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SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN AN ATOMIZED WORLD:
THE NECESSITY OF THE CHURCH AS FAMILY IN THE SPIRITUAL
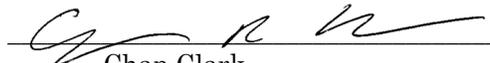FORMATION OF MIDADOLESCENTS

Written by

ADAM HERNDON

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Chap Clark

_____
Kurt Fredrickson

SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN AN ATOMIZED WORLD:
THE NECESSITY OF THE CHURCH AS FAMILY IN THE SPIRITUAL
FORMATION OF MIDADOLESCENTS

A DOCTORAL PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
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OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
ADAM HERNDON
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ABSTRACT

**Spiritual Formation in an Atomized World: The Necessity of the Church as Family
in the Spiritual Formation of Midadolescents**
Adam Herndon
Doctor of Ministry
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
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There are many ideas as to how spiritual formation happens in midadolescents. Traditionally, most discipleship programs encourage midadolescents to grow in their faith by participating in youth programs, to read their Bibles, and to pray. This project demonstrates that the church is God's worshipping community on earth and has been ordained since the beginning of time to be such. While a personal relationship with God is important, so is participation in the family life of the church.

The church over the last few decades has placed all the responsibility of spiritual growth on the shoulders of believers. Faith has become exclusively about a personal relationship with God that is grown through personal devotion to God. Church has then become a place to go to service one's faith. It has become a collection of individuals who share a common interest but no true need for one another. This mentality has led to the atomization of church ministries. A church's various ministries, including those focusing on youth, children, women, and young adults, for example, have very little connection with one another.

A sense of responsibility for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ needs to be recovered in the local church. If believers want to fully grow in their faith, they need to be present where Christ is, and Christ is found in the church. Over and over again the church is referred to as the family of faith. Christians are called "children of God," the "family of faith," "adopted," and Paul's favorite term, "brothers and sisters." Midadolescents need a family of faith for their spiritual formation. They need older siblings who mentor and care for them as younger siblings. When the church lives into its ontology, it creates the best environment for the spiritual formation of midadolescents.

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PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

At least one thing has become clear in field of youth ministry in the last decade,

that we need to rethink how we disciple midadolescents. There have been a number of

studies done[1] that have shown that teenagers are not sticking with their faith after they

graduate high school. The reality is that this downward trend begins in their junior and

senior year of high school.[2] There have been a few new strategies developed to help

address these concerns in the evangelical church. Sticky Faith[3] and Orange[4] have

become two of the more popular attempts to change the way that youth ministry is being

thought about. Up until these ideas came to the surface, most of the previous youth

ministry literature asserted that spiritual formation or discipleship of midadolescents

happens primarily in the nuclear family, catechism, programs, or through evangelism.

There are many different ways to think about discipleship in the field of youth

ministry. The reason youth ministry exist is to create adolescents who are lifelong

disciples of Christ.[5] Over the years there have been many popular ideas and programs

created in order to produce adolescent disciples, including Purpose Driven Youth

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[1] One such study is as follows: Christian Smith, Melinda Lundquist Denton, and Lisa D. Pearce, "National Study of Youth and Religion, 2002-2003," University of Notre Dame, accessed August 20, 2014, http://youthandreligion.nd.edu/research-findings/reports/.

[2] Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[3] Kara Eckmann Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

[4] Reggie Joiner, *Think Orange: Imagine the Impact When Church and Family Collide* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009).

[5] Mark Cannister, *Teenagers Matter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013); also see Doug Fields, *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 1998).

Ministry, Simple Youth Ministry, D6, Dare to Share, and Presence Centered. When speaking of discipleship in youth ministry, most literature as mentioned above leads to programs, catechism, or rethinking ministry foundations, all of which are important. While these ideas all have their own merits, they are highly individualistic modes of discipleship. They are individualistic because the teaching, programs, and evangelism are typically done through generational ministry or affinity groups. The family model can be an individualistic model as well, as it puts the primary weight of discipleship on the parents.

Youth ministry needs to give adolescents more than a good program or theology class. Andrew Root rightly points out, "To contend that if young people knew the Bible and theology is not to give them the bread that is the living Jesus but a cold stone of ideas to break their teeth on."[6] We need to give a clear picture of Jesus' call to them, "Follow me" (Matthew 4:18-20). The call of Jesus is where discipleship starts and where it ends. The call of Jesus to "follow me" is not done in a silo, but the call is to follow him with a diverse community. Jesus did not call one disciple; he called twelve. Many theological scholars, such as James Wilhoit,[7] Stanley Grenz,[8] and Scot McKnight,[9] contend that we are made for community. If people are created for community and Jesus calls us to follow him in community, then why does youth ministry isolate adolescents from the rest

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

[7] Jim Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

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

[9] Scot McKnight, *A Fellowship of Differents: Showing the World God's Design for Life Together* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015).

of the church?

In his book, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, Chap Clark begins a new conversation for youth ministries to consider changing the paradigm of youth ministry.[10] Clark calls the church to revisit its call to be the family of faith. Adolescents are incredibly stressed and lack the support structures that generations before had enjoyed. The demands on them today are higher than ever before. The danger of a program/activity-driven youth ministry is that it creates more demand on their time. Therefore, the church becomes another organization in their lives that competes for their time and creates further stress. It then tends to value those adolescents who show up for their programs over the ones who do not, making spiritual formation performance based. When the church becomes and operates as a family, the church will then become a place of rest, encouragement, and support for adolescents instead of another competing system that evaluates them for what they can do for the institution.

While the importance of the church living as a family of faith is important for spiritual growth in the lives of all believers, it is especially important for midadolescents. Midadolescence is a remarkable time of growth and development. They are undergoing a tremendous amount of change. Their bodies and brains are growing and changing at a rapid rate.[11] The beginning of abstract thinking coupled with identity formation and the need for belonging creates a truly unique time of development. These factors also create a challenging atmosphere for a person's spiritual formation.

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[10] Chap Clark, ed., *Adoptive Youth Ministry: Integrating Emerging Generations into the Family of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016).

[11] Frances E. Jensen, *The Teenage Brain: A Neuroscientist's Survival Guide to Raising Adolescents and Young Adults* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2015).

Three main psychological tasks take place in midadolescence: identity, autonomy, and belonging.[12] All these changes, accompanied by the beginnings of the development of abstract thinking and puberty, leave one feeling vulnerable. Midadolescents need a solid support system or social capital to help manage all these changes taking place. These tasks each play a role in how we think about discipling midadolescents as well as the challenges of an atomized culture. Yet in most churches, as children's need for social capital increases, they are placed in an atmosphere with less of it. Usually a children's ministry is the most intergenerational ministry in the church. There are parents, grandparents, young adults, and seniors all working in one area of ministry. When children move into early adolescence, they are placed in a ministry with the youngest member of a pastoral staff and mostly college-aged or post-college students as youth workers. There is a large shift in the demographic diversity of the church represented, from great diversity in children's ministry to hardly any once an adolescent enters the youth ministry.

The need for solid attachments or belonging begins in our life as infants with our parents, to relationships with mentors and peers as adolescents and adults. Relationships with others are a foundational part of who we are as humans. If we desire adolescents to become spiritually healthy adults, they need faith-based relationships with adults that go beyond pedagogy and become familial. The church is called to be a family that relates to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. This ought to be the metaphor by which the church functions.

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[12] Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 167.

Solid attachments are difficult to come by in our world today. Adolescents are

over scheduled to the point of having no time for relationships, including ones with their

peers. As Americans, our lives have become busier and busier we have become a more

atomized culture. The rise of social media has become the answer for the desire for

relationships in an over-scheduled world. Adolescents are on social media to connect

with their friends. Parents and adults tend to see social media and "selfies" as a

narcissistic indulgence for adolescents.[13] But in reality, adolescents take "selfies" and

use social media because they desire to be known and to have relationships with their

peers.

We live in a highly atomized world. There is less and less community

involvement in neighborhoods and community organizations than ever before in

America.[14] This stems from a philosophy of individualism in our society. Individualism

at its core defines the individual as the authority of one's own life. This individualism

has led to a devaluing of community. Psychologist David Elkind writes, "There is little

or no place for adolescents in American Society today—not in our homes, not in our

schools, and not in society at large."[15] Sherry Turkle observes that today we spend more

time alone and less time with each other.[16] This individualism led Harvard professor

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[13] Walt Mueller, "Selfless Narcissism.. . .," Center for Parent/Youth Understanding, March 10,
2011, accessed December 29, 2016, https://cpyu.org/2011/03/10/selfless-narcissism/.

[14] Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York:
Simon & Schuster, 2000).

[15] David Elkind, *All Grown Up and No Place to Go: Teenagers in Crisis* (Reading, MA: Perseus,
1998), 3.

[16] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each
Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 154.

Robert Putnam to write, "We Americans need to reconnect with each other."[17] There is a lack of people coming together for the sake of others. Because of the atomization of our society, there is a pressing need for the church to stop thinking of itself as a collection of separate or atomized ministries that minister to particular individuals and start thinking of itself as the family of faith. It is important for youth ministry to stop seeing itself as a program of the church and start thinking of adolescents as a part of the family of faith. Midadolescents today need more support than ever to navigate the complexities of our world. More and more midadolescents live in a performance-based culture.[18] In most systems they participate in, they are only as valuable as what they can do for the system. Due to the increasing demands on their time, midadolescents have turned to the digital world for social capital.

In the opening of his book, *Our Kids*, Robert Putnam shares stories of the loss of social capital in the lives of adolescents.[19] He tells the stories of a few different kids with whom he grew up in the 1950s as compared to the stories of two kids growing up in the same town today. In the 1950s in the town of Port Clinton, Ohio, there was a sense of community, that the kids of the town were truly "our kids" regardless of the socio-economic status of the kids. Adolescents from lower income homes still enjoyed having most of the same opportunities as kids from higher-income families. The kids were all cared for by neighbors, teachers, and business storeowners. Today, the town is largely

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[17] Putnam, *Bowling Alone,* 28.

[18] Denise Clark Pope, *"Doing School": How We Are Creating a Generation of Stressed Out, Materialistic, and Miseducated Students* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 4.

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

divided by economic status. In the 1950s, rich and poor lived near one another; today, they are completely separated. Most of the kids in the impoverished areas are living in single-parent homes in which parents are working multiple jobs to make ends meet, and the parents on the wealthy side of town place too many expectations of success on their kids. It is much more difficult today for the kids in the impoverished areas to get out of poverty than it was in the 1950s. What has happened in Port Clinton is a small window into what is happening across America.[20]

Considering the unique challenges of midadolescence, our culture, and the rise of technology, we need to rethink how we disciple midadolescents in the twenty-first century. Social media specifically has changed the landscape that midadolescents are growing up in. Social media is an extension of adolescent community. Youth ministry needs to help our students learn what it means to "follow me" in the midst of their lives in this digital and atomized age. However, this is not a task for youth ministry alone. It is the call of the entire church to live out its call as the family of faith.

The aim of this doctoral project is to see that when the local church embraces its call to be the family of faith and live into their call as adoptive brothers and sisters in Christ, it creates the best environment for the spiritual formation of midadolescents. The first chapter discusses developmental changes taking place during midadolescence, including abstract thinking, identity formation, and the need for belonging. These factors create a challenging atmosphere for a person's spiritual formation.

The second chapter presents the cultural challenges to the spiritual formation of midadolescents. In today's performance-based culture, many midadolescents feel they

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[20] Putnam, *Our Kids*, 31-50.

are only as valuable as what they can do for the system. Due to the increasing demands

on their time, midadolescents have turned to the digital world for social capital.[21]

The third chapter discusses the nature, purpose, and look at the paradigm of the

church as family. The church is the gathering of adopted brothers and sisters in Christ.

When this family of faith gathers, they represent the living body of Christ in this world.

The church is a family of faith that has no ethnic or generational allegiances.

Understanding and learning to live as a family of faith is essential for the spiritual

formation of midadolescents.

The fourth chapter considers how spiritual formation has traditionally and

currently been talked about in the church. In today's world, spiritual formation is often

thought of as an individual pursuit of Christ-likeness. However, spiritual formation does

not solely or primarily happen through the will power of an individual but rather where

the presence of Christ is found, that is, the church. Even though many American youth

and their families regularly attend church, many do not do so with the intentionality that

they are engaging in a spiritual practice that can enrich their lives as well as the lives of

those with whom they are worshipping.[22]

Lastly, the fifth chapter considers all things that have been looked at so that a new

way of discipleship for midadolescents can emerge. There are many ideas in youth

ministry regarding how spiritual formation happens in midadolescents. The problem with

each of the current approaches is that they lead to further atomization. When the local

church functions as a family of a faith, it is able to meet the foundational needs of

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[21] Turkle, *Alone Together*, 154.

[22] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954).

midadolescents and create the best atmosphere for the spiritual formation of

midadolescents. Therefore, the church should be the primary place where spiritual

formation of midadolescents takes place.

CHAPTER 1

THE PHYSIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT
OF MID-ADOLOESCENTS

Midadolescence can be a strenuous and confusing time of development in one's

lifetime. Midadolescence occurs between the ages of fifteen and eighteen, which

corresponds to grades nine through twelve.[1] The category of midadolescence was not

introduced until the 1990s. Chap Clark notes, "Early and late adolescence have been

with us for several decades, but as they both were stretched as adolescence lengthened,

they reached the point where neither could be stretched any further."[2] In midadolescence

young people begin to think in new ways, challenge old ways of thinking, and begin to

develop a sense of self. Clark describes midadolescence as walking on a tight rope.

They can no longer go back to childhood nor do they have the complete cognitive

processes of late-adolescence to understand the complexities of the world.[3] Susan Harter

writes, "Adolescence represents a dramatic developmental transition, with pubertal and

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[1] David G. Martin and Allan D. Moore, *Basics of Clinical Practice: A Guidebook for Trainees in the Helping Professions* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1998), 208.

[2] Chap Clark and Dee Clark, *Disconnected: Parenting Teens in a Myspace World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 133.

[3] Ibid., 137.

related physical changes, cognitive-development advances, and changing social expectations."[4] When midadolescence happens in a supportive environment, it creates a wonderful foundation to then enter into emerging adulthood. Arnett describes two ways that the self can be developed, the independent self or the interdependent self. In a Western culture that promotes individualism, the development of self is promoted as an independent function.[5] This way of thinking leaves midadolescents on their own without the support they need from adults. This doctoral project demonstrates that this atomization is not the best method for the spiritual formation of midadolescents. Describing a study done by Kurt Fischer, Harter writes, "Further support from significant others is also highly relevant during adolescence. As Fischer and colleagues have convincingly and perhaps paradoxically argued, higher levels of cognitive development requires sustaining support and scaffolding."[6]

One of the major changes that take place from early to midadolescence is the ability to process oneself in relationship to other people, ideas, and contexts. In early adolescence everything is very compartmentalized. It is difficult for early adolescents to see contradictions in their actions across different situations.[7] Early adolescents are concrete thinkers and may describe themselves as smart in math class, but stupid in science. They do not have the ability to understand how they may learn differently in

[4] Susan Harter, *The Construction of the Self: A Developmental Perspective* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 72.

[5] Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood: A Cultural Approach* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007), 188.

[6] Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 114. Harter provides the following reference: K. W. Fischer, "A theory of cognitive development: The control and construction of hierarchies of skills," *Psychological Review* (1980): 87, 477-531.

[7] Ibid., 82.

different subjects. This concrete way of thinking begins to change during

midadolescence. Harter writes about the change that takes place from early to

midadolescence: "The unreflective self-acceptance of earlier periods of development

vanishes. . . . Self-awareness, therefore, is quite intense; however, the images are not

stable or enduring."[8] With this new awareness of themselves, midadolescents naturally

question themselves and their commitments.

The Three Major Psychological Tasks: Identity, Autonomy, and Belonging

Along with developing a new sense of self, which is part of the identity formation

process, there are three main psychological tasks that happen in midadolescence: identity,

autonomy, and belonging. These psychological tasks each play a role in how we will

later think about discipling midadolescents

Three questions are constantly asked through the process of adolescence: Who am

I? Who do I want to be?   How do others perceive me?[9] Steinberg writes, "It's not until

adolescence that a young person is able to think in systematic ways about hypothetical

and future events. . . . For this reason, it is not until adolescence that individuals typically

begin to wonder, 'Who will I become?'"[10] The answers to these questions are extremely

important because they begin to shape the type of person and company that an adolescent

keeps. In his book, *Adolescents at School*, Michael Sadowski comments, "In

adolescence, questions of identity take on special significance as adolescents try to make

sense of themselves their futures, and their world in the face of pressure from peers,

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[8] Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 96.

[9] Laurence D. Steinberg, *Adolescence* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 254.

[10] Ibid., 256.

teachers, parents, and others."[11] Most scholars agree identity can be defined as having a strong and informed "sense of self."[12]

One aspect that has complicated identity formation in the twenty-first century has been the globalization of our world.[13] Midadolescents today are exposed to more information than ever before. They are more aware of cultural standards for what constitutes beauty, success, and sexuality than ever before. This over-saturation of information and ideas led scholar Kenneth Gergen to write, "These relationships pull us in myriad directions, inviting us to play such a variety of roles that the very concept of and authentic self with knowable characteristics recedes from view. The fully saturated self becomes no self at all."[14] The complexity of the world today creates a challenging and confusing atmosphere for questions of identity to be answered.

Identity formation takes place over the course of one's life; however in adolescence, is the first time an individual has a real sense of self and understands how different changes affect them. Laurence Steinberg describes the importance of identity formation this way: "Another reason for the attention that researchers and theorists have given the study of identity development during adolescence concerns the fundamental, biological, cognitive, and social changes characteristic of the period."[15] There are so many changes that are taking place in adolescence that it makes it difficult to develop a

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[11] Michael Sadowski, *Adolescents at School: Perspectives on Youth, Identity, and Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2004), 3.

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

[13] Ibid., 163.

[14] Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic, 1991), 7.

[15] Steinberg, *Adolescence*, 255.

true sense of self. Madeline Levine explains the importance of developing a sense of self: "A healthy sense of self helps insure that life will be interesting, satisfying, and manageable."[16] It is important for adolescents to be able to distinguish themselves from others. To understand midadolescents we need to have a good understanding of how they understand themselves and the world around them.

An important feature of identity formation in midadolescence is the creation of multiple selves. Midadolescents become aware of contradictions in their behavior, but they do not yet have the ability to reconcile those differing behaviors. Harter comments, "The ability to identify opposites becomes problematic because the individual cannot yet truly integrate such self-representations and thus resolve the contradictions."[17] To make sense of these conflicts they see in themselves, they create what Harter calls a "kaleidoscope self."[18] The kaleidoscope self allows them to see themselves differently in different contexts to reconcile these conflicts in those differing behaviors or thoughts. Multiple selves are created to deal with the many facets and demands on the adolescent's life and lack of adult support to navigate those demands.[19] An example of multiple selves would be how the same midadolescent can exhibit contradictory behavior in two different social environments. In a church setting this adolescent may go on a mission trip and adults will view the youth as being extremely spiritual and close to God. However, a week later the same young person could be seen at a party, intoxicated with friends, and

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[16] Madeline Levine, *The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 64.

[17] Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 108.

[18] Ibid., 97.

[19] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 51.

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not think about how the two selves conflict. Midadolescents can compartmentalize their lives, and the compartments do not touch.

Eventually midadolescents begin to recognize this pattern of behavior and an "actual self" and a "false self" begin to develop. Arnett defines an actual self "as a person's perception of who they are" and a false self as "the self a person presents to others even though it is not what they are thinking or feeling."[20] Due to the awareness of these internal contradictions, Harter argues, "the creations of multiple selves, coupled with the emerging ability to detect potential contradictions between self-attributes displayed in different roles, naturally ushers in concern over which attributes define the true self."[21] For midadolescents to develop a healthy sense of self, they need a lot of support or social capital from adults to help navigate their self-representations and to help build awareness of these selves in relation to others.

As adolescents begin to develop a sense of self, they need what Erik Erikson labeled a "psychosocial moratorium," that is, a protective time where they can sort through major life questions and get a sense of who they are in the context of adult communities. Erikson defines moratorium as "a period of delay granted to somebody who is not ready to meet an obligation or forced on somebody who should give himself time."[22] This can be seen as a time out for adolescents from other obligations to ask questions and experiment for the pursuit of self-discovery.[23] For this to be done in a

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[20] Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 150.

[21] Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 97.

[22] Erik H. Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 157.

[23] Steinberg, *Adolescence*, 269.

healthy way, adolescents should not be expected to do this on their own but in a community where questions can be asked and adolescents can be recognized as people.[24] Adolescents need a safe space to be able to make solid commitments to life's questions in order to become healthy adults.

The second task of midadolescence is autonomy. Autonomy happens as parents allow adolescents to make decisions for themselves and let them handle the consequences of those decisions. Arnett defines autonomy as "the quality of being independent and self-sufficient, capable of thinking for one's self."[25] If adolescents do not get the support they need from their parents, it can lead to them being dependent, passive, immature, and impulsive. Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck and W. Andrew Collins write, "Achieving autonomy is one of the key normative psychosocial developmental issues of adolescence, and all perspectives on the development of autonomy emphasize the problematic outcomes that may follow from a lack of appropriate support of autonomy."[26] Adolescents need their parents' support as they separate from the role of child. Clark writes, "The task of accepting responsibility for one's life, or achieving autonomy, answers the question, Do I matter?"[27] Harter explains,

> An important developmental task in childhood is the creation of an autobiographical account, a narrative, that links one's past, present, and future selves. The role of supportive parents in co-creating such a narrative is critical.

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[24] Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis*, 156.

[25] Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 183.

[26] Melanie J. Zimmer-Gembeck and W. Andrew Collins, "Autonomy Development during Adolescence," in *Blackwell Handbook of Adolescence* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 176.

[27] Chap Clark, *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Youth Specialties/Zondervan Pub. House, 2001), 55.

Those who lack support are subject to what we have labeled an "impoverished self.' Children are particularly vulnerable during middle adolescence when developmental demands require that they now create a self-identity that is coherent and continuous.[28]

The last developmental need of midadolescents is belonging or attachment. The question asked in this aspect of their development is: How do I relate to others? Neurobiologist Daniel Siegel writes, "Attachment is an inborn system in the brain that evolves in ways that influence and organize motivational, emotional, and memory processes with respect to significant caregivers."[29] Relationships with others are a foundational part of who we are as humans. Chris Coursey calls attachments "the necessary building blocks for our lives. Attachments are the foundation for emotional and mental well-being and interpersonal interaction."[30] We need solid attachments from the beginning of our lives, as infants with our parents, and later in our lives, as adolescents and adults in relationships with mentors and peers. Coursey writes, "It is impossible to have healthy, meaningful relationships without mutual bonds between people."[31]

During adolescence, teenagers start to look for those meaningful relationships. If they do not find them at home or with other adults, they will look to each other. Clark explains that at the beginning of midadolescence, adolescents are able to begin to reflect on how they have been treated; they often recognize where they have been abandoned by organizations and people who were supposed to care for them. Because they have been

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[28] Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 113-114.

[29] Daniel J. Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 67.

[30] Chris Coursey, "Attachments: Life's Connections," Thrive Today, accessed August 10, 2015, http://www.thrivetoday.org/Articles/attachment%20articles.pdf, 2.

[31] Ibid.

"systemically abandoned," they look to their peers for support and protection.[32] Healthy

development is dependent on adolescents not only having healthy peer relationships,[33]

but healthy relationships with their parents and other adults.[34] Healthy relationships with

adults are key to healthy development in midadolescence

The Need for Social Capital

Identity formation has become a highly individualized process in our culture. In

the modern era, identity formation took place within social constructs, primarily in the

family, to help guide adolescents. Social identity is that part of ourselves that we

understand from participating in a social group, whether the group is unified by gender,

nationality, religious origin, political ideology, social class, family, age, or profession.[35]

However, more recently these social constructs have dissolved, placing the pressure of

identity development mainly on the shoulders of adolescents themselves. David P. Setran

and Chris A. Kiesling write, "In contemporary American culture, the potency of this

social identity has progressively dissolved, replaced by a recurrent appeal to personal

identity construction."[36] Adolescents are now expected to navigate the questions of

identity development on their own.

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[32] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 60-61.

[33] Ibid., 64.

[34] Enrico Gnaulati and Barb J. Heine, "Separation-Individuation in Late Adolescence: An Investigation of Gender and Ethnic Differences," *The Journal of Psychology* 135, no. 1 (2001): 59-70.

[35] Marisa Zavalloni, "Social Identity and the Recording of Reality: Its Relevance for Cross-Cultural Psychology," *International Journal of Psychology* 10, no. 3 (1975): 203.

[36] David P. Setran and Chris A. Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 58.

For most of human history, forming an identity was straightforward. It was a culturally prescribed role that parents and grandparents had themselves adopted.[37] Up through the modern era, an identity was given based on society and the family into which one was born. For Erikson, psychosocial moratorium is supposed to take place in the context of community, where one is safe to experiment and ask questions. Social identity is helpful because it gives an adolescent a sense of self-definition rooted in a community.[38] James E. Côté and Charles Levine add, "In pre-modern societies, people faced straightforward issues in the formation of their adult identities; most simply they had to fit into a collectively oriented community; metaphorically, as a brick fits in the construction of a house."[39] Social identity offers stability in the midst of adolescence, but it is not without its difficulties.

While Erikson believes that identity development should take place in community, he also recognizes the difficulties of developing an identity this way. Erikson explains, "The task to be performed here by the young person and by his society is formidable. It necessitates, in different individuals and in different societies, great variations in the duration, intensity, and ritualization of adolescents."[40] Setran and Kiesling comment, "Historically, cultural norms exercised considerable pressure on an individual to find identity by fitting into and sharing the values, beliefs, attitudes, role

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[37] James E. Côté and Charles Levine, *Identity Formation, Agency, and Culture: A Social Psychological Synthesis* (Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 3.

[38] Ibid., 4.

[39] Ibid., 64.

[40] Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis*, 155.

enactments, and expectations associated with a particular social mold."[41] Social identity development places many expectations on adolescents to adapt to standards set before them, with not much room for them to explore. These challenges made way for adolescents to find a new way to develop through personal identity development.

Personal identity development has much to offer adolescents in the process of their identity development. It allows for them to have more options in their choices of career, religion, and ethics. Personal identity development does not force them to fit into a certain mold that has been laid out for them. It gives them a greater chance to go through Erikson's psychosocial moratorium and there is less chance they will go through identity foreclosure. However, it has not come without its difficulties in the adolescent identity process. In this type of development, a social identity is no longer viewed as necessary because the self is not thought of as lacking anything, including the need for social constructs.[42] It has given adolescents more freedom and independence than they are mature enough to handle. This shift has confused individuation (genuine intellectual and emotional growth) with individuality (an impression management derived from mass culture).[43] Côté and Levine mention, "As humans have attempted to adapt to modern and late modern forms social organization, where choice has replaced obligation as the basis of self-definition, identity formation has become a more difficult, precarious, and solitary

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[41] Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 58.

[42] Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 33.

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

process."[44] Individuality masking itself as individuation has slowed the identity process in adolescents; it has extended adolescence and it has made the transition to adulthood extremely difficult.[45]

The process of individuation should take place in the context of a healthy family, in which the family members admire and support one another.[46] The over scheduling and busyness of families has taken away the space in which healthy individuation would otherwise happen. Families today are extremely busy. Parents have mistaken shuttling their teens around all over the place for investing in their teens' lives. Parents are investing less social time in their kids and are becoming managers of their teens' schedules.[47] However, driving teens around from here to there is not a substitute for having meaningful conversations and creating opportunities to spend quality time together. Adolescents have no one to protect their time.[48] They are over scheduled and overstressed.

Family meals have also become a thing of the past. Families are more defined by their autonomy than their togetherness. Each family member's success is more important than what the family needs as a whole.[49] With the over scheduling of adolescents and busy work schedules, families rarely sit down to eat with one another. This is another

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[44] Côté and Levine, *Identity Formation, Agency, and Culture*, 3.

[45] Côté, *Arrested Adulthood*, 35.

[46] Ibid., 34.

[47] Ron Taffel, *Childhood Unbound: Saving Our Kids' Best Selves—Confident Parenting in a World of Change* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 21-22.

[48] Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 153.

[49] Ibid., 63.

opportunity lost for parents to talk with their teens. Elkind affirms, "The shift from modern togetherness to postmodern autonomy as a basic family value is perhaps most easily observed at mealtime."[50] Adolescents are seeing less of their parents than in previous generations. Clark suggests that rather than doing activities at home, parents have outsourced "play time" to outside organizations.[51] This is another factor that has contributed to family autonomy. The reason this is a large problem facing adolescents is that studies have shown that adolescents who come from healthy families have healthier identity formation. Wim Meeus concludes from his research study on adolescent development that adolescents with a mature identity come from warm and supportive families.[52]

Adolescents today are expected to process and make decisions on their own. Mass marketing to adolescents has fed them the lie that making decisions like what technology they use and what clothes they wear are makers of true individuality. Côté describes the problem with this type of marketing: "However, instead of encouraging people to undertake the more difficult task of developmental individualization, many people have undertaken the easier course of merely presenting themselves as individuals."[53] Adolescents now place a high value on individuality without really knowing what it means.[54] Many adolescents love having the freedom of making choices;

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[50] Ibid., 76.

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

[52] Wim Meeus, "The Study of Adolescent Identity Formation 2000-2010: A Review of Longitudinal Research," *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 21, no. 1 (2011): 90.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

however, these superficial choices are not choices that will help them to individuate.

Setran and Kiesling comment on another side effect of individuality: "Interestingly, the individualization of identity development tends to lead to one of two possible extremes: anxiety or apathy. While the task of self-creation may seem to liberate from constraints of imposed categories, it also creates a recurring sense of pressure to create the best possible self."[55] Individuation is a long-term process that takes place by making informed thoughtful decisions about career, religion, ethics, and so on. It allows adolescents to make choices and be ready to handle the consequences of those decisions. The culture has substituted individuation with an individuality that is shallow. Côté argues that this is the crux of the problem people face today when making the transition from youth to adulthood.[56]

Identity development has changed from the modern to the postmodern era. The social protection that adolescents once enjoyed has disappeared with the pace of contemporary life and mass marketing. Personal identity development comes with many positive aspects, such as the ability to choose, but it also comes with its drawbacks. Adolescents have been given too much freedom, resulting in a facade of maturity.

Egocentrism and Egocentric Abstraction

Jean Piaget first used the term *egocentrism* to discuss the way that children are only worried about their own needs.[57] Elkind writes a key article on understanding

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[55] Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 59.

[56] Côté, *Arrested Adulthood*, 34.

[57] Jean Piaget and Bärbel Inhelder, *The Psychology of the Child* (New York: Basic, 1969), 13.

egocentrism in adolescence. He defines the egocentrism of adolescence this way:

"Particular attention is paid to the egocentrism of adolescence which is here described as

the failure to differentiate between the cognitive concerns of others and those of the

self."[58] According to Elkind, adolescents have a difficult time distinguishing between

what are the opinions of others and what are their own perceived thoughts of others. He

writes that adolescents believe that other people are as obsessed with their own behavior

and appearance as they are themselves.[59]

Adolescents create both an imaginary audience and a personal fable. The

imaginary audience is all the people whom the adolescent believes is watching their

every move. This imaginary audience is one of the reasons adolescents are consequently

self-aware. Because of the scrutiny they always feel they are under, adolescents believe

their feelings and problems are unique. This is why adolescents commonly say things

such as, "You just don't understand." In order to handle this imaginary audience and

personal uniqueness, adolescents develop a personal fable. The personal fable is a story

that adolescents make up that praises their uniqueness. The fable tells them that their

stories and hardships are of great importance.[60] Egocentrism is not purely a negative part

of midadolescent development, but an important part of the individuation process.

Individuation forces adolescents to become self-focused by necessity.[61]

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[58] David Elkind, "Egocentrism in Adolescence," *Child Development* 38, no. 4 (1967): 1025, accessed June 21, 2016, doi:10.2307/1127100.1025.

[59] Ibid., 1029.

[60] Ibid., 1031.

[61] Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 106; and Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 52.

Another key developmental feature of midadolescence is egocentric abstraction. Clark calls egocentric abstraction the defining characteristic of midadolescence, and he defines it as a self-centered protective screen.[62] As they begin the ability to compare single abstractions across related roles, midadolescents become very self-aware. As children move from early to midadolescence, they begin to worry about how others view them. Their need then becomes the way they want to be perceived or how they think their peers perceive them. In midadolescence young people have the desire to be affirmed, but they are a long way off from knowing who they are as individuals.[63] The lack of adult support and heightened awareness of themselves in relation to others is the cause of egocentric abstraction, which causes adolescents to bond with their peers. The implication of this is discussed in the next chapter.

Physiological Development during Midadolescence

The beginning of adolescence is marked by the onset of puberty. The release of hormones from the endocrine system causes the adolescent body to start changing: sexual desires begin, hair grows around sexual organs, sexual organs enlarge, and menstruation begins in women.[64] Puberty prepares the body for sexual reproduction. In early and midadolescence, one's body and brain are growing and maturing at a rapid rate.[65] Going through puberty can be challenging for adolescents because of their egocentrism. Elkind

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[62] Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 65, 158.

[63] Ibid., 65.

[64] Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 32.

[65] Jensen, *The Teenage Brain.*

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comments, "The physical changes associated with puberty become perils because adolescents have no way of knowing how things will turn out."[66] Because of the psychological changes that are happening in midadolescence, the physical changes that occur in puberty can make it a challenging time.

Adolescents have extremely powerful brains. Their brains are growing, changing, experiencing new sensations, and making new connections. They have a wonderful ability to take in and learn new information. Neurologist Frances Jensen contends that teenage brains "are at peak learning efficiency."[67] Adolescent brains are shaped by experience. Therefore, Jensen writes, "The more a piece of information is repeated or relearned, the stronger the neurons become, and the connection becomes like a well-worn path through the woods."[68] The reason that repetition is important in the teenage brain is because "one of the frontal lobes' executive functions includes something called prospective memory, which is the ability to hold in your mind the intention to perform a certain action at a future time."[69] Prospective memory is very efficient during midadolescence. In midadolescence, teenagers have a wonderful ability to take in and learn new information.

Another powerful feature of the midadolescent brain is its response to the release of dopamine. Siegel writes, "During adolescence there is an increase in the activity of

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[66] Elkind, *All Grown Up and No Place to Go*, 72.

[67] Jensen, *The Teenage Brain*, 80.

[68] Ibid., 73.

[69] Ibid., 40.

neural circuits utilizing dopamine."[70] The release of dopamine in the adolescent brain

can lead to great joy or great sorrow. Jensen explains, "As a brain chemical messenger,

dopamine helps motivate, drive, and focus the brain because it is integral to the brain's

reward circuitry. . . . The more those circuits are activated, the bigger the craving."[71]

These cravings are what can lead to unhealthy behavior such as drug use or risk taking.

However, they can also lead to positive behavior, as Siegel explains: "This enhanced

natural dopamine release can give adolescents a powerful sense of being alive when they

are engaged in life."[72] When they are engaged in community activities or positive

relationships, their brains will receive that reward.[73] Dopamine can even be released

when adolescents are doing something their friends are observing,[74] which can have a

negative consequence if that is leading to a risky behavior. It can also have a healthy

consequence if it leads to good behavior, such as a mission trip.

Conclusion

Developmentally, midadolescence is a very difficult time to navigate in one's

lifetime. Midadolescents are learning to understand themselves and the world around

them while their bodies are going through chemical and physical changes. The

complexity of the period is enhanced when there is a lack of social capital in the life of

the midadolescent. The next chapter discusses the fact that these are not the only things

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[70] Daniel J. Siegel, *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain* (New York: Penguin Group, 2013), 67.

[71] Jensen, *The Teenage Brain*, 54.

[72] Siegel, *Brainstorm*, 67.

[73] Ibid., 69.

[74] Ibid.

that make midadolescence a difficult period of life to manage, but the postmodern era has complicated it even further. Schools, sport programs, technology, the loss of community, and the religious climate of our time have put midadolescents under a tremendous amount of stress. They have been left to themselves to manage this stress and culture, while experiencing all the psychological and physiological changes of the period.

CHAPTER 2

THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE FOR MIDADOLESCENTS
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

There are more demands and expectations on today's adolescents than ever

before, so much so that families are forgetting that adolescents are not adults. In the

postmodern family, Elkind concludes "that adolescents are, after all, really not that much

different from adults."[1] Adolescence today is very different than it was years ago.[2] Most

parents and adults tend to think that being an adolescent has not changed that much, other

than the clothes they wear and music they listen to. However, today's adolescents are

growing up in a very different world than their parents did. Not only are there more

expectations, but the spiritual landscape for students is very different than in years past,

and a new class of adolescence lasts longer than it did forty years ago.[3] In this chapter,

four different aspects of today's adolescent are discussed, each of which contributes to a

picture of the world they are growing up in. These are the religious landscape, a culture

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[1] Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 153.

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

[3] Ibid., 17.

of performance and stress, loss of community and atomization of society, and the digital environment.

The Religious Landscape

Teens are a magnifying lens of what is happening in the culture. A value of our culture that has come from individualism is happiness. We firmly believe that everyone's happiness is the ultimate standard for belief and practice. If a major religion, usually Christianity, infringes on someone's lifestyle because one of its tenets is causing them discomfort, people then resort to calling it intolerant. Our world's emphasis on individualism and happiness has created a therapeutic individualism.

Individualism at its core defines the individual as the authority of one's own life. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton define therapeutic individualism as "the self as the source and standard of moral knowledge and authority, and individual self-fulfillment as the preoccupying purpose in life."[4] No longer do adolescents feel the need to adjust their thinking or lifestyle to a religious faith or social norm, but now the self can believe and do what it chooses regardless of society or religious standards. James Nolan writes, "Where once the self was to be brought into conformity with the standards of external derived authorities and social institutions, it is now compelled to look within."[5] Adolescents have no trouble coming up with their own mosaic of religious beliefs to define their own religion based on their feelings. According to the National Survey of Youth and Religion (NSYR), almost half of adolescents thought it was fine to pick and

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[4] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 173.

[5] James L. Nolan, *The Therapeutic State: Justifying Government at Century's End* (New York: New York University, 1998), 3.

choose religious beliefs without accepting the whole.[6] In this type of individualism, authority structures have shifted. Self-help professionals are seen as the source of authority for adolescents. In the past, teachers, pastors, and parents were seen as moral guides. Those roles have now been taken by talk show hosts, psychologists, social workers, and life coaches.

Contrary to popular belief, a vast majority of adolescents today identify themselves as religious or say they believe in a god. The NSYR found that about three quarters of US teens identify themselves as Christians. However, only about half consider it very important.[7] The study also found that over 50 percent of Protestant teens who profess faith said that their faith plays a major role in their life decisions.[8] Only about 16 percent of teens identify themselves as non-religious, and many of them say they believe in a god.[9] The idea that today's youth are spiritually empty is simply not true. Not only are they spiritual, but they are largely associated with Christianity. Smith comments, "First, US youth are not flocking in droves to 'alternative' religions and spiritualties such as paganism and Wicca."[10] Adolescents today are very interested in spirituality and their faith is influential in their lives. However, even though a majority of teens identify themselves as Christians, many do not believe that the Christian faith, among all religions, exclusively offers truth.

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[6] Smith, Denton, and Pearce, "National Study of Youth and Religion, 2002-2003."

[7] Ibid

[8] Ibid.

[9] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 31.

[10] Ibid., 32.

Within the Christian category, many identified themselves as "spiritual but not religious."[11] About 50 percent of teens across all denominations identified themselves this way as "somewhat true" of them.[12] Even though a majority of teens identify themselves as Christians, less than one third of teens believe that only one religion is true. The majority, a full 60 percent, believe that multiple religions may be true.[13] The data is clear that teens today, even though many identify as Christian, are pluralistic.

Another alarming part of our teens' Christianity is what they believe about who God is and how he acts. A new type of theology is rising up among adolescents called Moral Therapeutic Deism, which, as Smith and Denton explain, if it were a formalized system of thought, its tenets would be:

1. A god exists who created and orders the world and watches over life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God is not involved in my life except when I need God to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.[14]

This way of thinking about Christianity has come from two main sources: our culture's individualism and a partial gospel made popular by many churches in America. Kenda Creasy Dean calls Moral Therapeutic Deism a parasite.[15] This "parasite" has latched itself onto American Christianity and is slowly draining the life out of it. Teens do not

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[11] Smith, Denton, and Pearce, "National Study of Youth and Religion, 2002-2003."

[12] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 79.

[13] Ibid., 73.

[14] Ibid., 162-163.

[15] Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 13. She calls a parasite a "symbiote" in her book, taken from Marvel Comics.

see these tenets as contradictory to what Christianity teaches. The cause of this is largely

due to what our churches are teaching, which is that Christianity is not a big deal, God

does not ask much of us, and we are simply another social institution.[16] Smith and

Denton contend, "Moral Therapeutic Deism is . . . actively displacing the substantive

traditional faiths of conservative, black, and mainline Protestantism, Catholicism, and

Judaism in the United States. . . . It may be the new mainstream American religious

faith."[17]

The largest contextual factor influencing whether or not teens marked themselves

as religious was their parents' faith and practice. Smith comments, "Teens with parents

who attend religious services less often and for whom faith is less important are more

likely to be nonreligious."[18] In every religious category, over 50 percent of teens said

that their beliefs were "similar" or "very similar" to the beliefs of their parents.[19] Teens

will more often than not model what is believed and practiced in the home.

Looking at the spiritual landscape of teens today, there is a lot of encouraging

news. Despite the stereotypes often associated with teens, adolescents today are spiritual.

There seems to be an almost universal belief in the existence of a deity. For Christians,

we should also be encouraged that three quarters of teens identify with Christianity.

However, we have much work to do in shaping the spiritual identity of our youth, in that

they are not necessarily adhering to the type of Christianity we want them to embrace.

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[16] Ibid., 12.

[17] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 171.

[18] Ibid., 91.

[19] Smith, Denton, and Pearce, "National Study of Youth and Religion, 2002-2003."

The leading philosophical religious thought of our culture is therapeutic individualism, where individual happiness is the purpose of life. However, there is room to be optimistic. The survey results show that the vast majority of adolescents believe in the existence of God, and most of them identify themselves with Christianity, providing a great foundation for spiritual formation in midadolescence.

A Culture of Performance and Stress

Today adolescents are incredibly stressed and busy. Elkind writes, "Today, now that the new imbalance reigns, children and youth are under greater stress than adults."[20] Many of the laws and age requirements in our world today were created years ago when adolescence was a shorter period of time. Many of the freedoms they are given today were designed for late adolescence, such as driving.[21] Parents with good intentions push their kids to play instruments, play athletics, and take as many "advanced placement" classes as possible. Our culture asks them to be the best at everything they do. Not only do adolescents feel pressure from home to perform, but from their schools as well. Almost everything adolescents do in today's world is measured by their performance. If they do not perform, then they are no longer valuable. Clark states, "Adolescents have learned that what matters is not who they are but what they do."[22]

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[20] Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 188.

[21] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 18.

[22] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 136.

Many midadolescents today, especially those who come from privilege, suffer from what Madeline Levine calls, "the toxic brew of pressure and isolation."[23] They are experiencing tremendous amounts of achievement pressure, while being isolated from their parents.[24] Levine writes, "In fact, achievement pressure often comes from parents who are overinvolved in how well their children perform and inadequately involved in monitoring these same children in other areas."[25] Midadolescents are expected by their parents to be high performers, and when they fail to meet those expectations, it can lead to depression and even thoughts of suicide.[26]

Elkind states in his book, *The Hurried Child*, "Unhappily, the over testing of children in public schools has become more extensive than it was a decade ago."[27] In public schools, standardized testing has placed an unhealthy amount of stress not only on the students but on the teachers as well. The stress of school and competitiveness of college puts a heavy burden on adolescents. Denise Clark Pope writes, "The workload is so great and expectations so high that these students feel obligated to give up recreation and sleep as well as many aspects of social life in order to succeed."[28] In my own

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

[24] Suniya S. Luthar and Shawn J. Latendresse, "Children of the Affluent: Challenges to Well-Being," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 14, no. 1 (2005), doi:10.1111/j.0963-7214.2005.00333.x.

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

[26] Karen E. Ablard and Wayne D. Parker, "Parents' Achievement Goals and Perfectionism in Their Academically Talented Children," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 26, no. 6 (1997): pg. 652, doi:10.1023/a:1022392524554.

[27] David Elkind, *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Pub., 2001), xv.

[28] Pope, "Doing School," 4.

experience as a youth pastor and the spouse of a public school teacher, I see firsthand the stress from both sides. My wife often comes home exhausted and stressed because of the amount of testing and the pressure for all her students to score well. As a youth pastor, I often hear from students about the stress to pass these exams to graduate and the pressure of the SAT to get into a good college. When teachers are feeling stressed and overwhelmed, their effectiveness in the classroom goes down and their enthusiasm for teaching suffers. When teachers are not enthusiastic about their subject matter, their students suffer.[29]

Adolescents are particularly stretched too thin at school in terms of the amount of homework they are given.[30] It is typical for one of my students to wake up at 6:30 am, get ready for school, attend school for seven hours, participate in a club or sport that lasts two to three hours, arrive home around 6 pm, and then have up to three hours of homework. Laurence D. Steinberg and his colleagues report that student athletes usually can spend up to fifteen hours a week involved in their sport, and if they are in theater or music they spend another ten hours.[31] Many students enroll in multiple advanced placement classes and participate in multiple extracurricular activities because if they are not, then they will not be competitive enough to get into college. An adult could hardly maintain this type of schedule on a daily basis, yet we are expecting our adolescents to do this every day for four years of high school and sometimes as early as middle school. Clark argues, "There seemed to be little apparent systematic consideration for what these

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[29] Sadowski, *Adolescents at School*, 19.

[30] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 86.

[31] Laurence D. Steinberg, B. Bradford Brown, and Sanford M. Dornbusch, *Beyond the Classroom: Why School Reform Has Failed and What Parents Need to Do* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 174.

schedules, expectations, and pressures do to the development and health of midadolescents."[32]

Athletics in adolescence is no longer about character development, but making a name for the team and coaches.[33] In most cases other than a few exceptions, high school teams are already put together before the season begin. At the high school I attended, the school baseball team played on a travel team together. If you were not on the travel team or did not attend a select group of baseball camps, then you had no chance of making the team. The tryouts at the beginning of the school year were a mere formality. Clark echoes this based upon his research: "By the time an athlete gets to high school, his or her chance of participation, much less success, in a sport has been all but settled."[34] High school sports, which are supposed to exist to build character and a good work ethic in adolescents, are now more about building up the coaches and school.

The Loss of Community and the Atomization of Society

There has been a real loss of civic and community engagement in America over the last thirty years, largely due to the individualism that has become prevalent in our country. It has led to a sweeping social change in America, and these social changes have led to the atomization of our society. Americans do not connect with each other in the ways that they use to do. Americans love a good story about a super hero who beats all the odds, whether they are in the pages of our history or in a comic book. However, the communities of people around these "heroes" largely influence their

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

[33] Ibid., 112.

[34] Ibid., 105.

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accomplishments. Putnam shares the example of the midnight ride of Paul Revere. He is hailed as the sole hero of the story, but the warning system would not have worked without networks of civic engagement coming together. Putnam writes, "The myth of individualism continues to strike a powerful inner chord in the American psyche."[35]

The loss of community and civic engagement in our world is found at all levels, from the religious sphere to the workplace. The decline started to occur towards the end of the 1960s. By the 1980s, people began to recognize the side of effects of the lack of community engagement. In a poll taken in 1987, 77 percent of Americans saw the nation as worse off because of the lack of community involvement.[36] Americans today are less involved in political parties, public meetings, and voting since the mid-sixties. Americans today are spending less time participating in civic organizations and more time watching TV. Americans are less likely to join church membership today than three decades ago and are less involved in the church programming, including worship services.[37]

Americans simply do not commit to formal organizations like they did in previous decades. Putnam offers four reasons for the loss of civic engagement in America. His first reason is the collapse of traditional family. The numbers of families with two working parents, divorced parents, or single-parent homes has constantly risen since the sixties. The collapse of the traditional family has placed more pressure of time and money on Americans. Second, the suburbanization of America in the eighties has led to

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[35] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 24.

[36] Ibid., 25.

[37] Ibid., 72.

more and more Americans living away from cities and social centers and moving into gated communities. Third, the rise of entertainment technology has contributed greatly to the atomization of our society. People spend more time indoors now than in previous times. Fourth, a steady decrease in civic involvement has been handed down from own generation to the next. To put the blame on the millennials or this generation of adolescents would be a strawman argument. There has been a steady decline of civic engagement going back almost six decades.[38]

This atomization means our midadolescents are growing up in communities without a lot of support. They come from families with two working parents, divorced parents, and single-family homes. What they are not learning from their parents about the world, they are learning from the technology that surrounds them. They are learning less and less from their parents about the good of engaging in civic activity because it is not being modeled for them. Midadolescents participating in social causes, philanthropy, or church puts them in communities of adults who are building trust and offering support. Because midadolescents are not getting the social capital they need from adults, they turn to one another.

Peer Relationships and Clusters

Peer friendships are an important part of adolescence. Adolescents begin a second individuation process that leads to separation from their parents and a greater reliance on their peers.[39] Arnett writes, "These are periods of life in which the emotional

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[38] Ibid., 283.

[39] Peter Blos, "The Second Individuation Process of Adolescence," *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 22 (1967), accessed July 1, 2016, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=pph&AN=PSC.022.0162A&site=ehost-live.

center of young people's lives is shifting from their immediate families to persons outside the family."[40] Friendships are critical for healthy development in adolescence.[41] However, adolescents need more than strictly peer friendships. Familial relationships and relationships with other adults are important if adolescents are to have healthy relationships with their peers.[42]

The importance of adult friendships in the lives of adolescents cannot be overstated. However, it has already been demonstrated that adolescents today lack the social capital they need. Because adolescents have been systemically abandoned, they have turned to each other almost exclusively for friendship. Patricia Hersch comments, "Their dependence on each other fulfills the universal human longing for community, and inadvertently cements the notion of a tribe apart."[43] They have created their own tribes, or clusters, in order to get the social capital the need. Clusters are a "defense mechanism" to protect against the loss of social capital.[44]

Clusters are adolescent peer groups of about four to ten friends who have defined themselves as a relational unit.[45] These clusters have rules and norms. If the rules of the

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[40] Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 211.

[41] Elkind, *All Grown Up and No Place to Go*, 85.

[42] Maja Deković and Wim Meeus, "Peer Relations in Adolescence: Effects of Parenting and Adolescents' Self-concept," *Journal of Adolescence* 20, no. 2 (1997), accessed July 1, 2016, doi:10.1006/jado.1996.0074.

[43] Patricia Hersch, *A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1998), 21.

[44] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 61.

[45] Ibid., 65.

cluster are broken and loyalty is betrayed, the betrayer will be removed from the cluster. Clusters are formed because of the adolescent's need for belonging and safety.[46] Ultimately midadolescents are concerned about their own protection. Clusters are formed for this reason. Harter writes, "Adolescents become increasingly focused on their non-familial relationships and begin to fantasize about themselves in various interpersonal scenarios, where the self is at the center."[47] Clusters are not about self-sacrificial relationships but the opposite, self-preservation. With the introduction of social media midadolescents can easily be a part of many different clusters.

The Digital Environment

There has been an explosion of technology in our world in the last twenty years, from the introduction of dial-up Internet in homes during the 1990s to the smart phones we are so deeply attached to today. Midadolescents today have never known a world without a high-speed Internet connection, and most do not remember a world without an iPhone. They have grown up with screens in front of them and access to more information than they could ever consume. Every day they are bombarded with information, advertisements, and friend requests. Harvard professor Robert Putnam states, "When the history of the twentieth century is written with greater perspective than we now enjoy, the impact of technology on communications and leisure will almost surely be a major theme."[48]

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[46] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 66.

[47] Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 107.

[48] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 216.

There are many reasons why midadolescents use technology today. Arnett summarizes five psychological reasons why adolescents use technology: entertainment, identity formation, sensation seeking, coping, and youth culture identification.[49] Television is constant entertainment and background noise for midadolescents. They enjoy doing homework, texting, or browsing the Internet with the TV on in the background. Usually one would not associate media consumption with sensation seeking, however many shows and movies are accompanied by intense action scenes and/or sex scenes. Arnett comments, "Sensation seeking is related to higher media consumption in adolescence, especially TV, music, and computer games."[50] Jensen also found this to be true of adolescents, as technology can trigger the dopamine centers of the brain.[51] Adolescents also use technology as a coping mechanism. They frequently listen to music and watch TV to handle negative emotions.[52] Lastly, midadolescents use technology to identify with other youth. Media provides a common ground for adolescents.[53] Since belonging is one of the main developmental needs for midadolescents, it makes perfect sense why they would want to be on social media. It is where all their friends are communicating.

Our world prides itself on the ability to multi-task. All of our technology is supposed to simplify our lives in our global economy. Advertisements for tablets and

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[49] Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 340-341, 343.

[50] Ibid., 341.

[51] Jensen, *The Teenage Brain*, 206.

[52] Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 341.

[53] Ibid., 343.

smart phones usually show how easy the device makes multi-tasking and how quickly one can access different features of the device to help keep life organized. Craig Detweiler writes, "Devices designed to organize our schedules have made us busier than ever."[54] With busy schedules, midadolescents have turned to social media to connect with their friends as well as occasionally make new ones.

There has not only been an explosion of devices that midadolescents use to access the Internet, but more recently, the way people use the Internet has changed drastically with the rise of social media. MySpace made way for Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, Tumbler, Vine, Twitter, and Google +, to name a few. Pew Research Center demonstrates that 89 percent of teens are on at least one social media site.[55] Midadolescents frequently use social media to interact with one another by sharing what they are doing by sharing their thoughts on any particular subject. Each social media service has become its own community, with each having its own etiquette for posting, liking, and replying. Adolescents spend much of their time on social media platforms.

<div align="center">Social Media</div>

Social media has grown at an incredibly rapid rate. Facebook on its tenth birthday had 1.23 billion users; the company reports that they have 1.25 billion active

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[54] Craig Detweiler, *IGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2013), 30.

[55] Pew Research Center, "Teens, Social Media & Technology," 25.

monthly mobile users and 1.44 billion active monthly users.[56] It should be of no surprise

then that midadolescents use Facebook more than any other social media platform. The

Pew Research Center reports that "Facebook is the most popular and frequently used

social media platform among teens; 71% of teens are on Facebook."[57] However,

Facebook is not the only site teens are frequently using. Most teens, 71 percent, use more

than one social network site. The more social media platforms teens use, the more likely

they are to experience negative teen drama.[58] Instagram boasts 300 million active

monthly users who post an average of 70 million photos a day.[59] Teens averaged having

145 Facebook friends, 150 Instagram followers, and 95 Twitter followers.[60] With the

collective amount of users on each of these sites that many adolescents frequent, they are

bombarded with sexual images, dating advice, teenage drama, and many different

worldviews. These large communities are complex and play a major role in the lives of

adolescents.

Boyd writes, "Social media services like Facebook and Twitter are providing

teens with new opportunities to participate in public life, and this, more than anything

else, is what concerns many anxious adults."[61] Teens use social media to find community

or "a public." A public, according to historian Benedict Anderson, is not just a physical

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[56] Facebook Newsroom, "Company Info," Facebook Newsroom, accessed July 26, 2015, http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/.

[57] Pew Research Center, "Teens, Social Media & Technology."

[58] Pew Research Center, "Teens, Technology and Friendships," 64.

[59] Instagram, "Press," Instagram, accessed July 26, 2015, https://instagram.com/press/.

[60] Pew Research Center, "Teens, Social Media & Technology."

[61] Boyd, *It's Complicated*, 10.

community but can be an "imagined community" of people who understand themselves to be a community.[62] These publics have their own rules and norms. Teens "expect their friends and family to understand and respect different social contexts and to know when something is not meant for them."[63]

Teens often have a difficult time managing their different publics on social media. What can make the use of social media challenging is the merging of these communities. In previous generations, adolescents would have different friend groups in different places. A midadolescent may have a church youth group, school friends, or groups of friends with whom an affinity was shared even though they rarely or never met. Today with social media, adolescents' friends are all in one place and can interact with each other. If an adolescent posts something that is relevant to one group of friends, his or her other friend groups can see it and comment. This situation is like a *Seinfeld* episode in which George Costanza's girlfriend becomes friends with Elaine, who is one of George's good friends.[64] George was uncomfortable because his worlds were colliding.

Adolescents' worlds are in a constant state of colliding through social media. Boyd has noticed this dynamic with adolescents' use of social media: "I came to realize that, taken out of context, what teens appear to do and say on social media seems peculiar if not outright problematic."[65] Often messages or photos that teens post that may seem

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[62] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; Repr., London: Verso, 1991).

[63] Boyd, *It's Complicated*, 34.

[64] *Seinfeld*, created by Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld (Castle Rock Entertainment, 1989-1998).

[65] Boyd, *It's Complicated*, 30.

strange are "inside jokes" or understandings adolescents have within particular friend groups. When these different friend groups interact with one another over a post meant for one specific crowd, it can lead to misunderstanding. In physical spaces, the generations of previous adolescents only revealed what they wanted to a particular audience. Communication was private by default and public by effort.

Some scholars and youth culture researchers believe that this generation of youth is the most narcissistic generation alive.[66] They come to this conclusion based on how many selfies adolescents take, how they write about their lives on social media, and their constant need of affirmation. Mueller goes as far to say that when adolescents post to social media about social justice causes that they are involved with, they are doing so to build themselves up.[67] Dr. Tim Elmore writes, "One brief summary from a recent study reveals narcissistic students have inflated but vulnerable self-views, can't regulate their self-esteem, and rely on others for affirmation."[68] Elmore believes that narcissism is seen in the adolescent's constant need for affirmation from a lack of a healthy self-image. For these youth culture thinkers and scholars, midadolescents are self-absorbed and fragile.

The label of adolescents as narcissistic by Mueller and others completely misses the mark. It shows a lack of understanding as to the real reason why adolescents use social media, the egocentrism of the period, and the lack of social capital in their lives. Adolescents primarily use social media to share their lives with each other.

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[66] Jean Twenge, "Have Young People Always Been Self-absorbed?" *Psychology Today* (August 03, 2010), accessed January 06, 2017, https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-narcissism-epidemic/201008/have-young-people-always-been-self-absorbed.

[67] Mueller, "Selfless Narcissism . . ."

[68] Tim Elmore, "The Best Response to Narcissism in Students," Growing Leaders, August 11, 2016, accessed January 04, 2017, https://growingleaders.com/blog/best-response-narcissism-students/.

Midadolescents today are over-scheduled and stressed. They do not have the margin in their lives to get together with others. I have found in my experience that when given the chance, midadolescents would rather be together than sharing their lives only on social media. Because of their egocentrism, midadolescents are already more focused on themselves, so it would be a natural outcome that they would post many things about their lives and pictures of themselves on social media. Lastly, as Dr. Elmore points out, adolescents rely on affirmation from others. In previous generations, more of this affirmation would have come from the social capital midadolescents had from their communities and families. Today, much of that social capital is gone. Midadolescents are not suffering from a psychological disorder; they are misunderstood, and not many adults are trying to understand them.

When the adolescents in my youth ministry get permission from their parents to start a Facebook or an Instagram account, one would think it is the happiest day of their lives. They are excited to connect with their friends and know what is going on. As they get older they have less and less time to see each other outside of school. Children today have less leisure time than those of previous generations.[69] The Pew Research Center, in a recent survey, found that only 25 percent of teens spend time with friends in person on a daily basis outside of school.[70] The same study reports that 83 percent of teens who use social media feel it helps them to feel more connected to their friends.[71] Adolescents are

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[69] Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2005).

[70] Pew Research Center, "Teens, Technology and Friendships," 3.

[71] Ibid., 6.

not addicted to their gadgets or the Internet, as some would suggest. They are looking to connect with their friends in the midst of their busy schedules.

Adolescents do not go online simply to use all the gadgets they own. Boyd asserts that they go online because they are seeking friendship.[72] Social media is not simply a tool but a social lifeline; it is where all their friends are. They go online because of their crazy schedules. Madeline Levine comments in the opening pages of her book, *The Price of Privilege*, "Teens are scheduled within an inch of their lives."[73] They do not have the time that previous generations had to socialize. Boyd asserts, "More often than not their passion for social media stems from their desire to socialize."[74]

<center>Other Ways Midadolescents Use Technology</center>

The first screen technology that most children are introduced to is the television. Television is a staple in almost every American home. Today Americans are spending less time out in their communities and more time inside their homes around the television. Americans spend between three and four hours a day watching television.[75] Even when families are together they are spending more time watching TV than talking with each other. When adolescents today are not watching a show on cable television they have access to a multitude of shows through Netflix. The average subscriber

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72 Ibid., 18.

73 Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 10.

74 Boyd, *It's Complicated*, 22.

75 Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 223.

watches close to forty-seven hours of streaming video a month through Netflix.[76] Many

adolescents today will "binge watch" a whole season of a television show in a day or

afternoon. Watching a show on Netflix gives one the ability to not have to wait a week to

see what happens.

Video games play a large role in the friendships of boys. Of teen online gamers,

78 percent say that when they play games online they feel more connected to friends they

already know.[77] They are not just using games to play with their friends, but they are

also using online platforms to make new friends. Boys were found to be more likely than

girls to make new friends over the Internet through gaming.[78] Overall, 84 percent of

midadolescent boys play video games.[79] What used to be a solitary hobby unless friends

were actually present while playing, has been transformed by the gaming systems' ability

to use the Internet for gameplay. Gaming has become its own social network, with users

creating profiles and gaming identities. They can talk to those they are playing against or

with, even in other countries. Even though we usually associate game play with boys, 50

percent of midadolescent girls play video games as well. The Pew Research Center

states, "Teen gamers play games with friends they know in person 89% of the time and

friends they know only online 54% of the time."[80]

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[76] Statista, "Time Spent with Netflix per Subscriber Worldwide 2014/Statistic," Statista, accessed June 01, 2015, http://www.statista.com/statistics/326016/time-spent-netflix-subscriber/.

[77] Pew Research Center, "Teens, Technology and Friendships," Pew Research Center Internet Science Tech RSS, August 06, 2015, accessed June 01, 2016, http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/08/06/teens-technology-and-friendships/ 5.

[78] Ibid., 15.

[79] Ibid., 4.

[80] Pew Research Center, "Teens, Technology and Friendships," 4.

Text messaging, while having many advantages, such as providing the ability for parents to check in with their teens, can have some serious consequences when misused. Pew reports that 55 percent of teens spend time every day texting with friends.[81] If they are not texting using their phones, they can message through different apps, such as Facebook Messenger and Snapchat. The Pew Research Center reports, "91% of teen cell owners use text messaging—either directly through their mobile phones or through an app or a website."[82] It has become the most common way for teens to keep in touch with their friends. One of the first things teens do upon making a new friend is share a cell number to be able to communicate by texting.[83] Of all the different ways to stay in touch with their friends (in person, instant messaging, social media, emailing, or gaming), texting is the primary way they stay in touch.

Communicating via texting is not without its downside. Sexting in adolescent culture has led to many different tragedies, including adolescents going to jail on child pornography charges.[84] Digital communication removes the personal aspect of communication, and adolescents are far more willing to engage in behavior that they would never engage in face to face. Perhaps the most dangerous activity adolescents participate in on their phones is texting while driving. Automobile accidents are the leading cause of death in teenagers aged sixteen to nineteen, according to the Center for

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[81] Ibid., 3.

[82] Ibid., 17.

[83] Ibid., 10.

[84] Mark S. Davis, "Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS)," *The Concise Dictionary of Crime and Justice*, February 2010, accessed July 9, 2015, doi:10.4135/9781452229300.n15.

Disease Control.[85] Having a phone in one's hand while driving is a recipe for disaster.

Eastern Virginia Medical School conducted a study of teens driving while texting; they

report, "The results for the teens sending text messages or fiddling with their MP3

players showed increased 'lane position deviation' and speed changes, mostly slowing

down."[86] The average teen receives and sends an average of sixty text messages a day.[87]

It is almost a guarantee that teens' phones will be buzzing, ringing, or beeping while they

are driving.

Conclusion

The world our adolescents are growing up in makes is very difficult to develop an

orthodox Christian faith. They are growing up in a very pluralistic society that teaches

them to accept only those religious ideas that make them happy. They are overscheduled

and stressed by the amount of pressure they have on them to be high performers in

education, athletics, and performing arts. Clark writes, "To survive, a young person must

learn how to be a child, a student, an athlete, and a friend, while also continuing the ever-

lengthening process of determining who he or she is."[88] They are learning to navigate

this world with little or no social capital.

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[85] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Teen Drivers," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, October 07, 2014, accessed July 09, 2015, http://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/teen_drivers/index.html.

[86] Eastern Virginia Medical School. "Texting While Driving Can Be Deadly, Study Shows," ScienceDaily, accessed July 21, 2015, www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2009/05/090504094434.htm.

[87] Pew Research Center, "Teens, Smartphones, & Texting (2012)," Pew Research Center RSS, March 9, 2012, accessed June 01, 2015, http://www.pewresearch.org/topics/texting/2012/.

[88] Clark, *Hurt 2.0,* 2.

Midadolescents do not have the support of a community as they had in years past and often they do not have the support they need from their parents to navigate the complexities of their lives. For the most part, the primary means of social capital is coming from a midadolescent's peers through social media. Although today midadolescents face many challenges, there is an organization in this world that is uniquely gifted to help meet these challenges, the Church. The next chapter demonstrates how the very nature of the local church is about members relating to one another. This chapter begins to offer solutions in the midst of these difficult circumstances for midadolescents.

PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 3

THE NATURE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

In recent history the evangelical Church has been mostly about its mission. Many modern church plants and scholars have stressed the importance of being "missional."[1] While there has been much good that has come out of the church planting and missional movements, there has been a lack of focus on the nature of the Church, or why the Church exists in the first place.

There has been a lack of good ecclesiology in the evangelical Church, largely because evangelical churches are so diverse in belief and practice from one to another.[2] They tend to focus on what makes them unique as individual churches and not who they are as a part of God's universal Church. Because of their emphasis on distinctions, evangelical churches have placed so much of their focus on the mission of the church that they tend to lose sight of the essential nature of the Church. It is easy for them to be so concerned with growth and ministry practices that the nature of the Church becomes diluted.

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

[2] Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 8.

The central reason the Church exists is worship.[3] The nature of the Church or the

reason the Church exists should determine its mission, not the other way around.

Miroslav Volf agrees when he writes, "After all, ecclesiology determines missiology."[4]

The loss of a robust ecclesiology in evangelical churches has left many liturgical

practices empty of their rich meaning or completely gone all together. Because worship

is central to the Church, churches should regularly take time to evaluate their worship life

and practice.[5]

To understand why the local church is the most important component for the

spiritual formation of midadolescents, then, it is necessary to understand why the Church

exists. When the Church becomes unevenly focused on the mission and does not keep its

nature in view, then ministry practices can fall short of their purposes or miss them

altogether. Ministry practices all too often focus on money and church attendance as

their end goals, rather than worship. When a church is more concerned about physical

measurements, such as attendance, salvations, and money, than on the worship that

happens inside and outside its walls, its works become more important than its faith. In

Liturgical Theology, Simon Chan writes, "If, for example, the church is merely the result

of human decision to gather in a certain way in order to advance some practical end . . .

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[3] N. T. Wright, *For All God's Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 7.

[4] Miroslav Volf, "The Nature of the Church," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 26, no. 1 (January 2002): 68, accessed July 7, 2016, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN= 6432661&site=ehost-live.

[5] Wright, *For All God's Worth*, 8.

then worship is likely to be understood as a human construct to achieve that end."[6] The

nature of the Church must always be in mind when considering ministry practices. After

all, "the church is an ontological reality before it is a functional reality," writes Chan.[7]

Mission flows from its nature. The primary focus for the Church should be living into its

ontology or the nature from which its mission is expressed.

The Nature of the Church

All great businesses have distinguishing features about their products that make

them different from other businesses that offer similar products. The intention is not to

compare the local church to or think of a church as a business, but to see how the

principle applies. In the case of the local church, the following questions should be

asked: What are those defining qualities that make the church different from all other

organizations in this world? What makes the church different from any other parachurch

organization or philanthropic organization? What does the church have that no other

organization in this world has? The answer to all of these questions is worship. The

local church is the worshipping community of God. The worship life of the church is

what distinguishes the church from any other human organization.[8]

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[6] Simon Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 41.

[7] Ibid., 21.

[8] Paul M. Collins, *Christian Community Now: Ecclesiological Investigations* (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 158.

There are many scholars and ministry practitioners who believe that the Church exists first for mission.[9] Darrell Guder, in his book, *Missional Church* writes, "Mission means sending and it is the central biblical theme describing the purposes of God's action in human history."[10] Van Gelder and Zscheile point out that many adopters of the missional church philosophy use the term in a variety of ways, but they all tend to agree that the reason the church finds its purpose in sending is because God is a sending God.[11] While the above mentioned would argue that the Church exists for mission because God is a sending God, they do not address the root of why God is a sending God.

The reason God sends is to restore the purity of the worship that was lost in the garden.[12] He sends to redeem and restore all parts of his creation. The whole purpose of the seventh day and the climax of creation was for it to worship its creator. Romans 8:18-22 mentions how creation itself is anticipating the return of Christ so that it can worship the creator the way it did before the fall. The Garden of Eden was a temple where humanity was to worship in the full presence of God. However, when sin came into the world, humanity was banished from the full presence of God as a mercy to them. Through Christ, God is now restoring the pure worship that was lost in the Garden.

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[9] Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003). Also see Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005)

[10] Darrell L. Guder and Lois Barrett, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998), 4.

[11] Van Gelder and Zsheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 3.

[12] Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 21-22.

A Worshipping Community

Worship is a part of our very nature. The psalmist of Psalm 150 writes, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord."[13] All that the Lord has made is designed for worship. Daniel Block writes in his book on worship, "To be human is to worship."[14] Worship in its simplest definition is to give worth. N. T. Wright defines worship as "to accord worth, true value, to something, to recognize and respect it for the truth worth it has."[15] In worship we ascribe worth to God for his beauty. Often in the contemporary songs of the Church, our worship is a response for what God has done. We often do not take the time to simply worship God because of his beauty. When standing before El Capitan in Yosemite National Park, an overwhelming sense of awe wells ups inside the beholder as he or she looks at the grandeur and beauty of the rock. This overwhelming awe is what should describe our worship as we behold the beauty and grandeur of God. As the psalmist writes, "One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple" (Psalms 27:4). Worship is about beholding the beauty of God. Of course worship is more than simply a collection of individuals beholding the beauty of God in a building. Worship is how our lives and the practices of the church reflect the beauty of God in this world.

It would be impossible to say everything worship is in this project. When discussing worship there two main things in mind here. First, when the church gathers in

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[13] All biblical references are taken from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.

[14] Daniel Isaac Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 1.

[15] Wright, *For All God's Worth*, 6.

worship, it ought to tell the story of Christ in this world. Robert Webber writes, "In

worship we remember God's story in the past and anticipate God's story in the future."[16]

When God's people come together, we tell his story in the world. One of the great ways

we tell God's story is by coming to his table together, which is discussed in the next

section on eschatological community.

Second, when the church lives into its calling as cross bearers, believers reflect

the story of Jesus to the world. In Romans 12:1, the Apostle Paul writes, "Therefore, I

urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living

sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." Commentator

Craig Keener writes, "Now he will show that believers can choose in their minds to

present their bodies for the service of a greater 'body,' the body of Christ with whom

they have been united. When believers offer themselves as sacrifices, they imitate

Jesus."[17] These two acts reflect the beauty of God's love for his people and for the

world.

True worship happens in community.[18] When Christians come together they are

not doing so simply as a collection of individuals but as one body.[19] In John 4, Jesus is

speaking to the Samaritan women at the well about what true worship is, and Jesus says,

"Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the

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[16] Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God's Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 23.

[17] Craig S. Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 143.

[18] McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 26.

[19] Kimberly Bracken. Long, *The Worshiping Body: The Art of Leading Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 15.

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Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth." Within the words of Jesus to the woman is an implication of community. He says that Samaritans and Jews alike will worship together. They will worship not only on the mountain or in Jerusalem, but wherever they are gathered by the means of the Spirit and Truth. They will worship by "Spirit," meaning the Holy Spirit, and by "Truth," meaning Jesus himself.[20] This passage gives a picture of the Trinity and an early picture of what the renewed people of God look like: worshippers. Later in Revelation 21, John describes the fulfillment of the eschatological picture given here of all nations worshipping Jesus.

From the foundation of the world, God has had in mind the Church to be his worshipping community.[21] The whole narrative of redemptive history reveals God's eternal plan for expanding his worshipping community.[22] This plan extends from Adam and Eve in the Garden given the command to be fruitful and multiply, to the call of Abraham to establish a people of God. It extends from the tabernacle to the temple as the gathering spot, to Jesus the incarnate presence of God in the world calling people to follow him, to the Spirit living inside of his people making them one. God has always had in mind a worshiping community.

The temple is no longer confined to one place, but God's temple is wherever his people dwell. The Apostle Paul writes, "For he chose us in him before the creation of the

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[20] Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 263.

[21] Klyne Snodrass, *The NIV Application Commentary, Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 49.

[22] Block, *For the Glory of God*, 235-236.

world to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Eph 1:4). Ephesians makes it clear that the

Church exists for worship, or "to the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:14).[23] This has always

been God's plan even before the foundation of the world. The Church exists to "praise

his glory," or to behold his beauty. The Church exists to worship the Lord. God's Holy

Spirit creates and inhabits the temple of God, which is now his people. Ephesians 2:21-

22 states, "In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple

in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which

God lives by his Spirit." He creates places for the worship of God,[24] which now is the

Church. God had in mind from the beginning of time to create for himself a people to be

his worshipping community.

This worshipping community is called the Church, and the Church is the renewed

people of God. The Church is the continuation of the God's people established in

Genesis 12. God's people are not a certain nationality but a people of faith (Gal 3:28). It

would be wrong to think of the Church as completely separate from the people of Israel.

God has not discarded his people but has made them new. N. T. Wright comments, "The

fulfillment of Israel's story in the story of the Messiah is the foundational charter of the

church. That is why I speak of the gospels as telling the story of the launching of God's

renewed people."[25] The focus of the gospels is not so much the story of how the Church

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[23] Mark D. Roberts, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 32.

[24] Ibid, 85.

[25] N. T. Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (New York: HarperOne, An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2016), 112.

was founded as much as it is the story of how Jesus, Israel's God, became King.[26] If this

is the story the gospels tell, then the Church is God's Kingdom on earth. The importance

of this will have its full application when discussing the mission of the Church. The

renewed people of God was not a new idea that came with Jesus, but one told throughout

the Old Testament; it was God's plan before the foundation of the world.

An Eschatological Community

It would be shortsighted to see the Church's purpose as only fulfilled on earth.

The Church does not have a mere creaturely existence, but an eternal existence. In their

creaturely existence, believers work towards that which will be perfected when Christ

returns. The worship life of the Church will continue for all eternity. The Church

Militant's mission will eventually cease, but its worship will continue for all eternity.[27]

Philippians 3 explains that while believers live on this earth, their true citizenship is in

heaven (the age to come). Jesus reminded his disciples in John 15 that they do not belong

to the world, but that he chose them out of the world. Therefore, believers should be

about the business of their true home, and that business is the worship of the creator.

Christians are citizens of God's household (Eph 2:19). The community of God is

being built by the Spirit of God to be a holy temple. A temple by its very definition is a

place of worship. The primary task of kingdom citizens in this age and the age to come is

worship. In this age the place of worship where believers are reminded of their true

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Stanley J. Grenz, "Celebrating Eternity: Christian Worship as a Foretaste of Participation in the Triune God," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 60, no. 1 (2005): 50, accessed March 12, 2017, http://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1123&context=asburyjournal.

citizenship is at the Lord's table. The Lord's table is where one tells the story of Christ in this world.

Believers often think of the communion as a time to look back and think about what Christ has already done, as they should. In the words of institution, the one partaking in communion is reminded to eat the body and drink the blood in remembrance of Christ breaking his body and shedding his blood. However, if those partaking reflect only on that, then they will miss one of the greatest joys of coming to the table together. Coming to the Lord's table together is not just about looking back, but it is also about celebrating what is ahead. It should be a cause for joy.[28]

When Jesus was instituting the meal, he said, "I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Mt 26:29). This is one of the hopes and joys that Jesus embraced as he was preparing to face the cross. This picture of the Kingdom for him was a source of strength, as he was getting ready to go through something unbearable. It is a clear reference to a future reality. One day Jesus will be feasting with his disciples. The communion meal prepares the Church for what is to come. In *A Many Colored Kingdom*, Steve Kang writes, "The church of Jesus Christ is called to live out the covenant with God and with one another as the eschatological community, realizing or showing forth in the present the communal life of the eternal kingdom of God."[29] It is a source of strength for believers, enabling them to follow Christ and to endure hardships until they come

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[28] Nigel Scotland, *The New Passover: Rethinking the Lord's Supper for Today* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 136.

[29] Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, S. Steve Kang, and Gary A. Parrett, *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 215.

back to participate in the table again. The Lord's table is a present picture of a future

reality for all those who belong to Christ.

In the parable of the wedding banquet (Mt 22), there is a picture of what the

Lord's table looks like in eternity. When those who originally were invited to the

banquet did not show, the King sent his servants out to gather anyone who would come

from the streets. They did this until the banquet was full. One notable point here is that

the King went to gather all who were in the streets. Here is a picture of diversity.

Especially here, the gathering of "anyone" would have been those marginalized by

society—in the case of this project, midadolescents.

A second point to consider is that Jesus compares his banquet to a wedding

banquet. It is a cause for great joy. Jesus's first miracle was turning water into wine at a

wedding feast (Jn 2). When believers sit at the Lord's table together, it should be a cause

for joyful anticipation of what is to come for those who believe. In *Life Together*,

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "The day of the Lord's Supper is an occasion of joy for the

Christian community. Reconciled in their hearts with God the brethren, the congregation

receives the gift of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. . . . As the members of the

congregation are united in body and blood at the table of the Lord so will they be together

in eternity."[30] Coming together at the table is one of the Church Militant's greatest acts

of worship. When taking communion together, congregants paint a picture of the

eschatological reality and their desire for the age to come.[31] Those around the table come

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[30] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 122.

[31] Todd J. Billings, "The Lord's Supper and the Church's Public Witness," *Theology Today* 67, no. 1 (April 2010): 13, accessed March 12, 2017, https://www.mnu.edu/images/userUploads/Mabee_Library/TheologyToday/TT-67-1.pdf.

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from all walks of life, but have one important aspect in common: the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Worship is what distinguishes the Church from other parachurch organizations. The Church exists "to praise his glory" (Eph 1:14). When believers gather for worship, the space becomes a Holy Temple because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the presence of Christ as the head. Other organizations such as Young Life or Youth with a Mission (YWAM) exist for mission or to spread the good news of Christ; the Church exists to be God's visible worshipping community on earth. However, this does not mean the Church is only focused inwardly. It is through the worship life of the Church that it is equipped to go out.

The Mission of the Church

Mission flows from nature. In his book, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, John Piper writes, "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions because God is ultimate not man."[32] For Piper, the goal of missions is to create more worshippers. Psalm 67:3 states, "May the peoples praise you, God; may all the peoples praise you." God's desire is that all the nations praise him, therefore the goal of missions should be to help people discover the reason they were created, which is worship. The nature of the Church is what drives its mission. If the mission of the Church is not grounded in the nature of the Church, then the motivation for mission can easily become

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[32] John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), 11.

secular. Mission is the overflow from the worship life of the Church. The two should almost be indistinguishable.[33]

In the opening pages of Acts there is a formula at work. Acts 2: 42-47 gives a picture of what life in the early Church looked like. The Church was committed to worship. The passage states, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. . . . All the believers were together and had everything in common." These are four clear acts of worship to which they were devoted. The apostle's teaching was their worship of the Word of God, their fellowship was their worship life together, the breaking of bread was their commitment to the taking the Lord's table, and prayer was their direct worship of God. These practices that defined the early Church and they are all acts of worship. Commenting on Acts 2, Scot McKnight writes, "The ecclesial community is noted by the following salient terms: interpersonal fellowship with the apostles and one another, and interpersonal fellowship with the Lord in the breaking of bread and with God in prayer."[34] It was because of their devotion to worship that the Lord added to their number (Acts 2:27). It was from these practices that they were enabled to go out into the world, doing miracles and continuing Jesus' mission in the world.[35]

The mission of the Church is the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, that Jesus is King. The Church bears witness to the fact that Jesus is the Messiah. He is the God of Israel, who has come to establish his Kingdom on earth. This is the day the prophet

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[33] Volf, "The Nature of the Church," 69.

[34] McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 14.

[35] Ibid., 14.

Isaiah bore witness to in Isaiah 40: 3-11. In this passage the prophet describes that day that God himself will come back to his people. Jesus believed this to be true of himself when he declared, "The time has come. . . . The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mk 1:15). Jesus understood himself as the one who would bring God's Kingdom to earth. In the middle of the sermon on the mount is the Lord's prayer, in which Jesus told his followers to pray, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10). Jesus initiated this new age, and through his life, death, and resurrection, he ushered in the Kingdom.

Following the resurrection of Christ and just before the ascension, Jesus gives the disciples the great commission of Matthew 28. Readers often focus on the telling of the disciples to go, but it is important not to miss Jesus' proclamation of his Kingship. When Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt 28:18), Jesus is claiming that he is in fact King over the universe. Bruner writes, "And when Jesus claims all executive power . . . he means that he is the chief executive officer of the universe, in complete control of the whole world."[36] Jesus is clearly identifying himself as the Son of Man from Daniel 7. In Daniel 7:13, the picture of the Son of Man riding on clouds is a picture of his divinity. Frequently throughout the Old Testament, the Lord is seen in or on a cloud.[37] The importance of this imagery is not lost in Acts 1:9 as Jesus is pictured ascending in a cloud. In both passages, the Son of Man is given authority over

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[36] Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary* (Dallas: Word Pub., 1990), 1094.

[37] Tremper Longman, III, *Daniel: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text... to Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 187.

the universe and then gives authority to his people.[38] In Daniel 7:14 the prophet writes,

"To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and

languages should serve him." In Matthew 28, Jesus is clearly asserting his rightful

kingship of the universe as the Son of Man by declaring that "all authority" has been

given to him. R. T. France comments, "Here at the end of the gospel, then, we find the

culmination of the theme of kingship which was introduced by the Davidic royal

genealogy" (Mt 1:1-17).[39] The Gospel of Matthew is bookended with Jesus's kingship: it

begins with the introduction of Jesus as one born into the royal line, and it ends with

Jesus asserting his birth rite as rightful King of all. The authority he has received, he has

given to his people, so that they will make disciples.

The call of Jesus "to go make disciples," is a call to go and educate people

regarding what has happened: Israel's God has become King in Jesus. This is seen in the

following instruction, "to teach them." This is more than just making converts to

Christianity, but helping others to see the Lordship of Christ. Bruner writes, "The word

pictures students siting around a teacher more than it does penitents kneeling at an altar—

an educational process more than and evangelistic crisis, a school more than a revival."[40]

But to do this Jesus is sending them out with his authority and with his Spirit, which is

why he says, "I am with you to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:20).

The giving of God's Spirit was an important sign that God's Kingdom had come.

The prophet Ezekiel wrote about the day that God would put his spirit in people: "And I

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[38] David L. Turner, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 689.

[39] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2007), 1113.

[40] Bruner, *Matthew*, 1096.

will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ez 36:27). Jesus told his disciples that when he left them the Spirit would come on them (Acts 1:8), and early on in Acts we see that being fulfilled (Acts 2). N. T. Wright explains, "The point of the Spirit is to enable those who follow Jesus to take into the world the news that he is Lord, that he has won the victory over the forces of evil, that a new world has opened up, and that we are to help make it happen."[41] The Spirit empowers the people of God to go out into the world to proclaim the Good News: Jesus is Lord! This proclamation was not just for the people of Israel, but for the world. Jesus said, "Make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19).

Race, Gender, Status, and the Church

Revelation 7 presents a picture of what the Kingdom of God looks like: diverse and worshipful. The Apostle John writes, "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb'" (Rev 7: 9-10). The apostle sees a vision of the Kingdom in which a great multitude of people from all across the world are gathered together praising the Lamb. God has in mind a diverse kingdom. Even though this ideal seemed lost on the Israelites, in the New Testament it is clear that in Christ and in the apostle's message, God has not forgotten the words that he spoke to Abraham in Genesis 12.

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[41] N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 122.

United by Faith

One of the cultural realities of his time that Jesus addresses over and over again is that God's people are not a people of a certain race, but a people of faith. In a dialogue with the Roman centurion (a Gentile), Jesus says, "When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, 'I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel'" (Lk 7:9). Jesus explains that his family is not composed of those to whom he is biologically related, but rather those who are following him (Mk 3:33-34). John the Baptist calls out to the Pharisees, "And do not begin to say to yourself, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham" (Lk 3:8).

From the beginning of the gospels, the importance of diversity is not lost. In the nativity story, the angel declares to the shepherds, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people" (Lk 2:10). The message of Christ and the covenant love of God is for all people. One's race, gender, or economic status does not matter, for salvation and God's covenant love is for all peoples of the earth. God's people are those who have answered Jesus' call to "follow me" (Mt 4:9), or as Paul wrote, those who believe and confess Jesus as both resurrected and Lord (Rm 10:9).

Perhaps the most potent passage that shows the diversity of the Kingdom is the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10). Jesus shares a parable that would have been very hard to hear for the Jewish people, especially the Pharisees. This parable illustrates how the two great commandments were to be lived out, and the character who embodies the commandments best was a Samaritan, not a Jew. Samaritans were members of a minority culture. In *Ministry at the Margins*, Cheryl Sanders comments, "The

hypothetical Samaritan is presented as culturally inferior but ethically superior to the religious experts and leaders, because he is a model of social action."[42] The parable is another great example that those who belong to God are a people of faith, not of race.

Commentator Darrell Bock brings another interesting aspect to this passage.[43] He points to the occasion for the passage. An expert in the law asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responded by asking him, "What does the law say?" and the lawyer responds, "To love God and his neighbor." Jesus told him that he answered correctly. The next question the lawyer asks gets to the heart of the parable, "Who is my neighbor?" An expert in the law should know who his neighbor is. Bock writes, "The lawyer is looking for the minimum obedience required, but Jesus requires total obedience."[44] Doing God's Kingdom work means that believers, like the Samaritan, must put on their servant towels and serve and worship with those who are not like them. The Church ought to be leading the way for justice and equality for all peoples. Daniel Hodge, contributor to the book, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, contends that developing diversity in youth ministry is no easy task. It calls youth pastors and leaders to go beyond doing the minimum. He writes, "The gospel never calls us to take the easy road. Jesus's ministry was not one of ease and simplicity, and the apostles encountered many obstacles in spreading Christianity."[45]

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[42] Cheryl Jeanne Sanders, *Ministry at the Margins: The Prophetic Mission of Women, Youth & the Poor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 95.

[43] Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 1029.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Daniel Hodge, "No Church in the Wild: Urban and Multiethnic Contexts as the New Frontier of Youth Ministry," in *Adoptive Youth Ministry: Integrating Emerging Generations into the Family of Faith*, edited by Chap Clark (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 252.

In 1 Corinthians 12 the Apostle Paul writes about the importance of unity through

diversity. Paul compares the body of Christ to a human body. He argues that even

though the human body has many parts, it is one body. Unfortunately, many people miss

the point Paul is making. Many sermons are delivered that focus on which part of the

body an individual might have or which gift one might have. The point of the passage is

the opposite; it is not about the individuals, but rather the body as a whole. In his book,

Vulnerable Communion, Thomas Reynolds writes, "The whole community—not simply

several of its strong or more spiritual members—is the body of Christ, the continuation of

his saving presence in the world."[46] In verse 20 Paul closes his argument by stating, "As

it is, there are many parts, but one body." This oneness is made possible because all

believers share the same Spirit. This baptism in the Spirit transforms believers so that

their new citizenship is not on earth but in God's Kingdom. That is why Paul argues in

verse 13, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body, whether Jews or

Gentiles, slave or free." Commentator Gordon Fee comments, "In Christ these old

distinctions have been obliterated, not in the sense that one is no longer Jew or Greek,

etc., but in the sense of their having significance."[47] One important principle that Fee

draws out is that the oneness is not color blindness. In Christ one do not lose his or her

ethnicity; rather, ethnicity is part of the beauty of creation, but in Christ there is no racial

distinction. Paul also emphasizes the fact that this oneness not only transcends race but

[46] Thomas E. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), 235.

[47] Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1987), 606.

economic status as well. In the church body, one's economic status does not make that person any more powerful or important than another.

The erasing of economic status in the Kingdom of God is difficult for Americans. Even though many Christian Americans would not say that they distinguish themselves from others by economic class, the way we live would suggest otherwise.[48] Materialism and consumerism are highly valued in our world. America is consumed by it. It would be naïve to think that they do not influence church life. There are not many Christians who live lower than their incomes would allow in order to be an incarnational presence to others. We tend to live around the people who make us comfortable. However, the call of Christ to the rich young ruler in Luke 18 is to sell all of his possessions and follow him. Jesus told his disciples to take no provisions for themselves, but to rely on the hospitality of strangers to sustain their ministries (Lk 10).

In Galatians 3, the Apostle Paul introduces a new way in which the cross brings equality and diversity in the Kingdom of God. Paul writes in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Not only does Paul reiterate that there is no racial divide or economic divide, but there is no gender divide as well. The Bible is very forward thinking in its views of women. It gives more provisions, allowances, and leadership roles to women than any other document during the time of its writing. In Christ, believers are not to see one gender as more superior than another. In *Women in the Church*, Stanley Grenz writes, "Because the apostle demands that the positional unity of the other groups be made evident in church life, we can anticipate that Paul intends that

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[48] Putnam, *Our Kids*, 1-2.

the unity of male and female have the same effect."[49] Through both genders leading in

the church together, all receive a fuller picture of the ministry of Christ. However, this

idea of oneness does not erase our distinctness. It is those differences that make us more

fully reflect the character of God. Grenz comments, "These human distinctions are not

obliterated in Christ. Rather, because they have no significance for a person's position,

they no longer provide the basis for functional differences within Christ's fellowship."[50]

In the Church there should be no hierarchy of leadership based on one's race, economic

class, or gender. For God has given each the ability to minister and lead in his Church

because those who have faith in Christ share in the same Spirit (Gal 4:6).

The church environment needs to be a place where all people feel welcomed and

embraced. Reynolds writes, "Welcoming another makes room for a relationship that

transforms both the one who welcomes and the one who is welcomed."[51] There is a

mutual benefit that takes place when we welcome a stranger (one who is not like us) into

our midst. This was one of the foundational commandments in the Law (Lv 19:35). The

Israelites were to embrace the stranger as one of their own. There is an important

distinction to make here as it relates to hospitality. The Israelites were to embrace them

as their own, not to make them become like their own. The idea behind the text is not

that the person had to assimilate to become like the Israelites, but that the Israelites

should love them as they are. The language is adoptive.

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[49] Stanley J. Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 104.

[50] Ibid., 106.

[51] Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*, 245.

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The Church as Family: Adopted Brothers and Sisters

There are many helpful analogies throughout the pages of Scripture that describe the different dynamics of the Church. The Church is called the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, a living building, and the family of faith (Eph 5:21-33, Rv 21:9, 1 Cor 12: 12-31, Rom 12: 3-8, 1 Pt 2:5, and Gal 3:26). While each of these analogies provides a helpful framework to understand the role and function of the Church in the world, the analogy of the family of faith is the most helpful in thinking through our relationships one to another. The first three help readers think through how we work together, how God is building his Church, and the beauty of our diversity. There are two concepts that all these examples have in common. First, they have in common the idea that the Church is one: one bride, one body, one building, and one family. Second, it is the presence of Christ that makes the Church the Church.[52] Christ is the bridegroom, the head, cornerstone, and brother.

When Christ returns and ends this age and the fullness of the Kingdom comes, many of our relationships will change in the life to come. No longer will we need to be the body of Christ because we will be present with the body of Christ. No longer will we need to be built up into a living building because we will be in the house of the Lord. One type of relationship that we enjoy now and will continue for all eternity is relationship with our Christian brothers and sisters; our brotherhood/sisterhood will be perfected in the age to come.

In the Gospel of Luke, the Sadducees question Jesus about the resurrection and marriage concerning people who have remarried. Jesus replies, "But those who are

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[52] Volf, "The Nature of the Church," 68.

considered worthy of taking part in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection" (Lk 20:35-36). Marriages will fade away because we will be married to the Lord, but our relationships as brothers and sisters in Christ remain. Commentator Joel Green writes, "This is important because the basic concern here is with the reorientation of human relations through a reorientation of eschatological vision."[53] Our status as God's children remains in the age to come, while many of the other ways people relate to each other and even the way the Church functions on earth will no longer be necessary. To truly understand the importance of the Church as brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to better understand the importance of sibling relationships in the Ancient Near East.

Sibling relationships were very different in ancient families systems than in the western world today.[54] An example of this from the Old Testament would be the relationship between David and Jonathan. Although they were not biological siblings, they expressed their love for one another in terms of brotherhood, which gives a unique perspective on the importance of sibling relationships in the ancient world. When Jonathan died in battle, David said, "I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me, your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women" (2 Sm 1:26). Not only did they think of one another as brothers, but their love and loyalty to one another was greater than that of a spouse.

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[53] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 721.

[54] Joseph H. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 35.

In the ancient world the sibling relationship was the "tightest unit of loyalty and affection," writes Joseph H. Hellerman.[55] Not only was brotherhood seen as more loyal and affectionate than a spousal relationship, but this brotherhood was more important than paternal relationships as well. In 1 Samuel 19, Jonathan values his brotherhood with David above his loyalty to his own father.[56] In western culture today, the marital relationship is thought of as the most important, but in the biblical world the sibling relationship was seen as the closest, and marriage was seen as more contractual.[57] Commentator Robert Bergen comments, "A man's wife was his partner in procreation and parenting, but not necessarily his best friend, confidant, or social peer."[58]

This sibling relationship in the Ancient Near East was so important that betrayal among brothers was seen as the most treacherous type of betrayal. Many conflicts in Scripture, including the accounts of Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers, focus on sibling relationships and an act of betrayal. When Jesus says his family is made up of those who do the will of his Father, he was making a powerful statement about the commitment and devotion his family has to one another.

One of the most potent passages about the nature of Jesus' true family is found in all three synoptic gospels. In Matthew 12, Jesus is told while he is teaching that his biological family was waiting for him. He responds in verses 48-50, "'Who is my

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[55] Ibid., 36.

[56] Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel: Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 141.

[57] Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 57.

[58] Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel: The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 293.

mother, and who are my brothers?' Pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'" Jesus's family is made up of those who follow him and do the will of the Father. Jesus is making a statement that his family is not an earthly or biological family. In Luke 14: 26 Jesus says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life— such a person cannot be my disciple." Of course Jesus does not have in mind that his followers would actually hate their biological family, but their primary allegiance would be to him.[59] Jesus's brothers and sisters are those who do the will of God the Father. Affection, loyalty, and devotion among brothers and sisters in Christ must be greater than that of their earthly families. This idea of brotherhood in Christ is one Paul uses frequently throughout his epistles.

The Apostle Paul's favorite way to address the members of the churches he was writing to was to call them "brothers and sisters."[60] It is by the far the chief metaphor in the New Testament for how members of the Church are to relate to one another. In 1 Corinthians, Hellerman points out, "The word group *adelphos* (sibling terms *brother/sister*) occurs forty-one times in the course of the epistle. In every case but one, the term is used for the surrogate family of God."[61] This language is frequent because the standards by which brothers and sisters are supposed to treat one another have been

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[59] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 565.

[60] This is according to the 2011 translation of the NIV. The Greek word *adelphos* ("brother") is typically used by Paul, but the NIV correctly interprets the intent of Paul's use of the word by including both brothers and sisters.

[61] Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 99-100.

violated. Paul uses the brother/sister relationship in Christ to remind them of how they

ought to be treating one another.[62] Paul uses the phrase ten times in Galatians and fifteen

times in 1 Thessalonians. In almost every New Testament letter written by Paul or

another author, believers are addressed as brothers and sisters. This language occurs so

frequently that it is easy to forget the weight of the language. It is not a mere Hallmark

sentiment or idea, but a reality that the Church is to live into. Commentator Douglas

Moo writes, "In the ancient world this word was widely used by various associations to

stress the intimacy of relationship within these associations."[63] Unfortunately, today the

weight of this language has been lost in the way we relate to one another as brothers and

sisters in Christ. We tend to think of our relationship as brother and sister in Christ in

terms of friendship and not covenantal love for one another. However, this family

language and framework of thinking about the Church is important for the spiritual

growth of midadolescents.[64]

In Romans 8, Christ is the firstborn, the oldest brother in the family of faith. He is

the one we look to for guidance after becoming part of the family of faith. Jesus saw

himself as a brother to his disciples as well. In John 20:17, after the resurrection, Jesus

tells Mary to go and tell his brothers that he is ascending to his Father and their Father.

Mary then runs to the disciples to tell them the good news. Mary knew exactly what

Jesus meant when he told her to tell his brothers. Up to now in the gospel of John, Jesus'

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[62] Roger M. Keesing, *Kin Groups and Social Structure* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1975), 126.

[63] Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 71.

[64] This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

brothers and the disciples have been separate (2:12), but now his disciples (those who believe in him) are his true brothers.[65]

Becoming the Family of Faith

Following this discussion of sibling relationships in Scripture and the importance of brotherly and sisterly love, it is critical to then discuss how a group of believers can become a family of faith. One must also consider what the implications are for the children of God. Paul develops these ideas in two important passages: Galatians 3:1-4:7 and Romans 8. Jesus began to use family language to identify his followers as family before the epistle writers began their work. Paul used the family language in Corinth to help a broken church and in Galatia to help a divided church. He wanted the Jews and Gentiles to stop seeing each other as separate from one another and to start treating each other as one family of faith. The church in Galatia was having a difficult time knowing what to do with Gentile Christians and how much of the law applied to their new faith in Jesus as the Messiah.[66] Paul goes deep into the roots of Judaism to remind them of the promise to Abraham and how it comes to fulfillment in Christ.

In the opening verses of Galatians 3, Paul introduces three important passages about Abraham, quoting from Genesis chapters 15, 12, and 18. The reasons for this are threefold. First, chapter 15 is the promise of God to redeem his people in the Exodus. Second, he promises to Abraham a worldwide family. Third, he draws attention to the

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[65] J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 1001.

[66] Moo, *Galatians*, 19.

fact that what identifies members of Abraham's family are people of faith.[67] Paul

develops an idea of oneness among Christians, establishing its roots in Genesis

throughout the chapter: there is one Spirit (3:2), one seed (3:16), and one family (3:26).

In verse two, Paul reminds them that it was through faith that the Judaizers received the

Spirit. Then he argues that it was by the same faith that the Gentiles received the Spirit

as well, which was promised to Abraham. Paul then brings clarity to the promise of

Abraham's seed to further his argument. God's blessing was not merely to the biological

descendants of Abraham, or the promise would have been to Abraham's seeds (plural),

but the promise in Genesis 22:18 is to Abraham's seed (singular), which is Christ.

Commentator Scot McKnight comments, "That is, his particularistic reading of the 'seed'

leads to the universalism of incorporating Gentiles (vv. 8-9) because faith in Christ is

what connects one to God's promise."[68] Therefore those who belong to Christ are

Abraham's seed, not those who are born into his biological family.

The end of chapter three and the beginning of chapter four makes Paul's point

very clear. In 3:26, Paul states, "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through

faith." McKnight explains, "That Paul was most concerned with the word all in both

verses 26 and 27 becomes obvious by explanation in verse 28: in Christ there are no

racial, social, or sexual distinctions, because all are one."[69] His reason for this is that "we

were all baptized into Christ" (3:27). Since all believers have received the promise given

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[67] N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 861.

[68] Scot McKnight, *Galatians: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text... to Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 152.

[69] Ibid., 196.

to Abraham through Christ, there should be no divisions or spiritual egos in the Church, for all are the same in Christ and all are heirs of the same promise. Wright notes that "Paul does not of course, mean that all ethnic, social, and gender distinctions cease to have any meaning at all. . . . But these differences no longer count in terms of being part of Abraham's family."[70] It also means that our younger brothers and sisters in Christ are as important to the life and vitality of the Church as our older brothers and sisters. In Galatians 4, Paul discusses the role of the Spirit in creating the family of faith. Verse five points to the fact that no one is naturally born into the family of faith. It is only through faith in Christ that people become adopted as sons and daughters. Because believers are sons and daughters of God, he gives them his Spirit to dwell in their hearts (vs. 6). It is through the Spirit that believers know that they belong to the family of faith. It is through the Spirit that God the Father is Father to all. Paul develops the Spirit's role in binding together the family of God in Romans 8.

In Romans 8, Paul begins by introducing the Spirit's role in salvation. The Spirit has set believers free from the law, so they no longer need to feel condemned under it. This is what the Judaizers were doing to the Gentile converts in Galatia, making them feel condemned for not keeping the law. As a Holy Spirit-led people, believers are to set their minds on the things of the Spirit and not the law. Commentator Thomas R. Schreiner writes, "In both verses 14 and 15, that believers are children of God is inseparable from the obedience of believers."[71] It is the evidence of the Spirit in one's life that shows whether or not they belong to Christ (Rom 8:9). In verse 14 Paul states

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[70] Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 875.

[71] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 424.

that all who are led by the Spirit are children of God. The sharing of and leading of the

Spirit is how believers become the family of faith or children of God.

The Holy Spirit is the shared DNA of the children of God. All believers receive

the same Spirit that is from the Father; it is the same Spirit Jesus had (Rom 8:11), and it is

the same one Christians receive when they become children of God. It is the Spirit that

adopts us into God's family. Paul writes, "The Spirit you received brought about your

adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father'" (Rom 8:15). In his book,

Paul's Metaphors, David Williams writes, "It is our privilege as children to come without

hindrance into the very presence of God and to address God as 'Abba, Father,' even as

Jesus had done."[72] However, this was not always the case. Regardless of family of

origin, all of us were at some point in our lives spiritual orphans and outside of the family

of faith. Williams comments, "There was a time when we were under the *potestas* of sin,

but God, in his mercy, has made us God's children by adoption. The past has no claim

on us now."[73] As God's adopted children, our debt has been cancelled and now we are

co-heirs with Christ. We receive the same inheritance and blessing as the eldest Son,

Jesus Christ.

As God's children, believers all share an eldest brother whom they are trying to

be like. Another blessing of the Spirit is that he is working within his children to make

them more like Christ (Rom 8:29). This is the "good" that God is working in the lives of

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[72] David John Williams, *Paul's Metaphors: Their Context and Character* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 65.

[73] Ibid.

his children in the proceeding verse.[74] The process of God's children becoming like Christ is not a mere byproduct of the Spirit's indwelling, but one he had planned for all eternity. Paul writes, "For those God foreknew he predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters" (Rom 8:29).

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the Church was God's plan from all eternity to be his worshipping community. Those who belong to the Church have been entrusted with the Gospel, the proclamation that Jesus is Lord. The proclamation of the Gospel serves both as the foundation of the Church's worship and its mission of disciple making in the world. The Church has been given the Holy Spirit. It is through the work of the Holy Spirit that God is renewing his people and empowering them to fulfill their mission. Peter O'Brien comments, "The divine purpose in our election was not simply to repair the damage done by sin but also to fulfill God's original intention for humankind, namely, to create for himself a people perfectly conformed to the likeness of his Son (Rom 8:29-30)."[75] It is the Spirit's work that enables us to become children of God and imitate the Firstborn.

By the Spirit the Church becomes the adopted sons and daughters of God. This reality is how the family of faith is to relate to one another. Being brothers and sisters in Christ goes beyond a surface-level commitment to one another; it is instead a covenantal

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[74] Schreiner, *Romans*, 453.

[75] Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 100.

love for one another. Jesus told his disciples (brothers), "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Thus, the Church is a worshipping family of God through faith, expressed in love (Gal 5:6), that is called to go into the world with the good news that Jesus is Lord.

CHAPTER 4

SPIRITUAL FORMATION, THE ATOMIZATION OF THE CHURCH, AND
RECOVERING THE DISCIPLINE OF COMMUNITY

Spiritual formation is the process of a Christian becoming like Christ. It is

learning to participate in the divine life modeled to us by Jesus.[1] It is the end goal of the

discipleship process. Spiritual formation is what happens as one goes through the

discipleship process by engaging in the spiritual disciplines. In many cases the words

discipleship and *spiritual formation* are interchangeable. Since the foundation of the

Church, there have been many church fathers, mystics, theologians, and pastors who have

sought to teach the church these practices or disciplines, that set the conditions for the

Holy Spirit to conform them to the image of his son (Rm 8:29).

In this chapter, both *discipleship* and *spiritual discipline* are clearly defined. It is

these two practices along with the Holy Spirit that result in a person's spiritual formation.

These spiritual practices posture the Christian in a way that allows the Holy Spirit to do

the transforming work. The next section considers how the church in recent history has

neglected to emphasize community, the most important of these spiritual disciplines,

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[1] Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 68.

especially for midadolescents. The result of this lack of emphasis on community has contributed to the atomization of the church. The emphasis on a personal/individual faith or relationship with God has led to a generation of consumers of worship rather than participants. Finally, this chapter considers how when the local church understands the discipline of community to be essential to its spiritual life, it sets the stage for church to stop being a collection of atomized ministries and to start living into its ontology as the family of faith.

Discipleship

In its simplest definition, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his most notable work, *The Cost of Discipleship*, defined discipleship simply as "joy."[2] Joy should be in the heart of every disciple. In Romans, the Apostle Paul instructs the believers, saying that "the Kingdom of God is full of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17). The Apostle James could even find joy in the midst of any trial (Jas 1:2). N. T. Wright describes discipleship this way: "To allow oneself to be grasped afresh, day by day, by the compelling love and radical agenda of the most extraordinary man who ever walked the earth, to be sustained by his powerful presence."[3] Becoming a disciple of Christ is about experiencing true joy in this life. It is made possible because of the yoke that Christ gives. Bonhoeffer writes, "If they follow Jesus, men escape from the hard yoke of their own laws, and submit to the kindly yoke of Jesus Christ."[4]

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[2] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 38.

[3] N. T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Pub., 1995), xiii.

[4] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 37.

Christ offers to his disciples an easy yoke. However, there is still a cost that needs to be considered when taking on the yoke of Christ. Bonhoeffer writes, "Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow him; it is grace because Jesus says: 'My yoke is easy and my burden is light.' . . . When the Bible speaks of following Jesus, it is proclaiming a discipleship which will liberate mankind from all man-made dogmas, from every burden and oppression, from every anxiety and torture which afflicts the conscience."[5] Too often in youth ministry, discipleship becomes about dogmas and not about the joy of following Christ. Joy ought to be at the heart of every disciple. Apart from joy the call of discipleship would be overwhelming.

Discipleship at its core is the calling of Jesus: "Follow me." It is an invitation not to follow a set of rules and high demands, but to follow the living Lord. Youth ministry needs to be a constant invitation to our youth to follow the call of Jesus. Root says it is "a call to follow, a call to die. A call to resurrection, a resurrected life looks like the sermon on the mount."[6] It is a call of a new life made possible through Christ. It is a call to take on the yoke of Christ, which does not add to our burdens, but eases them.

Perhaps the greatest example of what it means to be a disciple is the life of Peter. Bonhoeffer explains, "On two separate occasions Peter received the call 'follow me.' It was the first and last word Jesus spoke to his disciple (Mark 1:17; John 21:22). . . . Between the two calls lays a whole life of discipleship in the following of Christ."[7] Dallas Willard comments, "It is in Peter and his kind that we begin to get a glimpse of

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[5] Ibid., 45, 37.

[6] Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, 189.

[7] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship,* 45.

what is really possible for human life."[8] There are three common threads in discipleship

that begin with the call of Christ: a call to follow, a call to trust, and a call to obedience.

These are three inseparable and necessary elements of being a disciple.

The first call of discipleship recorded in the Gospel of Matthew 4:18-20 is to

Simon Peter and his brother Andrew. Immediately following their call is the call to

James and John. What is fascinating about Jesus' call to follow is the immediacy in

which all four men dropped what they were doing to follow him. Commentator David L.

Turner writes, "In both narratives it is Jesus who sees the prospective disciples and takes

the initiative in calling them to follow him. . . . God's call regularly comes to people

when they are working."[9] The call to follow Christ can happen anywhere at any time.

While we do not have much information on the backstory of these four men or

perhaps a prior friendship they had with Jesus, it is clear that these men considered Jesus

worthy to follow. Bonhoeffer points out, "Behind the immediate following of call by

response is Jesus Christ himself."[10] Peter and the others did not need to know all the

answers right away; they knew Jesus was worthy to follow. Jesus did not call them to

follow a certain set of principles nor did he call them immediately to a life of obedience,

but he called them to himself. Root points out that "Christian faith is not believing the

ideas of Christianity, but following the person of the living Christ."[11] Root does not have

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[8] Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 74.

[9] David L. Turner, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 135. See Judges 6:11-12; 1 Kings 19:19; Amos 7: 14-15; and Matthew 9:9.

[10] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 56.

[11] Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, 182.

in mind throwing doctrine out the window, but he contends that first, youth should be invited to follow the God-man in faith before they are presented with doctrine. He explains, "It does not mean that there is no reason to care, read, or understand the Christian theological, creedal, or confessional tradition. Rather, we need these very materials to find the language for our experience of Jesus's call."[12]

Two scriptures confirm that we can trust Christ with our lives. At the end of the Great Commission Jesus says, "I am with you, even to the end of the age." And in Philippians 2: 12-13, the Apostle Paul writes, "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and act in order to fulfill his good purpose." In the words of Christ and Paul, believers are reminded that they are not called to be disciples and then left on their own. They are called and cared for. In these verses are two extraordinary promises that should encourage trust in Christ. The first is that Christ is with us and the second is that his Spirit will work in us. Discipleship is not something that is done out of the depths of one's own strength. Discipleship happens because God himself is working within believers to help them follow the call. As seen in the faith of the centurion in Matthew 8, discipleship is learning to trust Christ continually, day after day. Building trust is a process. It does not happen overnight, and like the disciples in Matthew 8, when the waves are crashing over the boat sometimes doubt and uncertainty can creep in.

The life of Peter exemplifies genuine discipleship: trust and fear, success and failure, faith and doubt. By the end of his life, Peter understood that he was not called to

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[12] Ibid., 188.

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follow merely the ideas of Christ, but to join the ministry of Christ in this world.[13] The

life of Peter demonstrates grace. This disciple denied knowing Jesus three times during

Jesus' greatest time of need. Yet he is the same disciple who wrote at the end of his first

epistle, "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you

have suffered a little while, will restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast" (1

Pt 5:10). Peter understood that trusting Christ is a process. In the book of Acts, one

reads about how he trusted in Jesus as he continued the ministry of Christ at great risk to

his own life. Peter truly trusted that Jesus was going to be with him to the end of the age.

Jesus instructed his disciples to teach all that he had commanded. Until this point

in Scripture, Jesus had done all the teaching and the disciples had listened and observed

Jesus' actions. Now, the disciples are to teach what Jesus taught them and model the

obedience they saw in his life. This obedience comes from the heart of one who has faith

in Jesus. Bruner writes, "Therefore, keeping Jesus' commands may be understood as an

obedience that flows out of a prior believing worship of Jesus' person."[14]

Bonhoeffer argues that faith is separate from obedience. While faith is what saves

and justifies the sinner, obedience is the first act of faith. He looks back to the call of

Jesus to Peter. Peter chooses to follow Jesus (an act of obedience) before he makes a

verbal confession that Jesus is the Christ (Mt 16:16). Bonhoeffer writes, "In exactly the

same way in which obedience is called the consequence of faith, it must also be called the

presupposition of faith."[15] Root also comments, "The response of the disciples is an act

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[13] Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, 179.

[14] Bruner, *The Churchbook*, 826.

[15] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 64.

of obedience, not a confession of faith in Jesus."[16] To sum up the role of obedience as it relates to faith, faith is not just a set of intellectual ideas or a bulletproof apologetic, but it is willingness to follow Jesus into this world and "into the life of our neighbor."[17]

Jesus' commands for his disciples can be found in the Beatitudes and the rest of the Sermon on the Mount.[18] Matthew chapters 5-7 provide a picture of Kingdom living. It is easy to look at those chapters and be overwhelmed with what Jesus is asking. For one person to follow these things on his or her own strength is impossible. Fortunately, disciples of Jesus are not on their own but have the Holy Spirit as a guide to help manifest this way of living. The Gospel of Matthew explains that Christ was not only called Emmanuel in the opening verses of the book, but he is still Emmanuel at the end when he promises to be with his followers.[19] Jesus tells his followers that his "yoke is easy and [his] burden is light." He promises that under his yoke, "you will find rest for your soul" (Mt 11: 28-30). Willard suggests that "the secret of the easy yoke, then, is to learn from Christ how to live out total lives, how to invest all our time and our energies of mind and body as he did."[20] This is where the spiritual disciplines, or the practices of a disciple, come in. Those who want to live the life of Christ must learn to emulate the way he lived.

Spiritual Discipline

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[16] Ibid., 57.

[17] Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, 186.

[18] Wright, *Following Jesus*, 32; Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, chapter 2; Bruner *The Christbook*, 830.

[19] Wright, *Following Jesus*, 26.

[20] Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 9.

Spiritual disciplines are the practices of a disciple. Dallas Willard calls the disciplines gifts of God's grace.[21] They are tools that Jesus modeled for us to help us trust him more. The disciplines are not life-taking practices but life-giving ones. They are what disciples do in order to enter into the easiness of the yoke of Christ in the midst of a fallen and complicated world (Mt 11: 29-30). They are not only for the spiritually elite or the contemplatives, but for the everyday people in the midst of their everyday lives.[22]

Often the spiritual disciplines are used as tools of shame. I attended a Christian university and grew up in a youth ministry where often one's spirituality was measured by how often they engaged in certain disciplines. Students were made to feel guilty if they did not spend a certain number of days and hours a week doing them. In *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster comments, "It is easy in our zeal for the spiritual disciplines to turn them into the external righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees."[23] These disciplines themselves do not make someone more spiritual, but they are God's way of positioning his people so that he can work within them and transform them.[24] They are the tools disciples use to learn what it means to live in the Kingdom of God. Foster writes, "The classical disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths."[25] Willard calls the disciplines an essential part of the

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[21] Ibid., 156.

[22] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 1.

[23] Ibid., 8.

[24] Ibid., 6.

[25] Ibid., 1.

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Christian life in order to experience "the full and effective presentation of the Gospel and the truth about life in God's Kingdom."[26] If youth are going to be effective disciples, then they should be encouraged to engage in the spiritual disciplines to help them become lifelong followers of Christ. In recent scholarship there have been three writers who have been the most influential when it comes to writing on the spiritual disciplines: Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, and Henri Nouwen.

The practices of the spiritual disciplines are how we become spiritual people. Willard writes, "A person is a 'spiritual person' to the degree that his or her life is correctly integrated into and dominated by God's spiritual Kingdom."[27] Willard breaks the disciplines up into two categories: (1) disciplines of abstinence; and (2) disciplines of engagement. He writes, "The disciplines of abstinence and engagement are the out breathing and inbreathing of our spiritual lives, and we require disciplines for both movements."[28] Disciplines of abstinence are those disciplines that train us like an athlete training for a race. They are done out of the public eye. Those disciplines are solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, and sacrifice. The disciplines of engagement are those that move us to action. Those disciplines are study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and submission. Willard explains, "Abstinence then makes way for engagement."[29]

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[26] Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 25.

[27] Ibid., 67.

[28] Ibid., 175.

[29] Ibid., 176.

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Foster, in his most famous work, *Celebration of Discipline*, divides the spiritual

disciplines into three major categories: (1) the inward disciplines, (2) the outward

disciplines, and (3) the corporate disciplines. The inward disciplines are meditation,

prayer, fasting, and study. These disciplines invite people to be still in the midst of the

crowd and the noise of this world in order to focus attention in a contemplative fashion

on the Lord.[30] The outward disciplines are simplicity, solitude, submission, and service.

The outward disciplines are things that happen inwardly that have an outward expression.

Finally, the corporate disciplines are confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.

These are the disciplines that are practiced with the church. They cannot be done alone

and are essential to the life of the disciple.

In Henri Nouwen's book, *Spiritual Direction*, he summarizes the spiritual

disciplines into three categories. The main passage of Scripture Nouwen draws his ideas

from is Luke 6: 12-19. Jesus went up to the mountainside to pray, then in the morning

come down to be with his disciples, and then they went to do ministry. Nouwen writes,

"These are the disciplines we are called to practice on the long journey home: (1) solitude

or communion with God; (2) recognizing and gathering together in community; and (3)

ministry or compassion in the world."[31] In solitude, one is drawn to the father as the

prodigal son was drawn in upon his return. Nouwen describes it as the "inner place"

where he calls us by name. Solitude then leads to the next discipline of community.

Nouwen writes, "Communion with God is where spiritual community begins."[32]

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[30] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 13.

[31] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*, compiled by Michael J. Christensen and Rebecca Laird (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006), 111.
[32] Ibid., 112.

Community is a way of living and relating to those who also claim that they are beloved children of God. After the beloved have spent time with the Lord and have met together, they then go out to do the ministry of Christ in the world. Their ministry is made possible through the power of the Spirit having worshipped in solitude and in community.

Nouwen's list is particularly helpful due to the brevity of three categories. Neuroscientist Frances E. Jensen writes that even though the teenage brains are at the peak of learning capability, much of the brain is inefficient. Therefore, we should not try to overwhelm teenagers with too much information at one time.[33] Willard's list contains only two categories and many subcategories, and Foster's list contains three categories with a few subcategories. Midadolescents may be overwhelmed at the thought of trying to accomplish all these disciplines. Nouwen's three categories are much more manageable for midadolescents. Quite a few of the subcategories of Foster and Willard such as submission, simplicity, and confession naturally happen as disciples learn to trust Christ more. Therefore, the three disciplines that should be taught to midadolescents are solitude, community, and ministry. Each one is discussed below, with a particular focus on the loss of community in the Church today.

Ministry, or the discipline of service, is necessary in the life of a disciple. James 1:22 states, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." The Apostle James is very clear that it is useless to study the word if readers do not let it change the way they live. Nouwen describes ministry this way: "Ministry is

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[33] Jensen, *The Teenage Brain*, 80.

when two people toast their glasses of wine and something splashes over."[34] For

disciples, ministry happens from the core of their very being when they are full of the

love of God. It spills out of the heart that is full of the Holy Spirit. It is how believers

model the love of Christ in this world. It promotes the good of others and work of God in

this world.[35] Foster writes, "True service . . . builds community. . . . It quietly and

unpretentiously goes about caring for the needs of others."[36]

Solitude is the discipline from which all others derive their strength. Nouwen

writes, "Without solitude, it is virtually impossible to live the spiritual life."[37] Willard

calls solitude "the most radical of the disciplines for life in the Spirit."[38] He comments

that a life in tune with God is done in time spent alone with him.[39] Solitude is not to sit in

silence and in loneliness, but instead to sit in and acknowledge the presence of God.

Foster asserts, "Solitude is inner fulfillment. Solitude is not first a place but a state of

mind and heart."[40] It is a space where we can practice a prayerful life, giving our full

attention to the Lord. Solitude is one discipline that Jesus practiced regularly, from the

beginning of his earthly ministry in the wilderness to the moments before his death in the

garden.

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[34] Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction,* 131.

[35] Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 182.

[36] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 113.

[37] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 69.

[38] Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 101.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 84.

Before discussing community, the study of Scripture should be mentioned. This spiritual discipline is the most talked about by far in churches and has not yet made its way here explicitly in the list of disciplines. The study of Scripture is a discipline that weaves its way into both the discipline of solitude and the discipline of community. Willard calls study of Scripture the primary discipline of engagement.[41] In study, he explains, "we withdraw into silence where we prayerfully and steadily focus upon it. In this way its meaning for us can emerge and form us as God works in the depths of our heart, mind, and soul."[42] Study is important because it is in the Scripture that God reveals himself to us and who we are in him. Just as Israel's new leader Joshua was told to meditate on the book of law day and night (Jo 1:8), in the Scriptures we find truth, which, as Jesus said, is what will set us free (Jn 8:32).

Study of Scripture is a discipline that takes place in community as well. The Israelites were instructed as a community to teach the Scriptures to their children (Dt 6:7). Jesus was found multiple times in the temple publically reading and teaching the scriptures (Lk 21: 37). Reading the Scriptures is not a discipline that believers do by themselves, but it happens in community as well. Churches practice this through reading Scripture in worship services, Bible studies, and small groups. The reading and study of Scripture is what guides the practice and belief of the family of faith.

Earlier it was mentioned that the discipline of community is missing from many churches. It may seem strange to think of community as a lost discipline since millions of Christians gather in churches across the world on Sundays. However, many miss the

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[41] Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 63.

[42] Ibid., 177.

real point behind Christian community. Individualism has led to a devaluing of

community. In her book, *Alone Together*, Sherry Turkle observes that today we spend

more time alone and less time with each other.[43] There is a lack of people coming

together for the sake of others. Church community has become largely about consuming

worship. Therefore, church for many exists to further their personal relationship with

God, rather than as a place where they give of themselves to the body for the sake of

Christ.

This next section focuses on how the discipline of community has been lost. This

section also looks at how discipleship is the call to follow Christ. It is a call to follow,

trust, and obey. The disciple better learns to do these things as he or she practices the

spiritual disciplines. The disciplines set the stage for the Holy Spirit to do his

transforming work in the life of the disciple. Foster, Willard, and Nouwen have been

valuable in helping Christians welcome God to have a more active role in their lives,

body and soul.[44] However, the Church has taken discipleship and these spiritual practices

outside of their communal context. If Christians are invited into participation in

Kingdom life on earth, then it should be something they do together. Churches have

made the role of a personal faith or personal relationship with God not only the only way

to salvation, but the only way to grow in faith and practice spiritual disciplines as well. If

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[43] Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 154.

[44] Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 31.

the individual tries hard enough, it seems in this line of thinking, then he or she can grow as a disciple. But a personal faith is not the *telos* of Christianity.[45]

Even though all three authors mentioned above write about the importance of community as a spiritual discipline, it is seldom practiced in churches today. The Enlightenment has had a large impact on the way we practice and think about Christianity today. In their book, *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction*, Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger write, "The Enlightenment, or modern era, arose in part out of concern for safeguarding space for the individual in the face of imperial and ecclesial institutional forces that oppressed the individual person during the medieval period."[46] This has led to the primacy of individualism in the way we do church and think about spiritual formation.

The Atomization of Faith, Church, and Ministry: The Loss of Community

One aspect of faith that the evangelical churches have stressed over the last few decades is the importance of a person's faith in Christ as the requirement for salvation. They have taken Martin Luther's three *Solas*—*Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Fide*, and *Sola Gratia*—and have emphasized the word *Sola* to underscore the role of the individual's faith in salvation. The *Solas* have come to mean Scripture over tradition, faith over works, and grace over merit. Each is taught to show an important distinction from Catholic practices and belief in Luther's time. However, Luther was more concerned with how each of the *Solas* define or show the marks of the true Church than how they

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[45] Chap Clark, ed., *Adoptive Youth Ministry: Integrating Emerging Generations into the Family of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 20.

[46] Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology: An Evangelical and Ecumenical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 40.

relate solely to each Christian's personal faith.[47] How the Church has emphasized them today has removed the role and authority of the Church in one's salvation and placed the responsibility for one's faith on the individual.

These ideas are not without merit. Throughout the pages of Scriptures, the individual's role as it relates to his or her own salvation is important. Jesus did not exclusively address large crowds of people in his ministry; he took time to address individuals and extended to them the chance to follow him. Jesus invites Zacchaeus, the woman the well, the sick woman, and the rich young ruler all an opportunity to make a decision to follow him. Other passages such as Psalm 139 reflect how much God knows and loves each person. The importance of every individual in the eyes of the Lord is one of most beautiful parts of the Christian faith. The Apostle Paul addresses the importance of the individual's faith as well: "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:9). This is another aspect of the Christian faith that makes it so wonderful.

Another area of faith that evangelical churches have focused on is the importance of each Christian having a personal relationship with God as the primary means for spiritual growth. According to Harper and Metzger, it is the "hallmark" of evangelical Christianity."[48] Many of the spiritual disciplines that were discussed focus on building that relationship with God. Churches have mostly focused on the importance of prayer and reading Scripture as the most important disciplines for the Christian to engage in. It

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[47] Paul D. L. Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 3.

[48] Harper and Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology*, 39.

is in these areas of growing a personal relationship with God that the Church has

misapplied Luther's *Solas*. The Church has implied that not only does salvation come by

means of personal faith, but spiritual growth does as well. If believers read the Bible,

pray, and attend church somewhat regularly, then they can grow in their faith.[49] The

problem here is that the individual becomes an island of faith and self-sufficient apart

from the church.

The value of every individual and the importance of a personal relationship with

God through Christ are clearly taught in Scripture. However, there has been such an

emphasis on these in the evangelical Church that it has lost the importance of its

corporate identity as the Church. How someone comes into faith does not mean that it is

the only way faith continues to grow.

When a personal expression of faith becomes the most important aspect of the

Christian faith, the Church by default becomes a less significant part of the life of the

believer. When people are taught that they are the sole authority of faith and spiritual

growth, then church becomes an added bonus and not a requirement. Church easily

becomes a place that furthers "me" in my spiritual life; it is no longer about commitment

to the family of faith. Worship then becomes something a collection of individuals do at

the same time in the same place and not as one body. Church becomes something to be

consumed and not something to be participated in. Brian McLaren writes about how

Christians often throw their faith into the mix of other things they possess: "I may have a

personal home, personal car, personal computer, personal identification number, personal

digital assistant, personal hot tub—all I need now is a personal salvation from my own

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[49] Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 18.

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personal savior. . . . This all strikes me as Christianity diced through the modern Veg-o-matic."[50]

Modernity has a strong hold on how we think about our Christianity. Christians do not often feel much responsibility to one another. The local church has become simply a place of emotional support for one's personal relationship with God.[51] Even though we may read about the church as the body of Christ or the family of faith, believers often only think about their faith in terms of an individualistic responsibility. There is not a sense of shared responsibility toward one another as brothers and sisters in Christ as there was in the early Church.

The way churches have structured or organized their ministries continues to cater to the individualism of modern society, which adds to the narrative of the culture, that the individual is primarily what is important in faith. Ministries in church are essentially affinity groups. They often do not intentionally interact. In 1989, Stuart Cummings-Bond labeled youth ministry as "the one-eared Mickey Mouse."[52] The popular phrase communicated how segregated youth ministries had become from the rest of the church and how little interaction the youth had with the church body as a whole.

Today we no longer have only a "one-eared Mickey Mouse," but an entire church full of ears. Churches today have ministries to college students, singles, youth, children,

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[50] Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 130.

[51] George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 37.

[52] Stuart Cummings-Bond, "The One-Eared Mickey Mouse," *Youth Worker Journal* 6 (Fall 1989): 76-78.

seniors, internationals, and so on. The only time they may get together is in the larger

worship service, but sometimes not even then. Many times youth are serving for an hour

and then going to their youth ministries, or college students show up only for the service

that is catered to them. Rarely in churches today are there intentional spaces where the

whole family of faith interacts and worships together. There is a time and a place for

these groups to be together, and it is good for people of similar demographics to get

together and share life. However, when these groups do not worship together or break

bread together, they miss the blessing of the diversity of the family of faith. Churches

have become fragmented families. Churches need to reclaim what it means to be the

family of faith.

Recovering the Spiritual Discipline of Community

At the beginning of this chapter, three aspects of what it means to answer Jesus'

call to follow him were assessed: the call to follow, trust, and obey. The call of Jesus to

his disciples was not to twelve individuals who would follow him how they saw fit, but to

create a family of faith who would follow him together.[53] Because of the individual

nature of how Christians understand faith in the world today, the communal nature of this

call of discipleship has been mostly overlooked. Harper and Metzger comment, "While

relationship with Jesus is truly personal, it is by no means private, individualistic, and

consumerist. It is public and interpersonal or communal."[54] Jesus does not call one

person, even though it starts with one person; he calls a community of people to follow

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[53] Richard T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 145.

[54] Harper and Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology*, 41.

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him. He called Simon and Andrew, James and John, and he continued to add to that community until there were twelve disciples. The twelve disciples are a representation of the nation of Israel and the renewed people of God. Jesus is forming a new corporate identity for his followers; the family of faith is expanding.

In the calling of the twelve disciples in the Gospel of John, Jesus invites Andrew and another disciple to come to the place he is staying. After spending a night with Jesus, Andrew goes to Simon and invites him to come and see the Messiah. Then the new disciples go to their friends and invite them to come and follow Jesus. The call to follow Jesus is not just a call that comes from the mouth of Jesus, but from the mouths of his followers. It is an invitation from the family of faith to, "come and see" (Jn 1:39) this great thing. Midadolescents are looking for purpose and a place to belong. The call of Jesus through the mouths of his disciples is an invitation for them to belong and to find that purpose. It is not an invitation to do something alone, but it is an invitation to join in the family of faith, to be a part of this great thing.

Discipleship is not a call to follow Christ on one's own, but a call to follow Christ with a community. At the same time, spiritual formation is not a call to grow into the likeness of Christ apart from the community of faith. The truth is that we cannot grow into the likeness of Christ without the community of faith. For example we cannot participate in two of the greatest acts of worship commanded by Jesus, baptism and communion, apart from the body of Christ. Nouwen writes, "We are called to God's table together, not by ourselves. Spiritual formation, therefore, always includes

formation to life in community."[55] To truly experience Christianity, midadolescents need to be joined and invested in a local church community, not just for their own spiritual lives, but also for the betterment of the spiritual lives of the rest of the community. For true discipleship and spiritual formation to take place, it must happen in the community of faith.

Belonging and worshipping with the community of God brings meaning to a person's life. James Boice, in his book, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, notes that "entering into the church also brings the Christian into the flow of biblical history, which makes one's own life meaningful."[56] As Christians, we draw meaning from our identification with Christ as well as from being a part of community of believers. According to Benson, adolescents are looking for transcendence or belonging to something bigger than themselves.[57] Not only does a relationship with God accomplish that, but so does being a part of thousands of years of church history. It is clear that the church is not simply a collection of isolated individuals.[58] Adolescents need to see how their relationship with God has greater value for them within the church. The fullness of Christianity can only be experienced in church. They need a picture of how they fit into the story of what God is doing in this world. The church needs to be proactive in giving adolescents a space where they can find their place.

[55] Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, 115.

[56] James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive & Readable Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 535.

[57] Peter L. Benson, Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, and Stacey P. Rude, "Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence: Toward a Field of Inquiry," *Applied Developmental Science* 7, no. 3 (2003): 205.

[58] Wright, *Following Jesus*, 203.

Certainly, all of the disciplines are important and necessary in the lives of midadolescents. Each discipline discussed not only has an important spiritual component, but it also has a component that is important in physical and psychological development of midadolescents. Community is the most important spiritual discipline in the life of midadolescents, but it is not the only discipline. For the discipline of community to be done well, midadolescents need to also engage in the discipline of solitude.

Perhaps the most important aspect of solitude is the way in which it affects community life. Nouwen explains, "In solitude, you realize that you are part of a human family and that you want to be together with others."[59] It is in solitude that our value and identity are affirmed in God, or as Nouwen says, we realize that our value comes because we are God's beloved. He writes, "If we do not know we are the beloved sons and daughters of God, we're going to expect someone in the community to make us feel special and worthy."[60] When we do not have to depend on the community to make us feel valued, it frees us to love without it being reciprocated. Foster comments on the importance of solitude as it relates to community: "Therefore we must seek out the recreating stillness of solitude if we want to be with others meaningfully. We must seek the fellowship and accountability of others if we want to be alone safely."[61] Many in the Church today look to their brothers and sisters in Christ to find their value or for validation. While the family of faith should be a source of acceptance and

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[59] Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, 112.

[60] Ibid., 114.

[61] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 85.

encouragement, our ultimate value should come from being a child of God. Bonhoeffer writes, "Let him who cannot be alone beware of community. He will only do harm to himself and to the community."[62] The Apostle Peter in his epistle did not miss the necessity of both disciplines. In 1 Peter 1:22, the apostle writes, "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart." In her commentary on 1 Peter, Karen Jobes writes, "The Christian life cannot be lived authentically in isolation. Peter shifts his exhortation from how to live rightly in relationship with God to how to live rightly with one another."[63] For Christian community to work well, Christians should not look at the church as the source of validation, but they should look to Christ. However, the absence of solitude is not the only challenge to the discipline of community today. A critical challenge to community is the way Americans think about religion.

As discussed in the second chapter, the guiding philosophy of how Americans value religion is known as moral therapeutic deism. The guiding principle behind the idea that "my faith is only valuable as long as it keeps me happy." This religious philosophy and the individualism of our culture produces what Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton call therapeutic individualism, which they define as "the self as the source and standard of moral knowledge and authority, and individual self-fulfillment as the preoccupying purpose in life."[64] James Nolan writes, "Where once the

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[62] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 77.

[63] Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 123.

[64] Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist. Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 173.

self was to be brought into conformity with the standards of external derived authorities and social institutions, it is now compelled to look within."[65] When we only look within, we fail to look to God to derive value and meaning. Because we cannot find our own value within ourselves, we then turn to our community to find value and happiness, which is a recipe for disaster. Bonhoeffer calls this clashing a wish dream. He writes, "Innumerable times a whole Christian community has broken down because it had sprung from a wish dream."[66] If we are to recover healthy Christian community, then we need to practice solitude. Putnam notes the sociological effect of a healthy community as it leads to "positive affect of social capital: mutual support, cooperation, trust, institutional effectiveness."[67] When Christian community is functioning as God intended, it is incredibly life giving and a wonderful witness to Christ. Commenting on 1 Peter 1:22, commentator Thomas Schreiner writes, "The characteristic of a Christian community is fervent or constant love for one another."[68]

Nouwen contends that community is a necessary discipline in the life of the Christian: "This spiritual practice requires us to be in relationship to the people of God, witnessing to the active presence of God in history and in community."[69] Bonhoeffer as well states that "Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ.

[65] James L. Nolan, *The Therapeutic State: Justifying Government at Century's End* (New York: New York University, 1998), 3.

[66] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 26.

[67] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 22.

[68] Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 94.

[69] Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, xvii.

No Christian community is more or less than this."[70] Root sums up Bonhoeffer's

argument this way: "Bonhoeffer states boldly that there is no Christian life outside of

community, for there is not Christian faith outside of Christ; and Christ, because he is the

incarnate one, can only be where his body is found. And this body is the church

community."[71] What makes Christian community difficult is that it is full of people.

There is no way we will ever find the perfect Christian community here on earth, or one

with no discord. Root says to expect to find a Christian community without any

problems is not to desire authentic Christian community but rather a drug.[72]

 One way for a Christian community to thrive and overcome discord is by praying

for one another. Bonhoeffer writes, "A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the

intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses. I can no longer condemn or

hate a brother for whom I pray."[73] Another key for Christian community to work is

forgiveness. As Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or

sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven

times, but seventy-seven times" (Mt 18:21-22). For Christian community to work, we

must always forgive our brothers and sisters. Peter wrote in his first epistle, "Above all,

love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sin. Offer hospitality to one

another without grumbling" (1 Pt 4:8-9). Christian community is about learning what it

means to love one another deeply. Love leads us to forgiveness because in love we are

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

[71] Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, 193.

[72] Ibid, 195.

[73] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 86.

not looking out for our own good, but the good of our brothers and sisters. Through this epistle Peter constantly reminds believers that their sufferings and the hardships they may experience through being part of Christianity community ultimately lead them into Christlikeness together. Because this is something believers do together as the family of faith, they ought to draw encouragement from it. Peter writes, "Resist [the devil], standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings" (1 Pt 5:9).

Conclusion

Individualism remains one of the driving philosophies in our world today. N. T. Wright comments, "Many people today find it difficult to grasp this sense of corporate Christian identity. We have been soaked in the individualism of modern Western culture that we feel threatened by the idea of our primary identity being that of the family we belong to."[74] When faith becomes simply about the individual and Jesus, it leaves no room for the Kingdom. Christian Scharen argues, "The primary language of individualism reorients faith so that it too becomes merely personal—a conversation between Jesus and me—or worse, a calculation about how much I need to do in order to receive a blessing in my life."[75] Christ came to establish the Church and not a bunch of individuals. When one reads through Acts, it is very clear that the apostles understood that the Church was not a collection of individuals but communities of worship. Boice

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[74] N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 203.

[75] Christian Scharen, *Faith as a Way of Life: A Vision for Pastoral Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008), 29.

again points out, "The Christian Church was established in the world, to realize the superior advantages of a social over an individual Christianity."[76] Christianity cannot be practiced on an island.

Foster, Willard, and Nouwen all stress the discipline of solitude as the primary discipline by which all others find their strength. Considering the developmental challenges that were presented in Chapter 1, such as the need for social capital, autonomy, and belonging, the most important discipline for midadolescents is not solitude but community. One of the reasons we engage in solitude is for the purpose of entering into community. The discipline of community is the most important in the spiritual formation of a midadolescents, and it is often the one the least talked about in churches and more specifically in youth ministries.

Too often church becomes about comfort or advancing the individual in his or her personal relationship with the Lord and not about serving the body of Christ. Authentic Christian community is not always easy, but it is necessary for believers to grow up into the image of Christ. Engaging in Christian community teaches how to worship, love, and forgive as Christ did. Christian community ought not be about what is convenient, but what is hard. As Jesus said to his disciples in the face of hardship they were about to endure, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (Jn 13: 34-35).

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[76] Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 535.

PART THREE

MINISTRY STRATEGY

CHAPTER 5

THE CHURCH AS FAMILY IN THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF
MIDADLOLESCENTS

There has been a wealth of literature written about the best practices and purpose

of youth ministry in the last few decades. Youth ministry has grown from a few

organizations doing campus ministry to an area of study at most Christian colleges.

Ministry to adolescents and their families is part of almost every evangelical and

mainline church, from a church of fifty to a church of five thousand. Churches have

dedicated thousands if not millions of dollars for staff and resourcing for youth

ministries. The importance of reaching youth with the gospel has not been overlooked.

With the amount of investment the church and parachurch organizations have made into

youth ministry, one wonders why so many young people leave the church when they go

to college. A Pew Research study has shown that the church, especially mainline

denominations, are losing their young people.[1] As with the changing culture, youth

ministry is now in a place where a change is needed.

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[1] Benjamin Wormald, "America's Changing Religious Landscape," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, May 11, 2015, accessed August 08, 2017, http://www.pewforum.org /2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/.

In the last ten to twenty years, there a have been a few youth and family ministry practitioners and thinkers who have begun the important conversation of rethinking how we do youth ministry. What youth ministry was doing in the 1990s is no longer working. That is not to say that it has not been beneficial or that youth ministry has failed, as some youth workers have said in an attempt to get youth workers to rethink youth ministry.[2] There has been tremendous good that has come from youth ministry of the 1990s. Many of the adolescents who were involved in youth ministry in the 1990s are the reason for the rapid growth of youth ministry as a major in many Christian colleges. However, those who were a part of youth ministries in the 1990s can no longer practice youth ministry as it was done in the 1990s for today's adolescents. If they continue to do so, then youth ministry may not reach youth today.

Spiritual Formation in Youth Ministry during the Last Two Decades

This chapter begins by looking at popular approaches to youth ministry. Since it is not in the scope of this project to go through a thorough history of youth ministry, it begins with one of the most influential books in youth ministry in the late 1990s and early 2000s, *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry* by Doug Fields.[3] Another popular model is the Gospel Advancing model, which is discussed at seminars at almost any major youth conference. Then the Orange and Sticky Faith models are reviewed as they have begun popular conversations about the importance of the parents' role in the faith development of children and teens. Finally, Chap Clark's *Adoptive Youth Ministry* is considered as it

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[2] Mike Yaconelli, "The Failure of Youth Ministry," *Youthworker Journal* (May 2003), accessed August 08, 2017, http://sundaysoftware.com/site/yaconelli/.

[3] Fields, *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry.*

relates to how the church as family needs to become the model not just for youth

ministry, but for the whole church, if it is to reach the younger generations.

<center>Program Driven Youth Ministry Models</center>

After Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, was published in 1995,

many churches across the country began to build their church models based on the book

with the hopes of becoming the next Saddleback Church. The Saddleback Church

movement has had a large impact on how churches think and practice ministry. The key

to a successful church, according to Warren, is that its programming follows the five

purposes of the church: evangelism, worship, fellowship, discipleship, and ministry.

One of the areas of ministry that the book had a large impact on was youth

ministry, particularly after Doug Fields wrote his follow up book, *The Purpose Driven*

Youth Ministry. For Fields, the key to a good youth ministry is following the same model

set out by the church. The book then goes into detail about ways to include the five

purposes of the church into youth ministry programming. Early in his introduction,

Fields admits that the purpose of programs is not to plan activities just for fun, but to

guide in the discipleship process,[4] which he defines as "helping students become more

like Christ."[5] Fields's book is significant in the field of youth ministry. His passion for

the importance of spiritually healthy youth workers, finding purpose in youth ministry,

teaming up with parents, and building a good leadership team have all made important

contributions to how youth ministry is practiced. However, one of the downsides to how

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[4] Fields, *The Purpose Driven Youth Ministry*, 18.

[5] Ibid., 157.

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Fields thinks about youth ministry is that the youth ministry functions as its own church, or a Mickey Mouse ear.

Two of the five purposes of youth ministry which are more relevant to this project—worship and discipleship—are focused on here. At Saddleback, Sunday worship is about reaching community seekers at their worship services. The student ministry models this as well. Ministry leaders try to create an environment where students want to bring their friends; they want it to be fun. While having fun at church is great, the problem with a youth service being the only experience that the students have in church is that it is not church. They never truly experience church or the assembly of the whole body.[6] It communicates that church is about entertainment, my peers, and me. When students are given many alternatives to the main worship service, it communicates that corporate worship is not important for their faith development. It leads to isolation from the church.

Discipleship moves students toward Christlikeness, according to Fields. He writes that the best way for discipleship to happen in the lives of students is for them to develop the spiritual habits of "hang time" with God, accountability with another believer, Bible memorization, involvement with the church body, tithing, and studying Scripture. Notably, Fields writes that involvement with the church body is essential for discipleship. However, he then writes, "this is the only habit of the six for which we don't have a specific resource to give students."[7] In this model of ministry this statement shows how isolated the students are from the rest of the church. Other than simply

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[6] Cannister, *Teenagers Matter*, 115.

[7] Fields, *The Purpose Driven Youth Ministry*, 169.

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encouraging students to attend whole-church activities, there is no space for midadolescents to participate in the life of the faith community. In this model of student ministry there is not a strategy for bringing students into the family of faith.

Another program driven model is *Simple Student Ministry* by Eric Geiger and Jeff Borton.[8] This youth ministry model also follows what the larger church body is doing. There is great value in all ministries within a local church practicing ministry or discipleship with the same process. However, each ministry should be included in the one model and not be its own version of the model. This model of ministry encourages youth workers to cut back on the extras and make sure all programming aids in their discipleship process.

One of their keys to discipleship is connecting to others, or participation in peer-to-peer small groups in the church. The problem with this, as with Fields example of fellowship, is that connection with others in the church is reduced to connection to a peer small group or accountability partner and one or two adult youth workers.[9] In both of these program driven models, the youth ministry is designed to be a mirror image of the church's process for discipleship. However, the youth ministry follows the model in its own way, apart from the rest of the family of faith. The question needs to be asked regarding why the youth ministry cannot participate in discipleship as a part of the rest of the church.

<div align="center">Behavior-Based Model: Gospel Advancing</div>

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[8] Eric Geiger and Jeff Borton, *Simple Student Ministry: A Clear Process for Strategic Youth Discipleship* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2009).

[9] Ibid., 142.

There is another train of thought in youth ministry that spiritual formation

happens when adolescents share their faith with their peers. In *Youth Ministry in the 21st*

Century, edited by Chap Clark, contributor Greg Stier calls this the Gospel Advancing

view.[10] One of Stier's strong points is his passion for students to embrace and share

about Jesus, and another is the relational context through which evangelism should

happen. For Stier, sharing faith happens through relationship. Also valuable about his

approach is the desire to do something different with adolescents. All day they sit in

different types of meetings and are talked at, and then they come to church and get more

of the same. His approach to get youth out of their church youth meetings and into

neighbors and other places is inspiring; it is what midadolescents need. It is great that he

is thinking about discipleship as more than a simple transfer of good theology.

The theological foundation for which the Gospel Advancing view is built could be

stronger. Stier's chapter in *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century* conveys a sense that Jesus

is frantic about evangelism when Stier writes, "At the core of the heart of Jesus is a

desperate search-and-rescue mission for the lost."[11] God's plan from the beginning was

to bring his Kingdom to earth and that there would be little distinction between the two.[12]

God has been working his plan of redemption since the beginning and Jesus was a part of

that plan. When the second person of the triune God became flesh, God did not suddenly

start operating out of desperation as if he could not accomplish all he had set to

[10] Greg Stier, "The Gospel Advancing View of Youth Ministry," in *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century: Five Views*, ed. Chap Clark (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2015).

[11] Ibid., 5.

[12] McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 72.

accomplish in his appointed time, as Stier implies. Stier comments that the Great Commission is all about reaching the lost, but the heart of the Great Commission is that God has become King, and that God will never be absent from his people again, which is why Jesus concludes by saying, "I am with you to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20).[13]

Like the Purpose Driven model, this Gospel Advancing model contributes to the one-eared Mickey Mouse. Discipleship under this approach happens without any adult involvement, other than a couple of adults showing adolescents how to share faith. Evangelism is only an aspect of discipleship; it is not the whole thing. All of Stier's components for discipleship are in this one basket. There is not a larger ecclesiology into which his discipleship method fits. While involvement with one adult mentor is better than none, youth workers need to have a bigger picture of where youth fit into the community life of the family.

Another concern with this view is that it is a performance-based discipleship program. As discussed above, midadolescents are constantly evaluated, and they often find value related to how other adults want them to perform.[14] The midadolescents who are the top performers are praised and valued, and the ones who do not perform to standards are left behind. If the Gospel Advancing view becomes part of a youth ministry, then the youth ministry becomes another place where they are valued based on their performance. This model greatly favors extroverted students and could leave

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[13] Wright, *How God Became King*, 97.

[14] Levine, *The Price of Privilege*, 29.

introverted midadolescents feeling inadequate as Christians.[15] In this view it would be almost impossible for the midadolescents who are performing at a high level not be praised more than their peers for whom evangelism is more difficult.

Family Ministry Model

The Orange model of ministry has swept churches across the country. The founder, Reggie Joiner, published his book, *Think Orange*, in 2009. The concept of Orange is that "two entities partnering together make a greater impact."[16] When the church and the family work together, they will have a greater impact on reaching the next generation. The concept of Orange began a couple great conversations that needed to take place in churches. These conversations discussed the questions, Is the way we are doing things now the most effective? And how can we better equip parents to shepherd their children?

Orange refocuses discipleship efforts toward equipping parents to minister to their children, rather than churches focusing solely on the children in their programming. This is an important effort as Joiner rightly points to the fact that parents are the most influential people in their kids' lives. The importance of the faithful parents in the lives of teens was also reported by Smith and Denton.[17] Joiner describes the church being yellow for the light of Christ and the family being red for the love they share. When the two partner together it creates orange, and this is the primary model for discipleship.

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[15] Adam S. McHugh, *Introverts in the Church: Finding Our Place in an Extroverted Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 13.

[16] Joiner, *Think Orange*, 24.

[17] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 108.

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Joiner makes a few great points about the nature of the church and the family. For instance, he discusses how one of the primary functions of the church is to illuminate the light of Christ to the world. The church should always be shining its light on Christ, rather than focusing on other things such as politics or parenting strategies. The spiritual priority for families is that the quality of relationships shared should be a reflection of Christ's relationship to the church, drawing from the language of Ephesians 5 and 6.

While there is much to learn from and incorporate from this model of ministry, the foundation from which it is built is not theologically grounded, which Joiner admits in the opening pages.[18] Even though Joiner makes statements such as, "We are the church,"[19] the foundation of the model does not support the theological truth of this statement. The church is the family of God, but reading through the book one walks away feeling that the only important family in the church is the traditional family. A single person reading the book would conclude that his or her role in the body of Christ is to serve families because they are the most important part of the church. Even in Joiner's explanation of Deuteronomy 6, he discusses how the whole nation of Israel was being addressed, but then leaves the application on the handing down of faith to one's biological family: siblings, aunts, uncles, and grandparents.[20] Perhaps the most theologically inaccurate statement in the book is, "The heart of God was communicated primarily through the heart of the family."[21] He justifies that statement by arguing that

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[18] Joiner, *Think Orange*, 16.

[19] Ibid., 36 and 95.

[20] Ibid., 70.

[21] Ibid., 50.

Old Testament genealogies and the one in Matthew are about the importance of faith

being passed down from one family to the next. However, the genealogies are not about

the traditional families passing on faith; they are about how God came to earth.[22] The

heart of God was communicated primarily through the heart of Jesus Christ, not through

families. If churches are built around this model, then traditional families become the

focus of church ministry and worship.

The problem with this model of family ministry is the emphasis of the nuclear

family over the spiritual family. A clear example of this was seen in 2005 and mostly

recently in 2016 when Christmas Day fell on a Sunday. Many pastors all over the

country decided not to hold services on Christmas day so people could stay at home with

their families, because Christmas is a "family holiday."[23] In this decision, pastors are

placing the importance of biological families over the spiritual family and worship, which

contradicts what the Scriptures teach about the nature of the church and the importance of

our spiritual family.

<div align="center">Sticky Faith and Adoptive Youth Ministry</div>

The Sticky Faith and Adoptive Youth Ministry models of youth ministry have

raised a question that needs to be answered, not only in the field of youth ministry but by

the church: Is the current way in which churches are doing youth ministry producing a

lasting faith in adolescents? The answer is simple: no. One Gallup poll showed a steady

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[22] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 25.

[23] Harper and Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology*, 41.

decline in church attendance among adolescents as they get older, especially as they go off to college.[24]

For many years, church structures have encouraged youth ministries to become their own little churches. They have their own vision/mission statements, services, camps, small groups, and missions trips. In *Sticky Faith*, Kara Powell explains that most youth ministries are like the "kid's table" at large family affairs; the adults do not want to be bothered by the kids so they place them all at their own table.[25] *Sticky Faith* is a guide for parents to start addressing the problem of teenagers not sticking with their faith when they go to college. The book encourages parents to build a web of Christian adult relationships in the lives of their adolescents who will model faith through sharing life together. Sticky faith encourages parents to build a ratio of five adults to every one of their children. It also encourages churches to start incorporating youth into the worship life of the church and to incorporate the ratio as well. While Sticky Faith is mostly geared towards parents shepherding their kids in faith, it is not as traditional family-centric as Orange.

Where the Sticky Faith movement is lacking is that it does not recognize the benefit it is to the entire church family. Everything in Sticky Faith focuses on why it is important for young people, but not why it is important to the church body.[26] There is a

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[24] Gallup, Inc., "The Religiosity Cycle," June 04, 2002, accessed August 8, 2017, http://www.gallup.com/poll/6124/religiosity-cycle.aspx, as cited in Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 15.

[25] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 109.

[26] In the new book, *Growing Young*, Powell and her team focus on the mutual blessing that takes place by the inclusion of young people in the church. Kara Eckmann Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016).

mutual blessing that takes place when the whole body is functioning together. Another

area that the Sticky Faith model is lacking is the importance of peer-to-peer, faith-based

relationships. Not only are adult friendships important in the lives of adolescents, but

faith is strengthened as well when they are experiencing or living it with their peers.

Sticky Faith would benefit from including how Christian peer-to-peer friendships also

encourage a lasting faith.[27]

In *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, Clark addresses how the church ought to be

embracing its youth, not as outsiders but as fellow siblings in Christ.[28] The Adoptive

Youth Ministry model goes beyond thinking about traditional families and looks at all

vulnerable populations of the church, such as the elderly, single parents, divorcees, and

so on. The Adoptive Youth Ministry model remembers that the primary family to which

children of God belong is the family of faith. The Adoptive Youth Ministry model

moves beyond the parents' role in the spiritual formation of their children and encourages

churches to begin to think about a new paradigm in how they view one another through

being brothers and sisters in Christ.

Concerning the theology of adoption, Clark writes, "the inner circle of the

gathering does whatever it needs to do to make sure that the adopted person experiences

the family of God as fully embraced and included participants."[29] In the Adoptive Youth

Ministry model there is a shared responsibility one to another. It involves developing a

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[27] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 116.

[28] Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 3.

[29] Ibid., 2.

new narrative for youth ministries that includes them as full participants in the family of faith.

Many churches across the country operate following a business model. The leadership possesses the power for setting vision, programs, and financial decisions, and everyone else follows. In many cases, if a church member is not an adult in a traditional family, that person's voice is not heard when it comes to worship and leading the church. Clark writes, "In today's church we need to dismantle the institutional baggage of power and hierarchy by recognizing that we are all in this together, young and old alike, because we are God's family."[30] The Adoptive Youth Ministry model invites a more inclusive and communal framework for the church. It recognizes that every member of the church is equally important. It remembers that the church is the priesthood of believers from the youngest to the oldest who trust in Christ (1 Pt 2:9). It is our corporate identity together as the renewed people of God.[31]

Where the Adoptive Youth Ministry model can be improved is how this model of ministry spiritually forms midadolescents. Clark does a great job discussing how the church leadership needs to change how it views itself and the vulnerable populations such as midadolescents in the church. It begins the conversation for those in youth ministry to rethink their practices and invite youth to be full participants in the family of faith. Clark does not delve into how this model of ministry spiritually forms midadolescents or why it works. He simply discusses what it looks like structurally and how it meets some of the challenges that midadolescents face today. The other contributors to the book discuss

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[30] Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 16.

[31] Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 91.

what it looks like in different areas of ministry or in the lives of midadolescents, such as technology. The goal now is to see how the church, when it is living into its calling as the family of faith, spiritually forms midadolescents, more so than other approaches to youth ministry that were discussed.

The Church as a Family Model in the Spiritual Formation of Midadolescents

The Adoptive Youth Ministry model proposes that the local church revisit the paradigm for how believers relate to one another, and it calls the church back to the understanding that they are the family of faith. A church is a family of siblings who have the same heavenly Father. Therefore, all are equals and ought to love one another as such. The model is truly about how the whole church should be functioning, not just the youth ministry. An application of that is how it benefits midadolescents in the church. This project began with the task of discovering the most effective way to spiritually form or disciple midadolescents in the current cultural climate, and Chapter 4 demonstrated that spiritual formation happens through community. For this reason, the Adoptive Youth Ministry model is an effective model for spiritually forming not only midadolescents, but the whole church.

The rest of this chapter demonstrates how the church operating as family is essential for the spiritual formation of midadolescents in the twenty-first century. Midadolescents in today's world are under a tremendous amount of stress.[32] They are going through a developmental stage that presents many challenges, the demands on them are higher than ever before, and they have less social capital than ever before.

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[32] Denise Clark Pope, Maureen Brown, and Sarah B. Miles, *Overloaded and Underprepared: Strategies for Stronger Schools and Healthy, Successful Kids* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2015), 12.

When the local church lives into its call to be the family of faith, it can uniquely meet the current challenges that face midadolescents today.

The Church has overemphasized the Christian faith as a private, personal, and individualized faith. Peterson writes about how the Church today reflects American culture: "We come to the Bible as consumers, rummaging through texts to find something as a bargain."[33] This type of atomized faith makes church and Christianity a way to advance oneself. This way of thinking at some level is manifested in the program driven, Gospel Advancing, and Orange models of ministry. While each at some level discuss engaging youth in the larger church body, having adult leaders, or equipping parents, they do so with the understanding that spiritual formation is primarily an individual pursuit. None of them have a clear path for midadolescents to participate more fully in the life of the church. If the communal aspect of spiritual formation was a priority, then they would each have a greater commitment to having midadolescents involved in the life of the church—other than through serving in children's ministry or having a few adult volunteers in the youth ministry. Thinking of the church as the family of faith places midadolescents right in the middle of where spiritual formation happens—the family of the faith, the church.

From the beginning of time, God had in mind both humankind and subsequently the church; it seems clear that they are to complement one another.[34] In the story of Adam and Eve, Eve was the perfect gift or complement to Adam because they were made

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[33] Eugene H. Peterson, *As Kingfishers Catch Fire: A Conversation on the Ways of God Formed by the Words of God: Sermons* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2017), 68.

[34] Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 23.

to be together. God has wired people to be together. In his book, *Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect*, Dr. Matthew Liberman points out that the default network of our brain is to think of our social networks.[35] Our brains are wired for community. If God created a social context for which his people would worship and be together, it would then be reasonable that this social context, the church, would meet the developmental needs of those in the community. In this case, it should meet the needs of midadolescents, and thus lead them toward Christ-likeness as they experience being part of this community or family. Chapter one discussed the fact that the three major psychological tasks of midadolescents are identity, autonomy, and belonging. The next section addresses how the church, when it operates and understands itself as family, helps midadolescents walk through these tasks, thus leading to their spiritual formation.

<p style="text-align:center">In the Midst of Their Developmental Needs</p>

The church as family spiritually forms midadolescents in the midst of their developmental needs. In identity formation midadolescents are developing a sense of self. This sense of self begins to develop as they experience life in their biological families, schools, organizations, and friendships. Midadolescents experience an awareness of themselves and then begin to see how they interact with people in each of these contexts. Because they may start to see contradictions in their behaviors in these different spaces, they develop multiple selves.[36] Multiple selves are not put up to be a façade, but to learn how to navigate the social contexts of these different environments.

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[35] Matthew D. Lieberman, *Social: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Connect* (New York: Broadway Books, 2013), 19.

[36] Harter, *The Construction of Self*, 97.

As they navigate through competing ideas and commitments, developmental

psychologist Erik Erikson contends that adolescents need to go through a moratorium, or

a place where they can question the things they are taught and grow up learning.[37] It is in

a moratorium where adolescents make commitments or beliefs that they are actually

committed to, not just belief in what was handed to them. This can be a challenging for

midadolescents as they begin to question what they have always known or believed. As

they experience the world and new ideas, it can be confusing to walk through on one's

own. This is why Erikson notes that adolescents need a safe adult community around

them to support them as they figure out their beliefs.[38]

When the church lives into its call to be the family of faith, it provides a stable

ground for a midadolescent to go through the identity formation process. As

midadolescents begin to develop a sense of self, the worship life of the church provides a

grounding narrative for them to understand themselves in any context they find

themselves in. The narrative of the church worship should reveal how they should

understand the person of Jesus and how when Christians come to the Lord's Table

together, they come together as the family of faith.[39] The Lord's Table gives

midadolescents a narrative for understanding their past, present, and future in light of

Jesus. Their identity is that they are children of God and belong to the family of faith.

For this to happen, older brothers and sisters in Christ need to invite midadolescents to

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[37] Erik H. Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 157.

[38] Ibid., 156.

[39] Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship*, 168.

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come alongside them to reinforce that they belong as members of the family of faith and share the same Spirit.

When midadolescents begin to question faith as part of the moratorium process, the family of faith provides a safe place for them to ask questions. Families are families for life. Even though relationships may be estranged or damaged, even though members of one's family may make bad or selfish decisions, family is always family. The church family ought to be a safe place for midadolescents to ask questions, doubt, and confess. No doubt at some point in midadolescence, teens will question an aspect of faith, all of faith, or have some doubts they develop regarding their identity.[40] Some will walk away from faith and live lives that contradict the life of Christ. However, through those experiences, a midadolescent's family of faith ought to be a place where the adolescent feels comfortable asking questions, raising doubts, and confessing when they fail.

The church as family provides a safe context for midadolescents to begin to separate from their biological parents (autonomy). As young people develop, they need a safe context where they have some separation from their parents, but still have the support of a loving community for them to make decisions on their own and learn how to handle the consequences.[41] When midadolescents have close relationships with other adults in the church, it gives them a place to become interdependent with other adults. Adults in the faith community ought to appropriately empower their midadolescents to be

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[40] John W. Santrock, *Adolescence* (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2014), 148.

[41] Bart Soenens and Maarten Vansteenkiste, "Antecedents and Outcomes of Self-Determination in 3 Life Domains: The Role of Parents' and Teachers' Autonomy Support," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 34, no. 6 (2005): 591, doi:10.1007/s10964-005-8948-y.

part of regular church activities and worship.[42] Adults in the faith communities of

midadolescents provide a place where midadolescents can begin to make decisions about

involvement in the family of faith out from under the immediate umbrellas of their

biological family. As midadolescents are empowered and supported by the adults in their

faith community to participate in the life of the church, the church becomes a greater

reflection of what it means to be the body of Christ.

The Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:21-22, "The eye cannot say to the

hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the

contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable." Paul writes

that all parts of the body are indispensable, which includes teenagers. In the family of

faith, all parts of the church are needed to do the work of the ministry (Eph 4: 11-13).

When gathering at the dinner table in a family, a parent would not say that it is so great to

have the whole family together if one of their children were not present at the table.

Midadolescents need to be included at the table for the church family to be together.

This means purposefully integrating them into the life of the church in age-

appropriate leadership roles. An age-appropriate role would be serving communion,

serving as a deacon, opening and closing the church building, or being a part of church

planning meetings. A few things that would not be age appropriate would be sitting on a

ruling elder board or a personnel committee where intimate details about personnel

decisions are made and discussed. Churches need to empower their youth to take

responsibility for doing ministry. As youth get older, they need to be given more

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[42] Powell, *Growing Young*, 50.

responsibility and appropriate power to carry out that responsibility.[43] However, this

needs to be done with adults coming alongside them as they enter into these types of

roles. The adult leadership must encourage, ask questions of, and genuinely listen to the

ideas of midadolescents for this to be effective. As youth are empowered by adults, they

will feel like they belong.

The last developmental need that the church as family meets is belonging. The

church meets this need in two different capacities. First is the need for social capital,

which is discussed in the next section, and second is the need for peer-to-peer

relationships. One of the first things people do when they walk into a social context is to

look for people like them.[44] Midadolescents coming to a church for the first time will

look to see if there is anyone like them. They will look for peers who they feel like they

can connect to. This is one of the reasons why youth ministries are still an important part

of the church. Midadolescents want to belong in a community of peers. Youth ministry

in its traditional form serves as an entry point for new midadolescents to the faith

community.

If true spiritual formation is going to happen, however, this cannot be the end

point as it becomes with the program driven models of ministry. The goal of youth

ministry should then help midadolescents participate in the whole family of faith. If

youth ministry is primarily about creating a fun space where teens want to come, then it

has failed because they will never have truly experienced or been part of the church. The

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[43] Powell, *Growing Young*, 53.

[44] Sindy R. Sumter et al., "The Developmental Pattern of Resistance to Peer Influence in Adolescence: Will the Teenager Ever Be Able to Resist?" *Journal of Adolescence* 32, no. 4 (2009): 1010, doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2008.08.010.

emphasis of youth ministry needs to be on getting them more connected to the whole family, which goes beyond serving in children's ministry as an alternative to being in the service. Engagement in the family of faith cannot merely be something that we hope happens, but it should be the primary goal. Therefore, churches ought to create a space where midadolescents can be together, but this should not be the only experience where midadolescents participate in church life. It should serve as an entry point to connect them to their other siblings in the family of faith.

While peer-to-peer relationships are important in the lives of midadolescents, so are mentoring relationships. When thinking about sibling relationships, older siblings have great influence in the lives of their younger siblings.[45] Older brothers and sisters in Christ should be present in the lives of their younger siblings to provide a positive example of a life of faithfulness. Adolescents need to be nurtured in the family of God. The next section discusses older sibling relationships and the need for social capital.

In the Midst of Their Need for Social Capital

The church as family spiritually forms midadolescents in the midst of their need for social capital. Midadolescents today lack social capital. There is very little space in midadolescents' lives where adults are investing in their lives beyond a program, sport, or activity.[46] Loading midadolescents' schedules with these types of activities is not a replacement for communities, families, and churches embracing and knowing their young

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[45] Corinna Jenkins Tucker, Susan M. Mchale, and Ann C. Crouter, "Links between Older and Younger Adolescent Siblings' Adjustment: The Moderating Role of Shared Activities," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 32, no. 2 (2008): 158, doi:10.1177/0165025407087214.

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

people. A parent running their midadolescent from one activity to the next is not a substitute for spending quality time with them. Psychologist David Elkind states, "Only when all of the institutions that impact upon the family, as well as the family itself, begin to pay more attention to the needs of children and youth will we see a decline in the new morbidity (stress)."[47] Midadolescents need adults who will encourage, listen, and support them unconditionally. The church needs to be a place where those actions are embraced.

The church as family meets the midadolescent's need for social capital as it embraces the call to be brothers and sisters in Christ. The church is a place where midadolescents are surrounded by a community of adults who should be a reflection of Christ's love for them. Clark writes, "The church, as a family of 'families,' is called to be the prime agent of nurturing this and any future generation. . . . Adolescents need an adult community who will love them appropriately with great care."[48] One of the places where Sticky Faith shines is that parents need to be intentional about building this type of social capital around their children. However, this responsibility should not fall solely on the shoulders of the parents alone, but on the entire church. The whole community should be invested in one another because Christianity does not exist outside of engagement with Christian community.[49] It is important for midadolescents to learn the importance of Christian community. When midadolescents plug into Christian community, Dean writes, "Christ's passion transforms adolescent desire into sacrificial love that finds expression in the witness of the church and is made visible in the practices

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[47] Elkind, *Ties That Stress*, 208.

[48] Clark, *Starting Right*, 61.

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

of Christian community that shape human relationships."[50] Plugging in to Christian

community, namely the local church, is imperative in the spiritual formation of

midadolescents.

All members of a family of faith need to invest in one another. These types of

relationships are not without challenges and conflict. It does not come easily, but the

challenges and conflict experienced in the family of faith serve as means to make the

family of faith a greater reflection of Christ in the world. Scot McKnight writes, "Love is

often hard work."[51] Midadolescents should be prepared for real church community. Just

because the local church is made up of Christians does not mean it will be perfect.

Developing social capital in a community of people of all different ages, cultures, and

backgrounds is not easy. Root comments, "As mentors and ministers to young youth

workers [and young people], we must encourage them to put away the idol of 'their

dream of Christian community.'"[52] Authentic Christian community is engagement with

the whole community, not just those who are similar to each other. McKnight comments,

"The church is God's world changing social experiment of bringing unlikes and

differents to the table to share life with one another as a new kind of family."[53]

It is through Christian community that midadolescents are hopefully cared for by

other adults and begin to understand that the church is about the entire body working

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[50] Dean, *Practicing Passion*, 15.

[51] Scot McKnight, *A Fellowship of Differents: Showing the World God's Design for Life Together* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 54.

[52] Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker*, 198.

[53] McKnight, *A Fellowship of Differents*, 16.

together. This means that as the church experiences conflict between its members, it works through that conflict in love. By doing so it creates a deeper sense of belonging. This type of social capital reinforces to midadolescents that even though they might have made mistakes (or the adult made mistakes), questioned leadership, or had doubts, they are loved and belong as members of the family. It is when brothers and sisters in Christ embrace midadolescents that they are spiritually formed as they learn they belong to the family of faith.[54]

In the Midst of Cultural Demands

The church as family spiritually forms midadolescents in the midst of cultural demands. There is more expected of midadolescents today than ever before. Denise Clark Pope tells the stories of how high school students live in a constant state of stress and anxiety to perform well.[55] Not only is there more expected of them, but they are asked to manage these expectations with very little social capital and to do so in a highly technical world where they have access to more information than ever before. Through social media midadolescents are connected to each other all the time. All of their friendship circles are in one place. There is a cultural pressure for them to become moral therapeutic deists because to be anything else would be intolerant. All of these challenges that face today's midadolescent make the church as family an indispensable part of their spiritual formation as it speaks to each of these challenges.

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[54] McKnight, *A Fellowship of Differents*, 14.

[55] Pope, *Doing School*, 4.

In today's schools midadolescents are expected to be performers.[56] There is a lack of emphasis on learning and a greater emphasis on being a good test taker. In other words, they are getting really good at being test takers and not necessarily learners. Because schools are evaluated based upon how well their students perform, it is very common for the highest-performing students to be the most valued or the ones who are the most highly praised. Therefore, they learn that they are valued based on how well they perform. They not only learn this lesson in their classrooms, but in sports, orchestra, dance, and almost whatever else they participate in. The world teaches that their worth is in their performance.

The church as family has a far greater message for them. As in any healthy family, children and siblings are loved regardless of their performance. When midadolescents come to church, they should feel valued simply for who they are—created in the image of God and as a brother or sister in Christ. The church should be a reflection of God's love for them. In the story of the prodigal son, both sons were equally loved by the father simply because they were his sons, even though the younger brother had abandoned the family. The church needs to be a reflection of this type of love for midadolescents. They should feel welcomed and valued, especially when they make decisions that go against Christian morality. This is one of the blessings of Christian community—that all can share struggles with one another and receive encouragement.[57]

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[56] Ibid.

[57] Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, 195.

Social media becomes another platform where midadolescents find their value in how others perceive them. Midadolescence is a time when egocentrism makes them acutely aware of themselves in relation to others. Because of this developmental factor, positive feedback in the form of "likes" and "comments" becomes extremely important to midadolescents when interacting on social media.[58] This desire for affirmation from their peers is even greater when they do not have social capital.[59] The church as family provides a context where they have social capital built into their lives that provides this affirmation.[60] The affirmation provided by the church family ought to point midadolescents to the fact that they are wonderfully made (Ps 139), point them toward Jesus, and remind them that they belong in the family of faith.

The religious climate in today's world is a confusing one for midadolescents. The culture in which they live promotes personal happiness as the ultimate spirituality.[61] Being a brother and sister in Christ provides midadolescents a deeper spirituality than their own happiness. While happiness comes and goes, the family of faith is constant. The church provides consistency and congruence. The church provides a consistent message that they are loved and God is present with them no matter what their emotional state may be. While the values and principles of the world shift to and fro, the church provides a consistent message for its young people.

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[58] Hersch, *A Tribe Apart*, 21.

[59] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 283.

[60] Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered*, 195.

[61] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 173.

The church as family shows the midadolescent unconditional love, sacrifice, and a place to belong. These are found in the life of any healthy family. The church as family means that all share a sense of responsibility for one another.[62] Each member must ask, What does it mean for me to love the orphan, same-sex attracted youth, pregnant adolescent, single adult, and elderly person in the church? To do this well it will take personal sacrifice, but it is this sacrifice for the community that causes the community to be a greater reflection of Christ in this world. As McKnight has titled one of his books, the church is "a fellowship of differents." We are "differents" who share a Heavenly Father, making the church a family of siblings.

In a family one does not get to request who his or her siblings are. When a child is born into a family, he or she is born into the family as a brother or sister. The same is true in the family of faith. Christians do not get to pick who are brothers and sisters are, but they are called to love another. A person becomes part of this family through rebirth (Jn 3). In his book, *On Being Family*, Ray Anderson writes, "Through spiritual rebirth, we each become a brother or sister of Jesus Christ through adoption into the family of God."[63] Because Christians are a family of brothers and sisters, they should love and have responsibility for one another even though they do not choose each other. The church as family shares this type of love between siblings. If spiritual formation happens in the church, then inclusion in the family of faith is necessary in the spiritual formation of midadolescents.

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[62] Ray Sherman Anderson and Dennis B. Guernsey, *On Being Family: A Social Theology of the Family* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 159.

[63] Ibid., 147.

Conclusion

Youth ministry over the last two decades has continued the narrative of the western Church that faith is all about a personal relationship with God. This idea of faith has led to the one-eared Mickey Mouse model of youth ministry, which tends to value an isolating model of youth ministry over meaningful engagement in the church body. When churches live into their identity as brothers and sisters in Christ, it removes the Mickey Mouse ears of the church and recognizes that full integration of all family members is necessary to have a healthy family.

The church as family recognizes that a believer's value does not come from what he or she can do for the church or what the church can do for that individual, but a believer's value comes from being a child of God. Everyone is of tremendous value simply because he or she is a part of the family. All members of a family contribute and add value to the family by their presence in that family. While a parent usually provides income, shelter, transportation, and the like, children add joy and love to the lives of the parents simply by their presence. Midadolescents are a blessing to the church simply by their presence, which means that the church needs to feel their presence. The church as family makes sure that the presence of all members is felt and valued. It is through this type of community discipline that the members of the church are spiritually formed.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

An important question churches need to ask today is, Is our church a reflection of

true Christian community? or Do our relationships with one another reflect that we are

brothers and sisters in Christ? While many may cling to the idea that they are brothers

and sisters in Christ, very few live into this reality. The reality is that for the most part,

Christians do not share a sense of responsibility for anyone who is not in their small

group of friends. If there was a real sense of responsibility for one another, then no one

would be in need, children and youth of the church would have dozens of Christian

voices in their lives, and singles (including widows and seniors) would never feel lonely.

But the truth is that there are many needs, children and youth ministries scramble for

volunteers, and singles often feel left out. This is not to say that there is nothing good

happening in the evangelical Church; there is plenty, but relationally we could be doing

better.

The breakdown in this relational aspect of the Church has come from an over

emphasis on the Christian faith being a private and individualistic faith.[1] The

individualism of the post-enlightenment period has had a large influence upon how we

talk about and interpret salvation and discipleship.[2] The problem has become that the

individual has become so important, that churches view themselves as a customer service

business competing for churchgoers. This becomes problematic when churches start

planning worship with entertainment in mind and not God. It feeds the consumer

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[1] Harper and Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology*, 39.

[2] Ibid., 40.

mindset of our culture and furthers the message that worship and church ministries are something to be consumed and not participated in.

Because people have become so accustomed to the language of faith being about an individual pursuit of holiness, church has become a thing to be consumed in order to grow in faith. A frequent critique heard after a service is, "I really didn't get anything out of it." It is as though church is another product to instantly make one feel better or, in this case, more spiritual. The church then becomes a place of emotional support for one's personal relationship with God.[3] This leads to a lack of commitment to the church and to people treating it as any other business. If consumers have conflict with an employee, or if something happens they do not like, or is they do not get their way, the simple solution is to find a new place to do business. There is not a sense that one is walking away from family.

This mentality has found its way into how youth and family ministry is done. These ministries have become products that churches try to sell parents in order to get them to attend. Therefore, they easily become about creating an experience that is entertainment driven. Children and youth are placed in separate rooms away from the adult service and often do not experience all aspects of church. Studies have shown that adolescents are for the most part are not sticking with their faith when they go away to college. Youth ministry professor Mark Cannister writes, "Time and time again people say, 'We are losing our young people from the church.' It's time for a reality check. In

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[3] Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 37.

many cases, our young people have never been part of the church."[4] Other than a few

committed youth volunteers, who are vital in the lives of midadolescents, youth rarely

experience interaction with other adults in church. Midadolescents too often do not get to

experience life as a full brother or sister in Christ. Church becomes another place where

there is a lack of social capital in the lives of midadolescents.

Midadolescents in today's world suffer from a lack of social capital in many

aspects of their lives. They hardly know their neighbors, many households have two

working parents and/or the kids live in single parent homes, many organizations only

value the adolescents as they are able to help the organization, and even in the church

there is a lack of adult investment. Elkind expresses concern about this breakdown of

families, communities, and schools.[5] In a developmental time period in life where social

capital is most needed, it is rarely found. Harter writes, "A major source of global self-

esteem, beginning in mid to late adolescence, is the internalization of the opinions toward

the self that are communicated by significant others."[6] In midadolescence, teenagers

become acutely aware of themselves in relation to others. Midadolescents today are

lacking significant adults in their lives to build their self-esteem. Because they are not

getting the support they need from the adults around them, they are turning to one

another. However, they need adults in their lives who will support them as they question

their commitments, wrestle with differing self-representations, and develop a core

identity.

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[4] Cannister, *Teenagers Matter*, 115.

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

[6] Harter, *The Construction of the Self*, 102.

Another reason there is a great need for social capital is that midadolescents today are over-saturated with information in this digital world.[7] Between their overloaded school schedules, social media networks, YouTube, and access to the internet through mobile devices, midadolescents are constantly bombarded with advertisements and information. They hear many different ideas as to who they should be, what they should believe, what decisions they should make, and what things they should own. Without a solid network of adults to help them navigate through all of this, midadolescents are left to figure it out on their own. Adolescents need a community of caring adults in their lives. They need the church to start being the church; they need the church to live into its ontology as the worshipping family of faith.

If the goal of youth ministry is the spiritual formation of youth, then the practices of youth ministry should be to help adolescents experience church community and to help youth to feel like they belong as members of the household of faith. Concerning those who do ministry with adolescents, longtime youth worker and youth professor Dean Borgman writes, "What all of these share [or should share] in common are the basics of youth ministry: caring relationships with those passing from childhood to adulthood, relationships inviting youth into the adult world and community of faith."[8] Midadolescents are equals, fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. They need their older brothers and sisters to come alongside them and invite them to participate in the life of the family. This is the means by which spiritual formation happens.

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[7] Gergen, *The Saturated Self*, 7.

[8] Dean Borgman, *Foundations for Youth Ministry: Theological Engagement with Teen Life and Culture*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 8.

There have been a few new models of ministry that have started to take aim of the problem of adolescents leaving the church or abandoning their faith as they leave for college. The Orange and Sticky Faith models have introduced new ways forward for family ministry. While both these models have helped churches start to rethink the ways they are doing ministry with adolescents and children, the focus is too narrow. Both of them place the traditional family as the focus of church ministry. Orange promotes the traditional family as the most important item to focus on in ministry. In Orange, the church is focused on traditional families, which leaves many populations of the church on the periphery. Sticky Faith focuses so much on making an impact in the lives of teens that it overlooks the blessing that teens are to the rest of the church.

The problem with most family ministry models such as Orange and D6,[9] is that they elevate the traditional family as the focal point of the church. There is not a sense of responsibility for others in the church who are not part of a traditional family. Essentially, within these family ministry models, the message is that if we equip parents, have some family-friendly programs, and create a few intergenerational experiences, then we will turn the tide of youth leaving the church. Clark rightly contends that this simply is not enough.[10] We need a much bigger picture of our relationships one to another.

Clark's *Adoptive Youth Ministry* asks an important question of the church through the lens of youth ministry: Who are we as a church? The correct answer, according to Clark, is that we are brothers and sisters in Christ, the family of faith, and our churches

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[9] Ron Hunter, *The DNA of D6: Building Blocks of Generational Discipleship* (Nashville: Randall House, 2015).

[10] Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 18.

need to reflect this reality in the way their members relate to one another.[11] This

approach to church ministry recognizes that regardless of one's role in the church, we are

all equals, from the newborn infant to the eldest senior saint. The church as the family of

faith not only blesses midadolescents, but it becomes a blessing to the entire church. To

be the family of faith means we take seriously our relationships as brothers and sisters in

Christ. The reality of these relationships need to go deeper than mere titles or casual

friendships, but into a covenantal love one for another that is reflective of the love that

Christ has for us. We ought to have shared responsibility for one another, which means

all populations of the church are embraced and loved by one another. That means youth

begin to feel responsibility for the elderly and children, it means that the leadership of the

church feels responsibility for the youth, and it means that like a healthy family we all

take care of one another. Living into this reality creates the best context for spiritual

formation to happen.

The church as family creates the best context for spiritual formation to happen

because spiritual formation happens by being present in the church. This does not mean

simply showing up on a Sunday or being a part of the youth ministry, but it means

engaging with all populations and places within the church. Church leaders need to help

members see that we are not a collection of individuals who unconnectedly share a

common interest, but siblings who share a Heavenly Father and eldest brother united by

the Spirit. Wilhoit writes, "Christian spiritual formation refers to the intentional

communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to

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[11] Ibid., 18.

Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit."[12] Growing in Christ is a communal

process. There is no Christianity outside of Christ, and Christ is found where his body is,

the church. The best thing the church can do for the spiritual formation of its

midadolescents is start living into its calling to be the family of faith. We need to recover

and place a greater emphasis on community as a necessary spiritual discipline.

When the church lives into this calling, it uniquely meets the needs of

midadolescents. While youth are developing the ability to shape religious beliefs and

make moral decisions for themselves, the church can be a safe context in which those

decisions are made.[13] It is important for adolescents to have the right amount of

scaffolding (or social capital) between how much they are watched and how much

freedom they are allowed. Psychiatrist Ronald E. Dahl writes, "Ideally this scaffolding

should gradually fade, allowing adolescents to make increasingly independent decisions

without placing them in situations that they are not yet ready to handle."[14] This speaks to

the need for autonomy and belonging. The older adolescents get, the more leadership

opportunities they can have, and by creating more leadership opportunities for them to

have, the greater sense of belonging they will feel. The church as family provides the

social capital midadolescents need as they navigate through the complexities of the

developmental time period.

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

[13] Lisa D. Pearce and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *A Faith of Their Own: Stability and Change in the Religiosity of America's Adolescents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 144.

[14] Ronald E. Dahl, "Adolescent Brain Development: A Period of Vulnerabilities and Opportunities. Keynote Address," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1021, no. 1 (2004): 20.

This approach does not undermine or overlook the influence parents have in the lives of their children. Rather, it strengthens and reinforces the parents' role by providing more examples of genuine faith for their children. The National Survey of Youth and Religion revealed that a midadolescent's faith was usually a mirror of the parent's faith commitment. On that finding Dean rightly comments, "Faith is a way of life, not only a body of information to master, which means that youth groups and church education programs, important as they are for social networks, religious information, and opportunities for spiritual reflection, play second string when it comes to the transmission of faith."[15] However, it is important to note that faithful parents often have many different Christian networks of friendships because faith is a way of life for them. The more parents are involved in the church, the more their children will be impacted by the family of faith.

This approach also does not undermine the role of the personal spiritual disciplines in the life of midadolescents. On the contrary, to engage in the discipline of community one needs to have a personal prayer life and spend time meditating on the Scriptures. It is through these practices that we are reminded that our worth comes from Christ and not from our world or others' opinions about us.[16] This frees Christians to serve one another without expecting anything in return. The personal disciplines and the discipline of community go hand and hand. The problem is the loss of the community as a spiritual discipline. They are equally important in the spiritual formation process and

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[15] Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 117.

[16] Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, 112.

both essential for growth in Christ. However, along the way the church has elevated the

personal disciplines and has lost the importance of what it means to be spiritually formed

by participation in Christian community.

The difficult question for church leaders is how to help members begin to shift

how they think of the people in the pews or seats around them on a Sunday. When it

comes to how people view church, it can be like fish swimming in water. They have

grown up in it and have always done church a certain way, and are unaware of how it

may not meet the spiritual needs of another. Conde-Frazier writes, "Through the act of

storytelling we recognize that those in the dominant culture have constructed the church

to fit their needs."[17] We need to construct a new model and a new story for thinking

about corporate life together, one that takes into account the needs of the whole. Scott

Cormode writes, "The purpose of Christian leadership is to make spiritual meaning."[18]

Church leaders need to help faithful followers see and understand the spiritual value in

what they are asking. Adjusting the narrative of one's worship life is no easy task and

will more than likely involve conflict. "Conflict takes place when multiple realities need

to be negotiated to create one common reality. Our realities have been constructed by our

different stories,"[19] writes Conde-Frazier. It is precisely experiencing and resolving

conflict and the act of suffering for the sake of another that causes us to become more

like Christ as a community. Our life in Christ together invites us into a hospitable space,

a new story we write together as brothers and sisters in Christ (Gal 3:26-29).

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[17] Conde-Frazier, *A Many Colored* Kingdom, 178.

[18] Scott Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense: Christian Leaders as Spiritual Interpreters* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2013), xi.

[19] Conde-Frazier, *A Many Colored* Kingdom, 188.

The Church living into its call to be the family of faith is critical for the spiritual formation of midadolescents. Living as brothers and sisters in Christ is not merely a meaningless phrase used throughout the New Testament as a vague address to Christians, but a deep and rich relationship of covenantal love and shared responsibility for one another. Bonhoeffer states, "Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate."[20] The Church needs to invite and allow midadolescents to participate in this reality.

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[20] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 30.

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