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IDENTITY SHAPING COMMUNICATION

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IDENTITY SHAPING COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

Identity Shaping Communication

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Identity formation is a chaotic time for adolescents. Every realm of life—biology, social, spiritual—is a changing target for every person as they navigate these waters. Society has many ways of handling adolescents. One way is to ignore and hurry these young people into adulthood. Another is to worship and adore adolescents, to meet their every need and desire. The Church also has historically offered discipleship to young people to either quickly transition them into adulthood or in essence worshipped them as the “church of the future.”

The preached word of God is a place to form each person’s discipleship. Preaching can be a formative and holy moment where the Lord God is made known to his people. It can also go astray and be a place of vague spirituality or about personal performance and not lasting relationship with Jesus Christ. With life adjusting all around them, adolescents are desperate for truth. Preaching should be a place where the Word of God comes alive and reaches their hearts. It should point them to the deep absolute truth of a God who loved them and the deepest reality is they are his. The purpose of this project is to understand the uniqueness of identity formation and marry that with making Christ known to his Church.

To aid First Presbyterian and other youth leaders this project seeks to create a preaching framework that could be used in various settings. The application will walk through a sermon series with materials for small group discussion to demonstrate the ability to tailor communication styles to aid in adolescent identity development. The goal is to create a grid for faithful communicators to reveal Christ and the hearers to see their deepest identity in Him.

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To Rachael, Peyton and Preston who have shown me the deep love of God and for never-ending support, encouragement, laughter and love

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INTRODUCTION

If “words have power”¹ then how we communicate those words means everything. Human beings communicate in various forms of verbal and even nonverbal communication to be understood by one another. They transfer knowledge from one person to the next and to communicate feelings. Actor and writer Peter Ustinov famously said, “Communication is the art of being understood.”² Communication is how we survive and thrive as people. The absolute best of communication “forces you to listen.”³ If we listen, we then seek to understand and be understood.

Communication is also important in one’s relationship with the Lord. Through the work of the Holy Spirit we have the ability to communicate with God almighty and to be able to read his Holy Word so that we might hear him communicate with us. Pastors carry the important job of communicating effectively both the story of God’s work throughout human history, and also to reveal God’s great move of claiming a people for himself.

When sin entered into the world every aspect of human life was fractured and broken. There is not a single person throughout history who has not had to respond to the brokenness and ramifications of a fallen world, even if they did not realize that was what was happening. All of human life is marred by sin’s effects and each age group has to

¹ Duffy Robbins, “The Communication of Adoption,” in *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, ed. Chap Clark (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016), 293.

² J. Kaplana, “Are of Communication,” *Journal of English Language and Literature* (February 2016): 116.

³ Max Dupree, *Leadership is an Art* (New York: Crown, 2004), 102.

deal with it in unique ways. For this project I will focus on the world of adolescents. Adolescence could be defined simply as “the period of life between childhood and adulthood.”⁴

Adolescents today are as fragile as they have ever been. For a long time the community “existed for its members, and the young were no exception . . . community was the central aspect of life together.”⁵ Even if they were problematic rebellious children, “young people knew they were valuable members of the community, were genuinely enjoyed and appreciated, and therefore given boundaries and protected.”⁶ The world was for the advancement of the next generation and people were focused on providing better lives for their children than they had for themselves.

As the world has shifted to postmodernity thoughts on life have changed. The common thought about young people today is, they are “alone, disillusioned, irreverent, uniquely postmodern, belonging to something that is ‘next’ and new, and in search of an authentic faith different from that of the existing adult religion, which simply isn’t cutting it. . . . They are searching for something that is radically different from the faith in which they were raised.”⁷ This same disillusionment creeps into the Church as well. Eddie Gibbs writes, “Due to its cultural entrenchment, the church no longer relates to the

⁴ John Santrock, *Adolescence* (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2013), 29.

⁵ Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today’s Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011) 192.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Christian Smith and Melina L. Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: University Press, 2005), 119.

surrounding culture, hence its increasing marginalization and perceived irrelevance.”⁸

The Church no longer has a position of sharing this common story with society around it. Now, many see it as not relating at all. The mental models of most Americans are not shaped by Christian faith. to the Church must face the harsh reality of “losing ground in terms of our ability to theologically engage students in a way that engenders both current and lifelong faith even while we try to go theologically deeper ourselves.”⁹ The Body of Christ needs to live out the calling of passing on faith and painting the story of God. What we need is more of God and less focus on ourselves. We need to learn how to bless one another.

Identity Shaping Communication

The purpose of this project is to create ways to effectively communicate the goodness of the Lord and help adolescents in their journey of faith. My desire is to better understand young people exactly where they are and be able help the truths of the Gospel sink into their lives. The goal is to not just to pass along information about who God is, but for a deep and meaningful relationship with God to begin. To help assist adolescents’ journey of faith, communication should seek to shape their identities. The fundamental shift and goal of adolescence is identity formation and adolescents need to hear of a God who has died “the righteous for the unrighteous to bring them back to God” (1 Pt 3:18).¹⁰

⁸ Eddie Gibbs, *Emerging Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 18.

⁹ Clark, *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, 7.

¹⁰ All biblical citations will be from the ESV version of the Bible.

God offered his own Son to bring his people back into right standing with himself and wants to shape and form their identities with writing his truths upon their hearts.

This project will contain a framework or template to aid in pastors' communication skills to be used in various settings. The application will walk through a sermon series with materials for small group discussion to demonstrate the ability to tailor communication styles to aid in adolescent identity development. The goal is to create a grid for faithful communicators to reveal Christ and the hearers to see their deepest identity in Him.

Over the last twenty years the Lord has given me the opportunity to communicate his truth to young people in the local church body. My most recent outpost has implanted my family in Baton Rouge to help shepherd and pastor the students of First Presbyterian Church. It is here God began moving me to focus on ways to help guide adolescent identity formation in the truth of who God is and the work he has done on humanity's behalf. My goal is to use the way the Lord has shaped my education and the practical theology of ministry experience to be useful to equip the next generation of Gospel communicators.

In the New Testament the phrase "in Christ" appears over 160 times as a way to highlight the new reality Christ brought when dying on the Cross. No longer are believers left alone, they are "in Christ." The work of the sacrificial system, offerings and the Temple are fulfilled completely "in Christ." This new reality also points back to the very beginning - Genesis. The deepest reality of who we are "in Christ" is that the Lord created us in his very image. As young people move through adolescence, it is imperative

to remind them of their true identities. The deepest and most meaningful aspect of their identities is they are “In Christ.” This is the anchor for their entire life that needs to be communicated effectively and often.

Henri Nouwen warns the “greatest trap in life is not success, popularity, or power, but self-rejection, doubting who we truly are.”¹¹ Advocates of the next generation need to constantly affirm the reality of their life in Christ. May they echo the words of Paul to this generation: “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified” (Rom 8:29-30). The Lord is at work in drawing this generation to himself and as God’s people we have a calling to pass on the faith from one generation to the next.

¹¹ Henri Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction* (New York: Harper, 2006), 30.

PART ONE
MINISTRY CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1

MINISTRY CONTEXT

In August 2016, the normal rainy days in Baton Rouge soon turned into something much stronger than any could predict. Over the course of a few days twenty to thirty inches of rain fell over the metroplex and flooding began to engulf the area. Every river, lake and bayou surrounding the area filled with water destruction began. It is estimated according to the National Weather service that “50,000-75,000 structures were flooded.”¹ The destructive force of the historic flood also pulled back the curtain on the capital city and the true heart of the city.

Earlier in the summer of 2016, Alton Sterling was shot outside of a convenience store by police officers and the city erupted in protests for days. The world watched to see how the officers were going to be treated and where justice would be found for all parties. Just a week later amidst protests near police headquarters an armed man set up an ambush for police officers and ended up shooting and killing three police officers. Tension was high in an already tumultuous city.

¹ Steve Hardy, “What Caused the Historic Flood of 2016, and What are the Odds it can Happen Again,” *The Advocate*, September 10, 2019, https://www.theadvocate.com/louisiana_flood_2016/article_3b7578fc-77b0-11e7-9aab-f7c07d05efcb.html.

Baton Rouge is the state capitol, but many times plays second fiddle to the gem of Louisiana - New Orleans. Like many cities in the deep south Baton Rouge is divided in a multitude of ways. Race, classism, economic disparity, increasing cultural shifts, education choice and many other influences seek to divide the city and segregate the people into only being around those who are like one another. Baton Rouge could be described as a “society wherein race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships.”² Louisiana State University is the one uniting factor for a city split on almost everything else. Divisions only seem to be getting stronger and early in 2016 part of the city tried to annex itself off and form a new city.³ The city and surrounding area needed to find ways to seek unity and come together, not pull further apart. Pastors gathered across racial lines to seek to understand one another and seek God together.

As the rain slowed in August with flood waters all around, people began to flood the streets as well. Some wanted to see the extent of the damage and others needed legitimate help or escape. Rescue workers were found in the form of average people pulling together and even from a group of powerful strangers calling themselves the Cajun Navy. The Cajun Navy was founded after Hurricane Katrina by individuals who worked together to try and rescue people in need. When the levees broke in New Orleans the National Guard and other authorities told them they could not go in, but “they went in

² Michael Emerson, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford Press, 2000), 7.

³ In 2019 the city voted and the new annexed city is moving forward.

and did it” anyway.⁴ It is estimated the Cajun Navy was a part of the rescue effort of nearly 30,000 people. The narrative was changing. People asked, how could a redneck country boy with a confederate flag on the back of his boat be driving into the storm waters, risking his life rescuing African American brothers and sisters? People were nonetheless happy that help was coming.

The water receded and then a new flood of people began. There were people seeking refuge in any area they could find (close to 40,000 homes were impacted by some level of water damage). The area also began to be flooded by a different kind of people. Volunteers from across the world showed up in Baton Rouge to lend a hand. Every relief agency mobilized and set up services in the capitol city. Churches processed donations, volunteers handed out meals, acted as shelters and worked together to provide hope.

As recovery work began the first step would be to rid the area of any affected water damage. This meant pulling everything out of damaged homes, most often down to the studs, and lining the streets with debris. Fully exposed, people’s belongings were on the street for the world to see and there was no turning back. Water damage could lead to mold and deterioration of homes, so it had to be done and done quickly. The extent and severity of flooding translated into an estimated \$3.8 billion in residential property damage and 90,000 automobiles lost.⁵

⁴ Melissa Locker, “What is the Cajun Navy,” *Southern Living*, September 10, 2019, <https://www.southernliving.com/culture/what-is-cajun-navy>.

⁵ Dek Terrel, “The Economic Impact of the August 2016 Flood on the State of Louisiana,” *Louisiana*, September 10, 2019, http://gov.louisiana.gov/assets/docs/RestoreLA/SupportingDocs/Meeting-9-28-16/2016-August-Flood-Economic-Impact-Report_09-01-16.pdf.

The heart of the city shone brightly though. Race, classism, diversity, economics were no longer dividing factors. The people of this area pulled together and leaned on one another and into the Lord. With loss all around, people relied on each other and looked to the faith community to step up when the government systems could not fill the gap. Baton Rouge was showing a deeper heart and began to look and feel like a community.

First Presbyterian Church

First Presbyterian Church is situated just a few blocks from the Mississippi River in the middle of downtown Baton Rouge. Founded in 1827, First Presbyterian is a historical church grounded on a reliance in the Lord God. The Word of God is central to this congregation whether it is preached, taught, memorized or sung in the pews. The church desires to be welcoming to anyone who walks through its doors. The staff and congregation are engaged in the full community around them.

First Presbyterian is a predominately White and middle-to-upper class congregation. There are three main worship services offering traditional and contemporary worship with a weekly attendance of around seven hundred. The church offers educational and missional opportunities to every age group with the desire to help implant the seeds of faith and imprint the Gospel story over every member. There is classroom time in Sunday School, Bible study and home groups as a way to learn and better understand the Reformed faith and to journey together in relationship with God. Learning also extends into experiencing faith being lived out in community and missional service.

Another distinctive of First Presbyterian is its desire to be intergenerational. Children and adolescents are encouraged to attend corporate worship with their parents instead of being asked to leave for children and youth programming. This uniqueness allows for young people to see and hear about faith, liturgy and truth even before they can fully understand everything happening around them. This also creates a movement within the Body of Christ, as people then take on roles to serve each other and one another's children. The Next Generation is right in front of them, so they seek to pull together, to be a family of faith, and to walk alongside children and adolescents as they come to connect with God Almighty. The children's and youth programs have over three hundred participants, so a multitude of volunteers are needed. The church employs two full time youth staff and part time interns as well as full time children's director and part time early childhood team members. A beautiful hallmark of First Presbyterian is the willingness for its members to pour into the next generation.

Rooted And Reaching

In the fall of 2016, following historic flooding in Baton Rouge and unexpected financial gifts, the leadership of First Presbyterian embarked on a new campaign. They wanted to preserve the historic campus and wanted to “reach further into the world and root deeper in Christ in our community, we are developing a strong foundation for the future of First Presbyterian Church.”⁶ The original campaign to raise five million dollars began to give church leadership a vision statement of what they wanted the church to be.

⁶ Gerrit Dawson “Rooted and Reaching,” First Presbyterian Church, September 10, 2019, <http://fpcbr.org/files/Case%20for%20Support%20Brochure.pdf>.

They were to be a body that was rooted. Rooted first and foremost in Christ himself, but also rooted in the historic downtown community around them in Baton Rouge. There was an aesthetic focus on creating beautiful environments within the walls of First Presbyterian in enhancing worship and the historic campus in downtown Baton Rouge. The church has a hallmark of being dedicated to the Word of God, but this campaign helped solidify the desire to root the people of First Presbyterian in God's Word.

First Presbyterian is also to be reaching, reaching to be the outpost the Lord has given them in downtown Baton Rouge, but also all around the world with the love of Christ. The campaign situated the congregation to be a bright shining light of Christ pushing back the darkness all around. The campaign helped the church invest deeply into the community by helping to launch a new Christian school for an underprivileged part of Baton Rouge. Another opportunity to be a reaching congregation came in the form of church planting and eventually helping launch a congregation in New Orleans.

This vision gave First Presbyterian the ability to live into the great theologian John Calvin's Reformed world and life view. Presbyterians have a deep appreciation and emphasis on "education, cultural engagement, political involvement, and social service all having a linkage back to Calvin's comprehensive reform of Geneva."⁷ Worship and spirituality are not just segregated to Sunday morning services or inside a church building. All of life is under the rule and lordship of Jesus Christ, so the congregation seeks to send its leadership and members into the mission field of their lives to daily surrender to Him.

⁷ Donald S. Fortson, III, *The Presbyterian Story* (Presbyterian Lay Committee Publications, 2012), 108.

Being rooted and reaching leads into work with the next generation. There is a strong focus on rooting children and adolescents in learning theology, Scripture, spiritual disciplines and walking alongside them throughout faith formation. Each of them is encouraged to reach their friends and share the love of Christ as missionaries sent out into the world. Young people were not left out, but encouraged to join the mission of God through the life of First Presbyterian. Each year through Vacation Bible School and youth camps, young people invite their friends and community to join them in growing closer to Christ. Our goal as a congregation was for this vision to not just be lived out in the church walls or just as head knowledge. The goal is to see heart transformation and for the remainder of their lives to live into the identity of who Christ is and share his love with anyone they are connected to.

This fertile ground of ministry is where my theological education and two decades of practical theology grew together to shape this project. My desire was to blend the understanding and knowledge of the next generation to better equip our people to minister to the next generation. There are many ways to minister to the next generation and my focus centers around the ways people communicate the Gospel. First Presbyterian has a rich history of caring for the next generation and I have been blessed to stand on the shoulders of many faithful pastors, ministers, volunteers and young people who love Jesus and want to see him be made known.

CHAPTER 2

ADOLESCENTS TODAY

As a society there is a great love of children and belief that children are the future. The world believes in them and wants to see them as treasures. Children are deeply loved and cherished but there is a clear difference between adults and the children around them. Chap Clark describes this reality by saying, “Human life span has historically been understood as having only two primary stages: childhood and adulthood. Children were viewed as precious and a nurtured resource and as such were guided into their place in the world.”¹ As scholarship and understanding have evolved, there has been a shift from one stage of childhood into adulthood, to acknowledgement of a new stage. Enter the world of adolescence.

Adolescents are no longer children, but definitely have not reached adulthood yet. The timing and understanding of this new people group has been studied greatly over the last century. Adolescents are an enigma to many around them and some may even “relegate it to an amorphous transitional phase of life.”² Society wants to better

¹ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 7.

² *Ibid.*, 8.

understand them because it treasures them, but also for selfish reasons because they are a great resource and commodity for adults. To better understand this group of people one must understand all of the dynamics of an adolescent.

Puberty is a clear marker of the beginning of adolescence; it signals something new is beginning and even physiologically this little one is no longer a child. The length and end point of adolescence is harder to pinpoint. There is not a clear physiological or societal marker for the ending of adolescence. Traditional markers of graduations, voting rights and even marriage are not clear indicators that the move into adulthood has happened. Many “adults” may even wonder if they fully have entered into the world of adulthood themselves.

Enter their World

Cultural anthropologists enter into a community to study and observe a people group to better understand them. To understand adolescents and not just make blank accusations or assumptions, one must be willing to enter into their world. People have memories of their own moves from childhood to adulthood, but must also realize things are definitely different many decades later.

To enter into the world of adolescents one must look at the context they are living in. Every aspect of life and every aspect of a situation must be examined to build a proper framework to better understanding. Also, the internal and the external context of the believer must be examined. The internal context is the history, family life, psychological and sociological factors of a person or group of people. The external context is the surrounding area, ethnicity, class, climate, culture and narratives that follow a group of

people. When looking at the internal and external factors of a situation it is wise to take one's time. To be effective ministers and get a clear picture of the anthropology takes time and patience. It requires time to learn as much as possible.

Internal context can be perceived as “primarily relational and are generally located within the familial systems, structures, and experiences that shape how a person or people group view themselves.”³ One has the ability to learn about a person, when she fully gets to understand every aspect of his life. This is especially important for the world of adolescents. A person's internal context impacts the way they move through adolescence. An example might be, if a teenager has had trouble adjusting to their parent's divorce, it is sometimes complicated for them to adjust at school or to other relationships.

In an “ideal, all-things considered world, mothers and fathers are very important in the developmental life of an adolescent. At the same time, youth ministers must constantly seek to care for students and families.”⁴ There is no such thing as the traditional “normal” family situation anymore. Families are always different and always changing. The makeup of a twentieth century family unit looks vastly different than just a few decades ago. Internal context also includes psychosocial development, family systems and an individual's experiences. One example of this could be to see how a family handles finances. An adolescent learns the appreciation of money, how to handle it, who makes financial decisions and how to use money from their family of origin.

³ Chap Clark, “Youth Ministry as Practical Theology,” *Journal of Youth Ministry* 7:1 (2008): 9-38.

⁴ Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark and Dave Rahn, eds., *Starting Right* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 28.

Their context of wealth, poverty or anywhere in between impacts their ability to navigate financial waters. Most adolescents will not realize how deep these internal factors play out throughout their daily lives. They could grasp pretty quickly the external factors, but not so much the internal factors of how they were raised.

With the move from childhood into adolescence there is agreement on the physiological changes a young person moves through. The movement from adolescence into adulthood has fewer formal markers and the length of time is not fixed. One major aspect of internal context is in a person's psychosocial development. The theory of psychosocial development comes from theorist Erik Erikson, who built on the work of Sigmund Freud and divided life into eight stages of development. For adolescents this development overlaps three different stages, which he identifies as competence (can I make it), fidelity (who am I) and love (can I love). Each of these areas create a "healthy path in adolescence establishing a clear and definitive sense of who you are and how you fit into the world around you."⁵

As adolescence has lengthened in time a new category, the emerging adult, has come into being in recent time. Jeffrey Arnett describes the dilemma of emerging adulthood as being the "age of identity explorations, the age of instability, the self-focused age, the age of feeling in between, and the age of possibilities."⁶ Young people are taking longer to "grow up" and move through the process. For the majority of adolescents, it would not be out of the ordinary to move home after they graduate school

⁵ Jeffrey Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 170.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 208.

and “wait” for the best job to come their way. This is not so they can grow closer to their families; it is a way for them to prolong the move into adulthood and out on their own, even if it is subconscious. Roger Epstein goes even further by saying, “The turmoil we see during the teen years in modern America is caused by the artificial extension of childhood past puberty. We hold our young people back and isolate them completely from adulthood.”⁷ His suggestion is that sometimes it is not adolescents who are choosing to maintain childlike behaviors, sometimes the adult systems that are around them hold them back. Over time culture has taken roles and responsibilities away from adolescents and relegate them to responsibilities for when they “grow up,” yet does not allow them to move on in the present. This elongating of adolescence comes into play when thinking about individuation and how an adolescent “becomes” who they really are.

Individuation highlights the ability for an adolescent to move into adulthood. *Webster’s Dictionary* describes individuation as, “The development of the individual from the universal or the process by which individuals in society become differentiated from one another.”⁸ In the world of adolescents this means moving through the process of becoming oneself and also being an active participant in the whole of society around them. A young person is then “willing to take responsibility for his or her life and choices, and has entered interdependently into the community and adult relationships.”⁹

⁷ Robert Epstein, *Teen 2.0: Saving Our Children and Families from the Torment of Adolescence* (Fresno, CA: Quill Drive, 2010), 144.

⁸ Webster’s Dictionary, “Individuation.”

⁹ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 11.

Adolescents seek to achieve understanding from adults, but also away from adults, processing the world around them on their own. It is in their own inner monologue where they are processing life, often influenced more by their peers or the media of today. For some this makes it harder to move into adulthood. It is seemingly in this space where media strikes a chord with young people. Media presents a life without consequences. Adolescents want that lifestyle but want mom and dad to continue to foot the bill.

Adolescents need help to move out of childish ways and into adulthood, not just with physical things, but through daily presence in their lives, people walking alongside them. Adults want to help adolescents individuate which, “requires people to construct their own life course, so that socialization is something that is done by the individual rather than imposed by outside social and institutional forces.”¹⁰ Typically, adolescents are seen as moving into adulthood by things like “willingness to take responsibility for his or her life and choices, and has entered interdependently into the community and adult relationships.”¹¹ This move is difficult and young people need others who care for them deeply to be undergirding forces all around them.

The other major tentpole of development is external forces, which include “anything outside the individual and their familial history that influences how a community and even a collection of individuals will think about a given issue.”¹² This is

¹⁰ Jeffrey Arnett, *Socialization in Emerging Adulthood in Handbook of Socialization* (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 214.

¹¹ Chap Clark, *Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 42.

¹² Clark, *Youth Ministry as Practical Theology*, 28.

predominantly how and where media, culture and the arts influence the life of an individual. More people are influenced by the world around them, instead of their direct family or lives of their own. Walt Mueller goes so far as to say “When push comes to shove, American dads and moms are devoting less time to bringing up their sons and daughters, thereby allowing someone or something else to raise their kids.”¹³ Adults must not stop parenting and influencing their children or they will hand those influential reigns over to culture. Dean Borgman warns of the danger of turning over the reigns because, “the adolescent identity quest is carried out with mirrors.”¹⁴ Young people look into the mirrors of peers, media and culture to understand who they are, how they compare and also process where they fit in. Parents and those who are committed to the next generation need to be one of those mirrors. They must seek for young people to “look more deeply at the way God sees us—beloved, accepted, affirmed and worthy of salvation.”¹⁵

The rise of media over the last few centuries has become a powerful force at play in society. Advertising agencies and companies around the world seek to use media of the day to spark people to act a certain way. Advertising executives will use sex, money, fame, deep longing in people’s hearts, power or anything they can to influence them to buy their product. They even try to convince people they would never be able to function again without a certain product.

¹³ Walt Mueller, *Youth Culture 101* (Grand Rapids, MI: Youth Specialties, 2007), 15.

¹⁴ Dean Borgman, *Foundations of Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 7.

¹⁵ Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, 27.

Hyper-Reality

Hyper-reality is a sociology term from Jean Baudrillard describing the reality that culture is creating, which tells a story that is “hyper real.” Hyperreality is “that of a state of being where symbols and signs in the visual arts can radically influence and alter the original event being represented.”¹⁶ Media displays vast amounts of sexuality on television, movies and music in a world where sexual dysfunction is rampant. It over emphasizes money and possessions to a context where the federal government is just like the majority of the populace, severely in debt. Media portrays a world that has it all together, yet society is far from it. As young, highly suggestive adolescents watch and learn, they try to make sense of these versions of society. It must be asked, is what they are seeing a real picture of a full life? It is here in these places the Church must communicate with truth and clarity a proper understanding of life, self and of who God is.

This hyper real world has consequences affecting adolescents greatly. People have a story to tell as a society and want the freedom to express it in various art forms. The problem is at the end, the art form is less real than the story on display or where it started out in the first place. Baudrillard goes on to say that with hyperreality, “the original object no longer has true meaning. But instead it is the replica or simulation that has become real.”¹⁷ What is on display in a hyper real culture is not the reality the world desires to show or really what it wants. It is a false mirror showing glimmers of the truth.

¹⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation: The Body, In Theory: Histories of Cultural Materialism* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1995), 54.

¹⁷ Ibid.

One of the root problems with the world of hyper-reality for adolescents is it shows a very self-focused mentality. The focus is on “me:” my decisions are about me; my time is about me. I am the king of my life and the metanarrative becomes all about my desires and wants. I am the leading actor, and I am the headlining singer, so turn the volume up. Yes, people help others, give their money away and be kind to people, but in the end, it is all for one’s own gain. It is a publicity campaign for one’s own persona. People are center-stage and the culture around them tells them this is what life is all about. All of one’s dreams and remote thoughts about reality can be fulfilled in a reality that is a faint glimpse of real life. It is reality in a hyper dimension of one’s own mind. A young adolescent does not know where the persona ends and where their true identity really begins.

Another major area where hyper reality has impacted culture is the way it has taken charge in adolescent’s views of morality. Every medium of today’s culture is a new input into the way teenagers view the world and how they interact with it. One can begin to understand the way students look and respond to culture by studying their worldview. Worldview can be looked at as the “basic deep-seated presuppositions that undergird the culture.”¹⁸ They have begun to develop deep thoughts and feelings about the culture they are in and it is usually inside their worldview that they begin to act and live out their morals.

¹⁸ Duffy Robbins, *This Way to Youth Ministry: An Introduction to the Adventure* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 250.

With the rise of a global society through technology this challenge will likely continue to grow. No longer are teenagers being influenced primarily through their families and those that are in close proximity to them. They now are interacting with, being educated from and influenced by people who could be halfway around the world. People they most likely will never meet are molding adolescents. Views on morality may be grey for students today, since the world they live in has many different voices that speak loudly about morality. Students have access to all of those voices with a click or swipe of a finger. The things young people justify today would never have been allowed ten or fifteen years ago. Global society has allowed many different worldviews to eek their way into the postmodern world of adolescents.

Media and culture play against the perpetual identity crisis teenagers face. Adolescence could be described as a constant state to “adapt to the latest trend . . . even down to young people learning ‘how to dress, make-up their faces, talk and act from movies and television.’”¹⁹ The entire industry of media is built on the desire for the latest and greatest. People cannot be happy with the clothes or technology trinkets they own now; they must have the newest one out there. It completely plays into any insecurity that one might have about who she is. One’s identity can be wrapped up in the possessions that he owns and the media he has hoped to mold his own image around. Society chases after obtaining certain products and fashionable items, only to find that once they obtain them, they are out of style or not the latest or best product available. Discontentment is the new normal many young people are facing. It is not about a world of the Builder

¹⁹ Dean, Clark and Rahn, *Starting Right*, 185.

generation in wanting to create a better life. It is now a world of endless choice and the wants of today being quickly replaced with something new.

“Hyper reality” also has the danger to elevate the virtual world and downplay the real world people live in each and every day. Mueller says, “A person’s virtual world becomes more important and real than his actual world.”²⁰ People have created themselves into their own media image. Who one is digitally supersedes who she is with the person across the table or her friends at school. Adolescents compare themselves to one another by how many “friends,” likes and followers they have online, friends who at best could be described as acquaintances. Adolescents are spending considerable amounts of time online and engaged with a flickering screen and a virtual world that is at their fingertips. Society has exchanged the light of the world in people directly around it for the light of little screens, and miss out on one another and the support systems God intended people to have - living, breathing human beings created in his image. Mueller describes how the “breakdown of traditional support systems—most notably the family—has also contributed to the number of kids who harness the Internet in search of answers to their legitimate questions.”²¹ Everything can be “Googled” and all of the information of the world is available when wanted.

The virtual world is just another mirror where adolescents compare themselves to one another. It is a dangerous game of comparison and one that could cause adolescents unnecessary stressors and feelings of unhappiness and despair. Not only are students

²⁰ Mueller, *Youth Culture 101*, 135.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 172.

comparing themselves, but they now enter into the age of cyber-bullying. Adolescents are highly influenced by the way people look at them or speak to them, whether in “real-life” or in real time online. If it is just a flickering screen with words on them, there is no context or social cues of what is being said. There is no natural recourse or view of a consequence to one’s actions in a digital world. Adolescents need someone to help them process the messages they see each day and help them protect themselves from a virtual world that could hurt their feelings or cause them to think negatively about who they have been created for. Adults need to monitor the way adolescents engage the powerful world of the Internet and what it is their students are engaging in.

Media and culture have also robbed adolescents of their own creativity. They have “forgotten how to actively listen, make their own fun and enjoy silence. When compared with television, music, movies and video games, real life is dull and boring.”²² They no longer are creating culture and engaging in their own enjoyment with their imaginations. They simply take on the mind dump of entertainment in front of them and want to be entertained. Silence is not something that is normal for most adolescents; they are in a perpetual state of motion and on the constant move from one thing to the next. Both adults and now even adolescents use their schedules as badges of honor at just how busy or important they really are. Time is a precious commodity and people are interested in showing how their time is taken up. The piece that is missing is who they are spending this precious time with.

²² Ibid., *Youth Culture 101*, 154.

The world of media and culture is a world that is moving families further apart. David White even goes so far as to say, “In each succeeding generation, music and media have driven youth and their families further and further apart. Creating markets means creating separate cultures, thus making the generations increasingly incomprehensible to each other.”²³ He highlights the fact that advertising is all about getting different generations to want different things, thus creating more market streams of revenue.

Media uses both subtle and overt advertising to keep kids hooked into desiring more. Billions of dollars are spent each year to tell teens they need to have more than what they currently have. This does not just magically begin when adolescents become adults and have their own lives. Advertising agencies want to start while kids are young and lock them into their products: “By the time they become adolescents these children not only have begun their own careers as consumers, but have acquired a significant influence on the consumption patterns and preferences of their parents.”²⁴ This is just one avenue where the next generation is not being treasured but is now a commodity.

Media is all about reproducing itself time and again. A number one song on the charts is only as good as the artist having the ability to do it again. A blockbuster movie is only really amazing if it can produce a successful sequel. As students are drawn deep into these wells, there is usually only a longing for more. And as people long for more media, and depend upon it, they fail to grow up. People may not be “told” to not grow up, but they might as well be. It is hip to be young, to strive to always live as the young do, to

²³ Clark, *Starting Right*, 185.

²⁴ Aaron H. Esman, *Adolescence and Culture* (New York: Columbia, 1993), 50.

live carefree with no worry in the world. People do not move into adulthood because it simply seems more appealing to stay young and important. Culture is fascinated with its youth and is always looking for ways that people can stay youthful or return to the fantasy of the “fountain of youth.”

A good practical theologian must pay attention to the messages that are portrayed to the target audience. The Church must exegete the culture in order to have a voice of influence that resonates deeper, if not louder than the culture. It needs to understand how impactful media and hyper-reality may be to individuals as well as groups of people. Again, context is key and the culture of the day is a great barometer on the world of the people the Church is looking to influence. Once having a firm grasp on the internal and external factors of context one can move into a biblical exegesis of the issue.

Influence

Adolescence is a time of life where people can be influenced in a variety of ways and find themselves a very influential people. Adults in their lives, want to join them on their journey and help them traverse across the tightrope of adolescence. This phase “necessitates a child experiencing the comfort of a committed and nurturing presence, a supportive environment where a child is encouraged to explore, experiment, and a relational setting where appropriate independence is encouraged.”²⁵ One way to help students stay centered through this developmental time is to introduce them to the words of Solomon the king who had everything: “I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind” (Ecc 1:14). Adolescents

²⁵ Clark, *Starting Right*, 50.

are in danger of focusing on the secondary things of life, which only speaks to gaining more and being a slave to attaining material possessions. Deep down those things will never satisfy. These things may give a temporary high or consume one's attention for a moment, but in the end when the shininess wears off, he will go looking for a new thing to give his attention to. The real danger comes when a person needs to keep increasing the volume to hear or feel anything. Again, chasing after the wind. As a pastor, my hope is for the Church to encourage adolescents in the way they process life, pushing them to understand the fallen nature of this world and pointing them to the eternally fulfilling nature of God. In the end, all the things of the world will never satisfy the deep longing that each one has in her inmost being. The King of Kings is the only one who can fill those longings.

The culture of today's world also makes adolescents look at community and family life very differently. For example, things have changed in what is typical for a given night at home. Students and parents may eat together briefly, but each runs off to their own space, their own media device or fixation for the remainder of the evening. Culture communicates that each person should be unique and individual and if someone is not, he should have it his way or be unhappy.

There are two dangers here; one, losing the vision to be the people of God and join the corporate story, and two, students not having a true place to dialogue. The Bible gives a reminder that God created a people in his image and seeks to be in constant relationship with them. Certainly, Christ came to this earth to tear down the impersonal nature of going to the tabernacle and someone else being a mediator between a person

and God. Christ also established a community of faith, the Body of Christ, called to be together. The call also remains to seek out a community to process life together and lift up the name of Christ. Paul writes that all people make up the Body of Christ and serve integral roles (1 Cor 12). The Church is formed as many parts comprising the whole, with no part being more important than another.

Adolescents need a community around them to process life and have ongoing dialogue about the world around them. They are eager people, who want to move to a more individual thinking process, but still need an outlet of people to speak into their lives. They need a faithful and trustworthy mirror to take life's questions to, not just search the internet for an answer. The Church need not abandon them. Community is a "way of living and relating; you gather around people with whom you want to proclaim the truth that we are the beloved sons and daughters of God."²⁶ Yes, they are their own people and have their own feelings about life today, but the Church must surround them with adults who have no agenda but to give them a space to dialogue about life. Students may have their peers to talk to each day, but as a sounding board for life's daily happenings, the adults in their lives need to help provide them and their families an outlet.

As the Church helps young people wrestle with the impact of culture in their lives, it needs to help them see the affect media and culture has. Looking at young people today, media and outside voices are not just observed passively. These influences sink into their hearts much deeper than they realize. Paul gives a great reminder of how

²⁶ Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, 113.

Christians should not be “conformed anymore to the patterns of this world” (Rom 12:1). The desire of a believer in Christ, should be to not let the things of this world influence her being. Disciples are to be people who are striving to become more like Christ, and not like the world around them. This is how they are able to live lives that impact others with God’s redeeming love. The way people live has a huge impact on them. Paul’s call is to continue to be “transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2).

Christ is the ultimate reward and one’s life in him is of supreme importance, but this value must be shown to the adolescents, because “most young adults, do not have a value of satisfaction; the hyper-real world has not given them healthy expectation of what life can offer.”²⁷ The Church comes alongside adolescents and helps give them real and true expectations about what life is and is not. The words of the Apostle Paul to the church of Philippi must be echoed and how he learned to be “content whatever the circumstance, whether in plenty or in want” (Phil 4:11-12).

Seeing Them Face-to-Face

One danger adolescents face is the world of abandonment. Chap Clark informs that, “Culture itself is no longer attentive to the needs of children and adolescents as it once was, and therefore, the young work hard at finding how to make it on their own.”²⁸ He points to the reality that most of the systems in kid’s lives today are abandoning them and not coming alongside them. Sure, kids are offered plenty for their attention and

²⁷ Mark Sayers, *The Trouble with Paris* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 64.

²⁸ Clark, *Hurt*, 42.

enjoyment, but most of those systems when broken down are really after the system's own gain, not the child's. When looking at the world of a teenager it can be seen that "the young have not arrogantly turned their backs on the adult world. Rather, they have been forced by a personal sense of abandonment to band together and create their own world – separate, semi-secret, and vastly different from the world around them."²⁹ Even the family system is broken: "The postmodern family is often so concerned about the needs, struggles, and issues of parents that the emotional and development needs of the children go largely unmet."³⁰ Adolescents and the next generation need people to simply spend free time with them and to just be together. There should be no agenda, no gain from the adult's time, just simply be present in their world and in the world of their families.

As people enter into their world and see them face-to-face, adolescents are moved away from aloneness and their use of media/culture drawing them more into themselves. When adults engage in the lives of adolescents, they show another way to live and a place to discover who they are. Community is where people can find accountability, blessing and discipleship. True community also counters adolescent's loneliness. Mueller encourages that, "By building in accountability, we're preparing them to move gradually into a healthy autonomy."³¹ Healthy communities are where adolescents are better prepared to move from adolescence into adulthood by having someone to walk hand-in-hand with them through this new world of young adulthood. Just as the promise of God's

²⁹ Ibid., 44.

³⁰ David Elkind, *Ties that Stress: The New Family Imbalance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 36.

³¹ Mueller, *Youth Culture 101*, 128.

blessing to offer his face and countenance (Num 6), adults too get to offer adolescents their presence and be a blessing from the Lord into their lives.

The work of the Church of God is to figure out a way to “do life” with the young people they are trying to reach. One main way the Church can adapt with this changing context is to build up strong leaders to do everyday aspects of life with students.

Adolescents are not able to handle all life will hand them. They need older individuals to walk alongside them as they explore the new contours of adulthood. The church should not just be getting them to attend programs or events; it needs outlets to just be in their world and vice versa.

One of the great assets that most churches do not take advantage of is their homes. Simply inviting adolescents into one’s home can change the dynamic of the faith journey and the journey into adulthood. This is not a blind invitation to not take seriously one’s own privacy and space. It is an invitation to bring adolescents into the home and allow them to observe how people do life with their own family. It serves to show them healthy adult relationships and how to handle conflict and tough decisions. Giving students healthy and appropriate relationships with older individuals is another outlet and model than just television screen and peers.

Peer relationships are sometimes troubling and dangerous for teenagers. Everyone is on a similar playing field and has roughly the same life experiences. Epstein looks at the challenge of teenagers and gives the simple advice, “Teenagers are most vulnerable to mischief when they are with peers and less vulnerable when they are with adults.”³² The

³² Epstein, *Teen 2.0*, 333.

Church has influence in teenagers' lives as people invite them into theirs. Adult role models or mentors are able to show adolescents lessons from their past or can serve as a sounding board for the difficulties and challenges adolescents are going through.

If a church dedicates resources and effort into a specific youth ministry, it must adjust to showing kids they are individually more important than the programs they are a part of. They are worth and deserving of all the efforts placed before them by a church simply because they are beloved children of God. They should be wanted, not simply counted. There is an all-encompassing danger of simply watching attendance numbers and wondering why this or that kid did not show up. The danger is when what begins to be communicated to the students that do show up is "Where is everyone else?" There is a danger of communicating to them about their own worth, presence and give them the idea that the church wants something from them, not just being with them. They need to be celebrated and their commitment to programs should be praised. The church has the ability to tell young people they are important, and this can break down their walls of feeling abandoned by the systems in their lives. Adults can celebrate their presence when they show up and encourage them, not reprimand them when they are away. The goal should be to build them up so they know they are an important part of the local church body just by being who they are. In their adolescence they have something to offer the whole church and build up the rest of the body.

Adults can help by teaching kids and showing them their importance, enabling them to surrender their whole lives to Christ. He is the one to be on the throne of their lives: "The story of the Good News is not about my fulfillment but rather the invitation to

step into the grand stream of God's story."³³ People can walk beside adolescents as they do life and point them to the grand story that is all around them. Hopefully, this is also where they begin to walk hand-in-hand with the Savior and he reveals to them how they are intricately part of his plan for this world. They may walk into the church full of worry and may feel life is out of control with no centering direction. As they encounter the lifesaving message of Christ, they should walk away changed and encouraged that their heavenly Father is in complete control.

Teenagers will always be bombarded with culture and constantly struggling to process its various messages. My hope is that ministries will help give adolescents a framework to think about those confusing messages and a way to process how to act. Older human beings are able to look at the culture and media of today and help students understand if what they are seeing and hearing is reality or just a faint and shallow shell of reality. Ministers "treat them like adults but lead them like adolescents."³⁴ Helping students process this information and determine true reality, helps to move them from adolescence and into adulthood. The Church lives out the Gospel with students where they live, learn and interact. Through these ways it is able to be an influence for good and able to support healthy tiers of influence in the lives of adolescence.

Identity formation processed around the community of faith helps to guide and direct an easily influenced adolescent. All around is the mystery of God's love and people can "know you are loved, and the more you will see how deeply your sisters and

³³ Clark, *Hurt*, 188.

³⁴ Clark, *Starting Right*, 57.

brothers in the human family are loved. The more you love others without conditions, the more you can love yourself the way God loves you and others. And the more you are loved by others, the more you realize how much you are beloved by God.”³⁵ This community of faith can be a guide through the journey of faith and ground us in the “love of Christ that surpasses knowledge and that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph 3:19).

³⁵Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction*, 125.

PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 3

LITERARY REVIEW ON COMMUNICATION

As Paul is equipping and training a young disciple, Timothy, he charges him to “Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tm 4:2). Timothy was ready to lead and Paul wanted to encourage him to speak boldly. God has gifted every individual with a sphere of influence and each one has the ability to lead and speak truth. For pastors and teachers he has given a unique opportunity to be his voice over a portion of his flock.

There are many who are given a unique gift to expound the Word of God or communicate with great vigor, but every person has the ability to teach. All have experienced life, so can share with others what has been observed and how the Lord has worked in one’s life. However, people must be careful to harness their moment of influence to not allow the depth of God’s goodness to be lost in communication. The Gospel is the greatest news for the people of the world and disciples want their hearts to burn like the disciples on the Road to Emmaus (Lk 23:13-35).

Much has been written on communication models and various aspects of preaching. This section looks into the “what” of communication and highlights the great

truth of a person's identity in Christ Jesus. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God's people should be drawn to His Word. This is not an infatuation with a particular communicator, but seeing the Word come alive. Peter told Jesus, "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the word of eternal life, and we have believed and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:68-69). As truth is communicated, God's people will hunger and thirst for more of him. Communication should point them squarely to the Cross of Christ and show them he has the words of eternal life and can be trusted.

Theological Influences

Supremacy of God in Preaching by John Piper

John Piper has created a resurgence of biblical preaching throughout the church world over the last twenty plus years. His unique calling is to locate pastors deeply in God's Word so that their affection for Christ would grow. As people long for more of Christ then they are able to speak Gospel truth into the lives of people. As they hunger for him, they turn their focus to his Holy Word as the "bread of life."

Piper's work, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, uses the life of Jonathan Edwards as a basis to help ground Gospel communication. Piper traces through the glorious task of preaching to God's people to help them to savor God by "teaching the mind and reaching the heart."¹

A core truth of *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* for communication to adolescents is an emphasis on the heart. The next generation needs to hear of a God who is Immanuel, a God who is with them. He is a God who cares and whose truth is real and

¹ John Piper, *Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 24.

can be trusted. They need to hear this God is deeply in love with them. This first begins in the pastor as he surrenders himself to the Gospel, washing over him as he studies it faithfully, to be “utterly dependent on the mercy of God for its fulfillment.”² As he daily surrenders himself to the Gospel washing over his mind, the “Holy Spirit fills the heart with holy affections and the heart fills the mouth.”³ The pastor who has surrendered himself to God’s holy Word has allowed it to sink deep into his heart and then he is able to speak directly to the heart of the people he is called to minister.

One of the commonalities of life throughout any time period is emotion. Emotions, like love, anger, fear and joy are timeless. As an individual is reading through the Bible she may not understand what all is happening or not be able to relate to the setting, but can relate to the emotions found in the very real people of the Bible. She may ask, how was God making himself known to her and how was she feeling? This speaks volumes as she can see a God who also is speaking over her. Preaching should come from a heart shaped by the goodness of the Lord and that is yielded to his working in and through a person. If a pastor surrenders herself like Piper and Edwards implore, then the Lord may use her to shepherd his flock.

The next generation is positioned with vast knowledge at their fingertips and almost anything in this world is available, but they still need to be in awe. Piper reminds readers that “people are starving for the grandeur of God.”⁴ The Lord has placed inside of

² Ibid., 99.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 107.

each person a deep longing for him to be in awe-filled worship of Him. Communicators are given the holy task of “painting the grandeur of God . . . and to spread a banquet of His beauty.”⁵ God is the supreme focus in preaching and the hope is he would be supreme in the hearts of those blessed to hear Gospel communication.

Christ Centered Preaching by Bryan Chapell

Christ Centered Preaching was one of the first books where my mind really began to explore what it could look like to have communication that fed God’s people and drew them closer to him. Chapell weaved together the story of creating life change in people’s heart by being faithful to the holy Scriptures and “revealing God’s means for enabling his people to glorify him and to know his grace.”⁶ Communicators use their understanding of biblical theology to draw from the well of Scripture and to be able to communicate the text before people and also draw on what God might want to say to his people today. No matter how often people hear it or study it, Scripture “discloses God.”⁷ Communicators do not focus on finding where Christ is mentioned in every text, but show how the text manifests God’s grace in order to prepare and enable his people to embrace the hope provided by Christ.

This type of communication dedicated to making Christ known helps aid adolescents in getting a clear picture of the Gospel. They can see the way God created them in his own image and how sin has completely separated people from him. They can

⁵ Ibid., 108.

⁶ Bryan Chapell, *Christ Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 271.

⁷ Ibid., 275.

understand the goodness of God shown in the life of Jesus who paid the penalty for sin, giving eternal life. A key distinctive when Christ is painted vividly is power to fight against selfish and narcissistic tendencies. The Gospel proclaims it is not about humanity and yet Christ gave himself for all fully.

Christ centered preaching seeks to create a foundation for communication in the truth of “what God would do, has done, or will do through the ministry of Christ.”⁸ Keeping the gaze of one’s heart on Jesus allows her to see her true identity is in what God says about her and what he has done on her behalf. Communicators who keep their teaching and preaching Christ focused guard against tendencies of the self and offering another self-help topic. Creator God has faithfully revealed himself to his creation that he loved so much to send his one and only son to die on their behalf. This is foundational for people to know who they are in him.

Desiring the Kingdom by James K.A. Smith

Most books on the topic of preaching and teaching focus on the unique voice of the pastor or teacher. Smith opens to the deep truth of Ecclesiastes, that God “has put eternity in man’s heart” (Ecc 3:11). Humanity’s very being is hardwired to seek and desire the Kingdom of God. Before people realize the truth of the Gospel, they know there is something missing and seek to fill this void. When the Gospel comes alive in one’s heart he lives into the words of Augustine of Hippo: “You have made us and draw

⁸ Ibid., 287.

us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you.”⁹ All of one’s longings find their meaning and truth in him.

Desiring the Kingdom sheds light on this search and positions readers to worship throughout the whole of their lives, not just during corporate worship. Human beings are formed to give themselves over to worship. People give their attention and affection away all of the time, many times not even realizing the deep impact it has on their souls. Smith wants to look at these desires and focus them on the deep well that is the Kingdom of God.

When *Desiring the Kingdom* turns its attention to the gathered worship time it explores all of the various aspects of worship and how they draw people into Christ. The gathering of God’s people “resist the presentism embedded in the tyranny of the contemporary” as they are a people of “memory, who are shaped by the tradition that is millennia older than the last Billboard chart.”¹⁰ They take a step out of ordinary time and take a step into the holy ground of a faith that is deep.

As Christians approach the reading of Scripture and hearing God’s Word taught they understand for those outside of the faith tradition, this may be a peculiar moment. This ancient book has everyone’s attention and the Scriptures “function as a script for the worshipping the community.”¹¹ I can vividly remember my first cognizant moments in worship as a middle school student, where I felt like an outsider without a copy of the

⁹ St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine* (Mount Vernon, NY: Peter Pauper Press, 1949), 354-430.

¹⁰ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 159.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

script. There was something there I desired, but I did not fully understand what that was. Even without knowing everything that is happening, there is something beautiful in that moment when one's heart is stirred and she focuses her mind as part of the body. The desire is that each person listening turns the gaze of their attention to the hearing of God's Word and the proclamation over their lives. Smith describes this incredible moment as a place where "the entirety of Christian worship inscribes the story of God in Christ into our imaginations,"¹² with the pinnacle being the preached word. I again return to my early understanding of the corporate worship space, where like a child I opened my hands and desired for the one leading to fill them with exactly what I needed.

Corporate worship then leads into everyday liturgies and practices of making sense of life. People "encounter Scripture in worship and are invited into its performance and thus initiated into a way of reading the world."¹³ The pastor has communicated truth and opened minds to a particular passage, but also revealed how people are to leave this worship experience and embark on their daily lives. It is here that people's identities can be continually shaped by their creator.

The Gospel Remix: Reaching the Hip Hop Generation by Ralph C. Watkins

As culture is changing the church no longer holds the defining role it had in society. It must become creative and live out the words of Paul to "become all things for all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel (1 Cor 9:22-23)." Ralph Watkins' *The Gospel Remix* is a desire to create a dialogue with a

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 197.

unique cross section of a new “hip hop” generation. The majority of Christian leaders may not find themselves in urban and ethnic communities where they need to fully understand hip hop music, but there is great truth Watkins taps into where all communicators can be encouraged.

A uniqueness of many ethnic congregations across all backgrounds is a strong community. The church setting for the African American community is “one of the only places where the people are forced to struggle together in community and come to grips with the message of the Savior.”¹⁴ The beauty of *The Gospel Remix* is an acknowledgment of cultural roots and a desire to reach a new generation. These do not have to be antithetical to one another. They can coexist and actually ground each other. Worship is something the Church should do well. It is a place of celebration and the world can learn a lot from the celebration that is enacted through brothers and sisters in African American churches. There is much to praise and give thanks to Christ for and worship should look like a celebration, not a funeral.

Another great foundational block found in *The Gospel Remix* is for communication and worship to contain improvisation. It is here where pastors “leave space for God moving beyond and outside our plans.”¹⁵ They come fully prepared but with a yielding heart to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Teaching may need emphasizing, there may be extended moments of pause to contemplate teaching and reading of God’s Word may cause people to break forth in praise. A good communicator

¹⁴ Ralph C. Watkins, *The Gospel Remix* (Valley Forge, VA: Judson Press, 2007), 118.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

can lean into this tension and surrender themselves to the Lordship of Christ to weave the message of what God wants to say.

The Gospel Remix shows desire for every aspect from preaching, singing, movement, building and grounds, and aesthetics being used to point people to Jesus. The worship experience, even if there is no preaching, should point a guest towards Christ.¹⁶ There is much to learn from the hip hop generation and the beauty found in its artful communication and poetry. The Church of Christ is creative and full of God's unique people, so the Church should find itself as a cultural influencer.

Deep Church by Jim Belcher

Church in the twentieth century exploded both in number and in varying expressions of faith. Millions of believers hold the truth of who Christ is and at the same time have a unique tradition of this faith expression. In *Deep Church*, Jim Belcher seeks to explore the contours of traditional church with the new wave of emergent or ultracontemporary churches. This exploration seeks to continue to be a faithful witness and to find creative ways to engage a disinterested culture surrounding churches.

When it comes to communication *Deep Church* explores the dynamics of traditional or “bounded set” and also the relational hermeneutic of emerging churches. Each are lacking the totality of what Belcher desired so he implored readers to seek to be “centered set” preachers. These pastors “preach the gospel to ourselves—our justification, our adoption, our union with Christ, our participation in the kingdom of

¹⁶ Ibid., 125.

God—we then “have the power and motivation to obey.”¹⁷ His preaching began to be shaped by the “indicative which indicates who we are in Christ through his saving grace and the imperative of the Gospel is what impels or empowers us to obey God’s word.”¹⁸ It may seem so simple. The Gospel is all about new life offered by God almighty and then God’s people living that out.

He also highlights the “aha” nature of Scripture and the way this should be woven into teaching. The Gospel should show people “our lives are suddenly and dramatically turned upside down by the surprising grace of God.”¹⁹ People lay out their true human experience with all of its brokenness and the unfathomable grace offered by God. This speaks to identity - it is not about us, but our heavenly Father who graciously offers us everything. Scripture is “living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword” (Heb 4:12) when it is opened, the goodness of the Lord should shine brightly.

The Communication of Adoption: Hearing and Making Known by Duffy Robbins

Adoptive Youth Ministry is a compilation of voices seeking to see youth ministry take new roots in local congregations as the whole Body embraces adolescents. Duffy Robbins speaks into the arena of communication. He is a top-notch seminarian, leading the charge to educate the next generation of youth ministers, but more importantly he speaks from decades of experience in the trenches ministering to adolescents. Most of his focus in shaping communication comes from the understanding it is all about the

¹⁷ Jim Belcher, *Deep Church* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 154.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 156.

relationship dynamics at play. He grounds his theology of communication in the unfolding of the Gospel narrative of creation, fall, redemption and restoration.

Robbins gives tactical advice on shaping messages so the glory of the redemptive message shines through. He highlights the reality of when thinking about communicating people are typically at a distance or on a stage. He implores readers to never forget the power behind “face-to-face interaction (think word became flesh) as the best way to communicate most ideas.”²⁰ Great communication is concerned with every aspect of what is happening, not just the twenty minute teaching time. A core focus is how preachers live out what they preach and teach with the flock the Lord has entrusted them with.

Another great reminder is the focus on the power of context and how it drives home what is heard. Robbins reminds readers “the most basic principles of communication is this: It’s not what we say but what is heard that makes all the difference.”²¹ Each person that hears another person brings to that conversation their own set of presuppositions, feelings, worldview and thoughts of their own racing through their heads. This is why when gathering with a group of people to discuss a presentation or even a sermon with a handful of people each will be impacted by something different. This is also how God’s holy Word continues to speak in new and fresh ways when people read it. Communication is all about “contextualization and that is giving attention to the soil into which we hope to sow the seed (Matt. 13:4-23).”²²

²⁰ Robbins, *Communication of Adoption*, 294.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 295.

²² *Ibid.*, 296.

Communication of Adoption also highlights the intentionality needed in communication. God almighty “is determined to do whatever he needs to do to communicate to specific people in specific place and specific times.”²³ As teachers are intentional in sharing specific words, stories and truth with adolescents they help to be God’s catalyst to build bridges in their lives, bridges to their horizontal relationship with God himself and also the vertical relationships they have with their parents and friends. Teachers come alongside people, following after the model seen in Christ sharing life-on-life relationships with his disciples. They communicate without even speaking a word by simply being present. As faithful communicators they must seek to shape every aspect of the medium and messages used to declare the glories of God.

He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World by Albert Mohler, Jr.

In *He is Not Silent*, Albert Mohler presents both a preaching handbook and also a deep call for a return to the Word of God. He draws on his observation of modern day preaching in the new landscapes of today. He notes the postmodern worldview of individualism and relativity. People are adamant that they are the kings of their castle and no one gets to speak into their world unless they allow them. This means that an authoritative and timeless Word of God already has an uphill climb to make.

The main advantage in the pages of *He Is Not Silent* is the dependence upon the text of Holy Scripture. This applies to the leader who is devoting themselves to “study and research the text to understand it”²⁴ so that she can “accurately handle the word of

²³ Ibid., 299.

²⁴ Albert Mohler, *He Is Not Silent* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 66.

truth” (2 Tim 2:15). The revealed word of God to his people is the “bread of life” Jesus spoke of and can be depended upon it for nourishment. Mohler also illustrates how pastors use the word of God as the guiding and central aspect of preaching and teaching. It is not the only thing happening during teaching, but the Word of God gets the spotlight.

One critique of *He Is Not Silent* is the almost dismissal of conversational or relational style of preaching in favor of expository preaching. He argues on seeing a danger of self-focus and topical discovery in these types of preaching. I believe faithful preaching can have elements of relationship and frank conversation. The desire in conversational preaching is to be able to not stand over a body of people and challenge or dictate over them as if one has it all figured out. Conversational preaching seeks to share the truth that the communicator is with the audience experiencing life as they are. Faithful communicators can weave through the text of Holy Scripture and lead the people of God to show all the ways the Lord is conversing with them.

Speaking to Teenagers by Doug Fields and Duffy Robbins

When most people think of teenagers, usually the first thought is to run the other way. For some though, there is a strong desire to move closer and see the beauty of this season of life. People who are called to minister to adolescents often refer to this style of ministry by saying they are “in the trenches.” This is to highlight the reality of the messiness of adolescents and the close proximity relational ministry is with them. It is hard work and sometimes the fruit of this labor is not seen by the leader or pastor, but they stay in the trenches to live out incarnational nature of Christ with adolescents.

In *Speaking to Teenagers* readers hear from two of the leading voices in youth ministry - Doug Fields and Duffy Robbins. One of the most beneficial aspects of this book is seeing communication as bridge building. This is found in the truth that God has bridged the gap between sinful people and eternal life with Him. As those who have surrendered their hearts to this truth, they then get invited into the job of building bridges from God to his people. Communication is deep truth that needs translating. Every “truth we want to communicate has to be encoded into some channel of communication.”²⁵ Bridges allow traffic to flow in both directions, so communication should give the sense of God speaking to his people and his people learning how to communicate back to him.

Another key element of truth in *Speaking to Teenagers* is emphasis on communication that is up close. It must be “more than just informational, but it must be highly relational.”²⁶ God is wanting to transform his people through godly communication and this means the words of Scripture must be lived out in front of the people they are given to communicate with. The apostle John draws on this nature when he reminds readers “the word became flesh” (Jn 1:1). Jesus lived out his relationship with God and his connection to Scripture directly with his disciples. They were blessed to see not just the information, but the transformation as well.

²⁵ Doug Fields and Duffy Robbins, *Speaking to Teenagers* (Grand Rapids: MI, Zondervan, 2007), 25.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

CHAPTER 4

EN CHRISTO

Throughout the New Testament readers are introduced to the incredible work of God's son, Jesus Christ. His life changed everything. Not only did Christ fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament, but he bridged the chasm separating God and mankind. It is in Christ's powerful work that the Lord began to redeem the world to himself. In Christ, "the two estates of the Redeemer, humiliation and exaltation, provide the basic redemptive-historical framework for understanding the climax of the *historia salutis* in the once-for-all, unrepeatable work of Christ."¹

In Paul's writing throughout the New Testament he draws on all the ways Christ was redemption on display. He constantly uses phrases like "in Him," "in His son," and ultimately the most common phrase, ἐν Χριστῷ or "*En Christo*."² His phrasing communicates the people of God are together fully united to Christ and his redemptive work.

¹ Lane Tipton, *Biblical Theology and the Westminster Standards Revisited: Union with Christ and Justification Sola Fide* (Westminster Theological Seminary, 2013), 12.

² For the remainder of the text, I will summarize with the English phrasing of "in Christ."

The phrase “In Christ,” or something similar, is mentioned 164 times throughout the New Testament as a constant reminder of the powerful work of Christ. To highlight a small portion of this deep, rich theology I will concentrate on one particular passage from Ephesians 1. As Paul wrote to the people of Ephesus, he encouraged them by saying:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved (Eph 3:1-6).

Paul sought to remind them of the great blessing the Lord placed upon them by the work of Jesus Christ. In these few sentences the “language is exalted and extravagant and yet, in another, the very repetitions of phrases reveals its poverty and inadequacy to do justice to the subject.”³ God is the one who was at work “before the world began” and through his endless grace drew humanity to himself. Through his gracious act people are blessed with redemption and adopted as sons “through Jesus Christ.” God’s people are given his grace and blessing through the work of Christ and he blessed them with being united to the Beloved.

Work of Christ

People know of the creator God who formed the entire world by speaking it into being. A change begins when they are able to see him up close and realize his very personal and deliberate work throughout all of history. Christians must “recognize we

³ Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians, Word Biblical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 43.

owe everything to God, we are nourished by his fatherly care and that he is Author of our every good.”⁴ Christ is the pinnacle of all human history and his death and resurrection is the grounding and redemption that all of creation longs for. N.T. Wright describes Jesus in saying he “remains the most compelling figures in all human history . . . you will find Jesus haunting, disturbing, and attractive.”⁵ The fullness of Christ’s work is a deep well where God’s people can continue to come back to drink every moment and be amazed as they learn something new.

In Christ disciples find the full redemption of the covenant God made with his people. God was the only one who could fulfill the covenant and now Jesus is the “surety, the one who engages to become responsible for the legal obligations of another will be met.”⁶ Redemption is found only in Christ’s work on the cross. Justification is only because of Jesus’ work, not one’s own Christian deeds. This fulfillment is trinitarian in the “elective love and grace of the Father, finds its judicial foundation in the suretyship of the Son and is fully realized in the lives of sinner only by the effective application of the Holy Spirit (John 1:16, Eph. 1: 1-14, 2:8; 1 Pet 1:2).”⁷

The repetition of the phrase “In Christ” in the Ephesians passage reminds readers of “Christ’s mediation of God’s activity toward his people.”⁸ Christ’s powerful work of

⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press), 41.

⁵ N.T. Wright, *Simply Good News: Why the Gospel is News and What Makes it Good* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 35.

⁶ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1932), 267.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁸ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 22.

paying the full penalty for sin has brought God near his people once again. He fully claims them as his own and fulfills the punishment for their sin all at the same time. Walter Elwell notes Paul's usage in the New Testament is "predominately used in the instrumental sense, signifying Christ as the channel through whom God works his will, elects, redeems, forgives, blesses, imparts new life, and builds up the church."⁹

Salvation is found solely in Christ alone. He alone is the one who was able to live a sinless life and pay the penalty for sin. He alone was able to die and through the power of God be resurrected to take his rightful place at the right hand of the Father. He alone will call people home to himself one day, but until then he graciously offers all believers the gift of community together.

Union with Christ

Union with Christ means everything because "every aspect of God's relationship to believers is in some way connected to our relationship with Christ."¹⁰ Once one has surrendered her heart to Christ there is not a place where she ends and he begins. It is the "present experience of the risen Christ indwelling the believer's heart by the Spirit."¹¹ The flow of thought in Paul's words in Ephesians of adoption and "In Christ" is to highlight adoption "is nothing less than the placement of sons in the Son."¹² She is

⁹ Walter Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2019), 789.

¹⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 840.

¹¹ Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 789.

¹² Dan Curver, *Adoption and our Union with Christ, in Reclaiming Adoption* (Adelphi, MD: Cruciform: 2011), 51.

brought into the family of God by the glorious work of the Son, who now offers her himself and to share in his inheritance as fellow brothers and sisters.

Salvation is a work fully completed by Christ and his followers are the recipients of that blessing. For every “blessing we experience within us is the result of Christ’s objective work for us, outside of, in history.”¹³ One is fully united to Christ so much so that a believer that has “fully surrendered believer’s identity is simply replaced with Christ’s.”¹⁴ This is not a “mysticism or absorption, the losing of human identity in the divine, but rather an intimate communion with God through Christ.”¹⁵ The identity markers and distinctions of each person are not removed, they just find out a deeper truth about God through being united with Jesus.

For centuries Christian scholars have written and studied the way this dynamic plays out in salvation and the life of a believer. One aspect is what is called the “marvelous exchange.” Christ Jesus takes on the full weight of sin and brokenness (substitutionary atonement) and returns to his people all of the glorious gifts of him being the son of God. They along with Christ are heirs to the throne of grace. God took the “death of Jesus and made it his triumph over our sin and evil. The crucifixion of Jesus in utter humiliation and pain became the foundation of God’s victory.”¹⁶ The Scriptures “teach that believers are clothed with the righteousness of Christ only as they are

¹³ Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*, 276.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 277.

¹⁵ Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 789.

¹⁶ Dawson, *Discovering Jesus*, 115.

ingrafted into him by a Spirit-wrought faith.”¹⁷ It is in this glorious exchange where I can begin to clearly hear what God almighty says about me and live into this calling. What should have “damned us instead became the basis of our eternal salvation.”¹⁸ God fulfilled the covenant he made with his people redeeming them for himself and for all of eternity shepherds that covenant relationship. The merits of Christ are imputed “only on the basis of our oneness with Him, that such an imputation could be reasonable.”¹⁹

In this marvelous exchange God’s work of sanctification begins. His followers are becoming more like Christ. Their “divinely wrought character is changed and freed from sinful habits and forming in us Christlike affections, dispositions and virtues.”²⁰ Only God himself could enact this process on anyone’s behalf and only through the power of the Holy Spirit could it continually be accomplished. This does not free one from the responsibility of living it out, but enables it to happen. Daily people are formed and conformed to his very image and are able to live out of that power to offer themselves over to one another. The believer is invited to join Jesus in discipleship which, “means helping someone live more deeply into that reality. Maturity is a benchmark that signifies growth.”²¹ The believer is discipled in his own relationship with Christ and joins in the work of discipleship. There is nothing to better equip people in their learning than to have to show another person how to do it.

¹⁷ Tipton, *Union with Christ and Justification Sola Fide*, 12.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 453.

²⁰ J.I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1993), 169.

²¹ Chap Clark, *Adoptive Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 49.

The fellowship each person longs for begins with a longing to have fellowship with Jesus (1 Jn 1:3). Being united with Christ is made possible by the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide and direct. This union speaks to the deepest parts of who one is and needs to be communicated over and over again. Too often in our isolating culture people drift back to a selfish and narcissist way of life and forget they are not alone. Christ himself promises that “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20).

Union with Christ is how believers are able to live an abundant life that Christ promises (Jn 10:10). Christianity is not just a good thought or “a speculative system but a new quality of life: a life in Christ.”²² Newness of life is created by being fused completely with Christ. Every one, “whoever we are, can be caught up in that transformation here and now . . . do not allow yourself to be fobbed off with anything less.”²³ The community of faith Christians now have in the Body of Christ is to be “animated by the same spirt, filled with the same love, stand in the same faith, engaged in the same warfare, and are bound for the same goal.”²⁴

A New Home

Another key aspect of Christ followers being “In Christ” is having a new home and a new destination. If one believes apart from Christ people’s lives are fully separated from him, then as Christ died on the cross, they are given a new eternal home. For all eternity disciples will not be separated from Christ, but are blessed to be in loving

²² James Stewart, *A Man in Christ* (Vancouver: Regent Publishing, 1935), 7.

²³ Wright, *Simply Good News*, 55.

²⁴ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 453.

fellowship with him. Jesus himself promised “On that day you will realize that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I am in you (Jn 14:20).” The eternal bond of love between the Father and the Son is now offered to each one to join in.

This blessing “can be said to be in the heavenly realms, yet they are not viewed as treasure stored up for future appropriation, but as benefits belonging to a believer now.”²⁵ When God created the world he created it perfect and faultless, but the brokenness of sin impacted every aspect of life on this earth. The truth is “earth and heaven were made to overlap with one another, not fitfully, mysteriously and partially as they do at the moment, but completely, gloriously and utterly.”²⁶

Our new found destination also has implications for life today as “we are part of a new movement by His grace, a movement rolling on toward the new heaven and new earth where all things are made right and where He is all and all.”²⁷ As the family of God, we have been adopted to both the Church universal and in our local areas and labor onward towards the heavenly calling we share. The good news of the Gospel is there is a target for our affections and a home to await.

Jesus himself promised the grace he would offer in himself if people would “abide” in him. In the Gospel of John, he records Jesus teaching his followers to “abide in me and I in you . . . to abide in the vine . . . to abide in his words . . . and that we would bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples” (Jn 15:4-8). Disciples abide in Jesus and

²⁵ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 21.

²⁶ N.T. Wright, *Simply Christian* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 217.

²⁷ Lewis Smedes, *Union with Christ: A Biblical View of the New Life in Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans 2009), 92.

his love just as he abided in his Father's love and obeyed his commandments. Union with Jesus means a constant reliance upon him for direction, nourishment and connection. They follow after his teaching and his life to imitate all they see in Christ the savior. This cannot be done in one's own power, but only in believing and relying on the power of the Holy Spirit.

Live for Him

One great refrain from modern church praise music is found in the last lines of *In Christ Alone*. Keith Getty and Stuart Townend declare, "As he stands in victory, Sin's curse has lost its grip on me, For I am His and He is mine."²⁸ The power and shackles of sin is no more. Through Christ's victory and the power of the Holy Spirit Christ's followers can stand. Jesus Christ, as Redeemer, "executes the three- fold office of a prophet, priest, and king, both in his estate of humiliation and in his estate of exaltation."²⁹ The remnants of the broken world remain, but now people can know the one who has power to defeat death fully. They must learn to "live as a renewed human being, anticipating the eventual new creation in and with a world which is still longing and groaning for that final redemption."³⁰

Redemption in Christ is foundational for theology and for ongoing relationship with him. Being "In Christ" means one has "been taken up into his body, exposed to the

²⁸ Keith Getty and Stuart Townend, "In Christ Alone" (Brentwood, TN: Capitol CMG, 2001).

²⁹ Tipton, *Union with Christ*, 1.

³⁰ Wright, *Simply Christian*, 223.

activity of the Spirit through the word . . . and shaped by him as person.”³¹ Through faith she is “united to Christ with all his benefits, as beneficiaries not only of his gifts but of the Giver himself.”³²

³¹ Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 106.

³² Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 271.

CHAPTER 5

ADOPTIVE MINISTRY MODEL

The adolescent years of development are a time of great growth and a time where adolescents are influenced in many different ways. There are many mixed messages in the arenas of influence toward adolescents. It must be asked, where do parents fit into the equation of adolescents growing up today? Television and media try to say that parents are losing their rightful place in the raising of their own children. Maybe their peers are the most influential people in an adolescent's life. Media could be the main teacher in the lives of these impressionable kids. All of these factors must be considered when thinking about raising children and influencing them one way or another.

Many in the media, and even Christian authors, try to paint a very scary picture of the lives of adolescents today. They claim that there is a vast departure from the traditional structures of parents being the primary influencers of children. News outlets claim adolescents are turning to peer groups or mass media to make sense of their lives and for instruction. To give critics credit, the traditional family structure is not the same anymore, nor does it hold its esteemed place in society. Divorce rates are high and the cry of relativism is king in this postmodern world.

Walt Mueller goes so far as to say, “When push comes to shove, American dads and moms are devoting less time to bringing up their sons and daughters, thereby allowing someone or something else to raise their kids.”¹ When adults stop parenting and influencing their children, they are handing those influential reigns over to a culture that is ready to have their full attention. This might not be for raising their children, but definitely using them.

The world will keep on spinning and family life in America is not completely broken. There should be a reminder of the calling on every adult’s life and especially on the family unit. Jesus is supposed to be the throne of their hearts and the Church is called to live out the words of the Psalmist to tell the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord (Ps 78). Adults must take large steps towards adolescents and their families to minister to them effectively.

One of Chap Clark’s big investments into the Church today is challenging the normal adult/child ratio. The normal ratio is one adult to every five kids to make sure things do not get out of hand. Chap is encouraging the Church to reverse to a “5:1 adult–t–kid ratio – five adults caring for each kid. . . . we are talking about five adults whom you recruit to invest in your kid in little, medium, and big ways.”² The goal is not for people who watch or just teach kids, but five adults who pour their lives into children and adolescents.

¹ Walt Mueller, *Youth Culture 101* (Grand Rapids, MI: Youth Specialties, 2007), 15.

² Kara Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 101.

Through Chap's research he has come up with four tiers of influence in the lives of adolescents: "The primary relational influence in a teen's life is the parent. The second tier is an involved non-parental person. The third tier is a non-involved, non-parental adult or peers. Media is a fourth-tier influence."³ He goes on to say, "If the first two tiers are doing well, the third and fourth tiers don't have a lot of impact."⁴ Each of these four tiers has an impact on the lives of students. They make many of their decisions based on the varying levels of importance and the influence of each of those tiers. For example, adolescent clothing choices are heavily influenced by their peer group, then secondarily by the media and probably lastly by their parents. However, unless the adolescent is paying for clothing themselves, their parents should have major influence over that purchasing decision. Even if the kid is paying, they should still speak words of truth and wisdom on the way their adolescent is dressing. For bigger issues like marriage, college choice and even faith, the family structure needs to be strong in an adolescent's life. Parents will be an influence much stronger than any other of the tiers of influence.

Tiers of Influence

First Tier: Parents

Adults may not feel like they have a strong voice in the lives of their adolescents. The media may portray friendships as the be-all-end-all for young people. Smith and Denton's *National Study on Youth and Religion* shows "the most important social

³ Jennifer Bradbury, "The YouthWorker Journal Roundtable on Kids and Youth Culture," (2013): <http://www.kpdq.com/11610492/#sthash.HRgkK8fQ.dpuf>.

⁴ Ibid.

influence in shaping young people's religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents."⁵ The influence of the home is still there. Kenda Casey Dean also states, "Parents matter most when it comes to the religious formation of their children."⁶ Passing on the faith to the next generation is a major aspect of the Christian home and should be something parents take great joy in influencing their child.

Parents are heavily influential in many areas of the lives of their children. For example, there is even research into the physiological influence in the role of the father and mother in nurturing and caring for a young child which has shown to have an effect on the age at which young girls experience menarche, with earlier menarche leading to higher risks of risky sexual behavior.⁷ One's environment impacts his physiology and the home is the primary environment for children and adolescents. Parents must be parents though. Elkind writes, "Children and adolescents are the young of our species and like the young of all species have to learn from adult guidance and direction."⁸ Parents must be adult role models for their kids, not their best friends. This is not a time to make sure adolescents will "not like them and in this way put themselves at their children's mercy. This is not healthy for either parent or child. It is an abrogation of adulthood and blocks a child's ability to grow by differentiation because the child adopts, by substitution, an air

⁵ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 56.

⁶ Kenda Casey Dean, *Almost Christian* (Oxford: University Press, 2010), 18.

⁷ J. Tither and B. Ellis, "Impact of Fathers on Daughters' Age at Menarche: A Genetically and Environmentally Controlled Sibling Study," *Developmental Psychology* 44:5 (September 2008): 1409.

⁸ Elkind, *All Grown Up and No Place to Go*, 242.

of adult authority.⁹ Sure, friendship with children is something to attain to, but adults need to model to children and adolescents, adult behavior and responsibility. This may become difficult as adolescents go through their teenage years and rebel against parental voices and role models in their lives, but parents must hold to their values and truth. This will provide them the “experiences adolescents need to attain an integrated sense of self and identity.”¹⁰

Arnett described it well when he said, “Parents and peers/friends are still involved in socialization for emerging adults, but to less of an extent that they were in adolescence.”¹¹ Young people are no longer giving carte blanche approval and validity to the norms and standards of their families and friendship circles like they used to. Epstein speaks about adolescent morality and suggests this is the prime time to talk to adolescents because it is during this time they “are passionately interested in moral questions.”¹² There are a thousand people or institutions that can be influencing them in the way they live. This is where youth workers and leaders need to partner with families to be a common voice and support structure to help nurture adolescents through these troubling waters.

Identity and worth can be affirmed in many ways. as the role of adults in the lives of young people is to let them see “who” they are (identity) is not just tied to the actions

⁹ Ibid., 243.

¹⁰ Ibid., 246.

¹¹ Jeffrey Arnett, *Socialization in Emerging Adulthood in Handbook of Socialization* (New York: Guilford Press, 2007), 227.

¹² Epstein, *Teen 2.0*, 171.

they perform or do not perform. Elkind warns, “When young people assume that parents are concerned only with how well they do, rather than who they are, the need to achieve becomes addictive. True meaningful support should communicate to children that achievements are supported because they are good for the children.”¹³ Again youth workers press into them who they are in Christ and the deep love God has for them. They need to remind them to have their “hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:18-20).

Second Tier: Non-parental Person Involvement

Adolescents also need to have committed adults in their lives who are not their parents. I was raised by my grandparents and was also heavily influenced by families inside of my church. For me, the church became my extended family. Clark writes, “Each individual, by the time he or she is a mid-adolescent, needs to know that at least one adult knows him or her well and will do whatever it takes to bring him or her into the community of healthy adulthood.”¹⁴ He would even argue these healthy adult relationships will have a greater influence even than the friends adolescents may choose. Whether it be a family member, coach, youth pastor or another committed adult

¹³ David Elkind, *The Hurried Child* (Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press, 2007), 152.

¹⁴ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 195.

adolescents need to know those adults are “for” them and are looking out for their best interests at heart, not their own agendas.

Third Tier: Non-involved, Non-parental Adult or Peers Involvement

With the shift from early adolescent to middle adolescent a young teenager’s mind is now reasoning with abstract thought. Clark points out that during this time period, “Adolescents begin to reflect on how they have been treated for much of their life, and it slowly dawns on them that they have been abandoned by those who—either explicitly or implicitly—were once there for them.”¹⁵ When adolescents are going through this shift sometimes the influence of their peers increases. Clark points out that, “Traditional theories of development affirm the shift of allegiance and intimacy to peer affiliation and commitment is a normal process during adolescence.”¹⁶ Peers become a strong influence over the lives of adolescents during this point in their development.

Groups or clusters are a normal scene in all middle school and high schools in the US today. Children, much like their adult parents, group themselves together. Unless a teacher or instructor wants to split them in certain ways, adolescents will inevitably connect themselves to other young people. Clark’s research into clusters reveals that middle adolescents do this because, “They believe their only choice is to find a relational place where they are not in danger of being ignored, used, or pushed aside.”¹⁷ One big problem with this thought process for young people would be that those peer groups or

¹⁵ Ibid., 60.

¹⁶ Ibid., 64.

¹⁷ Ibid., 65.

“clusters” will do just that in their lives. They will ignore each other, use each other or at times even push each other to the side. All of mankind is fallen and broken people who are selfish to some degree. As adults in the lives of young people, there needs to be a strengthening of the other tiers of influence. They can be something to depend on, not just fickle other young adolescents who are trying to wander through life themselves. Adults need to be able to do this without “disparaging or discouraging other support systems, especially his or her friends.”¹⁸

Fourth Tier of Influence: Media

After the first three tiers are met, adults who work with adolescents need to help students filter through the media and culture of the day, not deny it exists. Again, this is not a call to shove adolescents in a bubble and have no encounter with media and culture. Adolescents need to be assisted with a framework to process all aspects of their lives, even this fourth tier of influence. Media is a powerful force and can be very useful in the lives of adolescents; so leaders need to proceed head first with adolescents and see how media can influence lives and point people closer to their relationships with God. This generation is “unique in that, unlike previous generation, they do not know a world without technology and media.”¹⁹

Mueller suggest that, “Media is not only at their fingertips; it is woven in and through the fabric of who they are.”²⁰ It is not just something they consume on a daily

¹⁸ Ibid., 73.

¹⁹ Thom Rainer and Jess Rainer, *The Millennials* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2011), 183.

²⁰ Mueller, *Youth Culture 101*, 79.

basis, it is a part of everything they live and do. Mueller even quotes a study where they find “young people today live media saturated lives, spending an average of nearly six and one-half hours a day with media.”²¹ With this constant flow of media and pop culture into their lives it must be sinking into their lives in a deep way. They are always connected to it and they need help to be able to process what is going on.

Adoption into the Body of Christ

Almost a decade ago, I was at home when my phone rang at 10:30pm. On the other line I heard a panicked young person telling of her friends being shot outside of a nearby mall by some crossfire. I quickly got dressed and headed to the hospital to spend time with some of the students from our church and the boy’s family. Neither of the boys were critically wounded and would recover very quickly. What I was shocked to find was a waiting room full of adults, students and family members. The shocking part was not how many people were there, but in who was there. Here were the students’ closest friends from school and other random students from their school who did not know these boys very well, but felt like they needed to be there to just be present with them and their community. There were also plenty of adults, both adults who served in the student ministry and those who served by caring from afar.

I learned two very critical things that night. First, adolescents are incredible at caring for their friends or peers and are far more entuned to caring than their adult counterparts in this arena. Second, the shift was beginning. No longer was it just the “youth staff” that was tasked with caring for the young people in our community. Our

²¹ Ibid.

congregation was beginning to take on the role of caring for the young people of our church and young people in our city. This is not a normal circumstance in most congregations or even in our congregation all of the time. It has taken decades of work to try and shift the heartbeat of the way we do ministry.

The world is changing around adolescents, how do leaders help create life-giving systems around students? It cannot be another simple program or by creating more trendy places in the church building. It must be by shifting mindsets. The Church must support and gather around the traditional family unit and help draw it into the life-giving Body of Christ. Paul reminded the people of Corinth: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ . . . and that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (1 Cor 12:12, 25-26).”

The Church must work together, by finding individual and corporate rallying cries as it seeks to love on people. Families need to know they are important and play vital roles in congregations. The whole body needs all of its parts and too many times people get comfortable with living as a partial body because it is easier. Dealing with the whole body is sometimes messy. The whole body is complex and will have plenty of points of stress and it may look easier to just run from confrontations. The better way forward is to have all of the parts, dysfunctions and all.

Many families feel like they are on an island all alone in the way they are raising their children. Either they are oblivious to the needs of a child or they simply are

embarrassed by the way their children behave. Families today need partnership to support them and reassure them they are moving in the right direction. Churches need to change their traditional mindset of just offering programs at church buildings to disciple this next generation and care for their families.

In the New Testament, Paul needed to adapt new believers in Christ and the whole people of God to prepare them for their new spiritual lives. He needed to reframe their thoughts on Almighty God and change some of their mental models. He wanted to give them a “sense of the present and shape their future.”²² His leadership was pointing them to the great hope they shared in Christ. Jesus Christ had already changed the mental model the people of God had for the Messiah. Their original thought was he was coming as a conquering king who would bring them out of oppression and to a high position of authority. Instead he was the loving savior who conquered death and brought them back into a right relationship with God the Father. He was reminding them their “spirituality was simply the holistic quality of human life as it was meant to be, at the center of which is our relation to God.”²³

Paul wanted to point out to the people of God the intimate relationship God was offering with himself. The veil to the Holy of Holies had been torn down. No longer were the people of God separated from him. God Almighty had walked amongst them in Jesus Christ and now through the power of the Holy Spirit was initiating non-stop access to himself. God was still Lord, but Paul wanted to emphasize the depth of his love for all

²² Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, 69.

²³ Willard, *The Spirit of Disciplines*, 77.

humanity. Paul was beginning to highlight the Fatherly aspect of God and how Christians are called his children.

This did not come without its own problems. Ronald Heifetz notes, “Adaptive challenges arise when our deeply held beliefs are challenged, when the values that made us successful become less relevant, and when legitimate yet competing perspectives emerge. Such a challenge is distressing for the people going through it.”²⁴ It is hard and sometimes people want to rebel against this new way of thinking. The old way was just fine. People resist change because it “requires them to shift significantly away from the habits, skills, and capacities that have brought success up to this point.”²⁵ The problem is this type of change “asks people to alter their behaviors or beliefs that they take for granted. It asks them to change the way they see the world. Most people do not embrace such change. They need to be led to it.”²⁶

The people of God had a long history of God being far from them. He was behind the veil in the Holy of Holies and only one holy priest was able to enter his presence. He was the God who created the whole world and walked with Adam and Eve until they ate of the fruit in the Garden and sin entered the world. Yes, he created the sacrificial system, but he was no longer close and intimate with his people. The Israelites thought of God as far beyond their reach. Paul wanted to show the people of God a new way of thinking. He wanted to remind them of the story of God that had just played out in their midst in Jesus

²⁴ Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), quoted in Cormode, *Multi Layered Leadership*, 85.

²⁵ Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, 46.

²⁶ Cormode, *Multi-Layer Leadership*, 86.

Christ, but he also wanted to move them into a new direction by thinking about God as being intimately involved in their lives.

A beautiful image God's Word that helps explain his intimacy with humanity is the idea of adoption. Not only does it highlight the amazing work of God the Father redeeming and taking people as his own, but it helps show churches a way forward that is more about an attitude and way of life than another program. Paul is taking a "homiletic approach to leadership in that it sees the leader as theological interpreter, a prophet who points to God."²⁷ Adoption adds to the concept of God being Lord of the lives of the people of God and reminding them of the steadfast love of God. He is in pursuit of authentic relationship with his people. Paul does this by talking about adoption to "plant vocabulary, sow stories, and cultivate theological categories that bear fruit when the congregation uses those words, stories and categories to interpret their world."²⁸ He is shifting from believing God is far off to a God who is close through the image of family, which every person has some concept of.

In Roman culture the idea of family is portrayed in a unique way. The father or head of the household was called the *paterfamilias*. As children were born into the family, they were not taken immediately to the mother's chest for initial bonding like we are so accustomed to today in the West. Instead, "in the Roman World, being the biological father of a child did not necessarily mean one had to acknowledge, raise, shelter or care for the child. In Roman family life, the *paterfamilias*, or head male, had all

²⁷ Cormode, *Multi-Layered Leadership*, 90.

²⁸ Ibid.

authority. He decided whether or not the family would accept a new child.”²⁹ No one in himself had worth in the family. It was only if the one who led the family decided to bring them into his family structure. Dawson points out, “No offspring was actually a member of the family until the head of the family adopted him as his own. Biology alone did not create the family. In that sense, every child was adopted.”³⁰ Dawn Eden writes, “If instead of being lifted up by the Father, the newborn was left on the ground, he or she would be excluded from the family.”³¹ When the New Testament speaks of adoption in can be seen through the lens of being brought into the family of God.

When the Apostle Paul was writing the words of Romans it probably shook this structure on its head. The Creator God of the entire universe is likened to the *paterfamilias* who calls people and brings us into the family of God. Paul writes, “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom 8:15-17). We were bought with the price of God’s son dying on the cross and are adopted into the family of God with the same birthrights and status of Jesus Christ. Dawson paints beautifully this image by saying:

When we were laying helpless on the floor he saw us. When we were crying from breathing the toxic air of this world, he took pity on us. When we were helplessly wallowing in the blood and water of our birth, crying for food, for care, he saw us,

²⁹ Gerrit Dawson, *The Blessing Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 66.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Dawn Eden, *My Peace I Give You* (Notre Dame, IN: Ava Maria Press, 2012), 20.

nodded and reached toward us. When we could have been left to die, when we could have been sold as slaves, the Father said, “Mine!” He took us in his arms and claimed us.³²

No longer would the world’s mental model be of God as the high and mighty, God in the clouds, disconnected from his people. Paul was turning this viewpoint of God upside down. The Lord Almighty is the Father who scoops us up and cares for us and brings us into his home.

Paul also knew that this imagery would be a narrative for the people of God as they entered into the next part of their journey. It is “during periods of significant social change, society looks to such symbolic leaders to weave troublesome events into a coherent narrative of hope.”³³ God’s people were entering into a new era. They were going to be persecuted by fellow Jewish people who did not acknowledge that Jesus was the Messiah. The people of God would soon be persecuted for claiming that Jesus was the Prince of the Earth and that he would call all men to bow before his throne, even the almighty Rome itself. Times would be rough and Paul knew the people of God needed a reminder of their intimate relationship with the Father. This intimate relationship would be able to sustain them through these difficult times because of the hope that is everlasting. Paul was helping to “cultivate an environment that discerns God’s activities among the congregation and in its context . . . to discover the Spirit of God’s life-giving future in Jesus is among them.”³⁴

³² Dawson, *The Blessing Life*, 67.

³³ Cormode, *Multi-Layered Leadership*, 94.

³⁴ Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, 27.

Adoption into the Body

As discussed in previous chapters, the landscape of adolescence is quite different today than it was even a few decades ago. The community “existed for its members, and the young were no exception . . . community was the central aspect of life together.”³⁵ Even if they were “problematic” rebellious children, “young people knew they were valuable members of the community, were genuinely enjoyed and appreciated, and therefore given boundaries and protected.”³⁶ The world was for the advancement of the next generation and people were focused on providing better lives for their children than they had for themselves.

As the world has shifted to postmodernity, thoughts on life changed. The thoughts of young people today are seen as “being alone, disillusioned, irreverent, uniquely postmodern, belonging to something that is ‘next’ and new, and in search of an authentic faith different from that of the existing adult religion, which simply isn’t cutting it. . . . They are searching for something that is radically different from the faith in which they were raised.”³⁷ Eddie Gibbs reminds readers, “Due to its cultural entrenchment, the church no longer relates to the surrounding culture, hence its increasing marginalization and perceived irrelevance.”³⁸ The Church no shares “the” common story with society around it. Actually, many see it as completely unrelated. The mental models of most Americans are not shaped by the Christian faith.

³⁵ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 192.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 119.

³⁸ Gibbs, *Emerging Churches*, 18.

Linda Lambert has said, leaders evoke “processes that enable participants in an [organizational] community to construct meanings that lead toward a common purpose.”³⁹ Paul was giving the people of God a common purpose in an intimate relationship with God the Father. He was becoming more real to them. This is similar to the call today for churches to adopt students into their church bodies. The Church reaches out to them and invites them in with one common purpose of loving on them as Almighty God pursues them.

The whole Church must buy into this new framework. No longer is it the sole “job” of the youth ministry to care for the spiritual well-being of adolescents. The whole Church gets on board. It is not about solutions. Cormode writes, “Adaptive problems will not go away no matter how many ‘solutions’ a congregation throws at it.”⁴⁰

Congregations today have a mental model that programs, staff or new curriculum is the hidden treasure of reaching the next generation and making them interested in God. The answer is not a program or solution for adolescents; it is a change in the way churches think and a capacity to invite adolescents into a loving Body of Christ. Churches cannot make “programs or worship more ‘cool’ and attractive, but in modeling the kind of mature, passionate faith we say we want young people to have.”⁴¹ It is about modeling faith through life-on-life interactions with adolescents today.

³⁹ Linda Lambert, “Toward a Theory on Constructivist Leadership,” in Linda Lambert et al, *The Constructivist Leader* (New York: The Teachers College Press, 1995), 29 quoted in Cormode, *Journal of Religious Leadership*, 96.

⁴⁰ Cormode, *Multi-Layered Leadership*, 85.

⁴¹ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 4.

Adopting adolescents into the Body of Christ is going to take a missional mindset. Steps must be taken to move towards the adolescents in church bodies and communities, not the other way around. Missional leadership is “about creating an environment within which the people of God in a particular location may thrive.”⁴² The call is to move congregations forward into a new way of life to open their arms of love.

Cormode writes that the “goal of Christian ministry is what he calls ‘faithful action’ and faithful action is faithful, effective, contextual and communal.”⁴³ Churches need to be faithful. Faithfulness can be very overwhelming to congregants. Too many times I have heard people not wanting to work with children or adolescents because simply serving in a single area or capacity was not an option. The thinking was they had to commit to every single activity. They must teach Sunday School, lead Sunday night services, cook the meals, lead a Bible study for middle school boys and even be required to drive the church bus. I love the enthusiasm but they need to realize the goals are for them to “take the next faithful step.”⁴⁴ Much like how a person is not sanctified in one single moment, simple faithful steps and actions need to be applauded as the Church ministers to his people.

The next way to move towards faithful action is for people to be effective and contextual. The two aspects of faithful action go well together because to be truly effective the Church must contextualize leadership. I am a personal fan of all that Rick

⁴² Alan Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 6.

⁴³ Cormode, *Faithful Action*, 228.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 228.

Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, and similarly *The Purpose Drive Youth Ministry* have done to help the Church think about new ways of organizing itself and ministering to people. The ideas are transferable, effective and very faithful. The problem is too many people do not contextualize the examples of what Saddleback Church is doing. They are a West coast church ministering to thousands more than most congregations and are, reaching probably a totally different group of people than most. People copy their techniques and wonder why they are not working in the South. Context matters. The call of the church leader is to minister where God has planted each of their churches and think of creative ways to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As the church ministers to young adolescents, it needs to have a good idea of where they are today and the context of what they are going through. This does not mean leaders become exactly like them or begin to dress like them to be “hip.” It means the goal is to try and understand them and minister in ways where they see God coming alive.

The last aspect of faithful action is the communal nature of the way people become more like Christ. Mankind was not created to go through life alone. Young people were not meant to raise themselves and their parents should not be tasked alone to care for them. Faithful action is “communal in that it takes into account the needs of the whole people of God.”⁴⁵ All of God’s people should be impacted by the message of the Gospel and should seek faithful actions that reach out to those people. The shared hope is that God the Father is leading his people and showing them how to impart the faith to this next generation.

⁴⁵ Cormode, *Faithful Action*, 239.

This is where the leader must be clear in the ways he she speaks about adoption. The Church is inviting the people of God to see that all need to be adopted into the family of God. The invitation is to “locate themselves within a community that not only reflects their faith but also enhances and deepens it.”⁴⁶ Everyone needs to see themselves as ministers of the Gospel of God’s grace. The message should be a new way of life. The beauty of this type of message is that it becomes discussable for our people. It is not a specific program to be adhered to. It should be fluid and ever changing. It adapts with each new generation, but the main heartbeat is always the same. Young adolescents are in need of adults to come alongside their lives and walk them into adulthood by adopting them into the Body of Christ.

Leadership and Change

Change is hard in all organizations, but especially the Church. The Church loves its traditions because they keep it connected to the faith that has been passed down for thousands of years. Those traditions sometimes keep a similar pattern of repeating past failures or living off glory days from many years ago. So, it must be asked, how do leaders enact change? Traditional views of leadership are top down and seen as authoritarian. Leaders speak words of instruction and people follow the instructions and accomplish a goal. But, this may not be how great leaders lead.

Cormode highlights some new viewpoints of leadership quoting Robert Dale: “Leaders now make sense rather than make [decisions]. More accurately, they make

⁴⁶ Chap Clark, *Adoptive Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 49.

meaning.”⁴⁷ He also goes on to quote Max DePree when he said, “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality.”⁴⁸ The role of leadership is shifting with today’s society by the leader taking a direct role in explaining meaning. They may be proclaiming a grand vision of why a company exists in the first place or they are explaining the meaning behind a specific instruction. People want to follow after purpose and where they feel that purpose is valid and strong. Good leadership shows them that purpose.

In the church setting people are shaped largely by the senior pastor and her unique voice for the congregation. They are used by the Lord to create meaning out of the text of God’s Word. The pastor is able to share insight and understanding of how the Lord is communicating through Scripture to his people and provide application into their daily lives. They are blessed with a unique voice to speak into the context of where a church is planted in their city and how they can be an outpost for Kingdom work.

Another ability of an effective leader is to help people change their ways of thinking. People have set ways of thinking and ways of going about their lives. Some are easy to adapt and change to a new course; others take a lot of coaching or direct instruction. Effective leaders are able to bridge this gap and assist. Good leaders are able to “redefine situations so they become understandable and manageable. The ability to reframe is one of the most powerful capacities of great artists.”⁴⁹ Leadership then becomes about revealing a difficult thought or instruction, redefining the situation of

⁴⁷ Robert Dale, *Leadership for a Changing Church: Charting the Shape of the River* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 18.

⁴⁸ Max DePree, *Leadership is an Art* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1989), 11.

⁴⁹ Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 41.

where the church is and then reframing a purposed solution or new way of thinking. This means leaders will encounter individuals' deep set ideals and particular thoughts or mental models. Mental models are “a set of ideas and assumptions – that you carry in your head to help you understand and negotiate a particular territory.”⁵⁰ They are changing the mental models people hold onto and helping them shift to a new model.

The traditional response to a dilemma or problem is to create another program or seminar. Cormode points out, “Programs often accomplish little and a large portion of people do not really want to be empowered . . . and the resourcing model of leadership and leadership education is only sporadically effective.”⁵¹ Programs are only effective to those that come to them and for some people they feel like they are better served on the sidelines of those programs instead of getting into the game. The problem is many times families and sometimes even individual children are left behind as churches seek to create another thing in their buildings for people to come to. Programs do not build relationships, godly people who are woven together build relationships.

For the Church to move into an adoptive ministry model there is a need for careful leadership and shepherding individuals through it. Adoption is a common word today, but is loaded with various images and thoughts, so the faithful leader must communicate the desire of invitation into the Body of Christ. Paul introduced a new focus into the first-century church of an intimate relationship with God. Leaders today can use the adoptive ministry model to broaden the family of God and create a vision of bringing

⁵⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁵¹ Cormode, *Multi-layered Leadership*, 73.

others especially the next generation into the family. This will be unique to every individual context but has the capability of deepening a congregation's ministry to their community.

PART THREE
MINISTRY STRATEGY

CHAPTER 6

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Communicating the Gospel is one of the chief and highest callings in all of life. For mankind to be invited into the continual Gospel sharing process with God is a huge blessing and one to be handled with great care. Much prayer and preparation are needed to function as faithful communicators seeking to shape identities. There must be a reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit to be one's guide.

To help facilitate and strengthen First Presbyterian Church in the area of communication this project seeks to create multiple touch points. For my seven years of being on staff at First Presbyterian I have been given the opportunity to share in communication responsibilities across varying age groups and in different ministry settings. This history has helped shape my viewpoint of where our ministry is excelling and where our teams could serve our people more faithfully. To accomplish the touchpoints of this project strategic leaders were needed across multiple departments from pastoral staff, key ministry leaders and lay teachers. The desire is to think "macro, bringing along the whole church, and micro, leading individuals who are on the front

lines.”¹ Every congregation is full of individuals who need to “hear how they play a crucial role in creating the environment where adoptive ministry can flourish, as well as providing the presence and commitment to nurturing and empowering the young as they grow.”² To accomplish these goals this project was shaped around a leadership training, sermon series and focused small groups.

Leadership Development

The first touch point for this project was for a gathering of key church leaders, Sunday school teachers, youth staff and children’s ministry team to have a combined training in the area of communication. Our Senior Pastor, Discipleship pastor, Children’s director and myself (ordained youth pastor) helped lead varying aspects of the training. Gathering leaders across different environments and age groups helps to see how each one can learn from one another and create healthy dialogue in our church family. This crucial training is important for all of those who work with young people because it “requires the healthiest and best trained members of your community.”³ Our congregation deserves people who have been equipped and have a deep desire to walk alongside them, not just serve as babysitters or chaperones. Training entails our ministries joining teams where each person is necessary and gifted to serve the Body of Christ.

¹ Clark, *Adoptive Church*, 71.

² Ibid., 72.

³ Ibid., 93.

The schedule of training⁴ followed a similar pattern of learning and exploration found in this project and also prepared leaders to utilize their new training materials for the upcoming series. First Presbyterian Church gathers key leadership typically in August of each calendar year to prepare for the upcoming year, so this training schedule and major components can be replicated with minor content changes each year moving forward or could be tweaked for any church context.

The leadership gathering focused on the various ways we communicate with the people the Lord has entrusted us with. The training is a combination of large group teaching, table discussion and then break out discussion with individual ministry groups. The leadership of each ministry area (Children's ministry, student ministry, small group leadership and pastors) led their individual teams in discussion around the material presented and also unique ministry challenges they may face in the upcoming school year.

Leadership Training

To launch a new initiative and refocus our ministries, First Presbyterian needed to spend time training our volunteers and leaders. Leaders from all areas of the church need to be gathered in and equipped with encouragement, tools and direction to be sent into their mission fields. The goal in training is to not just hand out curriculum and materials, but to pass along the major learning initiatives of this project as a way to shape ministry at First Presbyterian and beyond.

⁴ See Appendix 1.

One major step in gathering leaders across various age groups is for intergenerational ministry to begin with leadership teams. Invitations should be made to all key stakeholders in a church where they can be included in adopting young people into the Body of Christ. This approach allows for a blending of ministry areas and for mutual understanding and learning from each age group. There is something for each group to learn from one another.

Leaders who are given the task of shepherding and leading the next generation should feel empowered by the church. If the church adopts Clark's Adoptive Ministry Model and *Sticky Faith's* focus of locating five adults to minister alongside each young person, leaders should feel the weight of the calling to be a shepherd. For the student ministry at First Presbyterian, the communication to leaders is they are the "youth pastor" to their group of students. Yes, there is a full-time ordained pastor to lead this ministry, but the desire is to communicate to leaders they are on the front lines of ministry. Most of the time this happens naturally and as groups of students bond with their given leader or volunteer they look to this individual for support and connection. Each leader is there to shepherd their own group and our main desire is for them to walk alongside them for many years. Many of our leaders stepped up to the challenge and desire to serve their students through graduation.

A key aspect of this focus allows the ministry to not rise and fall on one individual and their capacity to lead. Ministry is shared by many leaders and volunteers and the vision to carry out adopting adolescents into the Body of Christ is held by many

different stakeholders. This is a sustainable model that can be replicated in any sized church and in any location if the right leaders are located and empowered.

Another key component of equipping the Body of Christ is to intentionally invite adolescents into leadership roles throughout the church. They need to live into this journey and to see their purpose in living as a blessing to others. Clark describes the very goal of adoptive church ministries to “create an environment where young people are encouraged to live into their calling in Christ as agents of the kingdom within the household of God.”⁵

Adolescents can serve in almost every ministry inside the church, which allows for another opportunity for intergenerational connection. Many churches allow adolescents to serve in children’s ministry alongside an adult leader; they can serve a ministry that may have already blessed them as a participant. Adolescents also can add great depth to other areas like worship, senior ministries, service and mission. The beauty of inviting adolescents into ministry opportunities with other adults is it shows them who God has created them to be and also reinforces their identity formation in revealing a portion of their purpose in God’s grand narrative. They can see how they play a role in the Kingdom of God and can be used by him. Intergenerational service opportunities communicate the need for everyone inside a church to be involved and allows young people to experience discipleship from adults simply by watching faithful discipleship and service being modeled for them.

⁵ Clark, *Adoptive Church*, 49.

Training is crucial in any important task. Equipping the body to serve its members allows for a common mission and vision while preparing the group to serve faithfully in the area it is called to lead. Leaders are encouraged to know they are not alone in the task of discipling and shepherding and have a community of fellow ministers in the trenches with them. Focused training also allows a central message to be communicated and vision to be casted to a large group of stakeholders.

Evaluation

A key distinctive of this training, where we received positive feedback, was gathering all of the varying age groups together instead of siloed teams doing individual training days. This was appreciated from a simple logistic standpoint where individuals who served in various ministries did not have to attend multiple trainings. The training was a great opportunity to hear from the Senior Pastor and his desire for our congregation's identity to be shaped by Christ. It allowed ministries to see where they could share ideas and how we all could be used to lead the next generation. This intergenerational fellowship of leaders also allowed people scattered across three services to identify one another and see the great depth of leadership found at First Presbyterian.

Another key compliment and praise from our leaders was they felt encouraged and poured into. Many times when we gather leaders we are asking for a lot in return and giving them basic tools of curriculum or study materials. This training offered a place for leaders to feel loved and cared for by their church. I believe this is why many of our leaders are still leading groups and serving in ministries today.

Sunday Morning Worship

Another touch point is a four-week sermon series preached in all of the main worship services in consecutive weeks with a focus towards identity. Like the majority of Sunday morning worship services the preaching is led by our Senior Pastor with Associate Pastors joining in the other aspects of the service to create healthy environments for worship. The preaching used a common template⁶ and has coinciding small group materials for all adult and student groups to follow. The template follows the strategy of identity shaping communication in reaffirming who God is, who we are and faithfully responding to his Word. The constant refrain of affirming what God is saying about his people and how they live into that identity echoes throughout the sermon series and I hope will carry into future preaching. This has been a hallmark of a church that has been committed to God's Word for over 190 years.

Similar children and adolescent teaching times followed the main text and the template altered accordingly to their age group. Sunday school teaching time is the main corporate gathering for Children's programming and largest corporate gathering for the Student Ministry. With many gatherings happening on Sunday mornings this allows the whole church to have a centering time to study the same text and also to have overlapping family discussion points.

For adults at First Presbyterian the additional teaching and learning time is facilitated through small group ministry. Community is fostered in the church of God when individuals allow others into their lives to share and speak truth. The Body of

⁶ See Appendix 2.

Christ is not meant to go through life alone, but a modern tendency is to move towards isolation. The Apostle Paul warns that the enemy seeks to “steal, kill and destroy us, but Jesus has come to give us life abundantly” (Jn 10:10). Gilbert Bilezikian picks up these verses to describe the work of the devil, which in Greek *diaballo* means “to throw apart and that is precisely what the devil does best: to separate and divide, to destroy community.”⁷ If the enemy can divide God’s people out into isolation they are left alone and are more susceptible to his attacks. Small group ministry gives an active place where faith can be explored, taught and reinforced. This is a safe place where adults can unpack the sermon series, but also have a place to walk alongside one another.

First Presbyterian has adapted a regular practice of small group ministry that is seasonal in time frame. For liturgical calendar purposes we gather people together around Advent, Lent and also to kick off each year. This project utilizes this schedule to have a centering affect with the whole body sharing in learning and growing together. The same material used in adult small groups was adapted for adolescents and children to allow for carry over conversations and faith exploration in homes. This allows us to help prepare families to be Gospel communicators with one another and to build into the tiers of influence. God’s Word teaches his “purpose is to gather the redeemed into communities where they can grow and serve through their integration into the fellowship of God’s people.”⁸

⁷ Bilezikian, *Community 101*, 51.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 137.

Evaluation

The regular meeting of small groups and launching new small groups for various seasons is commonly praised. Some long-term groups only desire to meet with their existing groups, but most in the congregation liked the opportunity to meet with new people. I personally was blessed as my wife and I were involved in a group of primarily younger families in our similar life stage, but we were also blessed to have two seasoned couples who walked alongside our group and brought great depth.

For our student ministry, most students liked the idea of using the same study guides as the rest of the church. The first reason was because this reinforced the Sunday morning worship teaching and allowed for further discussion. It seems trivial but they greatly appreciated not having another topic or lesson to try and fit into their already cramped head space. This was a new perspective to me as my mind naturally compartmentalizes things, so I easily move from one topic to the next. Adolescents did not want a sermon series on Genesis, then a youth Sunday school lesson on apologetics and then another small group lesson on dating. One series with lessons and different aspects that built on one another was a huge blessing for them.

Another positive benefit for parents was this was an easy discussion starter in the home for children and youth. Many parents do not feel equipped to specifically lead family devotionals or even know where to start in discipling their children. The small group materials being similar in discussion allowed parents to have natural conversations and bring up their own discipleship journey while asking what their children and

adolescents thought. Young people were able to see their parents model discipleship and connection to the Body of Christ and be encouraged to do the same.

Project Evaluation

My hope is this project is just the beginning of continually building into the life of the Body of Christ at First Presbyterian and beyond. To best evaluate and assess this project and its various aspects we desired to create multiple feedback loops. The beneficial thing for me is this has been a regular practice at First Presbyterian and a very natural aspect of our leadership. Pastors and teachers gathered to assess Sunday morning services to see if both the sermon content and the adjoining worship services created moments to set the atmosphere of drawing people into the messages asking questions like: Was the Gospel communication clear and identity markers established? Some initial distinctives and common vernacular of “In Christ” verbiage is already found but further discovery is needed to see how First Presbyterian lives into the calling of being blessed to be a blessing. My hope is as our adolescents and children sit in the pews, they are shaped by God’s Word to prepare them to step out into their faith.

Leaders and key staff members also took time to evaluate the impact of Sunday service and their individual programs and small group materials. A common questionnaire was distributed to core leadership to evaluate the helpfulness and effectiveness of the sermon series and to see if there was common feedback.⁹ During weekly or monthly leadership gatherings the teams were led in discussion over the usefulness of the communication tools and training time. Sharing common corporate

⁹ See Appendix 3.

teaching and learning across all age groups and in various settings is not the normal case, so an evaluation of the effectiveness for First Presbyterian is in order. There was consensus to continue to find seasonal times to have common teaching across all age groups.

My particular area is with the adolescents of First Presbyterian in the context of the student ministry. The desire in the student ministry is for more adolescents to find a connection with a new small group, connect to a particular leader and grow in their faith. The Fall kickoff was a natural time to invite students to join into small groups, but the church-wide focus and adults' involvement in their own small group aided in growing numerical numbers in student small groups. As we have equipped our student leaders, interns and volunteers with the training materials, they felt more comfortable guiding discussions and facilitating student ministry programs. Our goal was for them to feel like the "youth pastor" for their group of students and I believe this was accomplished. New small groups were formed and students bonded quickly with their leaders. Our leaders and volunteers were regularly found going to student events and living out the adoptive ministry model. As I had the opportunity to meet with individual leaders, they shared the blessing of having not just materials to lead with, but felt empowered as a leader to speak into the lives of their students.

Another unexpected outcome of this project with student leaders is it allowed us to bring on new leaders and volunteers for our student ministry. As our current leaders and volunteers went about leading, they also sought ways to bring another adult along with them. Some of these were parents who were hosting a home group where a parent

was invited to actively participate with the group, not just be the host home for the group. Other times a leader would invite a friend who had not led a group before to join them and participate. By the end of the Fall semester we had more adults serving in the life of our ministry than we had anticipated.

A major goal of this project was for First Presbyterian to feel adoption into the Body of Christ. The technique and calling to adopt the next generation is a way to pass on faith, but also an invitation for them into the family of God. Our goal was to see adolescents stepping into roles of serving in children's ministry and alongside adults in our congregation, which has been happening. We were able to highlight various entry points like service projects, ministry teams and events where adolescence can be a part of intergenerational ministry. Our leadership is committed to creating these environments and being intentional about making them happen.

The greater goal of a culture of invitation was seen most evidently in our confirmation class. As our students enter the sixth grade, we spend an entire school year on an intense discipleship journey. They have specific teaching, Scripture memory class assignments and attendance requirements. A great tradition that was started before I arrived at First Presbyterian is each of our confirmands is also paired with an elder of the church to be their sponsor for the entire school year. The sponsor checks on the student and their family regularly and is an active part of the discipleship year.

The confirmation program kickoff coincided with all of our other initiatives and trainings, so recruiting and equipping were already in place. Our students and their parents stepped right into the process and before we began our anticipated class size

doubled, many of which were students whose families were not already members of First Presbyterian. Some of this energy and excitement could be attributed to the phenomenon of adolescents not wanting to miss out on what their friends were doing, but I also believe our parents and students were living into adopting others into the Body of Christ. At the end of their school year I along with a few of our pastors met with each student and it was an incredible blessing to hear them articulate their faith in Christ and share who he is for them. Their identities were being formed “In Christ.” Their energy and excitement reverberated throughout our entire student ministry.

Ecclesia Semper Reformanda Est

Identity shaping communication is not something that is ever finished because the Lord is never finished in centering our identity in him. This project has helped to shape a particular time and season in my ministry at First Presbyterian, but my hope is it would continue to shape the people of God. The regular gathering of leadership across all age groups allows us to learn from one another and to live out the words of Deuteronomy 6 to continue to carry the faith forward. First Presbyterian has hundreds of members scattered across three distinct worship services and the leadership of those groups needs to see and experience one another. The blending of ages, life stages and experience does a great work in weaving our people into one another’s lives. Small group and community focus create environments for the Gospel to take root in our homes and in the community the Lord has planted us.

Joducus van Lodenstein established the great hallmark of modern churches by saying “the church is reformed and always in need of being reformed according to the

word of God.”¹⁰ Pastors and leaders connected this thought to the Five *Solas* by renaming it, “Reformed and always reforming” to highlight our desire to grow and learn to be faithful disciples. The clear distinction I like about Lodenstein is a desire to hold fast to the guardrails of the Word of God to keep us in line with main stream Christian theology. Our desire to be relevant or creative should not outweigh being faithful Gospel theologians.

Technology and communication are constantly evolving and as faithful Gospel communicators we must pay attention. A leader must be willing to evaluate their preaching and leadership to make sure communication is happening and the environments are building trust with those who enter in. First Presbyterian is committed to evaluation and adapting the ways we communicate and reach our people to be a faithful witness for Christ in Baton Rouge and beyond.

¹⁰ Joducus Van Lodenstein, *Beschouwinge van Sion ofte aandagten en opmerckingen over den tegenwoordigen toestand van't gereformeerde christen volk: Gestelt in eenige t'samenspraken* (Van Hardenberg, Amsterdam. 1674).

CONCLUSION

The final scene of John Carney's *Sing Street* is of the main character embarking on a new adventure. The scene shows him set sail in a small boat heading across the English Channel. As he and his love embark on this journey, they almost run into the large ferry boat in front of them, but after a few moments of being jostled they ride into the ferry's large wake. I loved this movie for the beautiful depiction of adolescence and this ending was a fantastic way to show what the transition into adulthood could be. The positive and negative force of adults will produce a wake in the lives of the next generation. My hope is for the Body of Christ to provide a way to embrace adolescents and invite them into the great stream of faith.

Our lives are to "glorify him and enjoy him forever."¹ Christianity must find the way to respond to all of life with a faithful response of God being central. Craig Carter asks the question of "whether the church will abandon the Gospel in order to function as the religious chaplaincy of the post-Christian Western world, or whether it will cling to the Gospel and accept exile from the halls of power."² The Church must continue in preaching the Gospel of Christ's saving work and drawing men and women into this eternal story. It is not for the individual church's gain; it should be in lifting high the name of Christ.

¹ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 3rd ed. (Atlanta: Committee for Christian Education and Publication, PCA, 1990).

² Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Waco, TX: Brazos Press, 2006), 23.

Today's culture shift coupled with an adoptive ministry focus means we must seek the Lord's direction as we seek to faithfully minister to adolescents in the twenty-first century. As students journey through adolescence with the aid of committed and well-adjusted adult mentors they can become faithful disciples of Christ. They are given a better barometer of discipleship and are able to look at how much they "trust" in the Lord. These mentors move them away from "a performance-driven gospel of sin management"³ and to a "Sticky Faith of trusting Jesus to lead, guide, and change us from the inside out."⁴ As many have heard in sermons and books on faith people must ask, when things happen to a person, does she run away from the Cross out of fear and shame or run towards the Cross for help and a place of refuge? This is not simply a static knowledge-based understanding of Jesus, but a dynamic living and active faith where we participate with creator God in Him revealing himself to us and our continued growth in trusting Him. Charles Hodge describes faith in this way:

The primary idea of faith is trust. The primary idea of truth is that which is trustworthy; that which sustains our expectation, which does not disappoint, because it really is what it is assumed or declared to be. It is opposed to the deceitful, the false, the unreal, the empty and the worthless. To regard a thing as true, is to regard it as worthy of trust, as being what it purports to be. Faith, in the comprehensive and legitimate meaning of the word, therefore, is trust.⁵

Our people are not to be preached the false idols of prosperity or rosy "everything's going to be perfect" Christianity which usually makes an individual the object of

³ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 41

⁴ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 46.

⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology Vol. 3* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Printing, 2003), 43

worship. Instead we need to go back to the heart of the Gospel where God's people found their central identifying marker as being God's people (Gen 12).

If a young adolescent believes in the truth found in God's ultimate love, then they may be able to savor in His love: "The soul may walk in the paradise of God, and gather here a heavenly flower, conveying to it a sweet savor of this love of Christ." We must take that love deep into trust because, "We may taste that the Lord is gracious; and if we find not a relish of it in our hearts, we shall not long retain the notion of it in our minds . . . nothing in Him is of higher spiritual nourishment than His love, which we should always desire."⁶ He is worth far more than we can possibly fathom. "The service of God, the love of God, and fellowship with God are not superadded gifts but originally and integrally human. God claims all of man – mind, heart, soul, body and all his or her energies – for his service and his love."⁷ It is in who God has created in each one of us as image bearers revealing himself to the world.

One of the most "important currency(ies) a congregation has to spend is hope."⁸ We believe that God Almighty has brought us into the family of God as fellow heirs with Christ and we have a great hope he is moving throughout the lives of adolescents today. My hope is that as we shift away from programs as a way to minister to people and into a new mental model that is centered in bringing adolescents into a loving relationship with

⁶ John Owen, *The Glory of Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1949), 116.

⁷ Henry and Bavink, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 552.

⁸ Roxburgh, *Missional Leader*, 16.

God. If we do this, we will begin to see a whole new generation awaken to God's grace and mercy. May the Lord birth in us a boldness to lead our people into faithful action.

Matters pertaining to the "maintenance, growth and expansion of the church must be of supreme important to its members."⁹ This is not just a direction from a singular Senior Pastor or even the session or core leadership. This is an owning of the growth of the church by the congregation themselves. They step out of the doors of our churches and into the mission field of their lives so they are actively a part of the Kingdom of God advancing.

Preaching is "laying the heart bare before those he ministers. And within that context, the goal in view is so to lay bare the truth of the word of God that the hearts of those who hear are opened vertically to God and horizontally to one another."¹⁰ Effective communication is revealing truth at all times, allowing the Word of God to wash over ourselves and for it to sink deep into our hearts. Once it has invaded deep into us, we are compelled to share these glorious truths with everyone we come in contact with.

The Kingdom of God is like a "grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches" (Lk 13:19). The Kingdom comes alive in faithful communication of who God is and what he says about his people. It spreads throughout our whole being bearing much fruit inside of us but also sprouts outside of us to provide a place of shelter and refuge to others.

These little moments or seeds of communication can have a beautiful and life altering

⁹ Bilezikian, *Community 101*, 44.

¹⁰ Ferguson, *Some Pastors and Teachers*, 720.

impact on our lives and those who hear it. When God's people hear from him on a regular basis then they may be equipped to live for Him.

With Christ as our model we should also seek to model to the world around us a faithful presence to show them Christ. James Hunter describes, "A theology of faithful presence is a theology of engagement in and with the world around us. It is a theology of commitment, a theology of promise."¹¹ Christ was fully engaged in living amongst us and when he died, he gave the world the Holy Spirit to be our constant helper and guide (Jn 14). The Holy Spirit is engaged in lovingly pursuing us and pointing us to Christ. We are to emulate this very action in the world around us. This twenty-first century is a very disengaged and disconnected place to be in. The church's faithful presence opens up the door to reveal to the goodness of the Lord and to engage one another in faithful community.

The Lord in his mercy has spoken to the world, by offering up his very own son as the living word become flesh. He inspired his holy Word to be a constant guide and companion on our journey of faith. In Genesis 12, as the Lord gathered Abram in to be sent out, he told him "the Lord will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." God has communicated his goodness and mercy to his people and they are live as beloved sons and daughters as blessings to everyone they come in contact with.

¹¹ James Hunter, *To Change the World* (New York: Oxford Press, 2010), 243.

APPENDIX 1

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Leaders Who Communicate

Gathering and Breakfast

Main Teaching

Welcome and Introductions

Teaching (Senior Pastor)

- Ephesians 1
- Identity Markers (Student Pastor)
 - Importance of communication
 - 1:5
 - Adoptive Ministry Model
- Breakout #1
 - Table Discussion
 - What are your Identity Markers?
 - IceBreaker
 - What is the Gospel?
 - How can we Adopt young people as a church
- Teaching 2 (Senior Pastor / Discipleship Pastor)
 - Identity Series
 - Where are we going
 - Small group materials
 - Small group kickoff
 - Recruiting / group
- Breakout #2
 - Dismiss to ministry team
 - Material overview
 - Highlight main worship teaching
 - Uniqueness to ministry area
 - Family discussion touchpoints
- Lunch and Dismiss

Resources needed:

- Gymnasium setup with large round tables
- MultiMedia projector, screen and sound equipment
- Binders with leadership articles, schedule, notes and discussion questions
 - Also 4 week study guide materials for each age group

APPENDIX 2
SERMON TEMPLATE

Identity Series

4 Week Schedule

- Week 1: Who is God?
- Week 2: Who am I?
- Week 3: Who is Christ?
- Week 4: Who are “We?”

Who is Christ

Text: Ephesians 3:

Main Idea:

- God chose us IN CHRIST before the foundation of the world...
- He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons **through** Jesus Christ...

New Creation

- 2 Cor 5:17
- WE DID NOT CREATE OURSELVES

Children of God

- John 1:12-13
- WE DID NOT BIRTH OURSELVES

Were Dead, Made Alive

- Ephesians 2
- WE DID NOT RAISE OURSELVES FROM THE DEAD

Identity Marker

- You are a gift to Jesus from God the Father
 - John 17:6
- You are a citizen of heaven
 - Philippians 3:20
- You are an ambassador for Christ
 - 2 Corinthians 5:20
- You are a missionary for Christ
 - Matthew 28:19

Application for Home:

Deuteronomy 29:29

-The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children, that we may do all the words of this Law.

-What is one thing we can reveal about God to one another at home this week?

APPENDIX 3

SAMPLE SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM

Sermon Overview:

- Week 1: Who is God?
- Week 2: Who am I?
- Week 3: Who is Christ?
- Week 4: Who are “We?”

Discussion Starter: (Use following question to get your group to begin talking)

- What is a famous person’s story?
 - What is a famous or infamous scene out of their life? What was their legacy?
 - What do you want your legacy to be?
 - What do you do each day that contributes to that?
 - How can you also point towards God with your life?
- Defining moment
 - Is that all there is?
 - Whole lot of other things had to get us there.

Joshua 4

- Read the Story of crossing the Jordan
 - What do you see, hear, feel, makes you curious? (Don’t be quick to answer, let the room speak)
 - Why did the Lord have Joshua lay the stones down in a memorial?
 - What memorial stones do you have in your life (or would you like to have)?
 - How can they uniquely tell the “hand of the Lord is mighty?”

APPENDIX 4
LEADER EVALUATION

Name: _____ Main ministry area: _____

How long have you served in this capacity? _____

What was helpful during the training session?

What is something new you learned?

-One way God spoke uniquely to you?

-One thing you could use in your communication this week?

What area of the training was the most beneficial for helping you to lead?

What could be offered at future trainings to better prepare you to lead?

Is there any area of concern, unique challenge or problem we need to be aware of?

Are you willing to lead again in your ministry area? Serve in another ministry area?

Additional comments:

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