 1970 and 2000, “dramatically fewer adults lived independently, with more living with parents, in economic arrangements with others of their generation, or in other arrangements. The differences across decade are most dramatic in the mid-twenties, but even at older ages the percentage living independently has declined.”

The stage in life called adolescence has changed over the past 110 years and continues to evolve at an alarming rate. What has not changed is this: a child cannot become an adult until he or she has walked the tightrope of adolescence and been welcomed into the adult world by adults. Research has shown adolescence is taking longer, so much so that a new stage before full-fledged adulthood exists called emerging adulthood. Indeed, the road from adolescence to adulthood is longer than ever before and looks to remain that way.

66 Ibid., 186.
CHAPTER 2
EXTENDED ADOLESCENCE AT OAKS CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Oaks Christian School is located in Westlake Village, California, and was founded by David Price and Dallas Price Van Breda in the fall of 2000. It is an elite, private, college preparatory Christian school and was birthed with the construction of a new campus at the cost of over $40 million. Rarely has a school started with so much financial backing by such dedicated, generous founders. The campus sits in the affluent and paparazzi-rich Conejo Valley where successful celebrity actors, musicians, and athletes reside. With its close proximity to Hollywood studios, Beverly Hills entertainment law firms, and LAX, the Conejo Valley allows a high quality suburban life away from the rush of Los Angeles traffic and smog. Some of the celebrities who have been involved in past school symposiums include Will Smith, Sean Astin, Jane Seymour, Zanto Peabody, “State-of-the-Art Christian School Swings into Action,” *The Los Angeles Times*, August 28, 2000, accessed May 16, 2017, http://articles.latimes.com/2000/aug/28/local/me-11505.

Wayne Gretzky, Joe Montana, and former vice chairman of the Twentieth Century Fox Film Group, Hutch Parker.³

In the summer of 2006, Dr. Jason McMaster, Oaks Christian School’s middle school spiritual life director approached the spiritual life director of the high school. He highly recommended the purchase of a new book called *Hurt: Inside the World of Today’s Teenagers* for the entire high school and middle school faculty. Knowing that getting an entire faculty to read a book would be nearly impossible, the high school spiritual life director decided to read the book first. After reading *Hurt*, he was convinced the faculties of both schools would be better equipped as educators and spiritual mentors if they read the book. The book was received by the faculty with mixed reviews. While some embraced its thesis of systemic abandonment, others viewed adolescence as a universal painful journey that has not changed much in principle over recent decades. This dissonance is what the author of *Hurt*, Dr. Chap Clark, describes in the preface of his book: “Adolescence is a hard thing to describe. It is even harder to define. For the vast majority of adults, it is hard to understand. Most of us want to take the easy route of claiming that it hasn’t changed since we were in high school.”⁴

**Clark and Coates Smith Study**

Acknowledging its student population was not immune from the complexities of adolescence, the school administration decided to invite Clark to address the faculty and to lead a thorough study on OCS upper high school students. This request was debated

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because some faculty members did not believe in the concept of abandonment, often viewing today’s adolescents as being more resourced and entitled than any previous generation in the United States.

Interestingly, that opinion of millennials is not limited to the United States, according to this quote from a recent article from the United Kingdom: “Indeed, increasing numbers of bosses claim ‘Millennials’ are a nightmare to employ, with 63 percent reporting that 20-somethings and those in their early 30s require more guidance than any other age group, as well as displaying a ‘strong sense of entitlement’ and poor ‘decision-making skills’.”\(^5\) The idea behind Clark’s study was to interview two groups composed of about fifteen high school students, interview faculty, analyze the responses, determine if Oaks students were experiencing abandonment as described in Hurt, and finally, to make recommendations to the school regarding the spiritual formation of students.

The study eventually led to a Doctor of Ministry final project by Dr. Mindy Coates Smith, who was working at the time as a youth pastor at Bel Air Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles and served as the transcriber for Dr. Clark in both Oaks Christian focus groups. Not surprisingly, the final project revealed the majority of Oaks Christian students interviewed in the focus groups were experiencing firsthand the trials and tribulations of adolescence as described in Clark’s book and that they were not immune

The faculty did not all receive Dr. Clark’s report in agreement. Instead, there was a major attitude of denial. Dr. Clark and Dr. Coates Smith had to soften the language; otherwise, Oaks administrators argued the report would not be believable. Teachers felt strongly that the method Clark and Coates Smith used contained false narratives as a result of sloppy qualitative research, even though Clark especially understood and avoided this in his original study in writing *Hurt*.8

When Clark and Coates Smith conducted their focus groups in 2008, the school was still in its infancy and had graduated only five senior classes. The student population was around 1,000 students with a tuition price tag of just over $21,000. Seventeen years later, Oaks Christian School boasts just over 1350 students but with a bit of sticker shock. The annual tuition for the 2017-18 academic year will exceed $30,000, not including school uniforms and textbooks.9

Since the Clark focus groups, the school in 2009 added a new middle school building adjacent to the high school as well as an additional facility that houses an online school and a top-notch tutoring program called the Oaks Learning Center.10 Families can

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7 Jason McMaster, Telephone Interview with James Lee, Westlake Village, May 20, 2017.


easily spend three to five thousand dollars on top of the tuition for tutoring.\textsuperscript{11} The seventeen-year-old campus now consists of a high school, a middle school, four athletic fields, an Olympic-size pool (the 2008 Olympic men’s water polo team trained there under head coach Terry Schroeder, an Oaks Christian parent), a performing arts center, a gymnasium and tutoring center.\textsuperscript{12}

By any standards, the campus is simply impressive. A favorite saying of the staff is, “I may work here, but my high school was not anything like this.” Another saying regarding admissions season is, “If we can just get a family to set foot on the campus, they will want to come here.” As impressive as the campus is, and perhaps even because of it, OCS students still face enormous pressures to succeed.

When David Price and Dallas Price Van Breda founded the school, however, they never intended the school to be a place where students felt prone to depression, anxiety, or self-harm. Their intentions in founding Oaks Christian School were honorable: to build a private Christian school that would form the brightest academic minds, perform at high levels in athletics, and have an excellent arts program that would reflect the creativity of an infinite God. As stated in the history portion of the school website, “The history of Oaks Christian School begins with the generosity of David Price and Dallas Price Van Breda. Their vision was to create a Christian high school of the highest caliber in the

\textsuperscript{11} McMaster, Telephone Interview, May 11, 2017.
West Los Angeles area.” They both were founding members of the board, and David started as the school’s first chairman of the board of directors.

Findings of the Focus Groups

In Clark and Coates Smith’s four meetings with focus groups, one involved a group of high school seniors, one involved a group of high school juniors, and the final two groups were composed of faculty members. In Coates Smith’s Doctor of Ministry final project, she reported their findings. First of all, OCS is not immune from the effects of abandonment. Students consistently reported of immense stress and pressure to perform. Even if an OCS student received 50 percent in financial aid, it still meant their parents needed to pay almost $1000 each month, pre-tax dollars. Students understood parents were making tremendous sacrifices in order for them to attend a private, college-preparatory high school and often placed pressure upon themselves to excel in a very difficult academic setting.

This finding is consistent with children from affluent families outside of Oaks Christian. In many cases, parents are living out their unfulfilled dreams through their children, especially in the area of sports. A recent study confirmed this phenomenon with parents. Coates Smith points out one student felt the pressure to conform to a certain


“image” of a Christian school student: “Every student here knows you have to keep an image, to be Christian enough to go to Oaks, to make sure you promote the Christian image.”17 Another student confirmed the ongoing pressure to conform to the high expectations of a high-profile private, Christian high school: “I feel like I am dying, drowning in work and stress.”18

At the same time, there was always a minority contingency of students that were high performers and welcomed the pressure. One student admitted, “I like the pressure because it pushes you to do well.”19 What exactly entailed the OCS image was not specifically mentioned, but it could possibly be students feel the need to speak and act one way in front of adults and can only be who they really are in front of their peers.

This pressure to carry around multiple personalities can be exhausting to students and is consistent with other adolescent development literature. In Denise Clark Pope’s book, Doing School: How We Are Creating a Generation of Stressed Out, Materialistic, and Miseducated Students, she points out how students at a local high school must adapt to each specific class they attend, writing, “Like chameleons who use dramatic color changes to camouflage themselves in order to stay alive, the successful students at Faircrest exhibited vastly different behaviors from class to class in order to meet the diverse expectations of their teachers.”20 Clark Pope continues,


18 Ibid., 46.

19 Ibid.

The quality of adaptability, to change one’s “colors” to please various teachers, served the students well. Not only did they learn to provide general depictions of success, such as raising their hands even when they did not know the answers, many of the students learned to read and provide particular depictions for each of their classroom teachers. Figuring out how to “play the game” effectively in high school is difficult in and of itself, but figuring out six or seven different games, and then adapting classroom behaviors to play them all well, is extremely challenging.\(^\text{21}\)

Susan Harter of The University of Denver also acknowledges the challenges of teens living out multiple selves when she writes,

> Our own research has revealed that proliferation of selves during adolescence does engender problematic and soul-searching questions about which is the “real me,” particularly when attributes in different roles appear contradictory (e.g., cheerful with friends but depressed with parents). During our multiple-selves procedure, a number of adolescents has spontaneously agonized over which of the contradictory self-characteristics represented their “true” self.\(^\text{22}\)

The point is that children cannot keep up this juggling act of playing multiple selves through adolescence. It eventually catches up with them and they find themselves exhausted and confused. At a Christian school, the truth of students’ real identity is often revealed when they graduate from high school, go to college, and dispose of their Christian faith during their freshmen year. *Sticky Faith* authors Kara Powell and Chap Clark estimate that 40 to 50 percent of students who graduate from a church or youth group will abandon their faith in college.\(^\text{23}\)

The second finding of Clark and Coates Smith’s study groups was that OCS students were clearly walking the tightrope of adolescence and felt somewhat isolated in

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 157-158.


\(^{23}\) Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 16.
their journeys. This is not an uncommon phenomenon for affluent children, who often have a clear grasp on the fact that expectations are high and there is no choice but for them to perform at extremely high levels.\(^\text{24}\) Navigating adolescence at a school like OCS is similar to being a swimmer: the athletes in the pool may belong to a team, but the sport is an individual one with personal races being done alone.

For example, a significant number of students at OCS were growing up in two homes due to divorce and would forget textbooks or assignments because they lost track of where they had left the book. No matter how much adults or their friends cared these students, they realized much of school was meeting goals only they as individuals could accomplish. One interesting observation among the majority of students was that students were often not noticed unless they were the high performers or the high disciplinary students. A vast majority of students at neither end of the spectrum, students who do and live well, are somewhat anonymous and invisible. As a result, many students can feel invisible.\(^\text{25}\) As one student flying under the radar stated, “You feel like you are not very good, like you are part of a machine.”\(^\text{26}\)

The third finding of Clark and Coates Smith was that OCS students feel the tension of being at a Christian school where grace is preached, but they are living under large expectations of rules, conduct, and character. It often does not feel like living under


\(^{26}\) Ibid.
grace but more like living under the Old Testament law. This was especially confusing for students who did not come from a faith background or attend church, as they had a more difficult time reconciling school detentions and punishment with the idea of a gracious, loving God.

Some of the realities of establishing and enforcing rules seemed contradictory and confusing to students. One student recollected from the Bible: “Jesus hung out with the hookers. This school is too elite and not a welcoming presence. It shuts people out more than it lets people in.”27 Another student followed by saying, “Grace and God’s love is talked about here, but we get kicked out of stuff if we don’t meet the standards. How much does grace extend? Are the teachers practicing what they preach?”28 Questions like these hound students in an environment seeking to model the truth and grace of Christianity while also being a human institution with standards, rules, and human influences.

A fourth finding of the OCS study was that OCS students believed they needed to do whatever it takes to navigate the difficult world of college preparatory academics, even if it meant cheating. A recent ABC News Primetime poll of students revealed cheating is now common across American high schools.29 Time and time again, students expressed feeling justified in copying homework before class (a very common sighting at school if an adult at school knows where to look) or finding out what was on an exam. One OCS student admitted, “You can’t get good grades at this school without


28 Ibid.

cheating.” Another student confessed the tension that exists by saying, “When you weigh the consequences verses the consequence of not cheating, you will totally cheat.”

Cheating can never be excused, but when students see Harvard students cheating, Olympic or professional athletes cheating, college coach applicants lying on applications, or presidential candidates lying, one can see how easily it is to justify their actions. For example, a Kaiser Family Foundation study found that student athletes are negatively affected when they see a professional athlete cheating by using banned substances.

The fifth finding was OCS teachers largely understood the need students have for social capital and how complex the journey of adolescence is today. For the most part, they wanted to help and be involved in the lives of students. With both focus groups, the students mentioned the teachers as the number one strength of the school. They had the opportunity to name several other items: the beautiful campus, the impressive list of college acceptances, the championship banners hanging in the gym, or the teaching of a Christian worldview. But instead they talked about how teachers cared for them.

In the world of adolescence where the demands placed on students are constantly on the rise and the social capital offered by adults is increasingly difficult to find, OCS faculty are invested in the lives of their students. OCS teachers work long hours and are

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31 Ibid., 46.


generally available around the clock for students and their families. Rarely is there an OCS teacher who simply wants to “punch a timecard” and limit his or her role to lectures and grading. One student shared, “You have this mold within Oaks Christian, but there are some teachers I can talk to about anything.”34 When Dr. Clark asked a group of high school juniors what was great about OCS, Coates Smith observes what one student said about teachers: “Teachers actually care about you.”35

This observation affirms what researchers already know about how children are encouraged by invested adults. Decades ago, children transitioned into the adult world by spending the majority of their time with adults learning a skill or working the land. Within a century, that has reversed and children are getting on average only sixteen hours per week with adults.36

One last aspect of an affluent demographic at a private college preparatory school is the significant portion of the student population that is largely protected from adversity or hardship. Too often older adolescents are leaving high school and entering college without having developed muscles of independence or adversity. Today’s parents are so protective of their children that they do whatever possible to prevent their children from experiencing any type of disappointment, adversity, or rejection. They simply do not have healthy coping mechanisms.

Levine recognizes this when she quotes child and adolescent psychiatrist Dr. David Fassler, who says the affluent children he treats “haven’t had enough bad things

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., 49.

happen to them.” 37 Levine adds, “Affluent kids are so often protected from even the most minor disappointments and frustrations that they are unable to develop critical coping skills. A child cannot possibly develop resilience when his parents are constantly at his side, interfering with the development of autonomy, self-management, and coping skills.” 38

In How Children Succeed, the author describes how a headmaster of an affluent school noticed that many of the students at his school had never developed the muscle of adversity, asserting

The problem, as Randolph has realized, is that the best way for a young person to build character is for him to attempt something where there is real and serious possibility of failure. In a high-risk endeavor, whether it’s in business or athletics or the arts, you are more likely to experience colossal defeat than in a low-risk one—but you’re also more likely to achieve real and original success. 39

In a time when rewards are often handed out regardless of performance to make everyone feel like winners, parents may be unwittingly training their children to grow up dependent and weak. It is also quite possible parents are too insecure to admit to themselves or their aspiring young athlete or singer that their talents may be ordinary and their future more limited than they dream.

Spiritual Life at Oaks Christian School

In two years, the student body at OCAS increased from its opening 2000 enrollment of 191 students to 630. Recognizing this growth, the head of school approved


38 Ibid., p. 79.

Co-founder David Price was aware of the new position and called a friend, an airline pilot who was also on the pastoral staff of Bel Air Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles.

Jim Lee and David Price had become good friends at Bel Air Presbyterian. Lee had told David he was done with the airline pilot career and David promptly called asking if he would be interested in being OCS’ very first spiritual life director. When Lee put away his airline uniform and started at OCS, David made it very clear to him his primary job was to make sure the school never drifted from its mission statement of being devoted to Christ: “To dedicate ourselves to Christ in the pursuit of academic excellence, artistic expression, and athletic distinction while growing in knowledge and wisdom through God’s abundant grace.”

Price had always been extremely dedicated to the mission, and his unwritten rule was that Oaks Christian School would always be accessible to students who fit the mission but needed financial assistance to attend, especially minorities. Indeed, forty percent of the student population receives financial aid and the development department is staffed with several full-time employees.

It was a huge learning curve for the school’s new spiritual life director. First of all, Lee had not worked directly with high school students in ten years. It did not take long before he realized the adolescent world was much more complex than he had remembered and had changed dramatically in the ten years since he had last served as a youth pastor in Dallas, Texas. Simply stated, Lee found himself among students who were fatigued, stressed out, over-scheduled, and burning out on Christian school.

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41 Laura Mason, Telephone Interview with Jim Lee, Westlake Village, May 16, 2017.
programming. It was consistent with Levine’s findings from *The Price of Privilege* that students from affluent families often deal with intense pressures.\textsuperscript{42}

In the early days of its history, Oaks Christian School made a very deliberate determination. The spiritual life programs of the school would have a three-faceted focus: chapel, advisory groups (small groups) and community service. One of the most critical decisions was to mandate Bible classes and that the Bible department be under the academic dean rather than the spiritual life department. Bible was to be taught primarily as an academic subject and with rigor. Associate Head of School Dr. Jason McMaster has been at Oaks Christian since the beginning. When interviewed about this decision regarding Bible, he said, “The intent originated from a good place of recognizing that students needed to know the Bible in order to embrace a biblical worldview. But Bible classes had more of a seminary flavor, and students rejected this approach to teaching the Bible. It actually hindered learning and lacked engaging students with real-life applications of the living Word.”\textsuperscript{43}

While Bible classes were more academic, spiritual formation was guided through spiritual life programs. OCS is not a covenant school, meaning the parents or the students did not have to profess a personal faith in Christ. For example, Christ Presbyterian Academy in Nashville, Tennessee, describes its covenant school status by explaining that “CPA is a covenant school which means that at least one of the parents must be a professing Christian.”\textsuperscript{44} At OCS, even committed Christian students struggled with the

\textsuperscript{42} Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 17.

\textsuperscript{43} McMaster, Telephone Interview, May 11, 2017.

\textsuperscript{44} Nate Morrow, *CPA 101* (Nashville: Christ Presbyterian Academy, 2016), 5.
course load heavy on content and low on discipleship. A small minority enjoyed the academic pursuit, but to many, it did not serve as an effective way to maintain or develop walks with Christ.

Over the course of several years, tension built between two distinct sides. On one side was the Bible department, firmly entrenched in the strictly academic approach to the Bible. On the other side were the two spiritual life directors of the school, who were mainly concerned with the evangelism of the non-covenant students and the discipleship of the Christian students. In the midst of this tension, a void of spiritual leadership existed, with no one exercising any authority to reconcile the differences.

To make matters worse, frustrated students would confide in their favorite teachers or the spiritual life directors as to how bad Bible classes were. First of all, they complained there was no onus on the Bible teachers to engage the students with the material. The primary responsibility was scope and sequence of the curriculum, but if students were not engaged, that was not the responsibility or fault of the teacher. Secondly, little or no application of biblical principles was given attention in Bible classes. Students were responsible for knowing the material, but that is where the learning stopped. As a result, students saw Bible classes like other classes: learn, regurgitate what the teacher wanted, and move on to the next lesson.

Apparently, OCS was not alone in this problem. One Nashville Christian school surveyed its middle and high school students regarding their Bible classes. Their number one complaint about Bible classes was the lack of personal application.45 Perhaps the

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worst aspect that consistently came to the forefront regarding Bible classes was the perception that students could not express different opinion than the teacher, contrary to research about the value of allowing students to express doubts about their faith.  

Spiritually speaking, both sides were at a significant stalemate with no end in sight.

Problems persisted until founder David Price recommended OCS hire a consultant to take the school through a five-year strategic plan. In 2008, OCS hired an independent consultant by the name of Doug Howe, from Cincinnati, Ohio. Because David Price’s first priority has always been the spiritual life of the school, Howe was hired to study the school for two years. Howe did a thorough job and interviewed a wide variety of stakeholders, looking especially at the spiritual climate of OCS. In terms of Bible curriculum or spiritual life programming, nothing was untouchable.

Everything came under the consultant’s microscope: chapels, Bible curriculum, advisory groups, and community service. It helped that because OCS was less than ten years old, deep-seated traditions had not yet gained sacred cow status. Howe put together a ten-member spiritual life committee that included administration, faculty, parents, and board members. After two years of hard work, the spiritual life committee submitted a “Comprehensive Spiritual Life Plan” to the board for a vote. In April of 2010, the board unanimously approved the plan and put into place. The plan called for major structural changes in how OCS would approach its spiritual life development of students.

First, it was decided that the Bible department and spiritual life programs would no longer serve as separate entities but come under one department. To facilitate this, a

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new position would be created called the Associate Head of School of Spiritual Life. This new position would be the head over the newly formed spiritual life department which would watch over both the high school and middle school.

In addition to these changes, the Bible curriculum would make a major shift from being strictly academic to combining academics and spiritual formation. In other words, there would be an expectation on the part of Bible teachers to engage the students in spiritual growth. Finally, the Associate Head of School of Spiritual Life would lead the existing spiritual life sub-committee that would serve as a designated board sub-committee. The spiritual life committee would meet quarterly to remain updated and be forward thinking on issues to insure OCS would remain true to its spiritual roots and foundation.48

The implementation of the 2010 Spiritual Plan has certainly not rid the students of Oaks Christian School from all the effects of abandonment. But without question, the study led by Chap Clark and Mindy Coates Smith played an important role in the groundbreaking plan. It has been almost ten years since the student focus groups met to discuss what life was like in a private Christian college preparatory school. Without Clark’s and Coates Smith’s input and intervention combined with honest student feedback, the spiritual plan would never have been created and passed unanimously by the Board of Directors. To this day, the plan exhibits principles founded on the research findings from Hurt. Perhaps most encouraging, a community of adults and leaders has become educated about the hidden world today’s teenagers face and what they can do to minister to them.

48 Howe, OCS Spiritual Plan, 3.
PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS
CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Today’s youth often struggle to navigate the increasingly complex journey through adolescence into adulthood amidst a rapidly changing landscape. To help, any adult with a vested interest in raising children and adolescents to become healthy adults can benefit from studying the wealth of wisdom of established research on this complex transition. A review of this research reveals two broad categories parents may focus upon to better equip themselves for the complicated task of raising kids today: first, the complicated and constantly changing world of adolescence, and second, the evolving pathways into adulthood.

**Adolescence and Identity**

Although all adults living today once had to work through the adolescent years themselves, many have forgotten how difficult the process was or have incorrectly assumed their children have it much easier than they did. Often a discrepancy exists between what adults think preteens and teenagers are going through and what teens are
facing on a daily basis. To get an inside view of today’s adolescents’ world, Dr. Chap Clark had a unique idea: to insert himself into a large and affluent public high school as a substitute teacher in order to strategically observe the lives of adolescents. His groundbreaking study, which he refers to as “ethnographic qualitative research,” yielded two books, *Hurt* and *Hurt 2.0*.¹

With full permission from the school district’s administration, Clark served as a substitute teacher for one academic school year, giving him adequate and ample time to observe, interview, and reach conclusions about the complicated nature of the adolescent landscape in America today. His book begins with an immediate challenge to adult readers long ago finished with high school.

The temptation of any adult, Clark argues, is to believe that even though the names and dates change, the overall structure and dynamics of adolescence remains the same. In other words, the music, hair styles, fads, and language may change, but kids will always be kids, the structure of adolescence remains static, and if it is different, it has never been better. One adult claims, “Teenagers have never had it easier—they’ve got more money than we did, more freedoms, more options, and yet they are more defiant and more arrogant than we were.”² Clark lures in those adults with such opinions and shocks them with his arguments that adolescence today looks nothing like it did ten, twenty, or thirty years ago. In the preface to the first edition, Clark writes, “For the vast majority of adults, it is hard to understand. Most of us want to take the easy route of

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¹ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, xvi.

² Ibid., 12.
claiming that it hasn’t changed since we were in high school.” He awakens adults to harsh realities with convincing detail, inviting the readers into the world of high school hallways where few adults voluntarily dare to go.

Clark invests considerable pages into explaining the birth and history of adolescence and how adolescence developed into its own unique stage towards adulthood. His descriptions of adolescence move deliberately and convincingly towards his thesis that kids today have been abandoned by external systems, internal systems, and relationships. Clark claims, “Fast forward to today’s environment, by the time adolescents enter high school, nearly every one has been subjected to a decade or more of adult-driven and adult-controlled programs, systems, and institutions that are primarily concerned with adults’ agendas, needs, and dreams.” At first glance, the idea of kids being abandoned today goes against all common sense. After all, kids today are described by adults as the most resourced, entitled, spoiled, and coddled generation of all time.

It seems society has gone out of its way to make life as easy and painless as possible for children. Parents today often strive to ensure their children do not experience pain or disappointment. Indeed, this generation of parenting has birthed labels such as special snowflakes and helicopter parents. Upon further examination, however, Clark argues all of these labels have come out of a deep desire and twisted motives to meet the needs of adults themselves rather than the needs of children. To delve deeper into his case, Clark proposes that due to a set of tragic events and phenomenon in this country throughout the 1960s and 1970s, adult lives began to frazzle. Almost out of the

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3 Ibid., xviii.
4 Ibid., 30.
desperation of a drowning tourist, adults latched on to their children and abandoned pillars in society such as churches, civic organizations, and family gatherings that were originally created and designed to benefit children and their healthy development. He points out, “But as society began to unravel, adults found themselves trying to find their own safe place, a haven of security and rest.”\textsuperscript{5} Clark expounds on how adults have taken over their children’s academics, sports, arts, and other extracurricular activities in order to meet their own insatiable needs for validation, security, and significance. This misguided co-opting results in the abandoning of what kids really need in place of the needs of adults. Clark argues, “This rejection, or abandonment, of adolescents is the root of fragmentation and calloused distancing that are the hallmarks of the adolescent culture. The evidence for and the eventual consequences of this trend are the basis of this book.”\textsuperscript{6}

Of course, these hostile mergers and acquisitions of child activities are not done overtly, but instead are achieved rather inconspicuously in the name of sacrificially doing what is best for children. As Clark describes in chapter after chapter how kids today have been abandoned by adults and societal systems, he challenges adult readers to intentionally fight against abandonment and parent in ways that work for the welfare of kids, especially in the area of social capital. He argues as the demands on kids have increased as a result of twisted adult agendas, parents must seek out agenda-free adults

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 15.

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
who will take a personal interest in their kids and give them the social capital they need with no strings attached.\textsuperscript{7}

For purposes of self-preservation, Clark points out that kids have created their own self-contained world where they can support one another, completely free of adult agendas. He calls it “the world beneath” and describes it as their own created world of highly structured systems accompanied by rules, regulations, and expectations.\textsuperscript{8} Although the contributing factors for conflict between adults and adolescents are varied and complicated, Clark believes the primary factor is that “society has abdicated its responsibility to nurture the young into adulthood.”\textsuperscript{9} It is enlightening to discuss the following areas of Clark’s world beneath: peers, school, family, sports, sex, busyness and stress, ethics and morality, and finally, partying, gaming, and social networking.

Peers

Years ago, it was common for high school students to try to get as close as possible to the popular group of kids, but today’s adolescents navigate school by belonging to a cluster of friends. A cluster is usually anywhere from four to ten kids which Clark argues exists to provide midadolescents a safe place to belong.\textsuperscript{10} Reminding readers of the reality of systemic abandonment by adults, Clark affirms students’ need for clusters so that students can be among peers where their best interests are kept in mind.

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 196.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 45.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 66.
On any given school day at Oaks Christian School, an adult staff member can navigate the hallways and know where each cluster can be found, as clusters have unwritten rules about specific claims of territory. Clusters are not the same as social cliques. There is more diversity of social status among students in clusters than in cliques. Clark explains, “Clusters comprise the building blocks of adolescent society. Thick walls develop around various clusters as they create social and operational rules and norms.”\textsuperscript{11} Trenholm wrote of these critical group dynamics explaining how social groups develop expectations and standards. The group has rules, whether unstated or overtly communicated. She goes on to confirm that any violation of the rules threatens the very identity of the group.\textsuperscript{12}

School

Today’s high school students face unique challenges their parents did not face, especially those in a public school. Teachers find themselves squarely involved in an institution that sits right in the middle of systemic abandonment. Although many teachers seek to relate to the students and support them, according to Clark, school is one more major hurdle of abandonment kids must overcome. For any adult who believes school is essentially the same as when they attended, he argues, “Unless you have stayed in close touch with the changing adolescent culture, you will certainly be struck by the fact that the world you inhabited and the experiences you had are but a distant memory.”\textsuperscript{13}

As an example of what has changed, Clark notes the automatic challenge of teachers who expect students to want to learn for the sake of learning and the expectation

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 71.


\textsuperscript{13} Clark, \textit{Hurt 2.0}, 77.
that students will automatically give respect to people in authority. These expectations from adults combined with realities of kids today and their hesitancy to give respect to adults makes for a complicated atmosphere. While many students learn how to navigate high school and adult expectations by playing the game, Clark laments for the mass of students who, for a variety of reasons, choose not to try and impress adults and thus get left behind because of their perceived lack of willingness to engage with them.\(^{14}\) On the other hand, some students know how to play the game and appear studious or Christian, but act completely different when they are with their friends. Decades before Clark wrote Hurt, Hans Sebald acknowledged the alarming trend that secondary education was becoming a nonfamilial experience arguing the values students were being taught in school were often in conflict with the values children were bring taught at home.\(^{15}\)

**Family**

Family should be the one sacred institution in society that is immune to the effects of abandonment. Sadly, that is not always the case. Clark relates a story of interviewing two different students with divorced parents. In each of these two instances, the divorced parents remained in the same household and told their children the divorce was a secret and that they were not allowed to tell anyone, placing their own needs as adults above the needs of their children.\(^{16}\) As Wallerstein points out from decades of research and tracking children of divorce to their adult years, divorce causes parents to put their children’s

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 87.


\(^{16}\) Clark, *Hurt 2.0.*, 91-92.
needs on hold in order to tend to more pressing matters associated with adult agendas and needs. Clark also references the ABC sitcom *Modern Family*, a show about an older man with two grown children, a married daughter and a married son. The older man is remarried to a beautiful younger woman, and the two share a son the same age as his grandchildren. His adult daughter is in a traditional family with a mom, dad, and two children, and his adult son is in a homosexual marriage with an adopted daughter from China. As scandalous and unorthodox as these arrangements might seem to some, *Modern Family* is now in syndicated reruns.

In other words, the family arrangements portrayed that were to be groundbreaking and the exception are now in rerun status in the United States and considered relatively normal. Clark asserts, “What has happened with the notion of an attitude toward the family is perhaps the most significant form of cultural abandonment midadolescents have endured.” Even in cases where a traditional two-parent home exists, often both parents are working and too stressed out to be available to their children. What has become lost in the chaotic discussion with alternative family structures is the time-tested truth that a child’s experience as an infant, toddler, and child becomes an incredibly strong predictor of a healthy sense of self of an adolescent.

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18 Clark, *Hurt 2.0.*, 92.

19 Ibid., 93.

With today’s technology, all members of the home may be under one roof but disengaged as they navigate their personal devices. Even a family traveling in the same SUV does not guarantee any level of communication, down to the music being played. One auto stereo and entertainment publication predicted decline in car audio sales through the year 2020, as car riders choose their own individual playlists.\textsuperscript{21} To help address this redefinition of family, Clark calls on parents to understand the extension and complexities of adolescence, and secondly, to give them the freedom within strong boundaries to help them gain a healthy identity and autonomy.\textsuperscript{22}

Sports

“I cannot think of any other area in life where in which we as a society have abandoned our young more thoroughly,”\textsuperscript{23} Clark claims as he discusses the role of sports in a world of abandonment. His argument is rather simple: youth sports today are more about stroking the fragile egos of adults and about kids performing at the highest levels than they are about the welfare and healthy development of kids. \textit{Hurt 2.0} was written in 2011. The sad reality is that things have degraded even more for kids in a multi-billion-dollar industry where the stakes are higher for younger ages with each passing year. Sports today are not fundamentally about fun, health, or character development. Clark sheds light on the real world of high school sports: “The pressure is intense—to compete, to excel, to perform, and to remain in the game. By the time an athlete gets to high


\textsuperscript{22} Clark, \textit{Hurt 2.0}, 100.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 113.
school, his or her chance of participation, much less success, in a sport has all but been settled."  

In 2018, local parents would disagree with that statement and argue the matter is settled by the beginning of middle school. Sadly, youth sports are now much more about adults and dollars than they are about the welfare of kids. Clark reminds his readers about the founder of Little League Baseball, Carl Stotz, and how even he became uncomfortable with what Little League had become as it became more about making money than it did about players having fun and learning a game. Perhaps because so many kids have experienced disappointment with sports from a very young age, Clark reports that the best performing athletes were no longer the most esteemed students on campus. Sports is just one more painful reminder to students how adults have taken over a major activity that once belonged to kids.

Sex

Sex is an area of academia where the research is very difficult to collect and confirm. According to Clark, “When dealing with a private human arena such as sexuality, especially among mid-adolescent high school students, it is nearly impossible to collect conclusive data regarding their inner attitudes or actual behavior.” Despite the

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24 Ibid., 105.
25 Ibid., 107.
26 Ibid., 111.
27 Ibid., 6.
limitations in knowing actual behavior, he was able to arrive at two critical observations regarding adolescents and sex.

The first observation involves the world of adolescence, that even though it is saturated with sex and sexual messages, what especially stands out is the “palpable loneliness.” Secondly, Clark acknowledges students are not participating in as much sex as adults are led to believe. But perhaps the saddest discovery of all is the casual nature in which kids discussed and experienced sexual intimacy. He concludes, “I was surprised to realize that for most midadolescents the issue of sex has lost its mystique and has become almost commonplace. They have been conditioned to expect so much from sex and have been so tainted by overexposure and the emptiness of valueless sexual banter and play that they have become laissez-faire in their attitudes, even jaded.”

Clark gives an example of this casual nature and banter by telling how the term MILF was used in a Dr. Pepper commercial: “So, for anyone reading this that does not yet know, we now live in a society where to banter about intercourse with a peer’s mother is simply part of everyday rhetorical landscape.” Clark believes a high rate of casual sexual activity among the adolescent population is actually one of the strongest social indicators that the nation’s young are not doing well. He argues, “This statistic alone—the rate of STDs among teenage girls who have been tested and reported only

\[28\] Ibid.
\[29\] Ibid.
\[30\] Ibid., 117.
when they have gone to doctors—should compel us all to come to the table and find out just what is going on with our young.”

Busyness and Stress

With multiple adult agendas to fulfill, students find themselves completely stressed out and overscheduled to the point of exhaustion. Clark shares, “During the research I conducted across the country with both adolescents and adults, whatever the town, whatever the segment of society, the view was consistent: the busyness, fragmentation, and stress level of adolescents are relatively new, and they are increasing.” Stress is nothing new to the adolescent world. But with the strong dynamics of abandonment, kids have less social capital to deal with high expectations, pressure to succeed, and stress from family life. Another new component at record high levels compared to 2011 when *Hurt 2.0* was printed is the stress that adolescents experience from managing their social media. It has created a whole new dynamic that has required more of their time and emotional energy, constantly comparing themselves to the profiles of others. Maintaining profiles on social media has also led to increasing rates of anxiety and depression among adolescents.

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31 Ibid., 123.
32 Ibid., 133.
Ethics and Morality

The state of our youth’s morals today can be ascertained by looking at two particular areas of morality, lying and cheating. The bottom line is that kids do not feel any responsibility or shame participating in either because they believe adults have set up impossible demands on their lives. By lying and cheating, kids are merely doing what it takes to survive in an adult-driven world. Cheating scandals at the nation’s elite college prep schools and universities have become commonplace. For example, in the fall of 2017, over fifty Harvard students were under investigation for academic dishonesty in a computer science class.\(^\text{34}\)

Partying, Gaming, and Social Networking

The main finding regarding this final category centers around the fact that many students attend parties whether they are consuming alcohol or not. Clark describes it this way: “First, as I sought to understand the desire to party, I realized that I needed to shift my focus from the alcohol (and the marijuana) to the communal experience itself.”\(^\text{35}\) The world beneath is about finding safe places for kids to belong. Clark argues that partying is much more about consuming alcohol than it is about getting intoxicated itself. In describing the communal experience, Clark adds, “To put it another way, a party offers


\(^{35}\) Clark, \textit{Hurt 2.0}, 159.
adolescent partygoers the deeply human elements of communal celebration and ritual as they attempt to discover what people they belong to.”

Social networking is exploding in the lives of adolescents, and Clark points out this relatively new area of connection as well as the habit of gaming is providing a way for adolescents to connect with others. He concludes with this thought, “Adolescents are hungry for a transcendent experience that provides meaning, hope, adventure, and carefree celebration—whether they seek it through partying, social networking, or video games.” But as mentioned earlier, social networking has become a two-edged sword. With Facebook now embroiled in a data breach scandal in which it allegedly gave access to third parties regarding client data, young people are reminded they live in a world where adult-fueled agendas and corporate earnings win the day. And to raise even more concerns, Sales devoted an entire book to the secret lives and social media of American teenage girls where she warned her readers that adolescence has never been more challenging and that social media has only intensified the battle for girls to look “hot” and have peers like their pictures.

*Hurt 2.0* continues to be a book I consistently recommend to parents of toddlers and teens to educate themselves on the changing face of adolescence. Clark’s initial printing of *Hurt* was in 2004, yet his alarming findings over a decade ago set forth a

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., 163


necessary dialogue among adults asleep at the wheel of twenty-first century parenting. His insights about youth culture and abandonment have opened the eyes of countless adults in every possible professional field. Since 2011, many of the principles at work in the adolescence world have only intensified with an increasingly competitive landscape in a global economy and social media.

**The Price of Privilege**

Although many adolescents today have more wealth and opportunities than the legions of young people who went before them, the quality of their inner lives is often poor. Dr. Madeline Levine seeks to discover the reasons for this in her book *The Price of Privilege*. It was at the end of a long week of therapy when Levine contemplated on her practice, her time, and her work. Suddenly, it dawned on her that the majority of her clients were rich and affluent high school students suffering from a predictable list of problems such as eating disorders, self-harm behaviors, substance abuse, sexual promiscuity, and depression. Considered an expert after twenty years of treating unhappy kids and publishing two books on the media’s influence on child development, this harsh reality befuddled her.⁴⁰ Current government research confirms alarmingly high rates of depression in the United States for high school students with the Department of Health and Human Services reporting in 2015 that one-fifth of males and two-fifths of females experiencing symptoms of depression for at least two consecutive weeks.⁴¹ And with the recent suicides of older affluent and successful adults such as designer Kate Spade and

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CNN TV celebrity chef Anthony Bordain, it confirms that the wealthy are not immune to suicide. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that with girls between the ages of ten and nineteen, the suicide rate rose by 70 percent from 2010-2016.\footnote{Jamie Ducharme, “A Disturbing Trend on the Rise.” \emph{Time}. June 7, 2018, accessed June 12, 2018. http://time.com/5304227/suicide-on-the-rise/.}

Levine was baffled why kids who seemingly have everything were so overwhelmed by life with the complete inability to cope with it. She quietly wondered if this were unique to her practice and patients or if this were a national trend among like-minded colleagues. After making several phone calls to professional colleagues around the country, she realized she and her practice were not alone. She recalls, “Like myself, the majority of child and adolescent psychologists and psychiatrists I called have outgoing messages on their answering machines saying, ‘At the present time I am no longer able to see new patients in either treatment or consultation.’”\footnote{Levine, \emph{The Price of Privilege}, 14.} For a number of surprising reasons, a new at-risk demographic had arisen in the country. Levine’s casual findings inspired her to probe deeper into the collective narratives of dozens of affluent teens and practitioners across the country to discover the root causes of the record levels of depression and anxiety. She wondered what parents and affluent American society were doing to exacerbate serious mental and emotional issues among the children they seemed to prize above all else. Clark affirmed the need for these questions, referencing Levine’s work by saying, “There is a high cost to what she calls privilege, especially in contemporary society.”\footnote{Clark, \emph{Hurt 2.0}, 167.} Tim Kasser notes that affluence and materialism often only serves to exacerbate unfulfilled needs in other areas. Parents of affluence may be passing
on this dysfunction to their children.\textsuperscript{45} One of Levine’s original sources of research even confirmed almost a decade after The Price of Privilege: “Aside from drug and alcohol use, our findings have shown rates of serious rule-breaking behaviors, as well as depression and anxiety, that are two to three times the national norms.”\textsuperscript{46}

To address the problem of privilege, Levine focuses her efforts on challenging parents to ensure affluent kids are free to develop their sense of self, autonomy, efficacy, and agency. She argues, “As long as kids are not afforded the opportunity to craft a sense of self that feels authentic, a sense of self that truly comes from within, psychologists like myself will continue to see more and more youngsters at risk for profound feelings of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and emptiness.\textsuperscript{47}

In the summer of 2016, our then thirteen-year-old daughter enrolled in a songwriting course at Nashville’s iconic Country Music Hall of Fame. When the course concluded, one of her instructors sent us an email with perhaps the greatest compliment parents could receive. His compliment had nothing to do with her musical abilities or talents. Instead, he wrote that our thirteen-year-old daughter had a healthy sense of who she is.

According to Dr. Levine, this quality, a sense of self, remains critical to healthy adolescent development. She writes, “The reason that a well-developed sense of self is so critical is that, in the desirable and inevitable absence of external support, a sense of self


\textsuperscript{47} Levine, \textit{The Price of Privilege}, 12.
provides both a comfortable home base and an internal compass for navigating through life.” Levine insists affluent parents can unknowingly parent their children in destructive ways that prevent them from developing a healthy sense of self. She states, “It is hard to develop an authentic sense of self when there is constant pressure to adopt a socially facile, highly competitive, performance-oriented, unblemished ‘self’ that is promoted by omnipresent adults.”

Affluence and Autonomy

When affluent parents are overly controlling of their children and their worlds, they unknowingly prevent children from being able to function independently of parents and their agendas. Levine makes a strong case that kids with healthy selves are ready to own their own lives and decisions and to function independently. But a world of affluence and control prevents the healthy promotion of autonomy. Levine writes, “When children are denied the opportunity to figure out their own values, desires, and interests, the outcome is often a despairing dependency, the antithesis of healthy autonomy. Autonomy means that we are independent, capable, and loving and that we are free to choose how to use these qualities.” In a 2001 study published in the Journal of Research on Adolescence, Temple University professor Laurence Steinberg acknowledged the crucial nature of adolescent autonomy from parents and that this transition towards autonomy is actually more stressful parents than their children.

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48 Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 64.
49 Ibid., 65.
50 Ibid., 71.
Affluence, Efficacy, and Agency

Levine points out that many kids growing up in affluent households lack two critical life skills: efficacy and agency. Self-efficacy is a person’s belief that he or she can successfully impact the world, a belief and mindset that differs from agency. Agency is the ability to act appropriately in one’s best interest and centers on actions. Once parents of affluent children realize how high-pressured their kids’ upbringing can be and the potential for abandonment, employing Levine’s parenting strategies can help their children gain autonomy and a sense of self.

When parents give their children the freedom to believe they have a certain degree of control over their actions and can assert themselves, they prepare their children for healthy adolescence. On the contrary, Levine describes what kids look like that lack these critical life skills: “As a matter of fact, the kind of anxious, overprotective, over-solicitous, intrusive parenting that has become commonplace in affluent communities actually diminishes a child’s sense of efficacy and autonomy.”

Levine gives a clear example of how efficacy and agency play out in the healthy development of kids. Two students in the same class receive a bad grade on a paper, and both feel they deserve a better grade. One student decides to do nothing or perhaps worse, his mom contacts the teacher complaining about the low grade. The second student decides she should go directly to the teacher herself to advocate for herself and for a

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higher grade. Even if she fails in her attempt to raise the grade, she at least demonstrated self-efficacy (the belief her actions make a difference) and agency (the confidence to act on her own). In other words, she would at least know she tried. Parents who are wise enough to allow their children the opportunity to fail will be building in them character traits that will sustain them into adulthood.

Adolescence to Emerging Adulthood and Adulthood

During the late twentieth century, the transition from adolescence into adulthood seemed to be changing in the Unites States. Psychologist Jeffrey Jensen Arnett was one of many experts who began to see trends that would leave him to believe a new life stage was forming. At first, it seemed adolescence was merely being extended, as it was taking longer for adolescents to fully transition into adulthood. But Arnett realized these individuals on their way to adulthood were no longer adolescents but more like adults. They had not yet, however, reached traditional markers of adulthood such as marriage, career, having children, and home ownership, nor did they use these markers to define adulthood.

Arnett’s published research reveals this new reality: “Instead of sociological transitions, the most important criteria for adulthood to these college students were more intangible and psychological: accepting responsibilities for one’s actions, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent.” Arnett christens the new life stage of emerging adulthood, calling emerging adults to be those from the ages

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53 Ibid., 72.

of eighteen to twenty-nine. This framing differs from Clark, who would consider many early college students to still be in midadolescence.\textsuperscript{55}

Arnett’s new stage-of-life theory has come under some criticism regarding its applicability to those in society not included in middle-class or upper-middle-class categories. His critics argue that young people not fortunate enough to pursue college or to have the financial backing of family are not emerging adults; rather, they are in the midst of a difficult transition to adulthood because they do not have the luxury to ponder what they want from life. One critic writes, “This phenomenon is linked with the economic basis of Western societies. Thus, an extremely prolonged moratorium is observed only in highly industrialized countries, and even there mainly in the affluent middle classes, because large sections of the population cannot afford a lengthy education.”\textsuperscript{56}

Arnett contends that emerging adulthood is not limited to the middle or upper-middle classes, citing results of a 2012 Clark University-funded study of one thousand eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds. The study centered around five features of emerging adulthood: identity explorations, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and possibilities. Arnett points out that regardless of socio-economic class, the majority of individuals eighteen to twenty-nine years old consistently experience high levels of these five features of emerging adulthood. He states, “For all items pertaining to the five features proposed in the theory, the differences between the social class groups were not

\textsuperscript{55} Clark, \textit{Hurt 2.0}, ix.

statistically significant.” For example, when it comes to the area of eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds feeling in-between, 50 percent of those in the lowest social class in the study affirmed feeling in-between in life, 48 percent of those in the medium social class felt the same way, and 51 percent of the highest social class felt in-between. In other words, between the three social classes, in the area of feeling in-between, there was only a 3 percent variance in their answers.

Regardless of the advocates or critics of his theory, Arnett initiated a very much needed discussion on the elongated journey to adulthood. He reminds adults that it does not serve any demographic well when an older generation is critical of a younger generation for being spoiled and entitled. While the debate as to the validity of his theories continues, few can argue the journey to adulthood today is much more complex and varied than it was twenty or thirty years ago.

**Becoming Adults in America**

One decade-long study funded by the MacArthur Foundation Research Network explored this complicated transition to adulthood period, culminating in the book titled *The Coming of Age in America*. Understanding today’s transition from adolescence to adulthood is barely recognizable from just a few decades ago, researchers interviewed hundreds of young people in several cities such as San Diego, New York City, St. Paul, Minnesota, and a small town called Ellis, Iowa. The interviews were conducted among a wide variety of ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds. The book’s editors share

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57 Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 266.

58 Ibid., 247.
credible reasons why the journey to adulthood is taking longer and is less predictable: changes in gender norms, growth in people never marrying or at least delaying marriage, increases in the amount of schooling, the rise of housing prices, a global recession, and nonmarital child bearing.\textsuperscript{59}

Despite these patterns, the researchers refuse to panic about this younger generation, asserting, “Today’s fretful parents of twentysomething offspring would be shocked to learn that a half century ago, experts feared young people were actually growing up too fast and losing out on the support and time they needed to acquire the sound psychological footing required for a healthy adulthood.”\textsuperscript{60} While the editors recognize the relatively new proposed addition of emerging adulthood as a recognized stage of life, they are not quick not to endorse that label. Their stated purpose for the book is to “[explore] this new period of young adulthood, focusing on two important themes—the role of local context in shaping the transition into adulthood, and the subjective experience of young adults themselves as they experience this period of change, possibility, and uncertainty.”\textsuperscript{61} But one fact is for certain: the transition into adulthood today has many more roads and is as unpredictable than ever.

The book delves more deeply than Arnett’s work into the causes of the complicated journey into adulthood, focusing more on economic and social issues like global recession, ethnic subtleties, or a housing market where many twentysomethings are priced out of the market. The study itself also was more qualitative in nature, taking

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{59} Waters et al., eds., \textit{Coming of Age in America}, 2.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 3.}
into account the numerous subjective experiences of eighteen- to thirty-four-year-olds based on geography, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, relational status, and educational level.\textsuperscript{62} It even invested resources in studying less resourced individuals such as those who had aged out of the foster care system or young adults who have chosen the military as a profession. The editors structure the book to illustrate unique forces at work according to geography. They write, “One of the key themes of this book is that the transition to adulthood varies based on the local context.”\textsuperscript{63}

The following sections take a unique look at each of the four locations around the country and how they frame the transition to adulthood for the millennials who live there. The young adults of each location share some of the same struggles to grow up in today’s culture. However, with varying costs of living expenses, ethnicity, and family resources, the residents of each town face their own unique challenges.

Ellis, Iowa

Readers of \textit{Coming of Age in America} might wonder how researchers decided to select a small town like Ellis, Iowa, for a national study, a town that yields little or no information in a Google search. In reality, the lack of information is the result of the authors of the study renaming the northeastern Iowa town of less than 2000 to protect the identities of those interviewed.\textsuperscript{64} In 2001, Patrick J. Carr and Maria J. Kefalas moved to the tiny town in order to study how adolescents and young adults from rural settings navigated this time of life and how it affected their chances in life. At the onset of the

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 7.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 20.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 28.
study, they divided their subjects into five different groups. The first two groups were
called the leaver achievers and the leaver seekers.

**The Leaver Achievers**

The most academically promising young adolescents in the town were the leaver
achievers. This is because the best and brightest of Ellis were expected to leave the town
for a big city and pursue a better life than small-town America could offer. Carr and
Kefalas discovered achievers were informally selected at a young age by the entire
community. They describe this small-town phenomenon: “Parents, teachers, and
neighbors push these young people to leave Ellis behind since their abilities have marked
them as gifted and special. Not only are they given permission to leave Ellis, they are
expected to do so.”

Achievers had plenty of social capital in the bank from the earliest signs of
exceptional intelligence and receive their community’s support because of their talents
and intelligence. The editors claim, “The town’s most successful young people start out
as community projects, and, in a fundamental sense, their future achievements belong to
everybody back home.” This group always went to college to seek a four-year degree
and beyond. This recognition of attention focused on the highest achievers is consistent
with Clark’s findings related to the most intelligent and talented students receiving the
most attention at the detriment of those not as gifted or motivated.

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65 Ibid., 35.
66 Ibid.
67 Clark, _Hurt 2.0_, 79.
The Leaver Seekers

The second group of adolescents in the social pecking order were the leaver seekers. These individuals were not as strong academically as the leaver achievers but felt a strong desire to leave the small town behind and pursue bigger and better opportunities. Their ambitions did not spring from a community effort recognizing their extreme giftedness but instead from a personal agenda for development and dreams. A perfect example of a leaver seeker is the character George Bailey from the Christmas favorite *It’s a Wonderful Life*. From the time George is a child, he dreams of leaving tiny Bedford Falls for a world of cities, skyscrapers, and travel. However, it is his younger brother Harry who receives the permission and blessings of the Bedford Falls community to leave the town to pursue an athletic scholarship and go on to become a decorated World War II combat pilot.

In contrast to achievers, seekers like George Bailey are described as being “more interested in acquiring experiences, so they often move around from job to job without a clear-cut plan.” Education and professional development is not so much the goal as simply leaving behind small-town life. Seekers often do not have the financial resources to pursue college, so some of them seek the military to leave Ellis and see life outside of Iowa. As the authors point out, some seekers turn out to be achievers as they age. Some leavers even transition back to a group the authors call returners.

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68 Waters et al., 35.
69 Ibid., 37.
Returner Boomerangs and Returner High-Flyers

The third and fourth groups emanate from a category called the returners. Returners are either called the boomerangs or the high-flyers. Boomerangs usually left Ellis for a year or two and intended to return for family or romantic reasons. If they pursued post-secondary education, it typically involved a community college not far from Ellis. Boomerangs sought life outside of Ellis for a number of different reasons, but then decided life would be better and more predictable by returning to Ellis. The authors highlight these reasons for returning: “Ultimately, many boomerangs return home because the romanticized ideal of life outside a small town was nothing like the reality they experienced, and they find themselves longing for the familiar, comfortable routine of life back home.”

Returner high-flyers are those who left Ellis to pursue a college degree or profession and returned to Ellis to join the middle or upper middle class as business owners, professionals, or entrepreneurs. They returned because the community offers a pleasant, predictable, and affordable lifestyle. The authors point out that returner high-flyers are rather rare. They also observe that returner boomerangs often lack social capital and financial resources, which raises questions of social class and inequalities of opportunities. The authors remark, “It is not simply true that young people from lower-class backgrounds have no chance of becoming achievers, but rather that the achievers are more likely to come from middle and upper-middle classes.”

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70 Ibid., 38.
71 Ibid., 39.
72 Ibid., 38.
Stayers and Summary

The fifth group of young people from Ellis were called stayers. These young people simply liked the small-town familiarity and were content living in Ellis for the rest of their lives. While questions about their reasons for staying were often met with silence, the authors explain, “If leaving or returning requires a person to make a case for their actions and to actively do something, staying just seems to happen.”

Among the five distinct groups found in Ellis, the middle and upper middle-classes had more opportunities for college education and professions outside of Ellis. Researchers at The University of New Hampshire found that students living in rural areas had less access to high school AP courses and scored lower on AP tests compared to students in larger cities and affluent school districts. Those staying in Ellis tended to marry earlier and start families earlier than achievers. The more education a person accumulated, the more he or she was focused on personal and professional development, putting off marriage and family to a later time in life. Even in a small town, transitioning towards adulthood provides multiple paths and is somewhat determined at younger ages.

St. Paul, Minnesota

With a home full of possibilities for young adults in a large, progressive Midwestern city like St. Paul, researchers found the journey to adulthood was paved with

73 Ibid., 40.
many more onramps, exits, and detours than in a small town in Iowa. They divide their findings into three particular areas: work and career, family life, and civic involvement and collective identification. Among their findings related to collective identification, they studied the Hmong people: a group of refugees from southeastern Asia.

**Work and Career**

Minnesotans trace their roots back to immigrants from western Europe and pride themselves on possessing an extremely dedicated work ethic. As a result, many of their journeys toward adulthood focus on the attainment of education and profession. But even with this being the case in a state where housing costs are still somewhat affordable, young Minnesotans are finding the journey to adulthood is not as predictable and prescribed as it was for their parents. In spite of a dedicated work ethic, there was no shortage of young people having difficulty forging a path of ongoing education or career development.  

Researchers were not necessarily critical of this reality; rather, they conclude it is the result of the country’s relatively open system of higher education that does not require skill development toward a particular career.  

Neither did respondents to surveys seem alarmed either by delay or drift in completing their studies or finding a chosen career path. Instead, they often described what looks from a distance to be directionless wandering as “wise exploration that would lead to uncovering their true talents and genuine interests.” Similar to Arnett’s research

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75 Waters et al., 64.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid., 67.
in *Emerging Adulthood*, young people in Minnesota, regardless of financial means, expressed a great degree of optimism. The authors write, “One of the most surprising findings out of these interviews, in fact, was the high degree of optimism about work, education, and life in general exhibited by respondents of all backgrounds and situations.\(^\text{78}\)

**Family Ties and Intimate Connections**

While there was much more flexibility and fluidity as young Minnesotans discussed education and careers than in Ellis, discussions centered around family were viewed with much more of a desire and goal for family to be secure, dependable, and predictable. The researchers hypothesize one reason for their optimism about the future was the parental support given to the young adult children in the form of financial or emotional support.\(^\text{79}\) They also found high numbers of young adults living with their parents in favorable contexts. Parents were not forcing their children out of the home after high school as long as they were working or in school, moving towards a goal. As the authors assert, “The young adults in our study benefited from their parents’ ability and willingness to house them until they reached their goals, such as completing college, repaying debts, and purchasing homes, all of which would help them launch financially independent adult lives of their own.\(^\text{80}\)

\(^{78}\) Ibid., 67.

\(^{79}\) Ibid., 77.

\(^{80}\) Ibid., 79.
These family ties with parents were especially found among the Hmong population where grown kids often were able to assist their parents as their grasp of English was much better. Hmong parents provided housing, and Hmong American children filled out forms for their parents in English.\textsuperscript{81} When it came to discussions about starting their own families, there continued to be a great deal of flexibility. Nearly one-third of the women in the Minnesota study were single moms, and many of them had at one time received welfare due to the generous social programs offered by the state. As a result, any discussion of marriage had less to do with romance, with more of an emphasis placed upon financial provision and partnership. Hardly any of the participants in the entire study viewed marriage as a marker of adulthood, even though marriage brought along with it adult responsibilities.

\textbf{Civic Participation and Collective Identity}

For Minnesotans, one solid marker of adulthood is the ability to vote. The authors found this priority surprising: “St. Paul young adults’ commitment to civic participation is somewhat unusual when compared with other sites in this study and reflects a deep tradition in Minnesota of civic activity.”\textsuperscript{82} They explain that women and people of color often cited their reason for voting was to “fulfill a right won by disenfranchised ancestors” while others simply wanted to voice complaints about politics and politicians, but regardless of their reason, many young Minnesotans saw voting as “an important and

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 83.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 93.
indeed defining characteristic of a mature, responsible adult.”

This is in contrast to Smith’s findings nationwide about emerging adults and political engagement where the study revealed civil disengagement and feeling disempowered.

Perhaps related to voting and civic participation was a consensus regardless of political affiliation for the value of diversity in a community that has historically been homogeneous as a result of Western European immigration. The editors contend one universal political value in St. Paul is the belief in the advantages of diversity in the city, state, and nation. In the discussion on diversity, minority young adults demonstrated more difficulty in becoming adults. Not only did they need to navigate the waters of emerging adulthood, they also had to learn how to navigate it in a foreign culture. This centered around the fact that young minorities experienced life differently than young people from the majority. Because the Minnesota study had the unique opportunity of examining the lives of the Hmong community, researchers got a rare glimpse into their challenging experiences as minorities whose parents were not born in the United States. The Hmong young adults showed a fierce loyalty to their own, looking for ways to preserve their culture’s language and customs. The Hmong seemed to be the exception to second generation Asians as a Pew Research study found only 40 percent of second generation Asians spoke the native language of their parents.

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83 Ibid., 94.
85 Waters et al., 98.
Becoming Adults on the Coasts

New York City and San Diego are thousands of miles apart, but these two coastal cities share similarities in their immigrant and second-generation demographics and their high housing costs. Through data received from the Immigrant Second Generation in Metropolitan New York and the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study in San Diego, two particular areas of interest immediately emerged regarding how these coastal cities’ young subjects transition into adulthood. The first area is culture. The second area is social class and education.

**Coastal Ethnicity and Culture**

The New York study looked at young adults that belonged to immigrant groups from Columbia, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, West India, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Russia, and Puerto Rico. The San Diego study included immigrant groups from Mexico, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laotia, India, China, and other Latin American countries. A review of the data reveals how journeys into adulthood vary greatly based on cultural differences alone.

The first observation regarding young adult immigrants involves the cultural norm of multigenerational living. While a more traditional trajectory into adulthood means moving out of the parents’ home, ethnic groups celebrate grown kids staying at home in

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87 Waters et al., 108.

88 Ibid., 134-135.
order to obtain education, save money for a future purchase, or help raise younger siblings. Even after grown children of an immigrant leave home, they are often willing to move back in with their parents. The New York study reports, “Children of immigrants generally seem less reluctant to move back with their parents when the need arises, with some doing so to save money or take care of a parent and others just for comfort and company.” Children of immigrants often have a sense of obligation, understanding their parents’ move to the United States may have necessitated sacrificing professional careers in their country of origin. Younger immigrant children are often forced into translator roles for their parents, causing them to miss school and discussing complex legal matters of immigration, medical, housing, and finance. It is often too much for them to adequately handle while courageously trying to assimilate into a new culture.

A personal anecdote illustrates this phenomenon quite well. When I was a high school student in 1980, I was a busboy at Benihana of Tokyo. I made $2.65 an hour plus tips. There was a pecking order in the restaurant. The manager was a Japanese immigrant who spoke English with great proficiency. Although he had a slight accent, it was obvious he was educated and understood American culture and American customers. Next on the social ladder were the chefs, the magicians with their razor-sharp knives who wowed people as they cooked teriyaki steak and shrimp at their huge stainless-steel tables. The rest of the employees included the hostesses, usually white women; bartenders, white men; waitresses, Japanese women; and busboys, American high school

89 Ibid., 115.

students. But at the clear bottom of the barrel of employees were the Korean immigrant dishwashers.

One of the dishwashers was in his 40s or 50s and attended my parents’ Korean church. On Sundays, the dishwasher always wore a suit to church and looked like a diplomat more than a dishwasher at a Japanese restaurant. I will never forget the day my mom asked me if I knew who he was. I of course told her he was the man who ran the Hobart dishwasher in the kitchen at Benihana. My mom was quick to correct me, telling me he was a Ph.D. and high school principal from Korea who moved here to give his kids a better life in the United States. True stories like this may explain one of the findings of the New York study, as the authors report, “These respondents saw multigenerational living not as avoiding adulthood but as being responsible and mature. Many spoke in terms of repaying their parents for the care they received when they were children or taking responsibility for the family.”\textsuperscript{91} The New York study also reveals that immigrant families would purchase property together to save money. Indeed, immigrant families were more likely to live together, buy property together, and to purchase multiple-family dwellings to live together as extended families.\textsuperscript{92}

**Coastal Ethnicity and Social Class**

Children of immigrants consistently have higher expectations placed upon them by their parents than natives do. After all, many immigrant parents have made sacrifices in order to give their children opportunities in America. But the reality is that minorities

\textsuperscript{91} Waters et al., 116.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 117.
trying to become adults face additional hurdles as a result of social class realities in their lives. The days of completing a college degree in four or even five years for less resourced students are much more the exception rather than the rule. The New York and San Diego studies reveal many young people from these cities experience extended and disjointed periods of pursuing their college degrees because of a lack of finances. State government cuts in California have also reduced the number of classes offered to students, making it more difficult for students to enroll in the classes they need to complete their degrees.

In contrast, more resourced individuals who attend private universities do not experience this challenge. As an example of this discrepancy, the San Diego study found only one-quarter of its Latino students graduated from San Diego State University within six years. In addition to financial challenges that require full-time or part-time work while going to college, many subjects of the San Diego study felt underprepared in high school to take college courses offered by the state education system. Even if students of immigrants are able to complete college, some discovered a college education does not necessarily equate to job training. Native students often have internship opportunities between academic years because of connections family members have, but students of immigrants are much less likely have the same networks in place.

**Marriage and Family on the Coasts**

The challenges these minority young adults face with securing their finances, completing college, and successfully entering the workforce serve as a domino effect

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93 Ibid., 154.
when it comes to marriage and starting families. Even though immigrant parents aspire for their grown children to get married and start having kids after they are settled in education and work, young adults on both coasts are experiencing the same “out of order” events as their native counterparts. As the California researchers point out, having children and cohabitating have become quite normal with this generation, even though they come from traditional backgrounds where marriage is far more favored.\textsuperscript{94}

One unique challenge children of immigrants experience is their parents’ desire for them to marry within their own ethnicity. Interestingly enough, minority men were more comfortable with this line of thinking because some of the traditional subservient roles women often play in non-Western cultures. This also might explain why ethnic young female adults were more willing to marry outside of their own race.\textsuperscript{95} All in all, these coastal studies show that while children of immigrants share some of the same problems as their native counterparts, they also face their own unique set of difficulties on the road to adulthood.

Conclusions from Cross-Country Study of Emerging Adults

Studying young people in four different cities across the nation yielded some interesting information on the differences Americans face as they transition from adolescents to adults. First, experts note that traditional markers of adulthood still matter to young people today. What has drastically changed, however, is the timing of those events and the order of those milestones combined with some new markers of adulthood.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 165.

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
Young adults today recognize the benefits of the traditional timing of historical markers but believe their worlds work against them accomplishing these goals in a traditional manner.\textsuperscript{96} For example, the adult marker of moving out of one’s parents’ home is often delayed. Particularly in New York and San Diego, young people cannot afford their own housing, so they now live longer with their parents with no shame and with their parents’ full support.

Second, young people often do not feel like complete adults into their twenties and thirties. Instead, they feel like adults in some areas while still becoming adults in others, somewhat like hybrid adults.\textsuperscript{97} This reality is directly related to point number one, that traditional markers of adulthood are taking so much longer to reach today than previous generations, and this younger generation knows the journey is more complicated than ever. Thus, we have some young adults ready to have children who do not feel able to commit to marriage.

Third, the journey to adulthood does not involve one singular event; rather, the journey involves a series of upward slopes, turning points, and cycles. Upward slopes represent the gradual uphill battle in becoming an adult verses one singular event. Turning points include defining events that spur growth into adulthood. For example, the authors explain that marriage and parenthood remain pivotal events for young people to consider themselves adults.\textsuperscript{98} It is common for young people to say marriage and

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 172.

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 174.

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 178.
parenthood do not make one become an adult, but they do give one adult-like responsibilities.

Cycles refer to events that either seemingly propel young people forward toward adulthood or work in reverse, moving them backwards. For instance, when a young man needs to move back into his childhood home with his parents, he probably sees this as a setback on the way to adulthood. This is his reality even though his parents may be fully supportive of him moving back into the house to help care for them. It is certainly worth noting the perceived notion one minority subject communicated thinking, that white parents are smarter about the order in which certain adult markers are achieved, for example, finishing school, getting a job, moving out, getting married, and having children.99

A fourth finding centers around the concept of social capital. Social capital was discussed more in *Hurt 2.0*, yet in a book on becoming an adult, the importance of other adults in the lives of young people came into play when discussing healthy transitions to adulthood. The authors of the San Diego study refer to this dynamic as “the power of intimates and strangers,” saying young people felt like adults more around co-workers and romantic interests than they did with their own parents.100

While this may seem like an obvious point, it does speak to the critical nature of adolescents being welcomed into the adult world by other adults. The words of one researcher convey the power adults have in the lives of young people working towards adulthood: “Even random messages from strangers can have powerful effects on how we

99 Ibid., 179-180.
100 Ibid., 183.
think of ourselves and can even carry greater weight than reactions from intimates or acquaintances.”\(^{101}\) Regardless of one’s ethnicity or personal challenges, it is clear young adults need awareness of today’s unique obstacles, self-acceptance, perseverance, and encouragement from family members and others while navigating through the challenges of the journey to adulthood.

Summary

In coming alongside parents to help them with a strategy with raising their children to become adults by age twenty-five, research continues to demonstrate an extremely fluid situation with a generation of children and young people. Starting earlier and ending later, adolescence is simply not what it once was. Instead, it is fraught with more challenges and landmines than ever.

This dynamic is true regardless of socioeconomic class. Contrary to popular thinking, affluence, excess, and advantage in some ways works against adolescents and their psychosocial development. Any assistance to young people that protects them from pain, difficulty, or disappointment proves detrimental to the healthy development of the sense of self and finding personal identity and autonomy.

A new life stage has been introduced called emerging adulthood that is neither later adolescence or full-blown adulthood. The variety of ways in which a young person travels the road to adulthood is as diverse and unpredictable than ever as traditional markers to adulthood have been slowly dismantled. When a community of adults

\(^{101}\) Ibid., 184.
welcomes a young person into the adult world, demonstrating a sincere care and nurture with no expectations, the transition to adulthood is immensely smoother.
CHAPTER 4

A THEOLOGY OF ADOPTION FOR ADOLESCENTS

It was a hot and humid summer day in June of 2012 in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and I was with a team of twenty high school students from Oaks Christian School when the founder and head of an American orphanage named Miriam Frederick told me to have the team load up in her large Haitian-style truck called a “tap-tap,” described by an American Associated press reporter as “a psychedelically painted pickup truck taxi.”\(^1\) As we loaded up her enormous vehicle with forty-pound bags of beans and rice and jugs of fresh water, Miriam said she was going to show us what normal Haitian orphanages look like.

Against all odds, Miriam started her orphanage in 1982 in Haiti as a single mom from Florida. Over three decades later, her humble orphanage had grown to include five securely walled acres housing over one hundred children, many of them special needs kids in wheelchairs. New Life Children’s Home was an oasis in the middle of Port-au-Prince, a place dominated by chaos, unemployment, violence, and poverty. Only two years before on January 12, 2010, a 6.9 magnitude earthquake hit Port-au-Prince during

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the afternoon rush hour, killing an estimated 100,000 to 300,000 people.\textsuperscript{2} Because authorities were concerned about the spread of disease caused by decaying flesh, corpses were buried in mass graves without records, leaving no exact death toll.\textsuperscript{3} Even before the devastating earthquake, an estimated 380,000 orphans lived in Haiti. Some feared the number after the earthquake could double.\textsuperscript{4}

Our first stop was a small Seventh Day Adventist orphanage managed by a local pastor. Our team walked in and immediately started making peanut butter sandwiches for the approximately fifty children there. It did not take a trained medical eye to see the rampant malnourishment among the children, as many of them looked like stick figures with distended bellies. They quietly and patiently waited in a room sitting on the concrete floor until we finished preparing the gourmet meal, a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a small bottle of \textit{Sunny Delight} orange juice.

It was anything but pandemonium. Older kids made sure the youngest were fed first. As we passed out the food and drinks, the kids graciously accepted each meal with a quiet \textit{merci} and began eating. The eating was very methodical, not like the Hollywood version of how hungry kids would eat. Instead, these kids ate slowly, savoring each bite as if it were their last meal. I realized for the first time fifty children could eat simultaneously with barely a sound.

\textsuperscript{2} Katz, \textit{The Big Truck}, 70.

\textsuperscript{3} Ibid.

Then I saw her. She was a little seven-year-old girl named Merline, and the shape of her cute little triangular face reminded me of my daughter back in California. It was funny how I was able to make that connection three thousand miles away in a third world country. Through a translator, I asked tiny Merline if I could take a picture with her so that I could show it to my daughter when I returned to California. She was so tiny: I figured she was four years old. It turned out she was seven. But this was not uncommon. UNICEF estimates that one in four children die before the age of five in Haiti, the highest death rate among Latin American and Caribbean nations.⁵

Merline said something to a girl nearby and before I knew it, her identical twin sister Merlande broke through the crowd so that Merline, Merlande and I could have our picture taken at a poverty-stricken orphanage in Haiti, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Merline, Jim, and Merlande, June 2012

Several of my students surprised me by suggesting I adopt the girls. I had never even considered adopting twin girls from Haiti, especially since my wife and I already had three biological children. But after we left the tiny orphanage and returned to the

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sprawling five-acre American orphanage, I could not get my students’ words or the twins themselves out of my mind.

Secretly, I hoped it was like many previous short-term trips where I quickly returned to my comfortable American routines and focused on family, football scores, fast food, and financial markets. But I traveled home and broached the subject with my stunned wife Monica. If my goal with her had been shock and awe, I was successful. With three small children of our own, the thought of adoption was too overwhelming for her to even consider.

Six months later, I returned to Haiti with a small group of dads of the students that had been to Haiti on the earlier mission trip. It was now their fathers’ turns to go and see Haiti. Before I left, our ten-year-old daughter Karissa asked me to visit Merline and Merlande and check on their status and progress. Unbeknownst to us, Karissa had been praying for six months for my wife to reconsider. I found the twins, and they were tiny as ever and had not grown much, if at all. They actually looked worse than before and carried worms in their tiny intestines.

I returned home with fingers crossed to discuss once more with my wife the possibility of adopting the twins. To my complete surprise, her response was to step forward in faith and pursue the adoption. She revealed she had quietly been praying about adopting them. In January of 2013, we began the pursuit of adopting Merline and Merlande Faurestal into the Lee family. We had no idea what we were in for, and if we had known nearly six years ago what the journey would be like, perhaps we would have walked away. But it turns out God is in the business of adoption, literally and figuratively. On December 31, 2016, we boarded an American Airlines Boeing 737 in
Port-au-Prince with our twin daughters and took them home to Nashville, Tennessee.

Figure 2 shows the first picture of the Lee family at the airport.

Figure 2. The expanded Lee Family at the airport

It has been over a year since the twins came home and we transitioned from a happy and familiar family of five to a stressed-out and awkward family of seven. The journey has been difficult. Although there is much heartwarming and beautiful about adoption, in reality, it is fraught with awkwardness, mistrust, loneliness, trauma, disengagement, and tension. As author Dr. Dave Garner so accurately put it,

Onerous problems, including keen mental and emotional traumas, plague many families—both for the adopted children and for their adopting parents. These all-too-common darker sides to human adoption, some of which last a lifetime, can get lost in the sentiment of noble narratives. Just ask myriads of adopting families. Human adoption experiences do not produce the gripping theological analogies quite as neatly as they might first seem to do.⁶

But God continues to teach us the extent of his grace and love when he decided before the creation of the world to pursue our adoption as children into his kingdom and family, even though he knew it would be anything but storybook. It has truly opened our eyes to what adoption means and what it took for a Father who already had a son to adopt

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us. Interestingly, this model of spiritual adoption into the kingdom of God can help us better understand adolescence, abandonment, and the delay into adulthood.

As our cohort that began in February of 2011 discovered, the purpose of youth ministry is simply to adopt kids into the kingdom of God. In *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, Clark writes, “Adoptive youth ministry means we participate in what God has declared and is in the process of realizing throughout his human family, the church.” In an age of systematic abandonment, this is by no means an easy or simple task. In fact, it is more complicated than ever due to societal and cultural forces that seem to gain more and more influence over our nation’s youth with each passing year.

This chapter will analyze four passages in Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians where the Greek word for adoption, *huiothesia*, appears. In addition, it will make a critical case for the role of the church as it seeks to adopt kids into God’s kingdom and help them navigate the complex journey of adolescence into the world of adulthood.

**The Theology of Adoption**

What exactly is the theology behind the Apostle Paul’s use of the word *huiothesia* in the books of Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians? What does it mean for a human being and sinful outsider to be adopted into the family of the Creator of the universe? A discussion must start with the history behind the word *huiothesia*, which literally means “the placing of a son” from the word *huios* and the word *thesis*. It is a word limited to the books of Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians and is completely absent from the Septuagint. Vincent defines it as, “The Spirit of God, producing the condition of

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adoption. *Huiothesia*, adoption, is from *wios* son, and thesis, a setting or placing; the placing one in the position of a son.”

In the Greco-Roman world, when someone was adopted, it gave them several privileges. First, it afforded them the immediate legal rights of any biological child. The adopted son became the true son of the adopted father. It was an immediate difference maker in one’s legal standing in society. Second, an adopted child became an heir and gained all rights to inherit the assets of the parent in the event of death. Third, from that point onward, it was the responsibility of the parent to provide food and clothing for the new adopted child. Fourth, the transaction was permanent and could not be repudiated. Fifth, the adopted son could not go back to being a slave, and sixth, the natural parents could never reclaim the son.

Fitzmyer adds, “The word *huiothesia*, ‘adoption,’ was a technical term in the Greco-Roman world, expressing the legal assumption of a person into the status of sonship in a natural family.” A major motivator of someone to adopt a son was to continue the family line in case there was no apparent heir. As Burke explains, “This was usually due to the paterfamilias’s inability to have offspring of his own or because his

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children had failed to live to adulthood.” Following is an analysis of each Pauline passage using the word *huiothesia*.

*Huiothesia* as Redemption

According to Romans 8:14-17,

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

The context of Romans 8 is a discussion on living a sanctified life in Christ as a member of God’s family. As a disciple of Christ, the child of God possesses the Holy Spirit. Before we were in Christ indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we were slaves to sin. Garner asserts, “In his first use of *huiothesia* in Romans, Paul draws on the redemptive-historical contrast to deliver a soteriological point. Believers in Christ Jesus have received the spirit of adoption—whose outpouring certifies and seals consummate filial grace.” As Romans 6:6-7 teaches, “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.”

Being adopted in God’s family and being sanctified in the Spirit produces security and assurance. Commenting on this Romans passage during the Reformation, Calvin writes,

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He teaches us that our confidence in this respect is made certain by the Spirit of adoption, who could not inspire us with confidence in prayer without sealing to us a gratuitous pardon; and that he might make this more evident, he mentions a twofold spirit; he calls one the spirit of bondage, which we receive from the law; and the other, the spirit of adoption, which proceeds from the gospel. The first, he says, was given formerly to produce fear; the other is now given to afford assurance.\textsuperscript{13}

Morris reminds his readers of who now owns the believer, pointing out “[huiothesia] is a useful word for Paul, for it signifies being granted the full rights and privileges of sonship in a family to which one does not belong by nature. This is a good illustration of one aspect of Paul’s understanding of what it means to become a Christian. The believer is admitted to the heavenly family, to which he has no rights of his own. But he is now admitted and can call God “Father.”\textsuperscript{14} The child of God now has the honor and familial privilege to call the Father “Abba.”

Fascinating discussions have taken place on the Aramaic word for father, \textit{abba}. Burke points out the intimate version of the word was used by infants and children, but that even adults used the word, including Jesus addressing God the Father.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, the word goes beyond the popular usage of “Daddy” and also affords the giving of respect and reverence. Greathouse and Lyons make a case that this usage of the term \textit{abba} was an early church practice. The cry, ‘Abba Father!’ seems to be typical of the religious and


\textsuperscript{14} Leon Morris, \textit{The Epistle to the Romans} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 315.

\textsuperscript{15} Burke, \textit{Adopted}, 94.
liturgical life of the early Christian community. Paul mentions it in Romans, addressing a community he did not found, as well as in Galatians 4:6-7, one he did.”

As believers address the Father as abba, it is done so with the assistance of the Holy Spirit himself. Fitzmyer adds his thoughts regarding this reality: “The upshot is that Christians cry ‘Abba, Father’ because the Spirit so enables them and cries with them.”

Burke compliments this idea: “The expression ‘Abba, Father’ also enables adopted sons to address God in prayer through the Spirit; and in doing so they use the same language, Jesus, God’s Son, used in communion with the Father.”

The reality of being adopted and rescued from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of life brings with it life-changing truths that give new meaning, power, and life to those of us formerly dead in our sins. We receive a new identity as the children of God. As one author so adequately states, “Divine pursuit and presence are stark and stunning. By grace, the Creator of all becomes the Father of his elect, transforming spiritual orphans and rebels into his blessed and holy children.”

*Huiothesia* and Israel

Paul transitions from his discussion on the sanctification of children of God to God’s original children, the children of Israel. From the moment Jesus entered the scene of humanity, the religious leaders of God’s chosen people, led by the Pharisees and

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Sadducees, rejected the anointed one of Israel. This was an extremely painful reality to the apostle Paul, as related in the second use of *huiothesia* in the New Testament, Romans 9:1-5, where Paul writes

> I speak the truth in Christ— I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit— I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised. Amen.

Murray explains the extreme nature of Paul’s love for his Jewish brethren by highlighting the “the intensity of the apostle’s love for his own people . . . It is love patterned after the love of the Savior who was made a curse and sin for the redemption of men.”

Paul was painfully aware of the Jews’ rejection of Jesus. As Matthew 28:12-15 attests, the religious leaders of Israel promoted a story of the stolen body after Jesus was raised from the dead:

> When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, telling them, “You are to say, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

Paul begins Roman 9 speaking of a place of emphasis and authority with the words “in Christ.” Elaborating on the importance of Paul’s use of this prepositional phrase, Murray explains that “‘in Christ’ here refers to union with Christ. It is not a formula of adjuration nor in this instance is he appealing to the agency of Christ. Union
with Christ is the orbit within which his emotions move and the spring from which they proceed.”

Adding another point of authority, Paul mentions the Holy Spirit. Murray points out the apostle’s reference to the Holy Spirit gives apostolic credibility to his witness and union with Christ. In verse three, Paul was so grieved over Israel’s rejection of Christ, he was willing to be eternally cursed in exchange for the Jews’ salvation. Of this grief, Murray writes, “Any difficulty attaching to this verse cannot be relieved by toning down the force of the expression. It means to be abandoned to perdition.” Hodge agrees with Murray, recognizing Paul’s blunt use of eternal destruction. Although Paul’s grief may sound preposterous to modern ears, he is emphatic about his burden for Israel by speaking truth through the Spirit. Richardson reminds readers of Paul’s assertion in verse one that he is not lying: “By this he meant that he spoke with integrity and in a befitting spirit. In this his conscience, guided by the Holy Spirit, bore witness with his words.”

In verses four and five, Paul goes into great detail of what belongs to Israel as a result of God choosing them as his people. The first privilege he mentions, setting the tone for every following privilege received, is the adoption of sonship. Even though the Old Testament does not speak specifically of adoption and the Septuagint never uses the

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21 Ibid., 1.

22 Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2.

23 Ibid., 3.

24 Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 296.

word *huiotesia*, Paul chooses the word in chapter nine to provide a vivid picture of God adopting the nation of Israel. Richardson writes, “The Jews had been the peculiar people of God, his favorites. They were the objects of his special favor in his spiritual adoption of them (Dt 4: 1). They were the recipients of God’s theocratic blessings.”

Hodge echoes those thoughts regarding Israel, affirming “they were the sons of God, i.e., the objects of his peculiar favor, selected from the nations of the earth to be the recipients of peculiar blessings, and to stand in a peculiar relation to God.”

Paul describes the Jewish people’s second privilege as “theirs the divine glory.” Murray points out that the glory Paul refers to could apply to the glory that appeared at Sinai, that permeated the tabernacle, that resided upon the mercy seat of the holy of holies. These examples of God’s glory were a clear sign to Israel that God lived among them and wanted to meet with them. In the New Testament, as Christ breathed his last on the cross, the curtain to the Holy of Holies in the temple was torn right down the middle, giving believers access to the same glory once reserved for the Israelites.

The third privilege owned by the Israelites was “the covenants.” Genesis 15:18-21 reads, “On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.’” Covenants is plural because God made more

26 Richardson and Chamblin, *Romans*, 93.

27 Hodge, *Commentary on Romans*, 298-299.

than one with Israel. Hodge writes, “The plural is used because God at various times entered into the covenant with the Jews and their forefathers, by which he secured to them innumerable blessings and privileges.”

Even though Israel repeatedly violated these covenants, God demonstrated his unilateral grace remaining faithful to his promises, making covenants with Israel, and also giving them his law.

Deuteronomy 4:1 reads, “Now, Israel, hear the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land the Lord, the God of your ancestors, is giving you.” As no other nations were recipients of God’s covenants, neither did any other nation receive his law. Of this unique privilege, Hodge writes, “The and here shows that whom refers, not to the fathers, but to the Israelites, to whom pertained the adoption, the law, the service, and of whom Christ came. This was the great honor of the Jewish race.”

Regarding the law, the temple worship, and the promises, Murray writes, “’The giving of the law’ refers to the Sinaitic promulgation and ‘the service of God’ to the worship of the sanctuary. ‘The promises’ are those which found their focus in Messiah.” Hodge connects the promises to the God of Israel that fulfills his covenants to Israel, finding its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus and providing everlasting hope.

With the sum total of these privileges unique to Israel, it severely anguished Paul that God’s chosen people would reject the Messiah, especially as all their privileges

29 Hodge, Commentary on Romans, 299.

30 Ibid., 299-300.

31 Murray, Epistle to the Romans, 4.

32 Hodge, Commentary on Romans, 299.
pointed directly to Christ. In summary of Romans 9:1-5, Paul expresses his great grief at Israel’s rejection of the God of the universe that adopted and chose Israel, only to have them reject the anointed one.

_Huiotesia: From Slaves to Sons_

A third use of _huiotesia_ in the New Testament is introduced by Garner when he writes, “How is it that God can remain faithful to his old covenant promises and the gospel come to Jews and Gentiles? The answer? The very adoption that Paul has described in this new covenant relies on its historic-genetic ancestry in the old covenant adoption of Israel.” Paul writes in Galatians 4:3-7:

> So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

To begin the discussion on this passage, it is critical to refer to earlier passages to comprehend why Paul wrote Galatians. In Galatians 1:6-7, Paul writes, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.” Paul later explains that this false gospel consisted of men claiming that justification came through the law. In Galatians 2:15 he insists, “We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law, no one will be justified.”
Jewish Christians were teaching the Gentile Christians in Galatia that one must put their faith in Christ and continue to obey the Old Testament law of circumcision. In other words, salvation required both faith in Christ plus circumcision. Of this false gospel that greatly grieved and angered Paul, Burke writes, “The difficulty facing Paul in respect of the church at Galatia was the infiltration of agitators who were boasting of their acquired honour. This was partly based upon their success in getting the Galatians circumcised.”

Paul further describes the nature of the Galatians’ betrayal, as a rejecting not only of accurate doctrine but also of the Father himself. Writing about how Paul deviated from his typical salutation of thanksgiving in the epistle, Bruce claims, “The most probable account of the omission of any thanksgiving here is that Paul was impelled by a sense of overmastering urgency to come straight to the point. Evidently, he had just received the news of his Galatian converts’ abandonment of the gospel of free grace which he had preached to them, and he reacts to that news on the spot.”

Indeed, this false gospel stressed Paul to the point that he said any false preacher who preaches a different gospel should be condemned forever. As Bruce explains, this departure from the original and pure gospel angered Paul so much because if the law was still in effect as the way to salvation, then Jesus was not the Messiah and his conviction and crucifixion were justified. In Galatians 2:21 Paul states, “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.”

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33 Burke, Adopted, 154-155.
34 Ibid., p. 155.
35 F.F. Bruce, Commentary on Galatians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing), 80.
36 Ibid, 80.
In reference to the Galatian false teachers, Paul uses the same word for them to be accursed, *anathema*, as he used about himself in Romans 9. As Paul progresses though chapters two and three in Galatians and finally arrives at chapter four, he is still involved in the debate on justification and salvation. This context serves as the background for Paul’s use of *huiothesia* in Galatians.

The short passage in Galatians 4:3-7 discusses the difference between belonging to the world vs. belonging to God the Father. Paul describes believers in verse three as being slaves of the world until they were redeemed by the Son of God (verses four through five) and adopted into the family of God. Martyn says it this way: “We are taken by God into his own family. Thus, the cosmic change enacted by God in his act of timely redemption involves also the sovereign act of adoption by which he created the new family of his church.”

De Boer thoroughly spells out the life-changing aspects:

For a believer in Christ, who has become God’s ‘son’ by adoption, is precisely as such also an ‘heir’ of God’s promise, together with Christ, who is God’s unadopted Son. As the ‘sons’ of God, believers receive the ‘Spirit of His Son’ into their hearts; they receive ‘the inheritance’ of ‘the promised Spirit.’ Equally important for Paul is the event by which the status of sonship is effected: God sent forth his unadopted Son to redeem those enslaved under the law precisely so that they might be adopted as God’s liberated ‘sons’, thereby becoming ‘heirs’ of the promised Spirit.

Bruce points out Paul’s use of *huiothesia* in a Roman setting was appropriate, as Greeks and Romans were quite familiar with adoption as an institution where the adopted son had all the legal rights as a natural born son. The status and inheritance of adoptees

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39 Bruce, *Galatians*, 197.
changed one hundred and eighty degrees once they are adopted. It is the same spiritually with believers in Christ. Everything about our status is different, including changing from an enemy of God to a friend of God, from condemned to forgiven, from fearing death to being assured of eternal life. In contrast, a false gospel of mandatory circumcision for salvation under the law is no change at all.

Faith in Christ resulting in freedom from being under the yoke of slavery to the law is a genuine change in status. As in Romans 8, the Aramaic word *abba* also appears in Galatians 4:6, testifying to the fact that believers possess the Spirit of his Son in their hearts. The verse points out that it is not believers who call out “Abba Father,” but it is the Spirit inside of them who does so. Frank J. Matera says this about the use of abba in Galatians 4: “The Aramaic “Abba” is found in Mark 14:36 and Romans 8:15. In each instance it is translated “ho pater” which is to be rendered as a vocative, “Father!”

Jesus’ unique form of address to God becomes available to all believers through the agency of the Spirit.”[^40] This clearly provides a picture in a close and intimate relationship between God and his children. Vincent further elaborates on the meaning of abba when connected to the Greek verb *krason*, calling it “a strong word, expressing deep emotion. The verb originally represents the sound of a croak or harsh scream; thence, generally, *an inarticulate cry; an exclamation of fear or pain.*”[^41] Bruce points out how wonderful it is that Christians can address God with the same title Jesus did, a sign that we have the same Spirit inside us that he did.


In essence, the Galatians 4 passage proclaims the genuine gospel message is this: justification by faith instantly changes a believer’s status from slave to the law to adopted child of God. Garner sums up the power of Galatians 4 by saying, “As the sons of God in the Son of God, believers possess the Spirit of the Son and enter the Son’s full inheritance. The same God who sent his Son also sent into the hearts of believers the Spirit of his Son.” For those in Christ Jesus, everything has changed for eternity.

_Huiotesia: Chosen for Adoption_

A fourth use of _huiotesia_ is from Ephesians 1:4-6 and reads, “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.” Garner highlights the unique language of adoption and God’s sovereignty in the beginning of Ephesians by saying, “The apostle Paul transports his readers into the invisible and humanly inaccessible recesses of intra-Trinitarian counsel, where God determined and commenced the gracious plan of redemption.”

Wood also makes an interesting connection between God adopting Israel and God adopting New Testament believers: “Christians were selected in Christ prior to the work of creation. The verb ‘chose’ (_exelestat_ ) is the usual one employed in LXX in connection

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42 Bruce, _Galatians_, 199.

43 Garner, _Sons_, 15.

44 Ibid., 17.
with God’s choice of Israel.\footnote{A. Skevington Wood, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Galatians, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House), 24.} This choice by God was later used by some Christians to cause divisions in the early church. In Ephesians 2:11-13, Paul affirms the Gentiles’ welcome place in the church:

> Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called ‘uncircumcised’ by those who call themselves ‘the circumcision’ (that done in the body by the hands of men)—remember that at time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

Jews and Gentiles were two groups who occupied the church at Ephesus, natural opponents now sharing Jesus Christ as their common Savior. Paul argues that even though they had historically been enemies, they were now expected to be at peace with one another and exist in the same church with unity. Ephesians 2:14-16 reads,

> For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

Paul is clear in his instructions. The two groups are now one in Christ, and the two must exist in peace within the church.

In A.D. 70 when the temple was destroyed, a partition in the temple that separated Jews and Gentiles was also destroyed. Wood points out that before the partition was destroyed, Paul claims the wall dividing the two races had been obliterated in a spiritual sense.\footnote{Wood, Galatians, 40.} Burke sheds further light on this reality when he argues, “If the church is the
family of God’s adopted sons and daughters, then it is they more than all people on earth who ought to reflect and mirror the unity of the family before they eyes of a watching world.  

It is under this context in which Paul explains the believers’ status as being adopted into the family of God. He adds a new twist, bringing into this epistle the sheer pleasure and will of God as a motivator of his love and grace to adopt.

The Greek word for good pleasure is eudokian. Barth reports that eudokian appears nine times in the New Testament, eight times in the Psalms (in the Septuagint), and sporadically in other places. He insists, “Far from any idea of arbitrariness, it has warm and personal connotations. When God’s good pleasure is mentioned, his willingness and joy in doing good are indicated.” Perhaps believers are somewhat unaware God would do anything out of sheer goodness or pleasure, or they might even be astounded of the concept, but Calvin adds, “In adopting us, therefore, God does not inquire what we are, and is not reconciled to us by any personal worth. His single motive is the eternal good pleasure, by which he predestined us.”

The Greek word proridzo is a verb translated as predestined and appears in Ephesians 1:5. Hoehner explains the word’s origins as a compound between two Greek words, aphoridzo and pro. It means to determine beforehand and as an accusative,

47 Burke, Adopted, 81.

48 Barth, Markus, The Anchor Bible, Ephesians, Introduction, Translation and Commentary on Chapters 1-3 (Garden City: Doubleday), 81.

49 Ibid.

illustrates that God predestined us to something.\(^51\) We were predestined to adoption into the family of God because it gave God great pleasure. From the human perspective of time, this was determined before he created the world.

British theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking recently died at the age of seventy-six. He believed the universe to be fourteen billion years old.\(^52\) Regardless of how old one believes the universe actually is, it is safe to say our adoption into God’s family had been planned for a very long time. Theilman takes *huiōthesia* and emphasizes our sharing of the rights of Jesus as a son, saying it was the term Greeks and Romans used to describe when a father legally gave his inheritance to a male child who was not his own. In the same way, Jesus shares his divine sonship with believers, who become heirs of God along with him.\(^53\) A unique spin on our adoption into the family of God comes from Catholic theologian Peter S. Williamson:

> We have God as our Father and Jesus as our older brother (Romans 8:29). So intimate is this familial relationship that the Holy Spirit, who unites the Father and the Son, dwells also in us. As children we can count on God’s protection, provision and steadfast love (Matt 6:31-34; 10:29-31; Rom 8:39). As children, we are ‘heirs of God,’ with a dignity so extraordinary that creation itself will be transformed when our identity as sons and daughters of God is fully revealed (Romans 8:19-21).\(^54\)


\(^{54}\) Peter S. Williamson, *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture, Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 35.
Paul’s use of *huiοthēsia* was specifically meaningful to his audience. Burke points out that Rome, Galatia, and Ephesus were cities under Roman rule, whose citizens recognized the Greco-Roman concept of adoption and all its benefits. Paul writes as a Roman to those under direct Roman rule who clearly understand the analogy, one he doesn’t use in his other letters. When these passages in Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians are read together, the inspired word of God reminds us as believers what an intimate personal and corporate relationship we have with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Being adopted into his family changes our status for eternity.

**Adoption, Extended Adolescence, and Arriving at Adulthood**

God’s eagerness to adopt us as sons into his kingdom is the starting point. That love then spurs us on to invite others to join us as brothers and sisters in Christ. One critical group to encourage and invite into God’s kingdom is today’s youth, who are on an often tumultuous journey toward becoming adults. Two points will be made in an attempt to make the critical connection between adopting young people into God’s kingdom and the journey from adolescence into adulthood.

**Adults and Mentoring Relationships**

First of all, Christian adults need to initiate loving and mentoring relationships with young people in the church. Every adoption starts with an initiator. In January of 2013, we took the initiative to adopt Merline and Merlande. The argument could be made that the root of initiative for prospective parents to adopt is love. Initiative starts with eyes of love that sees a child in need of love and a family. When I saw the twins for the

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first time, it was certainly not the first time I had seen third world children in need of
loving parents and a home. I certainly did not lead a group of high school students to
Haiti so that I could find twin girls to adopt. Perhaps God placed a strong and stubborn
love in my heart for Merline and Merlande, and my wife Monica soon followed.

In an infinitely grander way, the initiative by God to love us was his conscious
decision and choice to pursue us, because it brought him pleasure. He did not have to
choose us, nor did he need to do so as if he lacked something, but out of his gracious
love, he did. Burke describes God’s adoption of us in this way:

The emphasis here is that what God had purposed in eternity (our adoption as
sons) cannot be thwarted, changed or overturned. God planned and purposed the
believer’s adoption in the past and his will was sovereignly brought to pass in
time. Included also in the word ‘will’ is the fact that we do not find God but that
God has found us and ‘willed’ or wanted us to be included as members of his
family.  

Burke further points out from the Galatians 4 passage that God is the initiator of
adoption of the believer, explaining that although Paul utilizes the image of father in
different ways and for different reasons, his use of the term early on in Galatians in the
context of adoption “underscores that fact that God as adoptive Father is the sole
initiative and authority in salvation.” But Garner makes an insightful difference
between spiritual adoption and human adoption, saying,

In short, unlike human convention, divine adoption is mediatorial and
redemptive—it comes through the divine Son, Jesus the Messiah. Divine adoption
does not proceed from dissatisfaction in God, in which he pursues a family
because he is incomplete or longs for something he lacks. Divine adoption moves

56 Burke, Adopted, 79.

57 Ibid., 84.
from heaven to earth by sovereign grace and transforms the children of wrath into the glorious and radiant possession of the heavenly Father.\textsuperscript{58}

Ten years ago, Dr. Chap Clark spoke at Oaks Christian School about adolescence and the journey into the adult world. He insisted one critical step of their journey was for other adults to welcome young people into the adult world. I have never forgotten those powerful words because it speaks of initiative by the adult to the adolescent. I certainly remember several mentors along the way that treated me as an adult even when I wondered if I was an adult. In light of how God has so graciously and willingly adopted us into his family, it is critical for Christian adults to follow God’s example and welcome others into the adult world. Adolescents and emerging adults have grown up in a much different world than older adults and need the wisdom, care and guidance as they transition into the adult world. When loving initiative is instigated and offered, the receiver must respond with either acceptance or rejection.

At the end of \textit{Hurt 2.0}, Clark offers some helpful tips for midadolescents, saying they need to have “authentic, intimate relationships with adults.”\textsuperscript{59} The same could be said of young adults transitioning into adulthood. Adults often do not realize the powerful influence they can have on younger adults when they are simply willing to connect with them and mentor them.

\textbf{Calling and Adopting into Divine Purpose and Christian Community}

\textsuperscript{58} Garner, \textit{Sons}, xxii.

\textsuperscript{59} Clark, \textit{Hurt 2.0}, 192.
The second point of connection between adoption and the journey of adolescence and emerging adulthood to adulthood is divine purpose. When we adopted Merline and Merlande into our family, everything changed. For instance, they no longer had to worry about acquiring parasites in their drinking water. They no longer had to worry about nutrition or orange hair from a lack of protein. They no longer face a future of no education. Their basic needs are now being taken care of by us.

At the same time, we are teaching them they cannot waste the incredible opportunities they now have as members of our family have been given. They have been chosen out of hundreds of thousands of children living in Haitian orphanages to face bright futures. They have the potential to live lives with divine purposes and impact others for God’s kingdom. This statement of course in no way insinuates children in Haitian orphanages cannot live out divine purposes.

When people are rescued from the kingdom of darkness and adopted into God’s family, everything changes. We are now reconciled to God instead of enemies of God (Rom 5:10). We are now children of God instead of objects of wrath (Eph 2:3). We were once foreigners and aliens but now citizens and members of God’s household (Eph 2:19). Because of these changes we now live with divine purpose. Paul spoke of living for human gain and aspiration versus living to know Christ in Philippians 3:7-11:

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. 10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.
With this eternal outlook, Paul was not afraid of death. In Philippians 1:21, he said, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

As Christian adults invite young people into the journey of adulthood, we should be inviting them into a world where they live as disciples of Jesus as divine ambassadors of the creator of the universe. 2 Corinthians 5:20-21 states, “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Clark refers to this specifically with young people as “adoptive youth ministry” where adults have the responsibility of the inclusion and calling of young people into the body of Christ and community. He even goes as far as saying to do so is the ultimate purpose of youth ministry.60

The twenties no longer exist as a gap decade where young people have a lengthy period of time to figure out who they are. Instead, the twenties become a journey into emerging adulthood to adulthood while living with eternal perspectives in mind. For example, perhaps someone is twenty-one and trying to discover what their major or passion should be. But as they live in a time of uncertainty, they remain connected to Christian adults as well as ministering to peers who are going through the same struggles. They form a ministry at their church under the umbrella of older and caring adults, even grandparents whose children and grandchildren live out of town. Being ambassadors for Christ does not result in having a life resolved of all questions and problems; rather, it

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60 Chap Clark, ed., *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 11.
reflects lives connected with the creator of the universe that calls us into his family and to live out complicated and complex lives for God and his kingdom.

Millennials are already a generation seeking higher purposes beyond themselves. As Peter Lang’s describes, “They are deeply concerned about social and economic inequality, they support egalitarian relationships among nations and peoples, and they believe that the government should do whatever it takes to protect the environment. They have a strong desire to ‘change the world’ for the better and are volunteering in record numbers to do so.” President of the Millennial Impact Project Derrick Feldman relates how millennials have impacted society:

This generation has affected more than just the nonprofit sector with their unique brand of social good and issue engagement. They have changed how the government responds with new social issue policies. They have changed the culture at corporate America to stand up for the disenfranchised and address the challenges within our communities. They are changing how nonprofits are defining philanthropy.

The church needs to recognize that young people are not the future of the church; they are the church today. As one young lady of seventeen explains, “A lot of my friends don’t really want to go to their church. But we want to be here, and the older people in our church can see that . . . so they want us to be here. Our whole church treats us like we’re the church of today, not just the church of the future.”

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63 Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, Growing Young (Grand Rapids: Baker Books), 13.
Summary

Adopting children into his kingdom cost God the Father his only Son. Adopting Merline and Merlande cost us thousands of dollars, four years of an extraneous legal process, and a number of challenging years that lie ahead of us as we try to become a new family. Adoption in divine or human terms is complicated, risky, and messy. Adolescence and the extended journey into emerging adulthood and adulthood is more unpredictable than ever. Describing this journey, Powell, Mulder, and Griffin claim, “Earlier Start + Later Finish = Longer Race.”

In a world of unpredictability, the church can move with intentionality toward a younger generation seeking to be invited into God’s kingdom and a loving community. It requires adults taking the initiative, coming alongside young adults during complicated transitions, and teaching them to live their lives with eternal perspectives and purpose. The final chapter of this project proposes a parent seminar to equip parents and ministries to assist young people in making the full transition to adulthood.

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64 Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, Growing Young, 100.
PART THREE

PLAN, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION
Ten years ago, I was on a school eighth grade trip to Washington, D.C. The trip started in Boston and moved its way south towards the nation’s capital. I found myself sitting next to a father of an eighth-grade boy, and we started to talk about adolescence. The man had lost his first wife to cancer and had an older son in his early twenties from that marriage. I told him about belonging to a doctoral cohort at Fuller Theological Seminary and the conversation shifted to the book *Hurt*. When we spoke of adolescence starting earlier and adulthood taking longer and longer to reach, he was immediately riveted because of his two sons. His older son was having difficulty moving through adolescence, and his younger son was just starting the complicated journey. He ordered a copy of *Hurt* and quickly devoured it. In August of 2017, I officiated the wedding of the man’s older son and baptized the son’s baby boy at the same ceremony—a clear reminder how the journey into adulthood has changed and that markers are not necessarily accomplished in traditional order.
The same conversation I had on the bus with that father has been repeated over and over again among moms, dads, educators, clergy, businessmen and businesswomen, doctors, therapists, stay-at-home parents, and grandparents. Everyone is trying to figure out why the journey into adulthood is taking much longer and what can be done about it. Since 2011 when I first joined the cohort, I have seen an exponential increase in interest as well in resources (especially books) on the subject. Visit Amazon’s website and type in the search bar “becoming an adult” and countless titles appear. The first five book titles that appear are *Becoming Adult: How Teenagers Prepare for the World of Work*; *How to Be an Adult: A Handbook for Psychological and Spiritual Integration*; *Adulting: How to Become a Grown-up in 468 Easy(ish) Steps*; *101 Secrets for Your Twenties*; and *Why Didn’t They Teach Me This in School?*

At the request of parents at Oaks Christian School, I developed my own parent seminar and have taught it in schools and at my local church in Nashville. When people discover the subject matter of my final project, they always want to enter into intense and focused dialogue on what is happening in our country with adolescents and the tumultuous transition into adulthood. Few know what to do, all want to know what to do, and all know how to recount the drastic changes that have taken place in the process when comparing past years to now. This chapter will cover the parent seminar I developed and am continuing to revise as each year seems to bring new technologies.

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challenges, and issues that further complicate adolescence and the perilous journey into adulthood.

**Contributing Factors to Adulthood Beginning at Later Ages in America**

The title of my parent seminar is, “Raising a Child to Become an Adult by Age 25.” Some today would laugh at the title, thinking it is impossible. Others would be critical that the age is not younger. In fact, any group of adults over forty years old would passionately debate at what age children become adults. For example, American, Delta, and United Airlines charge a full adult fare for a child who is three years old. American Movie Corporation (AMC) charges an adult ticket price for a child when they turn thirteen.

In a more sobering arena, Lionel Alexander Tate is the youngest person in America to be sentenced to a life sentence without the possibility of parole. He was thirteen at the time he committed first degree murder.² In Tennessee, some kids at the age of fourteen with working parents can get a driver’s license under the “hardship” rule.³ At sixteen, any adolescent in any state can get a driver’s license. At seventeen, an adolescent can buy a ticket to an R-rated movie without being accompanied by an adult. At eighteen, an individual is a legal adult in America. That person can leave home, join the military, vote, and have health records hidden from his or her parents. Federal law allows eighteen-year-olds to legally purchase rifles, just like Florida school shooter Nikolas

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Cruz. At eighteen, one may purchase tobacco. At twenty years old, Hertz will allow a customer to rent an automobile. One wonders if these ages determined by various groups make someone an adult.

Perhaps twenty-one is when one really becomes an adult. Twenty-one is the legal drinking age across the United States. A person at twenty-one can also buy a handgun. Not every arena considers twenty-one to be the magic age, however. For example, auto insurance rates remain considerably higher until a driver turns twenty-five, with rates generally decreasing by as much as twenty percent when drivers reach that age milestone. In contrast, under the Affordable Health Care Act, a child may remain on a parent’s health insurance policy until he or she turns twenty-six, even if the twenty-five-year-old is married and financially independent.

If we as a society cannot agree on what age someone becomes an adult, perhaps we can agree on the traditional markers of adulthood. Historically in America, the traditional markers of adulthood have included the following five accomplishments: moving out from home, launching a career, becoming married, having children, and owning a home. In times past, most young people reached at least three or four of these markers in their early twenties. Although the timeline for these historical markers looks much different today, the markers are still in the picture on the road to adulthood.

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5 Ibid.

According to emerging adults, what are the three of today’s new markers for adulthood? They include taking responsibility for yourself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially dependent. Before the subject of the transition to adulthood is discussed, it is necessary to recognize what factors are contributing to adulthood later.

The Changing Face of Adolescence

Clark says it well when entering the discussion on adolescence: “In a sense, the debate about whether or not adolescence is changing is like a big Rorschach inkblot test. People see what they want to see. So, where do I land in this debate? Do I think the world of young people is the same as it has always been? Or do I think things have changed in significant and worrisome ways? Sign me up for ‘significant’ and ‘worrisome.’” Without question, adolescents are growing up in a very different world than their parents did. The following points illustrate how adolescence has taken on new dynamics and hurdles.

Biology

Kara Powell of Fuller Theological Seminary in *Growing Young* points out that the starting line for adolescence is beginning earlier and the finish line ending later. Experts have different theories as to why puberty is starting earlier and earlier for girls, ranging

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from hormones in food and obesity to genetics and stress. A Berkeley study even revealed girls lacking biological fathers tend to start puberty at younger ages. In addition to the physical factors affecting young adults’ development, today’s culture brings its own pressures which can negatively impact healthy growth. Biology may signal the beginning of adolescence, but culture decides when adolescence ends. As discussed, that ending determined by culture has a finishing line that is increasingly hard to see.

Academics

There is more pressure than ever on high school students to excel academically, especially with children from affluent families. A 2015 NYU study focused on students from private, independent school and their stress levels related to academic pressure to succeed. The research team discovered a strong correlation between academic pressure, depression, anxiety, and increased levels of substance abuse. At the end of finals week several years ago, a friend of mine who taught at a local private school told me he had found pills on the floor designed to keep students awake when they were not sleeping enough.

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Levine reminds her readers what can happen when academic success is perceived as necessary to be loved: “Unremitting academic pressure leads to depression, anxiety, even suicide in some children, and a debilitating sense of not being able to keep any more.”

Parents may mean well, thinking pressure with a reluctant teen is what they need to excel in life and to have the best chances of getting into college. But their efforts are often counterproductive and destructive when the pressure exceeds the child’s capacities to cope.

Athletics

Who is the top sixth grade point guard in America? Thirty years ago, college coaches might have possessed a few names here and there, but things are different today. Today, a website called “middleschoolelite.com” will tell you that sixth grader Jerry Easter II from Ohio is the top point guard in the country of the Class of 2024. In a similar vein, before he graduated high school in 2007 from Oaks Christian School, quarterback Jimmy Clausen had a multi-page spread article of himself in *Sports Illustrated* with the title, “The Kid with the Golden Arm.” The article referred to this junior in high school as the “Lebron James of high school football.” Simply stated, youth, middle school, and high school sports have drastically changed into a multi-billion-dollar business.


According to *Time* magazine, Americans spend fifteen billion dollars on youth sports.\(^\text{16}\) Scores of private instruction facilities are popping up all around the country, offering one-on-one training with former college and professional players. Today, some people have come to associate bad parenting with refusing to drop thousands of dollars a year on private instruction for a gifted and athletic child. Although sports were once about getting kids together to learn life lessons, develop skills, and play with their peers, now their focus is on training future hopeful-professionals and putting money into the wallets of adults. As the importance, priority, and pressure of youth sports has increased, adolescents’ time for school, family, and friends has decreased.

**College Application Process**

Simply stated, the college application process is big business, with parents more than willing to spend huge amounts of money. It is more competitive than ever to get into America’s top colleges. According to an NYU article, “It has never been more difficult to enter one of these top-tier institutions, which may accept only 5 or 6 percent of their applicants, although in general a strong student will be able to gain access to any number of good colleges or universities. These highly selective schools and parents are responding to this competitive climate.”\(^\text{17}\) Just like private sports instruction, the world of private college counseling has become financially lucrative. The *Atlantic*’s Georgia Perry  

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wrote this in 2015: “The IECA’s most recent report found that nationally, $400 million was spent on college consultants in 2012. Hourly rates in the Bay Area can be as high as $400 an hour, and comprehensive packages with regular meetings throughout high school can add up to several thousand dollars.”

**Family Redefined**

*Modern Family* is a popular ABC television sitcom about three families. An older father Jay Pritchett has two grown up children, a daughter and a son. The son Mitchell is gay and committed to his spouse. He and his husband have an adoptive daughter from China. Jay’s daughter is married with two children. She represents the traditional family, but they are portrayed as quirky and awkward with a clueless father. Jay himself is divorced and remarried to a beautiful Columbian woman the same age as his daughter Claire. His new wife has a teenage son.

*Modern Family* was one of the first television shows that normalized non-traditional family arrangements. But it is not so modern any more, having originally aired in 2009 and now in syndication. In other words, gay marriage, divorce and remarriage, and a generational gap in age between spouses are now old news in American culture. What was once viewed as an anchor and foundation in the healthy development of children, a long-married two-parent household with spouses of the opposite sex, is now just one option of many for families today. A recent Pew Research study revealed the changing child-parent arrangements in the United States from 1960-2014. In 1960, 73

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percent of children were living with two parents married for the first time. In 2014, that number had dropped to 41 percent. In 1960, 9 percent of children were living with a single parent. In 2014, that number jumped to 26 percent. In addition, 7 percent of children in 2014 were living with cohabitating parents.\textsuperscript{19} Traditional, two-opposite-sex-parent households, once a steadying foundation for our country’s children, has decreased in influence.

**Less Social Capital**

Children today often have packed calendars with many demands. Because kids are busier than ever, they have less time with adults where they receive valuable social capital in preparation for adulthood. Only fifteen percent of teens get the recommended 8.5 hours of sleep each night.\textsuperscript{20} This number is not surprising, as large numbers of students in a setting like Oaks Christian School do much more than attend school. They play sports or travel sports. They enroll in AP courses and take private music or dance lessons. They are tutored, participate in service projects, and are expected to be active in church. Although these activities may be excessive, tremendous opportunities exist for adults to provide social capital to students as teachers, private instructor, tutors, youth


staff, and coaches. As Clark points out, one of the main reasons ministries to youth exist should be to address the erosion of social capital.  

**Systemic Abandonment**

Abandonment is explained by Chap Clark in *Hurt 2.0*. He describes it throughout his book as adults prioritizing themselves and their needs over the needs of kids by hijacking activities originally created for the healthy development and welfare of children. Sometimes, adults simply are too wrapped up in themselves to sacrifice for the needs of young people.

A recent, somewhat extreme but very real example of abandonment today was the murder of seventeen people in Parkland, Florida at Marjory Douglas Stoneman High School. Two separate tips about the mass murderer were relayed to the FBI. In both cases, the FBI failed to follow up and at least interview the murderer, Nikolas Cruz. The sheriff’s department knew Cruz had threatened people with a gun. But no one in law enforcement questioned why he had an AR-15. The *New York Times* reported, “In a tense interview on CNN on Sunday, Sheriff Israel said he should not be held responsible for the armed deputy assigned to the school, who failed to enter the building while the shooting was in progress on Feb. 14.”

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The armed campus officer on duty that refused to enter the building and confront the shooter is defending his actions. His attorney made this statement about his client’s actions (or inaction): “However, the allegations that Mr. Peterson was a coward and that his performance, under the circumstances, failed to meet the standards of police officers are patently untrue.” It seems fewer adults in charge of law enforcement are talking about the best way to keep kids safe, and more are doing what they can to distance themselves from responsibility of seventeen lost lives. The younger generation is watching adults fail to take ownership or responsibility and blame others out of concern for their own reputations. Meanwhile, seventeen people are dead and the kids are watching adults run and hide behind unions and attorneys. This is a classic case of systemic abandonment, and children know it.

**Overscheduled Children**

Many adults will fondly recollect days how much time they spent at church, recalling how if church doors were open, they were there Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night. Today, kids are lucky if they go to a worship service one time each week. Dedicated Christian families are choosing sleep, travel sports, SAT prep courses, and much needed family time over church. Students who attend private Christian schools probably consider the daily Bible classes and weekly chapel services as “church.” One pastor in a *New York Times* article was quoted in a sermon: “Let’s say this out loud, in front of the mirror, and see if we like it: ‘I will do spiritual things for my child’s sake

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until sports conflict, then sports win.”²⁵ As Madeline Levine notes, many affluent children from schools like Oaks Christian are scheduled to within an inch of their lives.”²⁶

**A Shortage of Life Skills**

According to a U.S. Bank survey of small business owners in America, 61 percent said they experienced extreme or moderate difficulty in expanding their businesses due to a shortage of skilled workers.²⁷ Neil Howe wrote an article in *Forbes* magazine about millennials lacking life skills. He asserts, “But when it comes to basic life skills, let’s be honest: Older generations are often astonished by how little Millennials know. Consider cars. Young Boomers spent endless afternoons tooling around with their tie rods and carburetors. But today’s Millennials spend more time perfecting the trip playlist than ever looking under the hood—if they even know where the latch is.”²⁸

This lack of preparedness is by no means simply the fault of young people today. Schools today no longer offer home economics, wood shop, or metal shop. Although young people do know how to ask Siri a question, access information faster than any previous generation, and have their own groceries delivered while in their pajamas, not

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many know how to change a tire, sew on a button, or balance a checkbook. With the increased pressure to perform in sports, academics, or arts, it is not surprising young people do not have time to learn life skills. A recent study at the University of Washington even revealed that college graduates lacked the skill of framing their own questions at post-college jobs when trying to problem solve.29

**Depression, Anxiety, Self-Harm, and Substance Abuse among the Affluent**

Dr. Madeline Levine has written extensively on this topic and has effectively alerted the nation that the most stressed out adolescents in the country are those from affluent families.30 Conventional wisdom would dictate that the poorest students in the country have the highest rates of depression, substance abuse, self-harm, and anxiety. But this is not the case. As mentioned previously, the recognition of her weekly schedule being full of anxious, depressed, affluent adolescents ignited her research and investigation into this area. Her research led to this finding: “It is now clear, however, that children of privilege are exhibiting unexpectedly high rates of emotional problems beginning in junior high school and accelerating through adolescence.”31

**Inability to Deal with Adversity or Disappointment**


31 Ibid., 21.
One of the most common emails or phone calls to the principal of a private school today goes something like this, “Hi. This is John Smith/Jane Doe and I am wanting to let you know how disappointed my son/daughter is in her/his English class. We just received a very poor grade on the last project. If my daughter/son could even understand Mr./Mrs. Brown, then maybe the test score would have been better.” This conversation is an example of a generation of parents who will do anything possible to protect their child from pain, adversity, or disappointment. The result is millions of young people ill-prepared for life because they have never had to deal with pain, adversity, or difficulties in life on a consistent basis.

Wendy Mogel writes, “College deans use the code name ‘teacups’ for incoming students who are overprotected and fragile. When presented with a challenge, teacups don’t rise to it. They crack.” She goes on to recommend that adolescents experience “good suffering” under parental care while they are still home in order to prepare them for the new challenges and difficulties of college life.

New Economic Realities

The changing face of adolescence has extended the length of adolescence and delayed the reaching of adulthood. The number of the reasons contributing to this new landscape of longer adolescence has been reviewed. In addition to these biological,

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33 Ibid., 97.
cultural, and psychological reasons, a second major category affecting the delay of adulthood is how the post-modern economy and education has impacted young people.

**College Degrees and Debt**

When considering the level of education and degrees an applicant needs to apply for one of today’s top-paying jobs, the topic of student debt is impossible to ignore. The average student debt from undergraduate studies in the United States is now $26,600; the average student loan debt for a graduate degree is $43,500.\(^{34}\) With these outstanding debt amounts, recent graduates often delay marriage until they can significantly reduce their debt.\(^{35}\) To make matters worse, wages have not kept up with student debt. Figure 3 illustrates the painful reality of graduates’ finances today.

![What Young People Make and What They Owe](image)


Figure 3. Difference in earnings and debt of today’s college graduates

**Higher Costs of Living**

It is not uncommon to hear stories from generations of older baby boomers and builders. In many accounts, the couple got married in their late teens then finished college in four years. Perhaps both worked for a while, or the woman stayed home and the man earned the living. They often bought a house by age twenty-one, started a family, and had all three kids by their late twenties. What these stories reflect is the way the economy functioned in this nation; the financial infrastructure allowed this exact scenario where millions of families could function on one income. But today is different, as wages have not kept up with inflation, and the middle class is steadily diminishing.

A recent *New York Times* article points out that the middle class is shrinking in America while it is growing in England and France: “For example, between 1991 and 2010, the proportion of adults in middle-income households fell to 59 percent from 62 percent, while it rose to 67 percent from 61 percent over the same period in Britain and to 74 percent from 72 percent in France.” Figure 4 illustrates wages versus cost of living.

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Figure 4. Wages versus cost of living

In tandem with this fiscal reality, the percentage of Americans renting homes today is the at the highest levels since 1965. The record-high amounts of student debt post-college affects millennials’ buying power. A 2017 article by MarketWatch stated this harsh reality: “Historically, Americans have bought a home by their early 30s, but today’s millennials are playing a waiting game because they’re saddled with so much student loan debt and can’t afford to save.”

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One final example of higher costs in this generation is the price of raising children. In 2011 the Department of Agriculture reported that over the previous ten years, the average cost for middle-income parents to raise a child from birth to age eighteen had climbed nearly 40 percent, or more than $60,000; the $226,920 figure did not include college.\textsuperscript{41} The annual expense to raise a child rose from $9,860 to $13,830 in a decade.\textsuperscript{42} The bottom line is that it is much more expensive to be a young family today than it has ever been in our nation’s history. Perhaps their fiscal reality is summed up best by Steven Rattner of the \textit{New York Times}:

\begin{quote}
They are faced with a slow economy, high unemployment, stagnant wages and student loans that constrict their ability both to maintain a reasonable lifestyle and to save for the future. Longer term, rising federal debt payments and increased spending on Social Security and Medicare will inflict a tremendous financial burden on them, threatening their own prospect of receiving promised retirement benefits.\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

As for the job prospects of young people, \textit{Time} magazine recently released the top-paying jobs for college graduates, along with their salaries, as shown in Figure 5.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[42] Ibid.
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Figure 5. College graduates’ top-paying jobs and salaries

These dollar amounts reveal the fiscal realities of gaining good employment and living in cities with high rent, healthcare costs, and other living expenses. Even if a college graduate lands a top-paying job, he or she may still have student loans to pay.

Later Marriage and Increased Cohabitation

Men and women are getting married for the first time at later ages than ever before. The reasons for this are numerous: increased length of education, higher student debt, growing levels of cohabitation, and fear of marriage by adults who were children of divorce. Cohabitation is on the rise, especially among younger adults: half of the nation’s cohabitating couples are millennials. Figures six, seven, and eight reveal some alarming numbers about marriage age, increasing cohabitation, and out-of-wedlock birth rates, illustrating the rapidly changing landscape.

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As Figure 6 shows, the median marrying ages for women and men respectively were 24.8 and 27.1 years old in 1996. By 2016, those ages had risen to 27.4 and 29.5. Figure 7 reveals that while the marriage age is getting older, adults age twenty-five through thirty-four are the most likely age group to be cohabitating. Figure 8 reveals that four out of ten babies born in 2008 were born out of wedlock. That rate remained steady in 2016 at 39.8 percent, which totaled over 1.5 million babies born out of wedlock.  

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**Figure 7. Cohabitation by age**

A record four of every 10 babies are born to unmarried women, new federal figures show. Among blacks, this “ unwed birth rate” rose to seven in 10; for Hispanics, it topped 50 percent. Single mothers tend to be in their 20s, with low income and little education. But two-thirds would escape poverty, research shows, if they were married to the fathers of their children.

**Figure 6. Out-of-wedlock birthrates**

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Another factor for the marriage age getting older is the significant advances women have made in their education and careers. In the 1950s and early 60s, it was generally expected that women be homemakers and put aside any educational or career aspirations for the welfare of the family. The economy accommodated the norm to be a single income that would adequately provide for a family. As the 60s transitioned into the 70s, the feminist movement provided the necessary boost to allow women to pursue education and professional careers. A groundbreaking movie came out in 1983 starring Michael Keaton and Teri Garr called *Mr. Mom*. IMDB describes the movie as a story of a mom that goes back to work because her husband was laid off from his auto factory job. The man stays home to take care of the kids and has no idea how to do it.\(^49\)

Today, the picture could not be more different. Women outnumber men in college by over two million students, and it is estimated that by 2026, 57 percent of college students will be female.\(^50\) As a result, women are getting married at later ages in order to first establish educational and career goals. To further complicate matters, for every four women with college degrees, there are three men. This is creating a shortage of marriageable men who possess the same level of education as women.\(^51\) These dynamics

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illustrate the path to adulthood in the context of marriage is as complicated and unpredictable as it has ever been.

**Lack of Purpose in Life**

Only one in four members of Generation Z, those born starting in 1998, look forward to the freedoms associated with adulthood; analysts believe their apathy toward growing up is associated with a lack of purpose and meaning.\(^5^2\) A 2015 Pew study on millennials revealed that generation to be the group with the least amount of religious affiliations than any previous generation in America.\(^5^3\) This should come as no surprise considering the previous discussion regarding the changing landscape of adolescence where pillars of society originally designed to invest in the healthy development of children have been completely uprooted.

**Summary on the Adolescent Landscape**

In the late 1980s, General Motors came up with a clever campaign slogan for its brand of Oldsmobile cars: “This is not your father’s Oldsmobile. This is the new generation of Olds.” In a similar way, today’s adolescence looks nothing like the adolescence of a member of Gen X or that of a Baby Boomer. Multiple forces have joined together to create an adolescent landscape that is fraught with quicksand, technology, and bear traps. No one can seem to agree on the definition of family. Adults

\(^{52}\) Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute, *Gen Z* (Ventura, 2018), 53.

in education, sports, arts, and the church have abandoned students and exchanged their efforts for agendas that primarily benefit adults. At the same time, this generation of students has never been more resourced with doting parents, media entertainment, and educational resources. Not only is adolescence lasting longer than ever, a new life stage has taken center stage between adolescence and adulthood: emerging adulthood.

**The Rise and Characteristics of Emerging Adulthood**

In 1995, college professor Dr. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett found himself perplexed about a seemingly new stage of life among young people in America. He found people in their late teens through late twenties were in an ambiguous category. He writes, “Eventually I concluded that they were neither adolescents nor young adults but something in-between, something that required a new term and a new conceptualization.” No longer adolescents and not yet fully adults, these young people tend to pursue education longer, get married and have children later than any previous generation, and enter the workforce with more uncertainty. As with any time in life, the new stage Arnett christened emerging adulthood has its own markers common to most people of that age. Some are carryovers from the previous teenage years, and others are signs of the growing responsibility that comes once those teen years are left behind. Following are the most common characteristics found in young people balancing the tightrope between adolescence and adulthood.

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Identity Explorations

Arnett argues emerging adults are trying to figure out more than any other time in their lives who they are when it comes to career and relationships. College majors may shift and change while relationships take on a different aspect of potential lifelong partners. At the same time, emerging adults are in no rush to get married. Identity exploration starts in adolescence but intensifies in emerging adulthood, as young adults have more freedom independent of parents to seek their own identity. Arnett emphasizes that while identity has historically been formed during adolescence, identity formation is now mainly formed in emerging adulthood.\textsuperscript{55}

Instability

Emerging adults are the most transient demographic in the nation. Because they are not beholden to parents or to a spouse, they move residences at the highest rate of any demographic. They may also try different jobs to figure out what kind of career they want in life. The operative words for emerging adulthood might be transition, change, experimental, and impulsivity. Arnett especially highlights the common revising of personal plans as they change majors, residences, aspirations, and relationships.\textsuperscript{56} But none of these plan revisions go to waste as emerging adults continue to learn about themselves and bank the experiences. Smith and Snell add, “Perhaps the most pervasive,
consistent theme in the lives of emerging adults is the fact of their frequent and varied major life transitions.”

Self-Focus

Emerging adults have the freedom to focus on themselves because they do not necessarily answer to parents, a spouse, or children. They have the ability and time to solely concentrate on their futures and to identify what it will require to reach their goals. In conjunction with identity exploration and instability, emerging adults possess a specific and intensified period of time to figure what they want in life. Some adults may view this as narcissistic, but with good adult guidance, this can serve as a healthy and reflective part of their lives.

Feeling In-Between

Because emerging adults often no longer feel like adolescents but do not necessarily have adult responsibilities such as family or career, they feel they exist in a world no longer adolescent and not quite adult. Parents often will parent until their son or daughter gets married. With the age of marriage starting later and later, parents then feel it is their responsibility to continue in their role as parents even though their grown child may be financially independent and living outside the home. When I married my wife at the age of thirty-three, my father officiated the wedding ceremony. He enthusiastically told the two hundred and fifty guests, “Korean custom says that you do not become an adult until you are married. So today, our son is finally becoming an adult!” My first

reaction was to roll my eyes, my second reaction was embarrassment, and my final reaction was pure celebration. I did not even realize it, but as a Korean American, I finally felt I was a complete adult at the wedding altar.

Optimism and Possibilities

Even though emerging adults live in a world of searching, transitioning, moving, and trying different careers, they maintain a great sense of hope and optimism about the future. Many come from broken, painful and dysfunctional homes. As Smith and Snell reveal, even the subjects in their studies from the most dysfunctional families and backgrounds were hopeful and confident that their futures were heading down a road of good things. They believe the beginning of adulthood brings new beginnings and opportunities. As a pastor of twenty-seven years, I have often counseled young people from difficult and tragic family circumstances. Operating under the Old Testament principle that the sins of the father are passed down from generation to generation, many I have counseled feel they are destined to follow in their family’s footsteps. I do not hesitate to speak truthfully and prophetically over them in order to turn the tide for themselves and the generations that follow. Without exception, I am met with faith, hope, and optimism. The beauty of youth can be a pure naivety that has yet to be completely stained by the world.

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Putting it All Together for Parents

Adolescence starts earlier and is ending later than ever before. To further complicate matters, a new life stage between adolescence and adulthood has surfaced called emerging adulthood. It is characterized by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and a strong sense of optimism for the future. Parents want to know how to prepare their children from a very early age to navigate the increasingly complex waters of adolescence, emerging adulthood, and adulthood. Although parent seminars can be full of data and advice trends, ultimately parents want to know what practical steps they can take to strategically parent through new territory. The following concepts give tangible tools to parents in the context of a Christian worldview.

Pain, Adversity, Disappointment and Preparation

Many parents today do their best to make sure kids do not experience pain or disappointment. Research reveals this is actually harmful for the healthy development of children and adolescents. It certainly does not prepare them for adulthood. Romans 5:3-5 teaches, “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.” When parents do all they can to protect their children from disappointment and pain, they unknowingly are telling their kids that they are not able to cope with difficulties and that God cannot equip them with the strength to deal with sad feelings.
Cause and Effect, Not Cause and Blame

Parents today are quick to place the blame and responsibility on others when their children face pain, disappointment, or discipline. As a result, the child fails to learn how to face personal responsibility, to be held accountable for bad behavior, or to suffer consequences for foolish actions. Parents are quick to rescue their child from well-deserved consequences and blame someone else, usually a paid adult. This communicates a few impactful statements to children. First it says, “You are not big enough to handle consequences, so I will rescue you from them and protect you. You do not have what it takes.” This so-called protection harms boys and girls equally.

Second, this blame game tells children, “We are smarter than everyone else, including your credentialed teacher with a master’s degree in education. If you received school discipline, earned a poor grade, did not get the starting position, or failed to land the lead role in the school musical, adults are clearly too stupid to understand how intelligent or talented you are. And finally, these adults all work for us. We are paying the tuition, the private lessons, and donate generously. We are the customers.” This kind of thinking is antithetical to the humility of Philippians 2 where Christ “did not regard his equality something to be grasped.”

Sports are for Children

Most adolescent athletes today are probably not future Olympic gold medalists or NFL Hall of Famers. Parents should relax and allow children to have fun with their friends at sports. They should be calm and encouraging in the bleachers and stands.
Children on the field or court take their cues from their parents. There is no doubt there are some Tiger Woods types who are extremely competitive and enjoy the pressure, but most children are not Division I quality and want to play sports for fun and enjoy the company of good friends. In healthy athletic environments, they learn life skill lessons of teamwork, collaboration, goal setting, serving others, commitment, dedication, winning with grace, and losing with dignity. No dad should ever be kicked out of a basketball game by the officials, especially at a private Christian high school. Yet it happens.

Teach Life Skills

Parents should be intentional and work toward teaching their children life skills such as utilizing tools, changing tires, gardening, cooking, and maintaining a lawn. It builds confidence when children know how to work with their hands and can see the fruit of their labor. Other opportunities for teaching life skills can be combined with technology such as managing a savings account, navigating a car, or ordering groceries. Of course, parents should not expect perfection when giving an assignment to an adolescent but should remember he or she is still learning.

In a culture where parents tend to overprotect their children, parents can think creatively about teaching communication, initiative, and responsibility within safe and predictable environments. Southwest Airlines allows children as young as thirteen to travel without being considered an unaccompanied minor, but they also allow a parent to drop off their child at the gate and an authorized adult to be waiting at the gate at the
destination city. Opportunities like this that teach life skills seem to be the exception more than the norm, and parents should think a little outside-the-box.

Finding Their Own Voice

Many kids today rely on others to dictate who they are supposed to be. Dr. Madeline Levine, author of *The Price of Privilege*, tells her readers that her affluent and young clients often lack a sense of self. They are so accustomed to having parents, teachers, coaches, private instructors, or tutors dictate their lives that they have little sense of who they are. Even if they do have a sense of self, they may not live in an environment where they are free to pursue their own interests. As children age through adolescence, their voices should carry increasing weight when it comes to decisions. This is not the same as spoiling; it is teaching children to exert themselves in healthy ways.

A Community of Adoptive Youth Ministry

Chap Clark’s research shows that students want a community of caring adults in their lives. With a student who comes from an intact home, Clark recommends a diverse group of adults for every child. These adults may be youth workers, relatives, coaches, or teachers. Parents cannot parent alone today, especially single parents. The cultural forces today are simply too great. Older children will often listen to an adult while they may not be quite as open to listening to their parents. It is part of their journey in establishing their own sense of self by distancing themselves from parents. Finding a

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church that is committed to adoptive youth ministry where young people are treated as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ is a rich place to find adults eager and willing to mentor young people.

Create Family Expectations

No matter what the research says about when children become adults, parents control their family narrative and expectations. Parenting certainly does not guarantee any outcome as children are all unique creations of God. But there is power in teaching children who they are and who they are becoming. There is certainly nothing wrong with communicating to a son or daughter that you will not be financially supporting them into their thirties.

Grand Social Capital

Grandparents bring an enormous amount of wisdom, love, and social capital to their grandchildren. Proverbs 16:31 reads, “Gray hair is a crowd of splendor; it is attained by a righteous life.” In a world of rapidly changing technology, the grandchildren are the ones portrayed as the younger ones needing to teach the older ones how to function in this world. But there is no substitute for the love, care, and wisdom a grandparent provides. Whenever grandparents live in the same city as their grandchildren, a regular presence of social capital is invaluable. But in this day and age of mobility, divorce, and remarriage, grandparents do not always live close to their grandchildren or have the time to dedicate much social capital if they have taken on step-grandchildren. Consequently, adoptive grandparents should be considered in cases where biological grandparents are
geographically or emotionally unavailable. In other words, parents are encouraged to find older couples in their churches to ask for help to provide social capital for their children.

Help Wanted: Skilled Laborers

Even though the national economy is often referred to as a knowledge economy, a growing national shortage of skilled laborers exists and is getting worse. A 2017 survey of contractors in America revealed an increasing difficulty in finding skilled workers with predictions of further shortages of plumbers and electricians.61 Young people today with certain skills should consider trade schools that can lead to lucrative careers instead of spending six figures on a college degree and having difficulty finding a job after graduation with no marketable skills. With a shortage of machinists in America, a machinist with ten years of experience could be making an annual salary of over $100,000 per year.62

Adjust to New Markers for Adulthood

Children are growing up in a different world where adolescence is longer and adulthood is reached at older ages. One of the best gifts parents can give is to adjust expectations to understand in what kind of world their children find themselves as adolescents. The adulthood markers millennials use are not the same as boomers used. It is not as if traditional markers do not matter because markers such as a chosen career

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path, marriage, and starting a family are still important. But they are happening at later and later ages, and adults need to recognize that.

Model Eternal Purposes

Above all else, parents must live out the lives they want their children to follow, setting an example of having an eternal perspective on life. Colossians 3:1-2 says, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, not on earthly things. Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things.” A sense of urgency to live for the kingdom of God can serve as motivation to move towards adulthood. With eternal perspectives in mind, an individual in the context of a healthy church environment can be welcomed into the adult world by other adults to serve God’s kingdom with zeal, knowledge, intentionality, and passion. This concept echoes Setran’s and Kiesling’s comments regarding young people and purpose: “Like the orphan, we are called to help twentysomethings develop a broader sense of God’s purposes and discern their particular areas of contribution within this grand plan. Vocation is an area that reflects and shapes an individual’s views of God, people, culture, and life purpose.”63 Parents and adults should strategically and intentionally welcome the young people in their lives into the adult world, prioritizing a kingdom mentality.

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

“Don’t mess with the bull young man, you’ll get the horns.”

Principal Richard Vernon, *The Breakfast Club*

This final project began with the true story of a dinner between two couples asking when young people become adults. Several years later, no concrete age has been determined for attaining adulthood, or ever has been for that matter. But stakeholders such as parents, educators, clergy, business professionals, doctors, therapists, chief executive officers, attorneys, politicians, and artists should be compelled to continue the pursuit of this question.

Adolescence has dramatically changed over the past few decades and as a result, so has the complex transition into adulthood. The intent of this paper is to create a strategy for parents to raise their children to become adults by age twenty-five. No parent brags their thirty-five-year-old finally became an adult. The development of a parent seminar is useful not only for parents, but additionally for churches, schools, and any other institutions that work directly with children, adolescents, or emerging adults.

Employing effective strategies can foster healthy adolescent development and prepare the way for a supportive transition into adulthood. Understanding how to parent children towards a healthy journey through adolescence and into adulthood begins with the knowledge and acceptance that adolescence and the transition to adulthood is drastically different than it was years ago. The landscape and journey of adolescence is longer than it has ever been in American history.
As Kara Powell has revealed, the starting line of adolescence is earlier and the finishing line is later.\(^1\) This reality is fraught with victories, defeats, obstacles, joys, setbacks, adventure and delays. As long as parents are aware of this, they can persevere through the most difficult of times with their children and enlist the help of other adults.

**Adolescence Defined by Abandonment**

The journey of adolescence is taking longer than ever, but the most defining aspect of adolescence is summed up in one word: abandonment. This goes against most popular adult opinions of today believing adolescents are spoiled, entitled, lazy, and soft. On the contrary, Clark argues that adolescents have been abandoned by the very social structures, systems, and institutions that were once created to aid in the healthy growth and development of children.\(^2\) Examples of this abandonment in the lives of adolescents abound in the arenas of school, sports, fine arts, and family.

The pressure for millions of youth today to succeed academically is a harsh reality. It is not necessarily that parents are intentionally cruel; rather, the costs of an undergraduate degree at a top-tier university can easily exceed $60,000 per year. Because college can be so expensive, enormous academic pressure is now being applied on children in order to earn a college athletic scholarship. Because it is increasingly difficult to escape a life of poverty, child athletes from socio-economically poor backgrounds face pressure to become professional athletes and earn millions of dollars. To make matters worse, disadvantaged children are finding it more difficult than ever to obtain college

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\(^2\) Chap Clark, *Hurt* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 44.
scholarships because they cannot keep up with more resourced children and specialize in one sport.³ This example serves as a rather sad, unintended consequence of abandonment.

“Family is Family” is a country song written and recorded by Texas music artist Kasey Musgraves. The chorus contains the following words:

Family is family in church or in prison
You get what you get and you don’t get to pick ‘em
They might smoke like chimneys but give you their kidneys
Yeah friends come in handy
But family is family⁴

Notice the words assume a fairly traditional and yet dysfunctional family consisting of church members and prisoners, organ donors and chain smokers. But as mentioned earlier in the paper, the definition of family has changed and continues to do so. One only needs to go to the greeting cards section at Target to find cards on divorce, remarriage, divorce again, remarriage again, gay marriage, gay adoption, and step-siblings. It seems only a matter of time to when the wedding and engagement section begins to offer congratulatory cards for moving in together for both heterosexuals and homosexuals. The most important and biblical institution for children to provide a nurturing, predictable, and loving environment continues to be in flux as new definitions and categories of the word family arise on a regular basis.

In order to survive the difficult phenomenon of abandonment, adolescents have formed their own world of safety that Clark refers to as the world beneath.⁵ It is a world

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that is structured with norms and rules. Adults are rarely welcomed in the world beneath. If an adult is ever welcomed, that adult often runs the risk of crossing a boundary where the adult might be required by policy or law to tell another adult about the conversation. Students find themselves in clusters where they find safe friendships. But they may discover it can be socially dangerous to violate codes of the cluster or become close friends with a person from a different or competitive cluster. Savvy students know how to hop back and forth between the world of adults and the world beneath. They know what to do and what to say with adults and then adjust accordingly when they are within the confounds and safety of their cluster within the world beneath.

**Emerging Adulthood Defined by Process**

Jeffrey Jensen Arnett began to discover the characteristics of emerging adulthood in the 1990s. After the past twenty years of further research, a major recession in 2008, and the continuing rise of technology, emerging adulthood is rarely debated as a stage of life. As long as the country continues to see a group of young adults in their twenties struggling to find their identity in work and relationships, twisting and turning down a road of transitions and instability, feeling between an adolescent and an adult, living in a world of self-focus, and seeing the future with a great sense of optimism, emerging adulthood will keep its place between adolescence and adulthood. The main question for emerging adults is how long they will be in this stage before they find themselves to be full-fledged adults, most likely having passed through a combination of traditional and contemporary markers. The fact that young adults on this path need to be anchored to

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Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 43.
loving and caring adults is more critical than ever, even though many seem to be well on their way to adulthood. Parents of emerging adults need to be educated about this relatively new life-stage and given information and tools to help their children navigate through this unpredictable time.

**Welcomed into Adulthood**

In the movie *Braveheart* a young boy by the name of William Wallace attends the funeral of his older brother and father who had been killed by the English that ruled Scotland with an iron fist. He stands next to his Uncle Argyle and stares at his large and deadly sword. Argyle pulls the sword out of its sheath and says to young William: “Learn to use this (as he thumps William on the head with his finger), and then I’ll teach you how to use this” (holding the sword). After being raised by his uncle miles away, William returns to his village as a man, riding on a horse.

The assumption is that his Uncle Argyle has welcomed William into the world of adulthood and has released him to go home. By the time the next battle scene ensues, it is clear that William knows how to outwit the English and use his sword and even unleashes deer antlers with deadly force on a poor English soldier. No amount of literature could emphasize enough the immense power of a respected adult welcoming a young person into the world of adulthood.

In Luke 2:41-52, Jesus leaves his parents as a twelve-year-old boy in Jerusalem and decides to spend time in the temple with rabbis. Verse forty-six says that he listened

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6 *Braveheart*, directed by Mel Gibson, screenplay by Randall Wallace (Paramount Pictures, 1995), accessed March 31, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-hKmhssSU.
and asked questions. Here we find the young Jesus among the great teachers of the law. While they were all amazed at his understanding and answers, the text insinuates he enjoyed being in his father’s house and thrived being in the presence of adults as he listened and asked questions. Churches must think theologically and socially more about whether or not their youth ministries are adopting youth into the body of Christ as brothers and sisters in Christ. Clark writes, “Transformation happens most deeply in the lives of teenagers when they are engaged in the broader life of the church and connected to a network of caring adults.”

Parenting Today and Toward the Future

On any given Sunday at church, parents can be found pushing their babies in the latest and coolest strollers complete with all the bells and whistles. The accessories for strollers continues to boggle the mind: blankets, mobiles, mirrors, music boxes, and shade coverings are just a few that can add up to hundreds of dollars beyond the cost of the stroller itself. These parents are making attempts to provide for their child, going above and beyond necessity. I often wonder whether they have any idea what they and their children are in for as their children walk and stumble through adolescence and toward adulthood.

Of course the answer is they have absolutely no idea. Neither did their parents. This is where the church can truly function as the church and a community. It is a common practice among churches today that when a child is baptized, the pastor performing the baptism asks the congregation if they will commit to the raising and

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7 Chap Clark, ed., Adoptive Youth Ministry, 136.
discipleship of that child. It is a commitment churches should take seriously as that child will face new and formidable obstacles as he or she travels through childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood into adulthood.

In the 1980s hit The Breakfast Club, principal Richard Vernon is supervising a nine-hour Saturday school of five high school students in a Chicago public school. He represents an administrator who only cares about himself and at one point boasts to a druggy student by the name of John Bender: “I make $31,000 a year and I have a home, and I’m not about to throw it away on some punk like you.”\(^8\) This scene serves as an exaggeration of adult agendas and priorities that demonstrate a complete lack of commitment to each child. But it also serves as a reminder of the enormous task we face as we are called to see each child as one God has created and willingly adopted into his family. With that in mind, we as adults and parents of young people can strive to help lead and welcome them with wisdom, grace, and forgiveness so they can travel the road to adulthood with as much support as possible.

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