Making Disciples of the Post-Christian Generation: A Strategy for Auckland Bible Church

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A STRATEGY FOR AUCKLAND BIBLE CHURCH

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MAKING DISCIPLES OF THE POST-CHRISTIAN GENERATION:
A STRATEGY FOR AUCKLAND BIBLE CHURCH

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
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OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
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BY

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ABSTRACT

Making Disciples of the Post-Christian Generation: A Strategy for Auckland Bible Church
Tim Collins
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2018

The purpose of this doctoral project is to develop a relational approach as an apologetic for Auckland Bible Church (ABC) to reach the younger, more post-Christian generations in New Zealand and to help them grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. The current religious climate in New Zealand shows that church attendance is declining. Many young people today consider that what the church is offering is irrelevant and disconnected to their everyday existence.

This project is looking to examine and critique what these young adults are turning to instead in contemplating how they live. I have examined what is typical of our postmodern culture by calling it a “Richard Dawkins, Lady Gaga, and Amazon.com” culture. These three icons represent secularism/atheism, sex, and consumerism/materialism. These are some of what our young adults believe will offer meaning and purpose in their lives. I have suggested and critiqued how these factors influence culture. I have also provided some examples in how young adults are using these cultural stimuli to give them meaning and purpose in their everyday decision making.

Through this analysis I have shown that what young adults most value today is genuine relationships. Truth, whilst still important, is secondary to belonging and experiencing. In the past, the approach to apologetics involved rational proof discussions. Today such a methodology is ineffective in this post-Christian age where truth is relative. These young adults are looking for experience before explanation.

I have critiqued these thoughts theologically as to why it is vital to take a relational approach to make disciples. I have then discussed and implemented new relational initiatives ABC can pursue to both retain and attract young adults. Finally I have reviewed the results of these initiatives to demonstrate how they have been effective.

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PART ONE
THE CHALLENGE
INTRODUCTION

As a pastor of a local church in Auckland, one of the saddest issues facing both my church and almost all Auckland churches is the absence of young adults.¹ There are bare spots. There exists a mass of holes created in our congregations from this missing emerging generation. They are at the movie theatres on Friday night and at the beach on Saturday. They attend the rugby match on Saturday night. But they are missing from the Sunday morning worship services. These bare spots make the church seem incomplete.

I was once of those missing young adults. I grew up as a teenager attending youth group on Friday night. I went to church on Sunday with my family. But at seventeen I left the church. For many years I contributed to the bare spots in the pews. Church lacked relevance for me. I did not want to buy what the local church was selling.

In fact what brought me back to the pews was not the Auckland church scene. As many New Zealanders do, I embarked on the big overseas experience. I travelled to London and met some young Christians who were living victorious Christian lives. They introduced me to St. Helen’s Bishopsgate, a vibrant, pulsating central London Anglican church. As I began to attend St. Helen’s, I saw for the first time how applicable the gospel was to my own life. The wooden, overformal and at times legalistic Auckland church experience was somehow different in this English church. Rather, these people had something that I wanted.

¹ The term “young adults” and “post-Christian generation” will refer primarily to generations Y (sometimes referred to as millennials) and Z (born between 1981 and 2009). Of course other age groups will also identify with post-Christian thought. But the focus of this paper is primarily on generations Y and Z.
At twenty-three, initially just drawn into this community of relationships, I committed my life to Jesus. I learned and absorbed the truth of the gospel and its applicability to the big issues of life. I was taught truth consistently and powerfully by one of the finest British biblical expositors of his generation. But what was most prevalent and dominant in my actual conversion and early growth was the relational apologetic on display. Truth was vital. But first I needed to see that Christianity actually worked.

My conversion was thirty years ago at this incredible church. Whilst I am now out of touch with the London church scene, as a church pastor I see almost every day how the New Zealand church landscape has changed little. The church today continues to seem so irrelevant and detached from the reality of the young adult world. Since my own experience of being part of the missing, I have yearned to better understand and help play a part in sharing the gospel and making disciples of this emerging generation. I hunger to bring some of my St. Helen’s experience into Auckland Bible Church and help contribute to the larger church network in New Zealand.

The purpose of this project is to present a strategy for Auckland Bible Church, utilising a relational apologetic approach that was so attractive to me. The goal is to reach the younger, more post-Christian generation in New Zealand, and help them grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. At the beginning of my Doctor of Ministry in 2015 through Fuller Seminary, I was impacted by a ministry focus paper presented by Dr. Tim Morey. Morey pastored a local church in California called Life Covenant

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2 Dick Lucas was rector of St Helen’s from 1961-1998.
Church. His paper wrestled with the same issues I do - namely to “present and live out the gospel in the heart language of this generation.”

After reading his paper I chose as a priority to select Fuller courses dealing with the same issue. As I looked ahead to designing and writing my own doctoral project dealing with the same issues, these courses became incredibly helpful.

Auckland and California may be geographically separated by over ten thousand kilometres, and Morey’s research was in a different decade, but the irrelevance of the church to these young adults still exists in my city and in my time today. My desire is that this paper may help others in the years ahead as Morey’s efforts have helped me.

As I seek to do this, I am encountering a significant problem. I observe that many Christian young people today, who are trying to become like Christ, are not becoming like the Christ of the Bible. The discipleship methods we are using do not seem to be moving them towards this goal. Instead, they are seeking to conform to the god of a moral therapeutic deism.

“Moral therapeutic deism” is an expression used by sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton. Their study was focused on the religious beliefs of American teens, but it captures the typical beliefs of many New Zealand young adults also. Their belief system is that God exists and keeps an eye on the world, and that he wants us to be good and nice. They believe that the goal in life is to be content and feel pleased about oneself, and that God is not overly involved in our

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lives unless we require him to solve a crisis. They also hold to the opinion that good people go to heaven when they leave this earth.

Undoubtedly it is true that not every young Christian reasons this way. But a surprising number do. My verification of this used to be subjective and more based on my own involvement with young adults. But then I read *The State of Discipleship*, which I will draw on in this project, and my experience was confirmed.

While many Christian millennials indicate they desire to become more like Jesus, the Jesus they are imagining is largely a “modern religious and cultural construct.” This is a Jesus who wants people to be moral, work hard, be religious and tick off church attendance weekly, be sensible with their money, try not to have sex before marriage, raise children who are respectful, and save up for retirement. The Jesus of the New Testament did not model this or teach this. This is not what it looks like to be a disciple, and is not discipleship as discussed in this project.

The term disciple refers in its most basic sense to mean “a learner” or “one who is taught.” Being a disciple in New Testament times meant being someone who followed and spent time with, and copied the life of, a great master. He is one who follows his teaching. Pertaining then to following Jesus, a disciple is a person who learns from him how to be like him. It means someone who, because of the grace of God in his life, begins to more and more conform words and actions to the words and actions of Jesus. Disciples are themselves becoming little Christs.

The four gospels give a comprehensive likeness of Jesus as he lived his life on earth. Working off the profile of these gospels, it could be stated that a disciple of

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7 Ibid.
Jesus is a “worshiper, a servant, and a witness.” There are of course other portraits of his life, but these three are at the fore.

At a fundamental level, Jesus unveiled what worship of his Father looked like. He looked up to his Father in heaven and stated “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do” (Jn 17:4). Jesus also modelled servanthood, and proclaimed that this is why he came when he said “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk 10:45). Finally he exhibited what it looks like to be a witness when he told his disciples “As the Father has sent me I am sending you” (Jn 20:21).

Appropriating the pattern of Jesus therefore, the term disciple in this paper refers to becoming an enhanced worshiper-servant-missionary. That is what it looks like to learn from him how to look like him. This project is looking to move young adults away from moral therapeutic deism and instead towards a biblical definition and example of discipleship.

This project is divided into three parts. The first part will explore the unique factors that have contributed to a decline in Christian young adults’ church involvement in Auckland and New Zealand. An explanation will be offered as to the economic and post-Christian impact on this country which has contributed to this decline. An analysis will also be made of the very specific context that Auckland Bible Church operates in. As Detweiler and Taylor state, “Jesus spent a lot of time in public places, engaging people, hearing their stories, and telling his. He developed his theological approach within the marketplace, telling stories that made God’s kingdom

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9 All Scripture quoted is from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.
relevant to the people he encountered.”

Part One will look to determine the marketplace that Auckland Bible Church functions in. This will provide relevance and context in how the gospel narrative is then conveyed.

Part Two will examine recent literature on the problem of young adults being disenfranchised from church. Differing philosophies will be suggested over alternative views on alleviating this problem. The suggested response proposed in this project, of a relational apologetic strategy, will be supported with biblical and theological foundations.

Addressed first (chapter two) will be the need for the church to understand why traditional missional activities are ineffective in the post-Christian terrain of today. Current research will be examined. From that I will espouse what a relational apologetic could look like for Auckland Bible Church. The recommended values for reaching the post-Christian generation will be becoming mission centric; community and hospitality focussed; and mentoring and accountability intentional.

Chapter three will examine the need to link together the roles of evangelism and spiritual formation into one process rather than two separate activities. The church today has tended to view these disciplemaking functions as separate. Instead it will be suggested that evangelism and spiritual formation are complementary and overlapping in the process of making disciples. In addition, a biblical basis will be given for the power of a relational approach in making disciples. Finally, an example of Barnabas as a beautiful relational apologetic in action, is examined.

Part Three takes the challenge and local context of Part One, with the literary and theological reflection of Part Two, and suggests a ministry response for Auckland Bible Church. Once that response has been implemented, an assessment of how
effective it has been will be discussed. The project will examine whether this strategy is working.

Chapter four takes the suggested relational apologetic approach and makes it unique to Auckland Bible Church. The plan entails a preaching series on mission. It also involves a new marriage mentoring initiative involving working with a young newly married couple and helping them to thrive in relationship together. In addition, there will be a new young adults group; a further emphasis on hospitality; and greater leadership opportunities for the young adults.

The end goal of these strategies is to develop relationships which lead to spiritual formation. At times the term spiritual formation will be used interchangeably with discipleship. Dallas Willard defines spiritual formation succinctly when he writes, “spiritual formation for the Christian basically refers to the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.”11 This project is committed to assisting young adults to become more like Christ himself.

Chapter five then provides a focus on how Auckland Bible Church has gone about implementing the given strategy. An evaluation is made of how successful the approach has been. The relational strategy impact is measured against both evangelism and spiritual formation.

Finally, a summary and conclusion is presented regarding the results of this project. This will review the outcomes and insights gained. Future next steps and plans for an ongoing addressing of this ministry problem are discussed. Recommendations and the implications for this project for the larger Christian community are also appraised.

One final note is in order and that is to define the term post-Christendom. Post-Christendom is defined as the “culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story, and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian conviction decline in influence.”\textsuperscript{12} It is helpful to state that post-Christendom is not the same as postmodernity. Postmodernism “represents a critique of modernism and is variously hailed as the most significant philosophical shift since the Enlightenment, or a minor adjustment within a worldview that will continue to be dominant for centuries.”\textsuperscript{13} Murray is correct when he defines postmodernism as a concept which “enhances the resurgence of spirituality, reflects loss of confidence in rationalism and science and urges pursuit of authentic humanity.”\textsuperscript{14} This paper is focused on post-Christendom rather than the cultural transference from modernity indicated in postmodernity.

\textsuperscript{12} Stuart Murray, \textit{Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World} (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004), 19.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 12

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 13
CHAPTER 1

THE RELIGIOUS SLUMP OF THE YOUNGER POST-CHRISTIAN GENERATION

We loved you so much that we shared with you not only God’s Good News but our own lives, too.

1 Thessalonians 2:8 NLT

“The heart of the problem facing the church today is how can we Christianise such a vast number of nominal Christians? How can we evangelise a world, that has become to a large degree, post Christian?”

Wilbert Shenk, *Mission, Renewal and the Future of the Church*

A Snapshot of Society

It is distinctly possible that in the near future the following examples of a secular culture on the rise could occur in New Zealand. In an Auckland school a ten year old with no Christian background hears for the first time the narrative of the birth of Jesus. His teacher explains it expertly and the child is captivated. At the risk of his friends’ ridicule, he thanks him afterwards for the story. One thing however has disturbed him and he asks: Why did they name the baby after a swear word?

Another instance of the same possibility in such a secular culture is as follows. One Sunday in Wellington a man visits a church building to pick up something for his partner who is employed in an English language class the church runs during the
week. He arrives as the church is leaving and recognises the Pastor who is an acquaintance of a friend. Astonished and somewhat incredulous, he asks: What are all these people doing here? I didn’t know churches were open on Sundays!

Two portraits of post-Christendom” in New Zealand – a nation in which integral characteristics of the Christian story are unfamiliar and churches are disconnected institutions whose pulses and rhythms do not normally have any relevance with day to day life. Only a few years ago both stories would have been lacking credibility. Today however there are numerous signs that the Christian era is fading fast.

Stuart Murray argues that post-Christendom makes no sense without a knowledge and of the past. He states “where the Christian story has been told and been influential, but alongside other stories that have had a definitive or equivalent influence alongside the Christian story, post-Christendom is not an appropriate term to use.”¹ I will argue that in New Zealand, Christianity has been the most prominent narrative by far up to this moment in history and hence the term is appropriate to use today. Today New Zealand has a post-Christian culture.

Nowhere is this cultural change more evident than in the young adults’ generation. The 2013 New Zealand census recorded 42 percent of the total population declaring they were of “no religion” (compared to 35 percent in 2006 and 30 percent in 2001). But the highest segment within that total population statistic for 2013 were young adults (58 percent).² Young adults consider that what the church is offering is irrelevant and disconnected from their everyday life.

¹ Murray, Post-Christendom, 19.
The Cultural Context

Given the reality described above, it is appropriate to consider the hallmarks of the culture that is heavily impacting these statistics. Gorringe describes culture as a metaphor of a spider’s web when he states “Human beings are animals in webs of significance they themselves have spun.”

Culture, we can say in another way, is concerned with the spiritual, ethical and intellectual spun webs of significance of the material world. It is, therefore, of fundamental concern. To understand our culture today and how we got to this point, we must first go back briefly to the modern founding of New Zealand.

A Young Christian Nation Currently Receiving the Last Rites

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, Aotearoa (New Zealand) was being considered by a range of prospective suitors each with different motives. Although Captain James Cook had claimed both islands in the name of King George III by planting flags in the North Island on 15 November 1769, and in the South Island on 31 January 1770, it was to be seventy years before the British official claim was made. But even before the arrival of Cook, Arama Toiroa, a Maori East Coast patriarch, had prophesised a new religion to hit the shores with this declaration made in 1766, “The name of their new God will be ‘The Son Who was Killed’”. A good God, however the people will still be oppressed.”

The first public Christian service was held in 1814. After that service, Christianity was to have a very significant role in the founding of the nation, including in the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. Governor Hobson, sent by

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the British Government to oversee the signing, declared “that if it was not for the help of the missionaries, a British colony would not have been established in New Zealand.”

The church has effectively operating in the role of a midwife to the nation ever since. But this is certainly not so evidential today. There is a marked difference between Hobson’s views as the first leader of New Zealand, to the current leaders’ acceptance of the gospel. At the beginning of every three-year term of Parliament, an opening prayer has been read asking God to bless our nation. This prayer has been in place since 1854 and finishes with the words “through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

These words were removed from the prayer employed to open the 2017 Parliament session. For the first time in over 160 years, any acknowledgement of Jesus has been removed from our Parliamentary launch. It is now publicly certified that today our governance system is disconnected from the gospel. Auckland Bible Church is operating within a culture rapidly rejecting the Christian gospel that was at the forefront of our modern history.

The trend seen above, of New Zealand increasingly becoming a non-religious country through statistics and government, is backed up through research looking thirty to forty years ahead. The Pew Research Centre has recently published striking data stating that while in 2010 Christianity was still the majority religion in New Zealand, by 2050 the largest religious group will be “unaffiliated.” The number of countries with a Christian majority in 2010 worldwide is 159. By 2050 that will have reduced to 151. New Zealand is one of those eight countries expected to lose their Christian majority.

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5 Newman, Bible and Treaty, 159.

Despite this, New Zealanders are very happy people. The latest World Happiness Survey commissioned by the United Nations points to this remarkable statistic. Individuals within countries were asked the simple question “Please imagine a ladder, with steps numbered from 0 at the bottom to 10 at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?”

The country with the highest overall score in the world remarkably is New Zealand, with a score of 7.418 out of 10. We feel we have a wonderful existence. The odd earthquake might shake us up, but we are overall content. We feel terrific about life and have no inclination to seek anything else. As a contrast, at the other extreme, citizens of war torn Yemen are very unhappy with a score of 2.983.

This research helps explain why New Zealand is a nation of materialists. As a Pastor I regularly talk to people who do not generally suppose there is anything supernatural. We like what we see in front of us and do not need to consider there may be anything else. Such observations are now being reflected in our daily lives. There is no objective truth to base our lives on. What we feel to be right – that is our benchmark. So as a by-product of those views, we have recently legalised gay marriage. In this country today the mantra is that anyone is free to marry whoever they wish to. Tolerance is the new national religion.

What are the Narratives Driving This Trend?

One of the fascinating aspects of the rise and fall of Communism in many countries over these past hundred years has been to see how religious liberty fell

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8 Ibid.
apart. Countries like Romania witnessed people who were free to fall into the hands of a tyrant. False ideologies spread throughout the country and convinced a population. Most of the leaders in Romania did not believe in God. They therefore sought to hasten the demise of organised religion.

It is intriguing to consider how the regime managed to do this from when they took power at the end of World War Two to when their rule collapsed in 1987. One of the crucial methods was to change the historical narratives of their country. They changed their history books. They set out to rewire the Romanian people and to make their history look like it had been a long struggle towards the Communist vision of freedom. All the books needed to be rewritten. They told a lie that appealed to the deepest longings of the people, and they cast this vision as the hope for the country.

Whilst New Zealand has not witnessed a total collapse of Christianity, we can learn from the principles of Communist Romania. Romania lived within a collection of myths that had come to define their culture. New Zealand is living with a set of myths today that help explain the leaning towards a post-Christian nation. To faithfully make disciples of the younger generation requires us understanding the narrative story we are living in today. It is prudent to consider the damaging narratives that are prevalent in New Zealand today and how they are rewriting culture.

The first is a narrative espoused by Richard Dawkins. Dawkins represents the new atheism movement. The audience these articulate and enthusiastic atheists have commandeered is significant in the history of atheism. Sam Harris began the assault with the release of Letters to a Christian Nation (2006) followed by Dawkins The God Delusion (2006) and finally Christopher Hitchens’s God is Not Great (2007).

God is Not Great, for example, debuted at number one on the New York Times best

seller list within a month of its release. Nearly 300,000 copies were in print by its seventh week.\textsuperscript{10}

This movement has impacted Christianity in this country. Recently I was asked to meet with a young man who had attended church all his life but was now having real doubts about the veracity of all he had been taught. As a teenager he had a general belief in God, but he had been assailed with doubts during his university years and had begun to live with no religious faith. His new hero was Christopher Hitchens.

As I spent time with him I discovered a series of events that had triggered his first doubts. He had met a real atheist who was not an immoral, unhappy misanthrope. At the same time he had witnessed a good and faithful believer suffer horribly for no good reason. Finally he had witnessed hypocrisy in his own local church.

When we met he presented me with a list. That list included all the unanswerable contradictions or errors he believed were in Scripture. The list also included scientific proof that the Genesis flood had never happened. The final section of the list included pithy quotes from Dawkins and Hitchens.

My new friend was angry. In his mind he has been sold a lie and he now no longer considered himself religious. He represents in New Zealand one of the 58 percent of young adults who ticked the “no religion” box in in the 2013 census. Today in this country science is the privileged form of reason. Science has stepped in and is the arbiter of what is true or not true. Anything other than science is ultimately a delusion. Dawkins writes “When one person suffers from a delusion, it is called insanity. When many people suffer from a delusion it is called Religion.”\textsuperscript{11} My young friend said to me he will not allow himself to be deluded any longer.

\textsuperscript{10} Josh McDowell, \textit{More Than A Carpenter} (Il: Tyndale House, 2009), 72.

There is another narrative dominating the New Zealand culture. It is the Lady Gaga myth. When *God defend New Zealand* is sung at sporting events, the climatic phase comes to an elongated high note: “God defend our free land.” The cheers begin here. Even though the song goes on to talk about desiring peace, this is an afterthought. Both the melody line and our culture highlight freedom as the main theme and value of our society. It is our national anthem, and for good reason. Who it is we are actually asking to provide us freedom today is uncertain. The Christian God of the song is being replaced with a range of gods including “polyglot Oriental, Continental and Asian immigration, and temples built for Sikhs, Hindus, Russian Orthodox, and Muslims.”\(^{12}\) We are divided on who to ask but more certain of what we want.

One of the ways our society looks to express that freedom is through our sexuality. They believe that as long as it does not hurt anyone else then it is an acceptable cultural anthem. Lady Gaga sings “you know that I want you; you know that I need you (cause I’m a *free* b… baby); I want it bad, your bad romance.”\(^{13}\) Sex is the new salvation. Sex is where society seeks transcendence in a country which has stopped looking at God to meet that need. Sex is an outworking of freedom looking for longings to be met that only Christianity can meet.

This is reflected in relationships amongst young people. In the current age, young adult dating has morphed in significant ways. Serial monogamy has evolved into a hook-up culture. In American culture, which is very similar to New Zealand, the average age of first intercourse (evangelical Protestants included) hovers at around sixteen, “meaning that many will have sexual experiences before even entering the


\(^{13}\) Lady Gaga, *Bad Romance* (California, Sony ATV Songs, 2009)
emerging adult years.” Extensive studies indicate that about 84 percent of Americans between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three have had sex.\(^\text{14}\)

Trevin Wax illustrates just how far society has moved in this loosening or abandoning of the traditional moral beliefs that once ungirded our Western societies. These standards have now been exchanged in a newfound understanding of freedom and pleasure. As an example of this, he compares the reactions of society to the sexuality of two sporting stars, Tim Tebow and Jason Collins.

Tebow, the former NFL quarterback, has been open about his Christian faith and his commitment to remain a virgin until marriage. Tebow was mocked for his faith and his sexuality. In contrast is Collins, a thirteen-year NBA veteran who became the first active player in any male American sport to come out as gay. Wax quotes responses to Collins making his announcement. Such words as “trailblazing,” “thoughtful” and “deeply courageous” were the headlines.\(^\text{16}\)

Fifty years ago the reactions would have been different. Tebow would be admired. Collins would have been shunned. Today Tebow’s view of sexuality is seen as backwards and out of touch today. Collins’s view of sexuality is forward thinking and progressive. Such is the change in society.

In this country we have another example of how the god of freedom is reflected through sexuality. In April 2013 the New Zealand Parliament passed into law legislation allowing gay marriage. Louisa Wall, who was the Member of Parliament introducing the bill, remarked after it was passed into law “I never would have thought that Parliament would have overwhelmingly supported it-so far two-


\(^{15}\) Ibid.

\(^{16}\) Trevin Wax, *This Is Our Time* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), 145.
thirds of Parliament have endorsed marriage equality.”17 Her surprise was warranted. Even twenty years previously the law makers would never have so overwhelmingly endorsed such a change. Homosexuality in New Zealand was deemed illegal just twenty-seven years ago. We are living in a Lady Gaga narrative. The stories are being rewritten.

Another cultural current sweeping the post-Christian generation into rapids and rivers is the Amazon.com narrative. This story represents the reality of consumerism in New Zealand. Today the New Zealand calendar is structured to meet the needs of the shopper. From New Year’s Day through Valentine’s Day and Easter; from Mother’s and Father’s Day to Christmas, we live in a nation that rides along from sale to sale. These are the seasons and the rhythms that give shape to contemporary society.

When society adopts the myth that the primary purpose of life is to accumulate more stuff, even calendars get reconfigured to help people consume more. This is what the world looks like when everything is geared towards the myths of consumerism. Nowhere is this better exhibited than with the New Zealand dream of owning a house.

The local community around where Auckland Bible Church is located is a wealthy one. The average cost of a home in this area is $1,400,000, which is significantly higher than the overall Auckland average of $930,000.18 The economic impact this has on the typical household is massive. Mortgages upwards of $700,000 are being serviced leading to astronomical monthly interest payments. Both parents


18 Jonno Ingerson, “Property Values Continue to Grow” (Quotable Value NZ, June 2016), 1.
are working fifty-hour weeks each to cover these payments. The need to own a home and to have possessions is dominating the hearts and minds of society.

Saint Augustine writes about the analogy of wealth as a weight when he writes “My weight is my love.” He further writes “wherever I am carried, my love is carrying me.” James K.A Smith explains what Augustine meant. “Our orienting lives are kind of like gravity-carrying us in the direction to which we are weighted,” he writes. “If our loves are absorbed with material things, then our love is a weight that drags us downward to inferior things.” New Zealand society has a narrative of consumerism that is carrying it away from Christianity and towards what is inferior. With such a myth the “hereafter becomes the here and now.”

These are three examples of the narratives driving the statistics. It is these stories that New Zealand young adults are turning to in a desire to fill the void that Christianity has filled in the past. We all have deep set longings within us. Some of those longings are to know that we have value; that we are unconditionally loved; and to know that what we do in this earth counts for something. We thirst for these longings to be quenched. Jesus offers to quench that thirst (Jn 4:10). But so does the trinity of Richard Dawkins, Lady Gaga and Amazon.com. At present many of the New Zealand younger post-Christian generation believe such an unholy trinity can do it better.

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21 Detweiler and Taylor, A Matrix of Meanings, 18.
Spirituality is Still Important

In amongst all of this, there seems to be a turning back to at least considering the possibility of the supernatural existing. New Zealanders still consider spirituality as very important. In a study of our views on spirituality conducted in 2011, 30 percent agreed with the statement “I don’t follow a religion, but am a spiritual person interested in the sacred/supernatural.”22 There seems to be a trend developing, where people are leaving the traditional forms of religion but are still seeking the sacred.

This trend may well be fuelled by what is occurring in our New Zealand schools. I recently had a conversation with a school principal who is required to teach spirituality as part of the four components of a whole person. This is now part of the nationwide education requirements. He asked for my help. So although Bible in schools are frowned upon, churches are still being asked to help teach this spiritual part of the curriculum. Our young people are being encouraged to consider the supernatural far more than when I was at school thirty-five years ago.

What Drives this Young Adult Generation when Considering the Big Questions of Life?

Within Auckland Bible Church we currently have a number of American Navigator and Cru full time staff who consider this their church home. They have been working with young adults in Auckland now for many years, and they suggest that the characteristics of these local young people are almost identical to the young adults they have worked with in the USA.

Given that suggestion, we are well served to use research out of the USA that will help us identify the physiognomies and religious big question drivers our young people are living out in New Zealand. Barna Research has produced some excellent

work describing the new moral code these young adults operate under. In considering the statement “whatever is right for your life or works best for you is the only truth you can know,” a staggering 74 percent would strongly agree or agree somewhat. In comparison, Elders are at 39 percent, Boomers at 37 percent and Gen-Xers are at 59 percent.

For these young adults there is no external moral standard that overrides their feelings. We are living in an environment today where young adults are no longer pursuing the way of Jesus but practising the way of self. Instead of a Jesus-centred theology they are embracing me-centred theology. The highest good, according to our society, is finding yourself and then live by what is right for you. The result of this is that young adults are described as “morally adrift,” devoid of any clear boundaries for right or wrong because it is significantly based on their personal opinions. Therefore, our discipleship labours must work towards not only converting young adults to Jesus, but also de-converting them away from the religion of self.

This is a primary challenge in making disciples of this generation. Other challenges are equally daunting. Binge drinking and drug abuse is becoming more prevalent. Some studies seem to indicate that “young adults view this stage of life as a decade set apart for pleasure and personal exploration with no regard for any vocational effort of responsibility.” All of this is occurring whilst young adults

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24 Setran and Kiesling, Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood, 7.


continue to untether themselves from a caring church community at this the foundational stage of life.

Yet despite the alarming indicators, some balance must be provided. For example, some authors have noted that the emerging generation are renewing their desire for social justice and empathy for the disadvantaged. According to Colleen Carroll, “many desire to bring the redemptive power of the gospel to bear on a broader range of personal and social issues.”\textsuperscript{27} Additionally some social observers are pointing to a rekindled desire amongst Christian young adults to establish links with the practices of the Christian faith.

In Auckland for instance there is an example of a traditional Anglican church in the city that has seen a resurgence of growth, and the Minister believes one of the reasons is the commitment to traditional liturgical forms. Robert Webber has described this new embracing of tradition alongside “strict moral and doctrinal creeds as a counterpoint for the diffuse permissiveness in contemporary culture.”\textsuperscript{28} Furthermore I see within Auckland Bible Church that many are seeking mentors to nurture and help them in their faith journeys. They are desiring guides who will “support their growth, challenge and critique where needed, and cast a vision for the future.”\textsuperscript{29}

The situation is not all catastrophic. Undoubtedly therefore there is exciting hope and capacity for these young people to bring revitalisation for the church in New Zealand. They are willing and ready to embrace new horizons. They are culture

\textsuperscript{27} Colleen Carroll, \textit{The New Faithful: Why Young Adults Are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy} (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2002), 45–46.


\textsuperscript{29} Sharon Parks, \textit{Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose and Faith} (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 27.
makers in their own right. They key of course is to tether that energy and potential to biblical truth. I therefore suggest that the opportunity with young adults in New Zealand is a time of a daunting challenge and yet a wonderful opportunity.

How can Auckland Bible Church Respond?

Darrell Guder, in discussing the role of churches in making disciples, states “God calls a people into discipleship, formation by Jesus, in order to send it out as an apostolic community, so that each of its members can be an apostolic witness with the flame of the Spirit ignited on every head.” The premise of this paper is that a relational apologetic is extremely effective in meeting the challenges above. Chapter Two will discuss why that is so in detail. But for Auckland Bible Church to respond to this religious slump, an adaptive change will need to occur.

Heifetz and Linsky suggest adaptive change is needed “when a problem cannot be solved with one’s existing knowledge skills and tools, requiring people to make a shift in values, expectations, attitudes, or habits of behaviour.” The problems and challenges above will not be met with the church continuing to do what has always been done. Rather, a shift is required.

Such a shift to attract and grow young adults will involve a renewed sense of mission. Many Christians who have boarded the “find yourself” treadmill have not done so in search of purpose, but as an escape from boredom. Such is the inevitable offspring of a tiny world. When the world is small, and an individual believes that they occupy a large part of it, boredom is a real possibility. But to have a mission put

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30 Mark Husbands and Daniel Treier, eds., The Community of the Word (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 125.


in front of that person, a mission that once understood is seen as comprehensive, compelling and inescapably exciting, is a metanarrative that individual’s life. People who call Auckland Bible Church their church home need to know this metanarrative gospel story and then see how incredible it is to join that story. That renewing will play a part in driving people forward to reach the younger post-Christian generation, and will also reinvigorate the young adults in the church.

It will also require a real focus on community and hospitality. Studies shows that in answer to the question “what has had the most impact on your spiritual journey?” the top five answers all involve relationships. Family members, people at church, home groups, friends and mentors are the most powerful influencers on the spiritual journey. Auckland Bible Church will need to develop a new habit of being more relational in community and in hospitality.

This adaptive change will need to be brought about in a church that is already very Bible literate, has a very successful church plant behind it in East Auckland, and is relatively wealthy. But the three hundred members in many cases are time poor and live geographically a fair distance away; and are generally more comfortable being insular than being sent out as an apostolic community.

**Conclusion**

The community and ministry context that Auckland Bible Church operates within is post-Christian, wealthy, happy (at least based on a UN happiness survey), not religious, but increasingly spiritual. It is archaic to even consider the Christian God. As a secular author wrote this in the national newspaper recently “I don't believe there is a God. But I respect those who do - just. Given the irrefutable scientific

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33 Stone, *Trends*, 44.
evidence. For post-Christians in New Zealand, common logic, science, philosophy, and reason are the drivers for their view on the world and their decision-making process. This is the post-Christian generation that has to be reached and discipled. To that end, we will begin with an examination of a relational apologetic strategy to meet that need.

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PART TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS
CHAPTER 2
THE NEED FOR A RELATIONAL APOLOGETIC

“You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.”

2 Timothy 2:2 (NLT)

“The church is not immune to the diseases of individualism and consumerism dominant in American society. . . . To the extent that the church is reduced to an aggregate of individuals who shop like consumers to meet their needs, we do not have the basis for community in any biblical sense.”

Ogden, Transforming Disciples: Making Disciples a Few at a Time

To facilitate growth for followers of Jesus, who love God with their whole heart, mind, soul and strength, is problematic when nearly every force in this rapidly changing culture seems to be arrayed against this outcome. Making and growing disciples has been a constant challenge for every age, but it seems especially tough in this narcissistic and pleasure-seeking age of today. For example, one of the prevailing ideas of our time is that people will find the best versions of themselves by simply looking inside. Nine out of ten adults and three quarters of practicing Christians agree
with this notion.¹ They affirm that happiness and fulfilment is found in being true to oneself. There is an encouragement to be a lone wolf and to choose one’s own spiritual adventure. This is the myth pervading the post-Christian culture today.

The quintessential requirement in reaching this younger post-Christian generation, and helping them to overcome this myth and grow as disciples, involves a rediscovery of a relational apologetic. I will suggest that young adults are looking for an experience that feels like family. They initially desire relationships, and only after that do they desire facts and information.

Many young adults would be less likely to leave the church if the church was doing a better, more holistic, and more relational job at discipling its people. One result will be to suggest how that apologetic might take shape in the particular context of Auckland Bible Church. The hope is that these thoughts might add to the discussion and motivate further contemplation on how to better convey the gospel in a post-Christian world.

It should be noted that rational, logical and evidential based apologetics are still important. Post-Christian young adults are not anti-reason. They still want to know if the gospel is true. However, in this post-truth age there is a growing recognition that what is presented as truth is often not quite as it seems.

Tim Morey demonstrates the balance required when he suggests “for most people traditional rational apologetics become useful at a later point in the process than they have in the past. Before the faith can be plausibly argued and the very good reasons to believe be accepted by the hearer, it must first be embodied over time in real people in a way that is winsome and convincing.”² Such a winsome and

¹ Sprinkle, Go, 11.

² Tim Morey, Embodying Our Faith (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 11.
convincing approach that is called for is greatly enhanced with a high touch method. A focus on relationships is essential.

Current research confirms this in that surveys point to the need for a greater relational approach to church life for young people. These younger adults are craving relationships. The Barna Group report commissioned by The Navigators parachurch group is an example of such a survey. *The State of Discipleship* confirms that emerging adults desire a high-touch, social, interpersonal type of relationship far more than Gen-Xers and Boomers (my generation). Yet despite these desires, loneliness continues to be on the rise. The desire to find one’s place amongst a few good friends has risen over a decade from 31 percent a decade ago to 37 percent today. But young adults are leading this charge in desiring relationships at 47 percent. They feel isolated. They deeply wish for community.

The early Church understood the power of community and kinship. According to Rodney Stark, the primary apologetic of the early Church was relational and community oriented. It was exactly that uniqueness that enabled it to become the official religion of the Roman Empire. Stark suggests,

Christianity did not grow because of miracles working in the marketplaces, or because Constantine said it should, or even because the martyrs gave it such credibility. It grew because Christians constituted such an intense community, able to generate the “invincible obstinacy” that so offended the younger Pliny but yielded immense religious rewards. And the primary means of its growth was through the united and motivated efforts of the growing numbers of Christian believers, who invited their friends, relatives and neighbours to share the “good news.”

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4 Ibid.

Robert Webber agrees that the early church used an embodied and incarnational apologetic. But he proposes that the church gradually moved away from this over the centuries as the Enlightenment gained such traction. The empirical methodology became central as the most dependable way to establish truth. The “church’s apologetic followed that shift and as such became more rational and evidence based.”

In hindsight is it easy to understand why the Church felt compelled to make that shift. Pinker has described the Enlightenment period as a “time when humanity was seeking new understanding of the human condition. The era was a cornucopia of ideas, some of them contradictory, but four themes tie them together: reason, science, humanism and progress.” At the forefront was reason. Reason was non-negotiable. Relativism was embraced and the early church relational apologetic was relegated.

However, we now live in a post-truth age as evidenced by the Oxford Dictionary recently announcing its word of the year. In 2016 that word was “post-truth.” Casper Grathwohl, President of Oxford Dictionaries, is quoted as saying "Fuelled by the rise of social media as a news source and a growing distrust of facts offered up by the establishment, post-truth as a concept has been finding its linguistic footing for some time." He also suggests it may become a defining word of our postmodern age.

Such a post-truth world particularly impacts young adults. That demographic is more likely than any other age range to say truth is relative. In fact “half of them say so (51 percent) compared to 45 percent of Gen-Xers, 41 percent of Boomers, and

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39 percent of Elders.”\(^9\) Only 27 percent of young adults today accept that the “Bible provides us with moral truths that are the same for all people in all situations, without exception.”\(^10\) The post-truth age is finding a firm foundation particularly amongst emerging adults.

**The Paradox of Relational Discipleship Regarding Young Adults.**

Yet there is a remarkable paradox occurring in young adults. According to the Barna study, “among the nine out of ten Christians who say spiritual growth is important, more than one-third say they prefer to pursue spiritual growth on their own.”\(^11\) Young adults are even more individualistic when it comes to discipleship as evidenced by “40 percent of Millennials who consider spiritual growth very or somewhat important prefer on-their-own discipleship, compared with 36 percent of Gen-Xers, and 32 percent of Elders.”\(^12\)

Yet as we have seen above, young adults generally have indicated they are lonely and desire community. It would seem that all in all, young Christians who desire to grow spiritually have missed the basic biblical theme outlined in the next chapter that spiritual growth happens in community. Many discipleship leaders would agree that the emerging generation are far too individualistic. Jonathan Dodson writes, “Churches today have more in common with shopping malls. They have become consumerist lifeless institutions, not Jesus centred missional communities… We have devolved from being Jesus-centred communities into loose collections of spiritually

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\(^10\) Ibid.


\(^12\) Ibid., 85.
minded individuals.”13 There are several possible reasons for this paradox. I will suggest some of these and possible ways to overcome them.

Technology and Social Media.

Particularly amongst young adults, the omnipresence of technology has hindered relational engagement. For instance, “49 percent of adults aged eighteen to thirty acknowledge that their personal electronics separate them from other people.”14 There is compelling evidence in further studies which confirm that social media and other electronics are hindering social engagement. For example, parents of young adults are not all that present in the digital technology of their children.15 Many mature adults do not even know where to start. The family is fragmented. Sherry Turkle would agree. She proposes “We are lonely but fearful of intimacy. Our networked life allows us to hide from each other, even as we are tethered to each other. We’d rather text than talk.”16

While technology has the potential to foster relationships, it cannot replace real, embodied, face-to-face interaction. There exists a slavish reliance on technology to satisfy the human longing for intimacy. But the technology is not working. People are lonelier than ever. Some even suggest that individuals are becoming more socially inept. For example there is an employer in Auckland who rarely hires young adults for positions in customer service. He believes that it is rare to interview a twentysomething who knows how to engage with real people.

15 Chap Clark, ed., Adoptive Youth Ministry (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 82.
There is a desperate need to work towards overcoming the technological addiction which is stifling relationships. Auckland Bible Church can play a part in this by simply addressing the problem. In the same way we tackle addiction to alcohol or pornography, we can preach about it and talk in small groups about it. We can address the biblical warning of being a slave to anything (1 Cor 6:12). Today, people are enslaved to technology, and it has been proven to hinder us from flourishing in our relationships.

Commuter Culture

Before the twentieth century, most people did life within walking distance of everyone else around them. Today that is completely different. Individual lives do not naturally intersect with people in our communities. Today people live in one area; shop in another; and go to church in yet another. I am aware of an individual who has just chosen to go and live with her partner two hours out of central Auckland. She commutes every day to her job in the city, picks her children up in a totally different location, and then drives home for another two hours.

Within our church we have taken steps to try and address this issue of our community being so scattered. We have suggested that people try and find a local church rather than travel for thirty minutes on a Sunday to come to us. We have set up localised small groups with a commitment that every part of Auckland has a geographically near home group for people to attend. We also look to have centralised church events that are necessary in off peak hours to reduce the commuter time. These details continue to need to be worked through. But we would be naïve not to recognise that there is a problem.
Noncommunal Communities

Part of the reason that many young Christians would rather keep their spiritual lives to themselves is that they have never experienced a rich, vibrant community. Maybe they are welcomed by a smiley greeter at the door, or perhaps they had a passing conversation on their way to their seat. Maybe they tried to connect with other believers at a Bible study, but none of those connections went deep. The fact is that many young adults have to this moment in their lives never experienced the community envisioned in the New Testament.

This is backed up by external research. Josh Packard and Ashleigh Hope interviewed many de-churched Christians who had left the church but not the faith. In their interviews they discovered a common theme. These people longed for intimate relationships, but they did not experience such relationships in church. According to one interviewee, church “was very corporate just in how it managed people and how it set programs. To me it was just like one big transaction, and the big thing especially to me, is that it is so impersonal.”

Given that a majority of the emerging generation (64 percent) do not feel that any one religious text has a monopoly on truth, there exists a reduced motivation to attend a church that is also impersonal. The local church just represents in their eyes a different expression of the same spiritual message. There may be other ways of seeing that same message, and those ways have better relationship opportunities thrown in for good measure.

Churches will always fall short of the ideal. As a pastor I sometimes look around at people on a Sunday who are lonely and not connected, but I have a queue of

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people wanting to talk with me. But we must continue to strive to create a community that no one wants to leave. True biblical community only flourishes when we see ourselves as “fellow subjects of God’s kingdom, submitted in fealty to the same King and his mission.”

In summary, technology and social media along with our commuter culture and lack of community experienced in the past can all lead to a desire to not want to be part of a relational apologetic as a key component in discipleship. But to overcome this, we need to be clear in that when we become Christians we are also making a commitment to join the community of God’s people. We must allow ourselves to come under that model of church. We will now explore what that model could look like.

What Might a Relational Apologetic Look Like?

The good news of Christianity is given to human beings and calls for their response. These people exist as members of communities in which their varied culture helps them understand the world they live in. Hence if the gospel is to make sense, it has to “be communicated in the language of those to whom it is addressed and has to be clothed in symbols which are meaningful to them.”

To flesh that out into the community that Auckland Bible Church operates in, a relational apologetic proposed here is mission centric, community and hospitality focused, and mentoring and accountability intentional. These three components will intersect in the day to day practice of the church. Furthermore, this kind of apologetic

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19 Sciacca, So, What’s Your Point?, 54.

accepts that evangelism will be treated as a process, not an event.\textsuperscript{21} Hence these factors are the key areas in which we will urge our people to be involved in, so as enable them to grow in their own spiritual formation as well as be being a vehicle for their unsaved friends to consider the gospel message.

**Mission Centric Apologetic**

One of the trends discussed in chapter one which is impacting young adults today is that of consumerism. Such a mentality has become mainstream in our local churches in this country. Churches who are looking to grow have too easily looked to identify what the individual wants and then offer it to them. The gospel is presented as a way to “satisfy their fantasies, promise them the moon, recast the whole message in consumer terms such as entertainment, satisfaction, excitement, adventure and problems solving.”\textsuperscript{22}

The amazon.com narrative impacts the young adult in various ways. But one of the major concerns is that when a person is totally wrapped up in oneself, they then become a very small package indeed. When one perceives the gospel as being all about them, it is easy to lose the sense of community mission that individuals have been called to. Hence the church wide mission or mandate - to be ambassadors of Yahweh, committed to reconciling sinners, has fallen out of our spiritual backpacks. We need to regain the glorious sense of mission that young adults want to respond to.

The reason why mission is so important, aside from the fact that it is biblical, is that people are actually searching and longing to be part of something bigger. When Josh Packard interviewed “church refugees,” he was shocked that these church

\textsuperscript{21} This will be outlined in detail in Chapter 3.

dropouts were once some of the most active members in church.\textsuperscript{23} The question he asked was “if they were so committed, so active, and so engaged, why leave?” The answer is distressing. He writes “nearly all of our respondents wanted…the church to leverage its organisational resources and infrastructure to get more things done outside of the church walls and to build community.”\textsuperscript{24}

Young adults want a cause to motivate them but are struggling to find one. Only 20 percent of Millennials who grew up in church say that they had opportunities to serve the poor through their church. Even fewer (15 percent) said they found a cause or issue at church that motivated them.\textsuperscript{25} Part of our discipleship process should empower people corporately to engage the mission of Christ working alongside one another.

The challenge is therefore establishing how to motivate this age group. Fran Sciacca suggests that the key to providing a real sense of mission amongst young adults is for them to know their purpose in life. He asserts that “Purpose is the product of design. Design determines purpose. Design, when applied to people, is known as identity.”\textsuperscript{26} He then goes on to suggest our true identity. People of faith are “Adamic, Adopted, Abrahamic, Alien, Apprentice, Ambassador and Advocate.”\textsuperscript{27} The first four look at who one is in relation to God. The last three look at who one is in relation to the world.

Sciacca then summarises by confirming that we must step into the one story of the one God. When we do that the gusto grabs us and drives us forward. The one story

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\textsuperscript{23} Packard, \textit{Church Refugees}, 99.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} David Kinnaman, \textit{You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church... and Rethinking Faith} (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 119.
\textsuperscript{26} Sciacca, \textit{So, What’s Your Point?}, 27.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 89.
\end{flushright}
of the one God is to restore *shalom* into this world. Shalom is defined as “the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfilment, and delight.”

Sciacca is correct when he challenges Christians to give ourselves to this restoration of shalom. To do so follows our design. It is living in a way that is consistent with how we are made. And because fulfilment comes from following design, “involvement in the restoration of shalom is the path to personal fulfilment. It all converges here: identity, design, plot, purpose and mission. This is the point.”

The position of this project is that providing a clear mission for young adults, where they work mutually and in unison as restorers of shalom, belongs together with discipleship. You cannot have one without the other. Together “we see ourselves as representatives of Jesus sent into our communities, and that the church aligns everything it does with the *missio Dei* (Mission of God) to restore shalom.” Our young people are looking for a mission worth giving their lives to. They are looking to play a role in reinstating shalom into this world which is captivating and inspiring.

**Community and Hospitality Focussed**

Communal formation through the local church can serve as one of the most powerful forces of spiritual growth in emerging adults’ lives, countering many of the deforming beliefs and attitudes highlighted in the research presented in chapter one. Auckland Bible Church can provide a unique communal fellowship component that

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28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., 91.

30 Ibid., 92.
facilitates spiritual formation. Setran and Kiesling suggest six elements that are particularly powerful in achieving this.31

The first reason that fellowship in the local church is vital because it is unchosen. Emerging adults spend most of their time in self chosen settings, selecting their friends for example that reflect their personalities and affinities. The problem is that when communities are self-chosen, it can seem as if the Christian life is based on affinity. In the local church however, where young adults are surrounded by people of real diversity regarding age and social status and personality, they can begin to see more clearly that the gospel and not human similarity serves as the irreducible bond of Christian fellowship.

Second, fellowship in local churches is important because it is intergenerational. Young adults need to mix with older saints and hence benefit from the wisdom and experience that models the spiritual faith journey. These older adults can be both models and benchmarks of the adult faith journey. Research also indicates the benefit of this. Kara Powell found that those who interacted with older Christians were far more likely to continue their faith and church commitments into their later years.32

Third, fellowship and community in local churches is important because emerging adults need authority and discipline. In a world with a tendency leaning towards there being no absolute truth, church authority provides boundaries that can protect emerging adults form their own tendency to construct false truth. The authority structures of the church provide a powerful reminder that there are standards outside of personal opinion.

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31 Setran and Kiesling, Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood, 143.
Fourth, fellowship in the local church is also important because of its embodied nature. Without weekly embodied contact with a local body of believers affirming common doctrines and practices, emerging adults begin to doubt the legitimacy of their worldviews and beliefs. A local church of believers provides powerful plausibility structures in young adults’ lives reminding them that what they believe is not crazy.

Fifth, fellowship provides family for emerging adults just at the time they most need it. Particularly in their single years and maybe living away from the security and comfort of home for the first time, they look to establish family in a different context. Local church fellowship meets those needs.

Sixth, fellowship in local churches is important because it provides a place of love and support and healing. Setran and Kiesling state “a true Christian church will be marked by continual confession, furnishing settings in which emerging adults can pull back the curtains of their hearts and allow the penetrating grace of God to begin his work of healing and transformation.” Great church communities furnish that type of powerful setting.

Dallas Willard refers to the power of community when he states that “personalities united can contain more of God and sustain the force of his greater presence much better than scattered individuals.” Young adults must be in contact if they are to sustain their individual growth and to facilitate being sustained by each other. Community and hospitality are powerful forces in making disciples in our post-Christian landscape.

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Mentoring and Accountability Intentional

Mentoring is a mutual, transformational, and spiritual relationship. It is mutual in that at times it is not limited to peer mentoring but can involve Christians at different maturity levels. Both individuals mentor each other. It involves a call to exercise humility whatever the current age of spiritual maturity may be. It is transformational in that over time there is an intention to bring about radical change in behaviour and character. It is also spiritual in the sense it is bathed in prayer from start to finish. It is a triadic relationship between mentor, mentoree, and the Holy Spirit.

It also is proven to work. Many young adults desire intergenerational relationships from older adults. *The State of Discipleship* shows that 59 percent of young adults who remained active in their faith had a close relationship with an adult believer in their church. Of those who dropped out of church only 11 percent had that same close older adult relationship. The research points to millennials being more likely to grow as disciples if they are mentored by older adults.35 We must linger to mentor.

I can relate to this with personal experience. Every leader making disciples with whom I have spoken to has confirmed that discipleship cannot happen apart from intentional mentoring and accountability relationships. More time with fewer people equals greater kingdom impact. Effective discipleship must incorporate intentional mentoring and accountability for millennials.

**Conclusion**

Today in New Zealand young adults are first approaching Christianity and asking themselves if the gospel works pragmatically in their lives ahead of whether it

is actually true. Such a situation requires that our apologetic be relational and not merely rational. Auckland Bible Church will look to implement such a relational methodology by being mission centric, incorporating community and hospitality, and intentional mentoring and accountability. Before this project begins to look at how that is incorporated into Auckland Bible Church, there will be a focus on the biblical and theological foundations of the church’s role in the task of making disciples.
CHAPTER 3

THE CHURCH: A PEOPLE SENT INTO THE WORLD

“Come follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”

Matthew 4:19 NIV

“Mission” means “sending,,” and it is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God’s action in human history….God’s mission continued then in the sending of the Spirit to call forth and empower the church as the witness to God’s good news in Jesus Christ.

Darrell L. Guder, Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America

The Church as a Manifestation of God’s Heart

One of the thrills of achieving some sort of longevity as a church pastor, by the grace of God, is being invited to spend time with those also involved in church ministry and to encourage and teach those people. One of those opportunities I have is in Myanmar through the Barnabas School of Leadership (BSL). BSL exists to train and equip pastors and leaders in under-resourced parts of the world.¹ Myanmar is a country with an estimated 5 percent Christian population, with Christian leaders who are desperately under resourced in finance and knowledge and encouragement. Buddhism is the majority religion in a nation that up to only a few years ago was governed by an army dictatorship. Christians were oppressed and intimidated, often going into hiding. Today a form of democracy has opened up and persecution of

¹ See www.bsl.org.nz
Christians is fast diminishing. The all-transforming gospel of grace is gaining traction in a works-based Buddhist system.

Yet, or perhaps because of this persecution over many years, the Myanmar Church is a missional church. I have never heard that term used by local Burmese Christian leaders. In my opinion they would not even know what a missional church by technical definition is. Yet they represent the epitome of what that looks like in action. They point people towards Jesus. The local church in Myanmar is living out daily what theologian David Bosch sees in this idea of mission, and being sent, when he writes,

Mission is understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It is thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine of the mission Dei as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit, is expanding, to include yet another “movement”: Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.²

The Myanmar church movement is characterised by individuals living as sent ones into their community proclaiming the gospel. They understand they are sent by the Holy Trinity into their neighbourhoods. They are proclaiming the euangelizo (gospel) as primarily good news and not good advice. In a culture that is so weighted towards what one has to do to get right with God, here is good news that God has done something for us that already makes us right with God.³ All one has to do is believe and receive (Rom 10:9-19). The local church in Myanmar is inspirationally missional.

There is a definite contrast with this Myanmar mind-set compared to the local church scene in New Zealand. I have attended many local Christian outreach


³ Essentially Buddhism, which is the main religion in Myanmar, offers good advice on the things one must do to be right with God. Christianity is essentially good news about what has already been done rather than good advice.
conferences over the last decade. The term missional either is directly included in the title of many keynote messages given or alluded to throughout each conference as a priority for the church. Most local church leaders could adequately engage in discussion on what it is to be missional using that term technically.

Yet I often long to transport my fellow New Zealand Christian leaders into a little local church in Mandalay and allow them to see a real and vibrant missional church in action. These local impoverished and sometimes discouraged Burmese Christians spend little time analysing what a sent church does from an intellectual viewpoint. They do not get their confidence from what Newbigin describes as “demonstrable and indubitable knowledge.” Rather they live with “the confidence of one who has heard and has answered the call that comes from the God through whom and for whom all things were made: ‘Follow me.’” They live as sent ones.

They also do not let themselves get distracted. There are examples of these distractions throughout normal church life. For instance, I shudder to think how much time and energy I have put into Auckland Bible Church recently over whether women should be allowed to preach on a Sunday morning. Monthly it seems at present I am being asked to discuss gay marriage when the wider New Zealand church scene is split on this issue. Both those inside and outside the church want to constantly debate whether speaking in tongues is legitimate today.

When I mention this to my Burmese Christian friends, they look confused. In a church of maybe twenty, sometimes there are only two males. When they are both away, a woman preaches. Otherwise there would be silence. The complementarian and egalitarian debate on whether women should be allowed to preach in a Sunday church service is not deemed worthy of discussion. In addition, debates over

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5 Ibid.
charismatic issues are put aside. Instead what drives their conversations is the church camp they held last weekend in which five hundred Buddhists came to learn a little English, and at the same time they had the gospel presented to them. Ten Buddhists became Christians during that weekend. That is where their focus lies. That is a missional church in action.

These examples highlight a propensity to be easily preoccupied with secondary issues. It is rare as a pastor for me to be asked how Auckland Bible can have a greater external focus. It is even rarer that individuals want to meet and discuss about ways to grow deeper with God. But questions asking me if it is permissible to attend their lesbian friend’s wedding are common. Those who are moving out of town are asking whether they should attend a church that allows a woman to preach. Parents are soliciting for a response when they ask me if it is permissible to send their child to Easter camp when there is a seminar on how to speak in tongues. We are distracted and diverted and inattentive to what is of most importance. We are struggling as Christians in New Zealand to keep as central the central thing, and are oblivious and unaware of the spiritual battle going on all around us.

C.S. Lewis in his masterpiece The Screwtape Letters sums up the opposition’s schemes to missional purpose when he dispenses advice to Wormwood on keeping a Christian away from a relationship with God and a role in mission. He writes, “You will find that anything or nothing is sufficient to attract his wandering attention. You no longer need a good book, which he really likes, to keep him from his prayers, or his work or his sleep; a column of advertisements in yesterday’s paper will do. …You can make him do nothing at all for long periods.” Lewis is correct when he indicates Christians are side-tracked from the missional mandate.

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Reggie McNeal defines the missional church as “the people of God partnering with God in his redemptive mission in the world.” The implication of this is freeing but also challenging. It is liberating because it makes us realise that it is God who is doing the work. It is God, who as Luke records in the birth of the early church, “added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). As McNeal succinctly writes “God is doing the heavy lifting.”

But it is also challenging. We are looking to be working where God wants us to be. That requires an incredible need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. In addition, we are called to be “imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:2). We are to be the sweet smell of perfume, just like Jesus, in our society. That is a sobering requirement in a culture which is disdainful of the gospel message and where the national religion is a rugby game. To better live out this missional mandate, we need to keep coming back to Scripture and seeing the central missional theme within it.

**The Scriptures Looked at Through a Missional Lens**

My wife came home last week with new glasses. She recounted to me her experience of sitting in the optometrist’s chair and going through the exercise of trying different lens to determine her correct prescription. After finally ascertaining her correct lens, she was astounded at how clearly she can see objects that were otherwise blurry. The objects had not changed. Rather the new lens had opened up to her a more splendid field of vision.

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8 Ibid., 16.
Similarly a few years back I preached a sermon at Auckland Bible Church out of Genesis 12:1-3. That developed within me a conviction for the need for our church to heavily focus on acting as sent ones into our community. I could see that major theme existing throughout all of Scripture. Up to then I had been looking at the Bible through a different eye piece than the overall missional lens that grew out of those verses. I began to better understand what McNeill was suggesting when he writes that the Bible “serves as a narrative to help the people of God understand mission in the world and their role in it.”

My examination of Genesis helped provide clarity in this missional mandate. The author of Genesis records God speaking to Abram at Haran: “The Lord had said to Abram…I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you: I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing… and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:1-3). God selects Abram through his grace to bless him and his offspring. But God has an ultimate and definitive purpose in mind in that choosing. He wants to bless and sanctify the world through Abram. McNeal summarises the call when he says “this simple but far-reaching covenant means that the people of God are charged with the responsibility and enjoy the privilege to bless everyone. God chose to embody his blessing in a people who were to show the world who he is and what he wants them to enjoy.”

This story continues to be revealed throughout the remainder of the Bible. Moses has a vivid experience at Sinai with God who says to him “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites” (Ex 19:5-6).

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9 Ibid., 21.
10 Ibid.
Israel’s task given to them from God involved intermediation. Stuart is correct when he states “They were not to be a people unto themselves, enjoying their special relationship with God and paying no attention to the rest of the world. Rather, they were to represent him to the rest of the world and attempt to bring the rest of the world to him.”

Peter then picks up this sent imagery as he shows this call to God’s chosen people, and their task outlined through Abraham and Moses, has been transferred to the followers of Jesus. Peter writes, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pt 2:9). Peter intentionally draws on Exodus 19:6 and uses the exact words found there to identify the church as a “royal priesthood” (*basileion hierteuma*).

The New Testament church, consisting of Jews and Gentiles who are the people of God, were being called to declare the praises of God into the world. Just as Israel was formed to point the nations to God, now the church is formed to take over the mission. We are called to be a missional people. We are to partner with God to be part of his redemptive mission for the world. That is the biblical narrative throughout Scripture.

**Partnering with God**

Given that the church exists to partner with God in his mission, the mission is not one it can choose to unilaterally select. Instead the community of believers must look to be in touch with the Holy Spirit and his direction. The church consists of

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“those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (Rom 8:14). A hallmark of the children of God are that they are led by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the command to “make disciples” will be functional only when there is incredible sensitivity and radical obedience to this instruction given by Jesus (Mt 28:19).

Within the local church I have observed various interpretations of this Great Commission. Some take this as primarily about outreach. The church needs to be seeker focused in all it does. A congregation member illustrated that focus to me once when he informed me our objective is simply to get people into heaven and not to worry too much about anything after that. Others suggest that such an approach lacks depth in understanding what Jesus is saying. They would argue that whilst of course his words apply to winning the nonbeliever, the focus needs to be on the spiritual formation of believers. The Church needs to be seeker sensitive but believer focussed.

There is a dilemma therefore in understanding what Jesus called for in making disciples. Morey is helpful in clarifying this when he states that “typically two terms are used to describe this activity: evangelism (or outreach) and discipleship (or spiritual formation).”\(^{13}\) In a sense evangelism is what happens up to the moment that a person accepts Christ, whilst spiritual formation happens to a new believer after they have been converted. It is my experience as a pastor that this separation model in disciplemaking creates needless complications.

For example, as Chairman of Campus Crusade in New Zealand, we regularly record statistics of outreach progress.\(^{14}\) We look at how many spiritual conversations are had with non-believers, how many new conversions occur, and how many of those flow into being church engaged. But there exists an issue that is highly problematic.

\(^{13}\) Morey, “Making Disciples of the Post Modern Generation: A Strategy for Life Covenant Church,” 118.

\(^{14}\) Called Tandem Ministries in New Zealand.
There is a big gap between the statistically recorded new converts and those we record as being connected into the local Auckland churches. I am concerned that the recorded decisions made are not real conversions because there seems to be no life changing commitment from these converts. It raises doubts over the genuineness of the decisions made.

A second complication is how separating these activities can have an implication on regular weekly church life. I have identified in chapter one how many people within Auckland Bible Church are time poor. Yet there are numerous demands made on their time related to the need to grow spiritually. For example, there is a need to volunteer for serving roles within the church, attend a home group, care for others, and the need to go on mission trips (with the corresponding fundraising requirement) being just some examples of this request for their time and energy. As a result, evangelism is seen as something to be tacked in on the end if there is time (which often there is not). Outreach becomes too hard and too tiring.

A third difficulty with this disjointed view of disciplemaking where outreach and spiritual formation are separated is that it views conversion as the type that Paul experienced (as an event) as the only valid biblical model and ignores other models like that of the twelve disciples shown in Mark’s gospel (as a process). Therefore, if the local church understands that conversion can happen in an unfolding process over time, this has implications for the way disciple making occurs.\(^{15}\) I will now look to suggest a biblical justification for viewing disciplemaking as a process not an event.

Biblical Justification for Disciplemaking as a Process not an Event

Richard Peace proposes that “how we conceive of conversion determines how we do evangelism.”\(^{16}\) Therefore, if one is convinced that what happened to Paul, which was an event, is the only valid experience, then evangelism will be confrontational instead. As an example of this method, people will be asked simply to accept Jesus as Lord. Evangelism will then be Billy Graham type mass events where people are asked to make decisions there and then. Evangelism will also involve door knocking. It will involve getting with non-believing friends alone over lunch and challenging them then and there to accept Jesus.

But if one is to accept that conversion can also happen over time as part of a process then the question a person is apt to ask is “Where are you currently in your spiritual pilgrimage and with what issues are you wrestling with when it comes to God?”\(^ {17}\) Peace is convincing in showing that for instance the disciples in the gospel of Mark were converted by process evangelism and not encounter evangelism in the same way Paul was. It took them many years to understand they were sinful: to grasp who Jesus was: and to accept him. In comparison it took only a brief event for Paul to turn to God (Acts 9). Peace states “the conversion of the Twelve is a major theme in the Gospel of Mark and, in fact, the organising principle by which Mark structures his Gospel.”\(^{18}\) In other words, Mark is purposefully showing examples of how conversion can at times be through a spiritual progression. The conversion of the twelve is equally as valid as that of Paul.

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\(^{16}\) Ibid., 16.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 26.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 27.
Disciplemaking in the church, as led by the Holy Spirit, is best brought together and combined into one process. Rather than separating out the outreach and spiritual formation aspects, instead they are amalgamated together in making disciples. There is an intentional fusing of the two. This will incorporate both the encounter and process biblical models shown above.

This model has implications for the local church. It would mean, for example, that believers invite their non-believer friends to any number of Christian activities. These are not limited to but could include church worship on Sunday, special interest groups on for example biblical parenting, a chance to join the church in serving in the community, or social events. These types of activities are planned around both a chance for a believer to keep growing spiritually whilst also providing an opportunity for the seeker to have their questions answered. As Morey states “seekers are invited into and embraced by the community of faith, allowing them to investigate ‘from the inside’ rather than having to make up their minds before really experiencing what the Christian life is like.”19 This has biblical justification, and the benefits are also profound.

One major benefit is that it removes the gap between a new convert and the start of spiritual formation from a practical view. It makes redundant the question regarding the existence of new converts that I experience within Campus Crusade. There is less of a need to get that new Christian started into a new church community. That new convert has already been in the local church and that sanctification process just begins after their conversion decision.

It also enables busy Christians within the local church to include outreach as part of their day to day Christian lives. The process model enables the church “to

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employ the same primary church structures for both evangelism and discipleship, minimising the dichotomy between these two activities.”

20 It is a seamless form of disciplemaking.

To summarise, making disciples does not involve evangelism on its own and nor does it involve spiritual formation on its own. Rather it is a combination of both. There is biblical justification that conversion can happen either through an encounter or through a process. Therefore, the church is best served in looking to make disciples by setting up structures that acknowledge both are valid. When this approach is taken, the ministry response envisaged and put into practice in Part Three of this project will be a more powerful rejoinder to the challenge outlined in Part One.

Motivation for Mission

In the section above there has been an exploration of the call for the local church to partner with God in redemptive mission. There has been an example given of what a missional church looks like in Myanmar. Such an example has been compared to a typical New Zealand church scene that Auckland Bible Church is part of. It is easy to be critical of the lack of mission intent locally.

It has also been confirmed that adaptive change is required to reach the younger more post-Christian generation. The church can no longer just keep doing the same thing. Churches have for too long been comfortable operating primarily as vendors of religious services, but this is no longer effective.21 The solution of a more relational apologetic strategy outlined for Auckland Bible Church requires new energy and risk and getting out of comfort zones.

20 Ibid., 122

Currently the Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast in Australia have just finished. These Games represent a bringing together of the best athletes from Commonwealth countries. The years of training and commitment and sacrifice, in some cases, are only evidenced over ten seconds. In other cases they are spread over days. But to even participate and get to compete in the Games, each athlete has had to go into strict training.

Paul takes this analogy of strict training in a similar event which some believe to be the Isthmian Games. Through such an analogy it gives an insight into how he became such a supreme example of how to sustain motivation to be missional. Paul was a man who partnered with God in redemption mission. In 1 Corinthians 9 he writes to the Corinth church about his motivation in winning the lost. He writes “I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (1 Cor 9:23). He then develops the athletic metaphor. He encourages the church to run in such a way to win the prize. Then he writes “Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training” (1 Cor 9:25). The Greek for “strict training” is \textit{ego kratia}. It literally means that in everything, let self (ego) rule (kratia). Paul is stating that those who compete must exercise self-control or self-rule in all things.

Paul then takes the athletic motif and applies it to himself. He is like the runner or the boxer. He is living his life also to achieve a crown. But his crown is not the type that is temporary like the “garland given to the winner in the Isthmian games

\footnote{22 For instance the 100 metres race.}

\footnote{23 A.C Thiselton, \textit{The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The First Epistle to the Corinthians}, Logos, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 187.}

\footnote{24 I wish to acknowledge a sermon entitled \textit{Self Control} preached by Timothy Keller in 2008 which has helped formulate in general my thinking on this topic.}

made from plastered pine leaves,” but rather one that lasts forever. But just like the Games athlete he is also in strict training with the supreme goal to achieve this eternal crown. He “beats his body” and “makes it his slave” (1 Cor 2:7). That is how he applies such tremendous self-rule over his body. He is incredibly desirous of this crown.

Paul is effectively declaring that he has set his heart on the one thing that is most important. Everything else in his life is constantly being relegated behind this desire to get this crown. He knows that unless he keeps a relentless pursuit of this prize he will fail. He is re-ordering the purposes and aspirations of his life to achieve this goal.

Thomas Chalmers is a well-known nineteenth century Scottish Presbyterian minister who once preached a very famous sermon entitled “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.” He confirms that the human heart must have at all times a particular object that is paramount to pursue. He said regarding the heart that “its desire for one particular object may be conquered; but as to its desire for having some object or other, this is unconquerable.” He used the analogy of a youth, suggesting that he may overcome one desire or affection such as partying, but only by replacing this affection with another such as material gain or career success. That young man “will be lorded over” by something.

Chalmers is restating what Paul is referring to in 1 Corinthians. Paul knows that some object must be at the central part of his heart. He wants to purposefully

26 Ibid.
27 Chalmers has an interesting link to New Zealand. A town in the South Island, Port Chalmers, is named after him.
29 Ibid.
ensure that such an object is the preeminent pursuit is to win the crown. One can observe that throughout his life. He was whipped and beaten. He was shipwrecked and stoned. He was imprisoned and mocked and persecuted. Yet he managed to get this tremendous re-ordering of his desires so as to accept this and keep going. He establishes this when he asserts “I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (1 Cor 9:23).

It is possible to see what motivates him so intensely. Two things overpower him. It is the gospel. It is also sharing in the blessings of the gospel. The gospel is that even though we are deeply sinful, God has entered this world and died on the cross. Because of what Jesus has done, if we accept him, then the Father will gloriously love and forgive and transform a person. God will love us like he loves his own son. That is the gospel that overwhelms Paul and is the principle affection at his core.

But also central is “sharing in the blessings of the gospel.” Paul is living this self-controlled, beating his body lifestyle not only to enjoy the gospel but as to share the gospel. The word “share” in Greek is sygkoinōnos. It means to partner in. It means to participate in. Such a thought of partnership is indicated when we observe what the crown is of verse 26. The ultimate prize for Paul is to share the blessings of the gospel with others. It is allowing other people to find Christ and receive the richness of this glorious gospel. He deeply desires above all else for others to see and experience the beauty of the gospel. So he looks to prioritise his affections by making Christ preeminent in his life. As he does this, others will observe how beautiful Jesus really is through observing Paul.

This is the example before Auckland Bible church which models the motivation to be missional. This is what must deeply be ingrained in us as a church if

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we are to so desire to make disciples of the Post-Christian generation. We must recalibrate the centrality of our souls constantly, so as to want to share in the blessings of the gospel that we experience, with those who do not know Christ. This project suggests that a powerful way of enabling this is through a relational apologetic. The next section will now look at a Biblical exemplar of what this looks like.

**A Relational Apologetic in Action**

One of the great biblical examples of a powerful relational apologist is Barnabas. Barnabas had been living in Cyprus and but was now established in Jerusalem (Acts 4:36). He was a Jew and a Levite. Coupled with his Greek and Hellenistic personal history in the Jewish diaspora, he had a background similar to that of Paul. Barnabas and Paul become close friends, and it was Barnabas who advocated for Paul resulting in Paul being welcomed into the Jerusalem church (Acts 9:27). Together with examples like Stephen, Barnabas denotes the large number of Hellenistic Jews who had come back to Jerusalem. An early tradition stemming from Eusebius suggests that Barnabas was one of the Seventy sent out by Jesus.

Barnabas is a Greek name interpreted by Luke as a “son of encouragement” (NIV). Other translations over the years have been “son of exhortation” (RSV; JB) and “son of consolation” (KJV). The Greek paraklēsis, which Luke uses in his translation, effectively describes the exhorting and proclaiming functions of the disciple. Polhill describes Barnabas as a “bridge builder.”

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31 I wish to acknowledge Timothy Keller who has preached various sermons on this subject which have helped me formulate my thoughts here.


Barnabas is a commanding example of the potency of a relational approach to making disciples. Luke tells us that when the church at Antioch began to grow, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to them (Acts 11:22). The result of his ministry was that a significant and wide expanse of people were caused to come to the Lord. As he and Saul assembled with the congregation and imparted the Scriptures to large numbers of people, the term Christian describing the new disciples was first applied (Acts 11:26).

Up until this moment in history, religious converts were known by the geographical location they were from. A convert from Rome was part of the Roman church, or if from Jerusalem he or she belonged to the Jerusalem church. But now for the first time, the term Christian was used to indicate the commonality of believers regardless of which location they were from. Country or race were no longer how they were identified.\(^{34}\) They were now simply called Christians.

Barnabas was incredibly effective in getting alongside the people at Antioch. One reason for this is that as “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith” he encouraged them greatly (Acts 11:24). The Greek for the word “encourage” is the verb *parakaleō*. It is a word that is hard to translate because it has lexical range that is extremely deep and rich and broad. Elsewhere the word is rendered as “exhort” (KJV) and “urged” (RSV).

*Parakaleō* is a compound word made up of *para* and *kaleo*. The word *para* means “alongside, as in one who comes up close alongside another person.”\(^{35}\) It consists of lovingly encouraging someone. The word *kaleo* means “to call, to beckon, \(^{36}\)

\(^{34}\) See Acts 13:1 for an example of the different regions/nationalities represented in the new Antioch church.

or to beseech.”36 It is a forceful word indicating the giving of truth. Renner is helpful when he states “but when these two words are joined to form parakaleō, it presents the picture of one who has something so important to say that he pulls right up alongside his listener, getting as close to him as possible, and then he literally pleads with him to take some course of action.”37 Put simply, it is grace and truth in action. That is why there is tension in the English translations, because not one English word can accurately reflect that meaning. It is intensely personal but also incredibly exhortational in nature.

The example is that of Barnabas, named the great “son of encouragement,” getting alongside the church in Antioch, with a beautiful mixture of truth and love. He bathes them with this ministry. He is just like a fertiliser in soil in that out of this rich nourishment, the church begins to flourish (Acts 11:24). The relationships he establishes puts the church into hyper-drive. McRay suggests that “besides Jerusalem, no other city of the Roman Empire played as large a part in the life of the early church as did Antioch.”38

It is incredibly hard to be people of such balance. I have observed over many years that many people are full of truth, but lacking love. On the other hand, others are full of love but do not have a whole lot of exhorting or beseeching showing up in their character. We all fall off the parakaleō beam. Yet we desperately need people like Barnabas in our midst. A person full of love and truth is someone who listens well and repeats back so well that their friend feels there is deep understanding of the issues raised. They feel loved. But then that Barnabas type exemplar pushes back and

36 Rick Renner, *Sparkling Gems From The Greek* (Tulsa: Teach All Nations, 2003), 944.

37 Ibid.

38 Hawthorne, Martin, and Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 24.
speak truth into that friend in front of them. They are transparent about their own struggles but not so transparent that it is all about them.

We live in a culture today that is desperately in need of this. I am convinced that such relationships can only really occur face to face and that they can only really work person to person. In my experience over the last ten years, we have three to four less face to face friends than we had in the past. The reason I suggest is the internet. The cause is social media examples such as Facebook. Facebook is a friend of information but an enemy of reflection. As Powell points out, young adults recognise the difference between Facebook friends and close friends.39

True love works best when we see facial expressions. It shows up in our body language. It does not demonstrate itself with a smiley face at the end of a social media post. We need more than ever people like Barnabas in our midst. He is a prime biblical example of a relational apologetic in action.

This sort of relational apologetic needs to permeate all other ministries in the church. There is no such thing as a separate department in a church called the parakaleō division. No matter how large a church is, there is no separate section. Instead this ministry needs to infuse and saturate people both inside and outside the church naturally. When someone sits down for a meal, they do not at first get given the meat to eat, then the vegetables, and then finally they eat the salt. The salt goes on, and over, all the other things. In the same way, encouragement needs to go over all things. We must penetrate it into all our lives. That is what Barnabas achieved in Antioch and what we need to do at Auckland Bible Church.

As Luke writes about Barnabas he gives clues on how to be as effective relationally as he was. Luke tells us that Barnabas was “full of the Holy Spirit” (Acts

39 Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, Growing Young, (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 19.
He modelled a beautiful and exquisite balance of truth and love because he was full of the Holy Spirit. There is a need to go back to the upper room discourse that John mentions to know what that looks like and how one can begin to emulate that.

In the upper room, Jesus tells his disciples that he is leaving them and that where he goes they cannot come (Jn 13:33). Thomas, in frustration, responds that Jesus has not told them where he is going. He is looking for directions. Philip also expresses his confusion as to where Jesus is going. Then Jesus responds with one of the saddest comments in Scripture. He says “don’t you know me Philip, even after I have been with you such a long time?” (Jn 14:9). Jesus responds with sadness that after all this time, and all that he has tried to teach them, they still are not aware of the road ahead.

But then Jesus in his grace looks to encourage them. He tells them that when he does go, they will receive the Holy Spirit in his place. The Holy Spirit is called “another advocate” (Jn 14:26). The Greek word for “advocate” is *paraklētos*. This is one of the few times in Scripture that the verb *parakaleō* becomes a noun. The Holy Spirit is named as the encourager, the exhorter, the beseecher. But he is the other advocate.

John in his first epistle tells who the first *paraklētos* is. As John writes to believers, he exhorts them not to sin. But when they do he tells them “we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One” (1 Jn 2:1). The word advocate in the Greek is *paraklētos*. John tells us that Jesus is the first advocate.  

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40 As was Stephen who as described with the same term in Acts 6:5

As our first advocate, a picture of a court room is helpful. Jesus is speaking to God the judge in the court room on our behalf. He is asking the judge not for mercy but for justice. He is saying to his father that all of humanity are sinful. He is agreeing that there needs to be a price to be paid for that sin. But he is then stating that for those who have accepted him as their Saviour, he has paid that price for their sin (Rom 10:9-10).

It would be unjust for the penalty for sin to be paid twice. Hence Jesus is advocating for justice. He knows his Father is a just judge. He stands before the bench like a defense attorney, not just holding our hand, but arguing and beseeching that justice be done. That is how Jesus is the first advocate.

The second advocate, the Holy Spirit, has a different role. Whereas Jesus speaks to the Father, the Holy Spirit speaks to the believer. He points to how glorious Jesus is. He reminds the believer of how loved he is by Jesus. He brings the cross front and centre showing the price Jesus has paid. He reminds the Christian how righteous one is in Jesus because of the cross. He speaks for the benefit of the believer. In doing so he magnifies the beauty of Christ in his soul. That is what it means for the Holy Spirit to “teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said…” (Jn 14:26).

Barnabas, in illustrating this great biblical example of a relational apologetic in action, balances truth and grace through the fact he is full of this second advocate. The second advocate continued to show Barnabas how beautiful the first advocate is. It is out of that fullness in his soul, that he is able to have such a profound impact on the church at Antioch. Disciples are made because Barnabas is face to face with the people. In doing so he models what that looks like and why it is so powerful and why it is necessary.
Conclusion

The purpose of this project is to take this missional redemptive purpose of God, into the younger, more post-Christian generation using a high touch relational apologetic. This discussion in this section explores a biblical and theological justification for the need for Auckland Bible Church to refocus on addressing the problems identified in chapter one and two. This analysis then feeds through into Part Three with a new ministry practice for Auckland Bible Church to be more effective in making disciples of the Post-Christian generation.

The ministry praxis to be outlined in Part Three will incorporate three components. These are to provide a clear sense of mission; develop a better sense of community and hospitality; and implement formal and highly intentional mentoring and accountability. These elements are aimed at achieving a more holistic all-inclusive transformation whereby young adults will emerge with a greater understanding of what following Christ really means (cognitive). Additionally they will also experience an attitudinal change in that they deeply desire to be more like Christ (affective). Finally there will also be behavioural change whereby these young people are taking the relational examples of mature Christians in front of them and using that to practically put into place the spiritual disciplines required to grow more like Christ.
PART THREE

MINISTRY PRACTICE
CHAPTER 4
MINISTRY OUTCOMES

Like new-born babies, crave spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.

1 Peter 2:2

Non-discipleship Christianity remains normative. People accept Jesus, but they don’t trust him much beyond the forgiveness of their sins. Their character, values, relationships and daily life remain unaltered by their devotion to Jesus. Christianity without apprenticeship is the predictable results of a truncated gospel that separates discipleship and salvation.

Carlson and Lueken, Renovation of the Church

This country’s post-Christian generation is disenchanted with and disengaged from the local church in New Zealand. In response, the church at times has looked to engage in rational proof discussions in attempts to regain the lost ground. The position of this project is that whilst this is still needed, of far greater value in making disciples is in developing relationships with non-believers to bring about conversion. In addition there is a need to use the power of relationships to grow existing believers into becoming more like Christ.
Given that truth is of secondary concern to many today, connection, rapport and personal interaction is an essential aspect in local church effort.\(^1\) This is where the focus of the Church needs to be. This is also what needs to be measured as a scorecard for church effectiveness.

This process of disciplemaking in Auckland Bible Church will be most powerful when outreach and spiritual formation are not treated as separate activities but rather amalgamated together. This allows for the biblical conversion patterns of Paul (an encounter) and the disciples in the gospel of Mark (a process over time) to be seamlessly incorporated into a church structure. It recognises both types of exemplars and can also allow for spiritual progression from the actual time of conversion.

The desired outcome of this project is to see young adults saved and young adults who are already saved “growing up in their salvation” (1 Pt 2:2).\(^2\) To facilitate this will require adaptive change within Auckland Bible Church whereby we partner with God to restore shalom. Sciacca succinctly sums up partnering with God when he writes “those of us who have been restored to shalom with God, who are beneficiaries of his grace, have also been enlisted to be agents of His redemption.”\(^3\) This project considers how to restore those who are lost back to shalom with God.

The implications for our church as we do this is to change the scorecard we use in measuring our effectiveness. We must understand that “the gospel solves the problem of our sin and its collateral consequences. But the gospel is not only about sin and eternity. It has much to say about who we can become and how we can live

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1. As further evidence of this, Israel Folau (a well-known Christian rugby player) has recently tweeted “gays are destined for hell unless they repent of their sin.” There has been an absolute public backlash to his tweet. There is no doubt he could have worded this far better. But in all the comments from secular New Zealanders, not one person has asked if the tweet is actually true. Engaging in a truth discussion is off the menu. Rather the response has been a demand for tolerance. Tolerance is the national religion of this country.

2. Although some of the tactics mentioned below will be transformational for other age groups also.

3. Sciacca, So, What’s Your Point?, 211.
right now. It has much to say about our lives today. The gospel invites us to a way of living that trains us for eternity.\textsuperscript{4}

Our church’s effectiveness will ultimately be measured in how well we contribute to both of these gospel realities of the remedy offered for our sin problem, along with the offer of a heart transformation. The three key strategies outlined to help realise this dual goal is for Auckland Bible Church to be more mission centric, community and hospitality focussed, and mentoring and accountability intentional. The target population for these plans are the existing young adults who are members of Auckland Bible Church (approximately thirty of which most are believers but some are not) along with those who are loosely connected through contacts we have outside the church (another twenty almost exclusively unbelievers). I will now look to give greater definition to these three key plans and finish this section with an implementation timeline.

**Mission Centric**

One of the great patterns in the Bible is that of great leaders relocating the people back into the big picture of what God is doing. They look to reposition the collective efforts of those they are leading into the central mission of God and how they need to be involved in that mission. They are inspirational trailblazers and they are relational in that collectively they demonstrate they are all in this together. These leaders look to remove distractions and make the main thing the main thing again. C.S. Lewis has how own unique way of expressing that call to the main thing when he writes “This world is a great sculptor’s shop. We are the statues and there’s a rumor

going around the shop that some of us are someday going to come to life." The Bible is full of reminders that people are part of this great sculptor’s shop and there is a plan to be involved in bringing folk back to life.

Joshua is this type of exemplar who reminds the people of their purpose. He considers his mortality and gathers the people together (Jo 24). He reminds them historically of the purposeful actions of God. He takes them back to the promises made to Abraham some six hundred years prior. He brings them into their own time with reminders of how they were brought out of Egypt and their subsequent victory over the Amorites. He recalls for them the crossing of the Jordan and their coming into Jericho. Then Joshua, after bringing them to the core of the plan of God and their witness to that, challenges them with “now choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve (Jo 24:15). Joshua retells the one story of the Bible as being God’s plan to restore shalom. He then invites the people back into that story.

Ezra is another example. Some eight hundred years after Joshua, he also regathers the people and gives them purpose. As the walls around Jerusalem are rebuilt after the Babylonian captivity, “all the people assembled as one man before the Water Gate” (Neh 8:1). Ezra brings out the Book of the Law of Moses and reads it day after day for seven days. Through this reading he is spiritually relocating the Jewish people, as they physically are standing in their restored Jerusalem, into the one story of the redemptive purposes of God. They respond with a binding agreement to make God’s story their story again. They are humbled and in awe of what is in front of them.

Five hundred years later, Peter and Paul and Stephen again follow the same approach. They reminded the people of the missional nature of God and their role relating to it. These leaders at times start with the promises God makes to Abraham.

For instance, as Paul writes to the Galatian Christians, he explains “Christ redeemed us…he redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through the Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:13-14). Paul is telling the Galatians they have a very big God with a very big plan to reconcile the lost back to him. The electrifying aspect is that he wants to use them, the local Galatian church, to be the means in which that plan is to be realised. As McNeill writes “the role of the church is simply this: to bless the world. In doing this, the people of God reveal God’s heart for the world.” Paul is telling the Galatian church to go and reveal the big plan of God.

All through Scripture one can see that the people are reminded that this one story of God restoring shalom into the world is taking place. They are stirred as they are reminded that their mission is awe inspiring and arousing and gets them out of their day to day ordinariness. They move from the mundaneness to magnificence through a mission centric culture.

This project in chapter one has suggested that young adults are looking for something bigger than themselves. They are looking to transcend the commonplace and they want to do it together. At times there are hints that this can be found in the Church. But more often than not this gets swallowed up in the distractions and pettiness of church life. My objective is to bring young adults back to this incredible mission for their lives.

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McNeal, Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church., 43.
Some say the best way to read any book is to turn to read the last paragraph and then start from the beginning. This gives a better understanding of the book as a whole. Sciacca does that when he talks about the beauty of making God’s mission central in one’s life when he writes:

Most middle-class Americans tend to worship their work, work at their play, and to play at their worship. As a result, their meanings and values are distorted. Their relationships disintegrate faster than they can keep them in repair, and their lifestyles resemble a cast of character in search of a plot. There is absolutely no reason why this assessment should ever be made of you. You understand who you are, why you are, and have an expansive understanding of both the vastness and the beauty of The Story. What remains is for you to determine a role for Jesus in your Chart Your Own Adventure, or to find your place in his. At the end of the day, this is the only choice you have. And it is the only thing that matters. Choose well.7

A core strategy in making disciples of the younger post-Christian generation is enabling and inspiring them to choose well by considering the final chapter entitled eternity. When they choose to move away from their Chart Your Own Adventure and instead find a place in God’s adventure, as a group of people working alongside each other relationally, inspirational stories are told. Events occur which participants can begin to see must be of God. Narratives are expressed which dwarf any stories that the world is able to convey. Disciples are made for eternity.

There are a number of tactics in this project to generate a desire to re-dedicate the young adult’s life into God’s adventure rather than his or her own. One of those is a sermon series spread over four weeks in April and May looking to regenerate missional excitement back into being part of God’s story. This series will be called “Welcome to Wonderland.” The first message is out of Isaiah 53 discussing the wonder of the gospel itself.8 The second sermon from Isaiah 6 will discuss the call to be a witness to that gospel; and the third using Malachi 3 demonstrates the call on our

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7 Sciacca, So, What’s Your Point?, 291.
8 Using the suffering servant motif.
money and time to be focussed on the big story of God. To complete the series there will take place a discussion on how to resolve the tension we face in being sucked back into the world (and our own story again) and away from a missional externally focussed lifestyle, using 1 Peter 2 as a proof text.

In addition, we will hold a prayer walk around our Greenlane neighbourhood in the place of a normal Sunday sermon. Mature Christians will be paired with a young adult and they will walk around the area praying not so much for individual needs but for gospel transformation within Auckland. This takes the centrality of the mission and prays for it relationally. Young adults need older mature Christians in front of them to see what a victorious Christian disciple looks like. Such strategic initiatives are developed to help the emerging generation to become more mission centric.

**Community and Hospitality Focussed**

I recently met with a young couple who had been looking for a church home and after visiting a number of churches in the area had settled on Auckland Bible Church. I was interested in learning what they liked in their visit to us on the day that helped make up their minds to become members. They said they had been welcomed. That was a huge relief as at times this has been a major weakness. But then I was surprised. It was not the sermon that day that had overly influenced them (humbling for myself as the preacher). It was not the building (which is actually quite nice and comfortable). It wasn’t even the singing (we spend a lot of time trying to get that right). It wasn’t any of the things that dominates our thinking in great church experiences.

Instead what was noteworthy to this couple was the genuine nature and warmth and hospitality that they had observed. It was the affection that was on
They said to me “that family community was what we have been looking for.” They shared that they had “laughed at the three year old girl interrupting her Mum whilst she was playing the piano during worship.” They were amused at the teenager dipping his bread in the communion cup. They loved the depth of feeling in the pastoral prayer. It was also the coffee time afterwards when people stayed and stayed and seemed to love being part of this church family. It brought home to me a phrase I once heard Kara Powell use – namely “warm is the new cool.”

This young couple show what has been established in chapter one in that the emerging generation value community. They do not mind a little imperfection in the worship service or the church. They just want a place where they belong and where there is warmth and authenticity and hospitality and caring. They desire togetherness and a chance to nurture relationships.

In seeking to make warm the new cool, there are a number of tactics in this project to help facilitate fellowship and hospitality. A new young adults home group will be started called Thrive. This will meet most Wednesday nights at the church using video Bible studies to promote further discussion. Incorporated into this group will be encouragement to do daily quiet times; prayer; and Scripture memory. An initial get to know evening at our home will help generate relationships.

In addition, two Sunday morning church services will this year be handed over to the young adults to organise and run on the day. They will choose the worship style and sing; they will preach; they will pray; and they will provide creative elements. The goal is to foster relationships amongst each other and also enable their style preferences to be incorporated into the church.

9 Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, Growing Young, 47.

10 The initial study is called Adulting by Jonathan Pokludu who is the Young Adults Pastor at Watermark Community Church, followed by a study by Francis Chan on the book of James.
A new initiative called “Look Who’s Coming to Dinner” will be organised for May. Those willing to host a meal at their place will be paired (by church staff) with those who would like to be hosted. Inevitably young adults love to be hosted. This will give the chance for the older church members to have deeper relationships with these young people over a meal that otherwise would never have taken place.

Finally we will look to invite young adults to serve together in such areas as our Wired group (thirteen to seventeen age range). This enables a further opportunity to experience warmth in a different section of the church community. Young adults want to serve in an area where they can make a difference. Younger teenagers look up to these twenty somethings and it is an opportunity for the older age group to have an impact as leaders.

**Mentoring and Accountability Intentional**

There is little doubt that emerging adulthood acts as a pivotal moment in numerous individuals lives. Numerous people look back at those years and reflect on the fact that what they have become today was hugely impacted by the time of transition as young adults. This transition occurs in moving from adolescence to adulthood. Such a space is hugely formative for the years ahead.

Some young adults focus predominately on the past in their decision making today. They consider how they have been impacted by family up to this time. Others live very much for the present. They move on from their history and are not too worried about their future, as now is what matters. Still others ignore the present and focus on a dream they may have for the future. In all of these cases they can easily
shut God out of their past and present and future. Setran and Keisling call it “a perpetual blind spot that limits a comprehensive view of life in Christ.”¹¹

Effective mentoring is a requirement in opening the eyes of emerging adults to see God working in their lives, how he has done so in the past, and where he is taking them in the future. It gives them a spiritual lens to see their whole life far more vividly. It enables young adults to “connect their stories to the past, present and future story of God.”¹² Mentoring is praying, meeting, listening and asking. It involves affirming and admonishing. It is powerful when it is reflective and it releases those mentored into being the people God wants them to be.

Accountability involves a willingness to be answerable. It goes hand in hand with mentoring. Sometimes it involves tough love. I subscribe to the view Bill Hybels has on accountability when he writes “One of the best definitions of tough love I know is action for the well-being of the beloved. We need more people who love others with such devotion that they will risk their current comfort level in the relationship, and say whatever needs to be said in order to protect the other person’s wellbeing.”¹³ Loving accountability can recalibrate our lives.

This project incorporates specific strategies in using the power of mentoring and accountability to make disciples of the millennial generation. A marriage mentoring course is being offered whereby twelve couples have been selected to attend.¹⁴ These couples have been married for a minimum of twenty years and are looked up to by the rest of the church as having not only strong resilient marriages but

¹² Ibid., 87.
¹⁴ From Family Life in the USA
who also present a compelling case for God’s obvious hand in their relationship. Outside trainers are being brought in to train these twelve couples in how to share such an example with others.

At the end of the course, these marriage mentors will invest time in newly married young people. This will involve intentional mentoring and accountability not just in the marriage per se, but also individual life on life discipling. The aim is to not only to strengthen the marriage but to be part of the pivotal moments that occur for the individual. In some cases these young marrieds are not believers. In other cases they are relatively mature Christians. In either case these marriage mentors will be a powerful tool in opening their eyes to see God at work in their past, present and future.

The tactics indicated above are timed to dovetail with each other to help ensure availability of key people. They are designed to achieve maximum effectiveness whilst working with the reality that people are busy. Listed below is the implementation timeline.

*Table 1. Timeline for Implementation Feb-June 2018*

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<th>ACTION</th>
<th>FEB</th>
<th>MARCH</th>
<th>APRIL</th>
<th>MAY</th>
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<td>Invite young adults into Thrive group.</td>
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<td>Begin Thrive through social event</td>
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<td>Thrive meet weekly with Bible Studies</td>
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<td>Formal Mentoring Relationships established</td>
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<td>Invite “Marriage Mentoring” couples</td>
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<td>Young Adults serve in youth group</td>
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<td>Prayer Walk</td>
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<td>“Marriage Mentoring” Training day</td>
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<td>Marriage mentors meet with young adults</td>
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<td>Young Adults take Church service</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Look Who is Coming to Dinner”</td>
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“Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

1 Timothy 4:15

“Paul’s communities are his audio-visual aids that he can point to inside of a debauched empire (where human dignity was never upheld as inherent), to give credibility to his message. To people who asked, ‘Why should we believe there is a new or different life possible?’ Paul could say, ‘Look at these people. They’re different. This is a different social order.’”

Richard Rohr, Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditation
My wife and I are blessed to have three children. Over the years I have been delighted to see the minute developmental steps that they have taken. They all have loved to stand beside the wall chart in our kitchen measuring their height to see if there has been any growth. Just a few centimetres of progress each time has led to great excitement.

Parents anticipate “physical and emotional growth in their children, but somewhere along that developmental continuum the expectation of growth diminishes. For some, adulthood equates with inertia and stagnation.”1 As Rowland Forman suggests, some adults are “content to be like the ‘lost boys’ in the movie Hook. They were the group of boys that Peter Pan lived with and fought against Captain Hook with, in Never-Never-Land. The most compelling feature about the boys was that they never grew up – they remained boys forever.”2

The goal of this project has been to bring about conversion for young adults who do not know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, and to grow those who already do. Just as parents determine the health of their children by their growth, the same is an expectation of the children of God. Peter anticipated such growth when he writes “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.” (1 Pt 2:2). He was indicating that progression is expected for all Christians.

Chapter four has summarised the core components looking to achieve this growth goal as being mission centric, with a community and hospitality focus, and being intentional regarding mentoring and accountability. Various strategies shown on the implementation timeline have been executed to help accomplish these goals. The

1 Rowland Forman, “Not Perfect, But Progressing” (Auckland, 2009), 2.
2 Ibid.
strategies have then been measured and field tested using both quantitative and qualitative assessments.

Quantitative measurements include the number of young adults established within Auckland Bible Church at the start of the 2018 calendar year and then compared midway through the year. Additionally those attending the new Thrive young adults group have been gauged. Other variables that have been used to assess the project effectiveness have been how many young adults are involved in supporting the younger age group Wired youth group, together with those involved in mentoring relationships. The final statistic recorded is the number of new conversions in this age bracket.

Qualitative measurements have involved observations and discussions with the emerging adult target group. The developing relationships through the initiatives above have led to an assessment and discussion around spiritual growth. These measurements are more subjective. At times they are not always uniform and automatic. But they are examples of certain characteristics that one can use to observe and measure effectiveness.

**Resources Used in this Project**

The project involves various leaders within the church. They have all been selected on the basis of their spiritual maturity, availability, and ability to have empathy with young people. In some cases such as the Marriage Mentoring course, outside experts have been brought in to train local Auckland Bible Church potential marriage mentors.

Resources that have been used have included an allocation of the financial budget to some of these projects, although these incremental costs are minimal as in-house capacity has already existed. The existing buildings have been utilised for all
the church-based activities along with our member’s homes for social events and mentoring meetings. The real costs have been time and energy in developing and then implementing the above strategies.

**Assessment**

A five-fold assessment has been used to evaluate the project outcomes. The first relates to those who have come to be new believers. The last four relate to pointers toward spiritual growth in existing believers. These last four signs or indications of real progression are sustained prayer life and study, greater experiences of God, deep changes in character, and a greater sense that the Bible is divine. These are not exclusive and there are a number of other options one could use such as Packer’s five signs of growth in Christian character. But they are fair representatives of different views of how to measure growth and provide an effective summary of what to look for in increasing spiritual maturity. I will now relate stories of some of the changed lives of young adults as living examples of these five assessment tools in action.

**Crossing Over from Death to Life**

Emma is a young Singaporean woman who has been coming to Auckland Bible Church for two years. She had bought into what Chapter one describes as the amazon.com narrative. She talked to me about the family pressure to accumulate wealth and was very much part of the consumerism that is so dominant in this country. With that background in her spiritual backpack, she remarkably gave her life to Christ during the community prayer walk the church undertook recently.

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4 Names have been changed to protect confidentiality
Emma is one of the reasons this project was undertaken. She has experienced the relational aspect of church and seen changed lives all around her. She said to me in part of our discussion “Tim I want to have what they have. They are different than other people. They have a peace about them.” She has heard the gospel. She has had truth discussions. But relationships were what powerfully bought her into the kingdom of God. The “warmth cluster” of people around her has had a powerful impact on her life.

Mike on the other hand is not one of the direct reasons for this venture and yet his story is a wonderful addition. He is fifty years old and is not part of the initial target population for this project. He has been attending Auckland Bible Church for about a month but one Sunday heard the first of the sermon series on Mission designed for this endeavour.

During that sermon he heard that Christianity is unlike all other religions or thought systems. Every other faith describes a way to get right with God. They describe the steps or actions one must follow to reach the deity, or heaven, of that particular religion. An implication of that is that it possible to know very little about the founder of these religions. For example Buddhists can still know very little about Buddha as they look to follow the noble eight fold path.

Mike heard that message and grasped that Christianity is different. He was reminded that Thomas asked Jesus to show him the way (Jn 14:5). Thomas wanted to know the steps to follow just like every other religion. Jesus turned to Thomas and said “I am the way…” (Jn 14:6). Jesus was saying to him that every other religion involves mankind trying to get up to God, but Christianity is God coming down to us. The way to God is not through a series of steps or paths but through Jesus. He has

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5 Comments made over lunch meeting June 2018.

6 Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, Growing Young, 134.
“bridged the chasm between man and God with his own flesh and blood.” When we accept him as Lord and Saviour, he will come into our lives and transform us from the inside out (Rom 10:9-10).

Mike came to me after that message and said “oh my goodness. I thought I was a Christian but now see I am not. I want to ask Christ into my life now.” Mike confessed his sins and asked Christ into his life at the end of that discussion. As he offered up his life to Christ, a brand new disciple was made. Ironically Mike is not part of the targeted age group this project is based on. But what he has in common with the other stories is that one person, a single woman, has befriended Mike and witnessed to him and invited him along to church. Truth was important. But first came a relationship of sorts.

Mike’s conversion is a bonus in the parameters laid out for this project. But both he and Emma represent a quantitative result of brand new conversions. These conversions are a result of the Holy Spirit working through many variables, but one variable is the relational apologetic on display.

Sustained Prayer Life and Study

One of the measurements of real growth in discipleship is the habit of prayer and study of the Word of God both in good times and bad. Many people pray to God when they need him to fix a problem. They “seek to hear God solely as a device for obtaining their own safety, comfort and sense of being righteous.” Some even study the Bible to try and find an answer.

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8 This discussion took place after Sunday church in May 2018.
But one sign of a growing maturity for a believer is the consistency of being in the Word and in prayer no matter what the external circumstances. Willard states “Our early experience may be so full that we neglect study. But relationship with God, as with any person, soon requires a contribution from us, which will largely consist of study.” Willard is correct. Early on the sheer thrill and experience of becoming a Christian may sustain us, but over time there is a need for study and prayer and meditation.

Bill is a Christian in his mid-twenties, intelligent, and has just left university with his Commerce degree. He is now working in a large company in Auckland. He has experienced loneliness and also financial stress particularly in the last few months. He is also about to preach his first sermon at church and is part of the young adults group established through this project.

One of the observations I have seen in Bill’s life over these last few months is his commitment to study and prayer no matter his current circumstances. There is a growing pattern of progress in his life. He is an example of the contribution required that Willard talks about in enabling a relationship with Jesus to blossom. His is a changed life growing off the unchanging Word of God. There is behavioural change through his growing disciplines. If there was some sort of spiritual formation growth chart in our kitchen at home, and Bill stood alongside it, we could observe he has grown a few centimetres in the last few months. There is a trend towards greater persistency in his Christian walk.

Greater Experiences of God

C.S. Lewis in his classic book *Mere Christianity* beautifully summed up what it meant to experience God as we live as Christians. He wrote “if you want to get warm you must stand near the fire: if you want to be wet you must get into the water. If you want joy, power, peace, eternal life, you must get close to, or even into, the thing that has them.”\(^1\) Using Lewisian phraseology, the thing that has them is God. God is a personal relational being who desires deep connection with his children.

Therefore, one of the measurements of growth as a disciple is a greater awareness of God in our lives as we mature. Given that, one of the dangers of a relatively non-Pentecostal church like Auckland Bible is the propensity to flee from any talk about experiencing the Holy Spirit more fully. I have had it said to me “we must get away from this feelings type mumbo jumbo Christianity and stay solid on what we can see rather than feel.” My response to that person (I hope graciously) was that “I heard it once said that the Holy Spirit appears fifty-nine times in the book of Acts and in thirty-six of those he was speaking. We need to be careful to not assume he has stopped speaking today.”\(^2\)

Perhaps a powerful example of God speaking today through this project involves the conversion of Emma mentioned above. At the start of our church prayer walk I prayed in front of the church and asked God to show himself to us today “in a way that it is incredibly obvious it must be you Lord.”\(^3\) As we came back to finish our church service, I heard the news that Emma had given herself to Jesus. I said to the church the following week about this conversion “Some may say this was a

\(^1\) Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 176.

\(^2\) During a church meeting held in September 2017.

\(^3\) At the beginning of our prayer walk held in March 2018.
coincidence. All I know is that coincidences happen when we pray.” Collectively I am convinced we experienced God in a deep way when Emma “crossed over from death to life” (Jn 5:24).

Deep Character Changes from Within

One of the great truths of the power of the gospel is that it takes sinful people and over time makes them more like Jesus. As Lewis writes “Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else.”

Willard says the same thing another way when he writes “…there can be no doubt on the biblical picture of human life, that we were meant to be inhabited by God and to live by a power beyond ourselves.” Over time we are meant to resemble Jesus a little more.

Micah is an example of how this looks. He rang me recently and asked to meet with me as soon as possible. He could not share anything on the phone. We just needed a confidential location. Normally these types of phone calls in my experience relate to either marital issues or pornography problems. Micah is not married. My fears were confirmed when he opened up about his battle with pornography. He shared with me that as a young man he has been battling this issue for a long time. He was desperate for some answers.

Micah is not alone in this. Pornography is a major issue among emerging adults. In their book Premarital Sex in America, Regnerus and Uecker, in writing about young adults, state that “pornography use is highest among this demographic. In the age range of eighteen to twenty-six, two out of there men agreed that porn use was

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14 Lewis, Mere Christianity, 176.

acceptable and that eighty-six percent of men interact with porn monthly.”\textsuperscript{16} To these young men represented in these statistics, what their life was like before online porn they now have no idea. Micah is one of those young men. As a Christian he is one of these statistics. But he is desperate to win the battle over his pornography habit.

Over these last few months I have seen Micah begin to change in this area. He is beginning to love Jesus at a deeper level as he realises that Jesus has taken away that sin in his life (at least positionally if not always practically). It is transparent to see that love for Jesus is growing as he learns to make him the most beautiful thing in his soul. He has said to me “At times I say to myself I just don’t want to go there (online pornography) because I love Jesus too much and don’t want to hurt my relationship with him.”\textsuperscript{17}

As I walk this journey with Micah and mentor him and hold him accountable, there are elements of the words of Lewis and Willard in his slow transformation. He is becoming more like a little Christ. He is also learning to live by a power beyond himself. Relational apologetics are crucial in enabling Micah to grow as a disciple because they are personal and visible to him in how this battle can be won. They are enabling deep character change from within.

Greater Sense that the Bible is Divine

The final characteristic of discipleship growth is trusting and seeing the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, and how it can be relied upon for all of life. In my observations this takes time. Sarah is part of the young adults Thrive group. She has been to our house for a meal. She also has a non-believing boyfriend. I can see that this is becoming an issue for her with her Christian conscience.


\textsuperscript{17} Stated during lunch meeting June 2018.
One of the real issues for the emerging generation is the deep desire to find a life partner. Certainly in Auckland there is a lack of suitable Christian young men. The result is that some Christian women are dating non-Christians. Their logic is something like “I want a partner. God is not providing. I need to take things into my own hands.”

Paul talks about Christians and non-Christians being together when he writes “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor 6:14). John MacArthur provides commentary on this when he suggests “this means Christians are not to be bound together in common spiritual enterprise or relationship (including marriage) that would be detrimental to the Christian’s testimony within the body of Christ.”

Whilst there are differing views on whether what MacArthur states is correct, and that this passage even applies to dating and marriage, I have never had a young adult come to me and debate this view from a biblical standpoint. In every occasion that I observe a young Christian adult dating a non-Christian, they have not looked at all to justify this stance biblically. They never exegete the passage and explain what it really means. Instead they justify their decision by ignoring Scripture. “Well I just don’t think the Bible is correct in this” is how one young person said it to me. Their opinion rather than Scripture is the authority.

These young adults are allowing the god of their need for a life partner to override the God of Scripture as the core authority of their life. They are picking and choosing the parts of the Bible they like and discarding the bits they do not like. It is sort of like a Subway sandwich. They are seeking to design the Bible to meet their

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18 As stated to me over a casual discussion after church in December 2017.


20 Lunch meeting February 2018.
own unique consumer needs. In this case the need is for a life partner and hence they allow this need to interpret what the Bible teaches.

Sarah is beginning to see how she has done this, and how Scripture is a true blueprint for her life. She is not fully there yet. She is still dating her boyfriend. But in discussions with her I sense a realisation that the Bible actually makes sense as a standard and guide for her life. She is seeing that if she can trust God to meet her biggest need (freedom from sin) then she can trust God to provide her a partner (or not). But either way “God works for the good of all those who love him” (Rom. 8:28). She is displaying a characteristic in her spiritual growth that she can trust the divinity of the Bible.

Summary

Spiritual formation for the Christian is ponderous at times. One does not always hear God in our lives as we should. Willard is correct when he postures “The infallibility of the messenger and the message does not guarantee the infallibility of our reception.”21 Of course progress is also hard to measure over the short term. One of my frustrations as a pastor, coming out of the business world, is that it is so easy to measure your efforts working for a business like Coca-Cola whom I was employed by for many years. Such examples as sales turnover, market share, earnings, and return on capital are quantifiable and objective measurements that cannot be hidden nor explained away easily.

But spiritual growth can sometimes be less obvious, certainly at least in the short term. Therefore the success or otherwise of this project will take longer to ascertain than over a six month period. There is quantifiable data available. For instance on a typical Sunday service at Auckland Bible Church there are regularly

21 Willard, Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God., 53.
thirty young adults now. Last year there were maybe twenty. The Thrive young adults group is now made up of twenty members. Last year there were four. An extra four young adults are now helping in the Wired youth group. Plus there are about four mentor relationships occurring whereby last year there were none. These are actual results partly from this project.

But success may well be realised years down the track. Discouragements still also exist, despite our best efforts in developing this relational apologetic. Some young adults are notoriously fickle. Some are still part of the missing discussed in the introduction. Others are still very much allowing the wrong narratives to govern the way they live their lives.

But the examples of changed lives of people like Emma, Mike, Bill, Micah and Sarah point to a relational apologetic being powerful in making disciples. They are progressing but not perfect. They represent what a church can do when it looks to partner with God in restoring shalom. On the kitchen wall chart of spiritual growth they have grown a few centimetres. Few things are more exhilarating for a Christian than helping others to become more like Christ. I am hopeful this project has played a small part in that and is transferable into other church contexts. In the final section I will now look to summarise this project and look at further learnings that can be taken from it.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Recently I attended a fascinating evening entitled “Richard Dawkins & Lawrence Krauss: Science in The Soul.” Ironically given the cynicism that Dawkins displays towards Christian spiritual transformation, Krauss had to withdraw due to a highly publicised moral failing.\(^1\) Hence the evening was exclusively one involving Dawkins talking about science and atheism.

The hall was filled with approximately three thousand people. I would estimate over half the attendees were young adults. The host asked the question initially “Who accepts that Dawkins is correct in his assertion that there is no God?” Over 95 percent of the audience raised their hands in agreement with that statement. But then there was a fascinating follow up question. The compere asked the crowd “Who considers themselves to be spiritual?” Well over 90 percent raised their hands in acknowledgement of this metaphysical aspect to their lives.

What was significant from the evening was that here was a snapshot of New Zealanders who fundamentally rejected the Christian gospel, and indeed any religion, but yet were still aware of a spiritual component to their life. They were a group, many of whom are in the target range for this project, who were willing to pay to hear Dawkins speak, were in total agreement with his views on the supernatural being non-existent, and yet were strangely looking for the divine and sacred outside of their day to day existence.

This glimpse of an informal survey from the Dawkins evening is in agreement with wider research into faith and belief in New Zealand. Almost half of New Zealanders feel that spirituality is “extremely or very important for their overall

\(^1\) Dawkins, The God Delusion, 145.
wellbeing (46%) and mental health (47%).”² Significantly those in Generation Y and Z are even more likely to recognise the importance of spirituality in their lives.

Even more noteworthy is the impact that relationships can have in attracting people to consider religion and spirituality. Three in five people suggest that observing first hand people who live out a genuine faith would “either somewhat or strongly attract them to investigating religion and spirituality further.”³ Non-Christians are looking for Christians to live out the values that Jesus represents in front of them. They want our actions to speak louder than words.

This project has been developed to do exactly that. A relational apologetic strategy has been presented for Auckland Bible Church to be more effective in making disciples of the post-Christian emergent generation. A model has been proposed for disciplemaking to treat evangelisation and discipleship as complementary and overlapping.

The project has developed a mission centric, community and hospitality focussed, and mentoring and accountability intentional strategy for Auckland Bible Church. These tactics have been employed and results have been recorded. Lives have been changed as a result.

This project has not looked to nullify the importance of truth. Truth is important still. But it is less so than life on life witness. Even Richard Dawkins mentioned in his New Zealand address of his own personal frustrations of the post-truth age that we live in. He gave an example that when he lectures in London on what he believes to be the facts regarding evolution, an entire segment in his classroom stands up and walks out on him. To quote Dawkins “they refuse to stay and

² Wilberforce Foundation, “Faith and Belief in New Zealand” (Auckland, 2018), 7.
³ Ibid.
listen to a truth statement because they are living in a post-truth age where everything is relative.”

It seems that even atheists accept that dogmatically pushing truth is ineffectual in the present environment.

Whether one chooses to look at current research, or formal talks with famous atheists, or just with my experience of being a pastor over many years, this project has looked to confirm that genuine relationships are most effective in making disciples of the post-Christian generation. I have witnessed first-hand that people can come to faith when the Christian looking to evangelise knows very little about the Bible. But I have never heard of a convert who came to Christ when the Christian in front of them was relationally ineffectual.

This project suggests that in an emerging generation so heavily influenced by the Richard Dawkins, Lady Gaga, and Amazon.com narratives being sold, there still exists a desire within these young adults for something more. Their souls are parched and the current narratives they base life on are not quenching their thirst.

Even Dawkins inadvertently acknowledges that the narrative he is expressing does not meet our human yearning for purpose. He was asked by an audience member about the purpose of life. His response was illuminating. His answer was that this was a question we should ask. Human beings have no right to ask such a question. There was stunned silence in the audience and a definite pause before the next question was asked. It is significant that even my friend alongside me, who is a Dawkins fan, considered his answer to be unsatisfactory.

People need purpose. Some are willing to consider a better way. The storylines being retold in New Zealand are ineffectual to many. These people need to hear and

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4 Dawkins has set up a Trust in the USA to attempt to go into schools and teach evolution. He also indicated his frustration at this being blocked.
understand the Christian gospel. This gospel is best shown to them in an embodied and high touch apologetic.

Summary of Tactics Implemented

The project has seen lives changed through this relational apologetic approach. Those who do not know Christ have come to know and love him. Those who do know him have grown in their love for him. There has been a renewed excitement within Auckland Bible Church about the sheer scale of mission that we have been called to. Young adults are motivated by being involved in something bigger than themselves. There is a real sense of what Newbigin calls “a sharing with one another of the actual experience of their weekday work and seeking of illumination from the gospel for their daily secular duty.” The mission of restoring shalom to this world helps to remove the mundaneness of life and give depth and purpose.

There is also a renewed sense of community. I have loved watching the younger adults sitting and talking and laughing with each other on a Sunday morning, and catching up with each other throughout the week. There is encouragement and honesty and a feeling of belonging. There is a sense within Auckland Bible Church of what Paul meant when he wrote “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). The people feel we are all in this together.

Finally the intentionality of the mentoring, and accountability alongside it, has been powerful in growing some of these young adults to be more Christ like. Mature exemplars have modelled transformative disciplines. One on one and group meetings have provided structure and encouraged commitment to discipleship. There has been a

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5 Lesslie Newbigin, Foolishness to the Greeks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 140.
deliberate priority given to development of this emerging generation. All of this has been with a view to what Lewis described as “a cleft has opened in the pitiless walls of the world, and we are invited to follow our great Captain inside. The following Him, is of course, the essential plan.”6 Young people are intentionally being encouraged to follow this great Captain by observing how others are doing that in daily life.

All of this has been done with a view that as Reggie McNeal states “people are built to last. Forever. The same can’t be said of companies, countries, churches, or even the cosmos. But people created by God in his image are fashioned for eternity.”7 It is easy to forget this. Progress can be painstakingly slow and it can seem at times as if efforts are ineffectual. But there is a hugely satisfying motivation in working for eternity.

Lewis stated it another way in his famous “The Weight of Glory” sermon preached in Oxford at the University Church of Saint Mary the Virgin in 1941. Lewis said “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.”8 This project has been focused on working with immortals.

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7 Reggie McNeal, Kingdom Collaborators: 8 Signature Themes of Leaders Who Turn The World Upside Down (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 81.

8 Lewis, The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses, 15.
**Learnings from this Project**

One of the adverse impacts of a project such as this is that the results must be recorded over the short term when the true benefits often only show themselves over the longer term. Discipleship can be slow. Leaders like me do not like anything to be slow. It is easy to look for short cuts where efficiency is critical. It is also easy to be tempted into what Smith and Pattison call “reducing Christianity to a commodity that can be packaged, marketed and sold.”9 As church leaders we are nervous in committing to a cultivation of a deep holistic discipleship model because it is hard to measure and does not always pay the staff salaries. The tyranny of the urgent tempts us back to visible results like the cash position and numbers in the church pews on a Sunday morning.

Hence this project can be at times frustrating and time consuming. But a key learning for Auckland Bible Church is to be patient and persistent. God himself is a loving, patient, and longsuffering God. All through Scripture we see this reflected.

As an example of this, in the book of Hosea, we read of a dreadful unfaithfulness that Gomer shows to her husband Hosea. Hosea complains to God. God responds with this command “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods…” (Hos 3:1). One of the key learnings from the book of Hosea is God showing humanity how despite humanity continually rejecting God, God continues to persist in his love and faithfulness to mankind. The faithlessness of man is contrasted with the love and commitment of God.

He calls us to the same patience and endurance and unflappability in making disciples. There is no other effective option anyway. This country has seen church

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after church look to develop products to attract unbelievers to come into the church building and hear the gospel. New Zealanders are telling church leaders, through their continued absence, that this does not work anymore. There has to be a paradigm shift. We as Christians we must be slowly “seeping into the cracks and crevices of society” in a relational manner to better represent Christ to the world.\textsuperscript{10}

Another key learning is not to follow a homogenous system with the emerging generation. Each person is unique in personality and background and propensity to want to hear the gospel. Some are far more motivated by a mission centric big picture approach. Others just want to sit and talk and be heard. Some are shy and are less focussed on community and more on a one on one doing life together approach.

A final learning is to allow the Holy Spirit to continually lead us as a Church. It is easy to become fixated on our own efforts and not allow God to continually reshape how he is working within Auckland Bible Church. Structures will continue to need to be tweaked and different relational apologetic strategies put into place. All with a proviso that truth still matters.

**Opportunities in the larger Christian Community.**

There are opportunities available to incorporate this local project into the greater Christian New Zealand community. Through the Living Stones network of churches, church leaders are encouraged to speak at conferences and run local on-line forums on key issues facing churches. In addition there are established relationships I have with Carey Baptist College and Laidlaw College here in Auckland who would value some practical input into the same challenges they face.

There also exists opportunities outside of New Zealand. Tandem Ministries (Campus Crusade) now are responsible for overseeing the work in the South Pacific. Countries such as Fiji and Samoa are very similar to New Zealand in the fact that young adults are missing from the church pews. They are very willing to receive support and wisdom in how to reach this particular demographic.

Finally opportunities exist through my role in Barnabas School of Leadership (BSL). The narratives being told in New Zealand are becoming more prevalent in these majority world countries. As opportunities open up in Myanmar and Nepal and Ghana where we currently operate, local church leaders are beginning to ask the same questions we are asking. Some of the learnings from this project can be applied into these different settings.

My observations in mixing with young adults in these countries is that for instance consumerism, particularly in a country like Myanmar which has been closed off to the rest of the world for sixty years, is really starting to take effect now. The army has stepped back from ruling the country and Western consumer trends are fast moving in just in the last three years. For example KFC and Pizza Hut have recently opened in Mandalay. The Amazon.com narrative is not far away. This project developed for a local Auckland church has the potential to be transferable into local contexts elsewhere.

As we continue to solidify our efforts in this country and further afield, my prayer is that these young adults might come to see that Christianity has the answers they so desperately need. The narratives they are listening to will never give real meaning and joy in their lives. They are trapped in a type of false narrative fog that

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11 I am Chairman of the Board of Tandem Ministries.
they cannot see through. My hope is that this project may be a beacon that contributes to piercing that fog and leading to an alternative and better way.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


