Korean American Immigrant Parents and Adolescents in Relational Challenge: The Church as an Equipping and Empowering Community

James Gi-Sung Lee

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Dissertation Approval Sheet

This Dissertation entitled

KOREAN AMERICAN IMMIGRANT PARENTS AND ADOLESCENTS IN RELATIONAL CHALLENGE: THE CHURCH AS EQUIPPING AND EMPOWERING COMMUNITY

written by

JAMES GI-SUNG LEE

and submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

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KOREAN AMERICAN IMMIGRANT PARENTS AND ADOLESCENTS IN RELATIONAL CHALLENGE: THE CHURCH AS EQUIPPING AND EMPOWERING COMMUNITY

DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JAMES GI-SUNG LEE

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Abstract
Korean American Immigrant Parents and Adolescents in Relational Challenge:
The Church as Equipping and Empowering Community
James Gi-Sung Lee
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The goal of this study is twofold: first, to honestly explore and carefully analyze the quality of relationships between Korean American parents and their adolescents, and second, to seek ways to reclaim and redeem the mission upon local Korean American immigrant churches. Working from these two bases, this research paper seeks to understand this particular issue within a framework that is both practical and has a solid theological foundation.

In its overall design, this research took a qualitative approach, drawing on multiple resources in which historical and ethnographic research came into focus. The paper integrates theological and psychological studies and research materials. Narratives of immigrant experiences noted in various articles and newspapers are also brought into the discussion.

Part one draws the landscape of the current status of Korean American immigrant families based on their historical, cultural, sociological, and spiritual background. Part two contains two main frameworks—theological and social—and ways these two disciplines can be integrated to enhance the wellness of families in transition. The experience of relational conflicts is explored in terms of both spiritual and social understandings. The last section closely examines the vision and the challenge for local Korean American churches to reclaim the call God has placed on them to build up the health of their local faith community.
and their families. The need for Korean American immigrant churches to reclaim and redeem their God-given mission involves providing healthy spiritual modeling to equip and empower these parents for the ministry of nurturing their adolescents through Christ’s covenantal character of love, grace, empowering, and intimacy.

This research reaffirmed that transformation towards relational growth and maturity for these families came in unexpected ways—the crisis and hardship in their conflictual relationships provided fuel necessary for developing more meaningful and transformational encounters with God, self, others, and the community at large. Theologically speaking, one of the central biblical themes in Scripture is that in the midst of unanticipated and unwanted suffering and hardship, one can truly experience tremendous spiritual growth, restoration, and redemption. So, for many of these Korean American immigrant families in transition and in crisis, this paper approaches these important life-transforming issues with more hope than despair.

Along with articulating this theological foundation, this paper discusses implementation of the relational model of psychologists Jack and Judy Balswick. It offers practical suggestions and ideas based on the works of Drs. Balswick and Balswick to help pastors envision the development and implementation of pastoral care ministry within the context of the local church while equipping and empowering parents and their adolescents towards family reconciliation and restoration.

Theological Mentors: David Jangsoong Pak, PhD.

Ohgueon Paul Kwon, PhD.

Euiwan Cho, PhD.
Acknowledgment

This dissertation is dedicated to my beautiful wife Alisa who has always been my personal encourager and enabler, and to my three wonderful daughters Faith, Hope and Joy, who are my personal joy and happiness. Ultimately, to my Father God who has called and placed a burden in me to serve His body through the means of His grace and mercy I have been blessed by.
Words of Thanks

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December 2018  James Gi-Sung Lee
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INTRODUCTION

The Ministry Need, Problem, and Challenge

Despite the recognition of the powerful role of parents and other primary care-givers in the faith formation of children and young people, many congregations still fail to emphasize the importance of parents in their children, youth, and family ministry programs. Religious education programs often operate in the isolation from home, not as an extension of the home.¹

What is a normal family in the 21st century? Clinicians and family scholars have become increasingly aware that definition of normality (interchangeably used with such terms as “healthy,” “typical,” and “functional”) in the context of family relationship is socially constructed, influenced by subjective worldviews and by the broader, dominant culture.²

Some family therapists criticize that too often in history, theories of normality constructed by these dominant groups, reified by religion or science, and used to pathologize or oppress others who do not fit ideal standards.\(^3\)

In rapidly changing and transforming world, no single model of what one may consider as normal and even healthy may not fit, a challenge exponentially increases when varying cultural and societal factors enter into the consideration.

Most so-called, if not all, “normal” families constantly experience changes, which may or may not result in growth in their relational qualities. Given such diversity and complexity, clinicians and pastors working to serve these families in conflict must be willing to embrace more comprehensive and pluralistic views.

This research paper hopes to honestly explore and analyze the current state of Korean American immigrant families, with one specific area of focus, the quality of relationship between Korean parents and their adolescents, often described as in conflict and crisis. It hopes to encourage our local immigrant churches to be faithful in their call and practice in equipping and empowering parents towards the relational restoration in the home.

In the search for the “greener pasture,” many of these families immigrated to the States with an anticipation of many exciting possibilities and opportunities – initially, everything seems to offer new and better chances for the parents and most notably, for their growing children.

Most researchers agree that the immigration experience can be summarized as one single event, but a collection of many varied and interrelated life transitions. Some of psychosocial distresses related to immigration as noted by many research paper and journals

are a language barrier, inadequate prior education, discrimination both by dominant and other ethnic cultures, inability to adjust to the mainstream culture, and downward mobility.⁴

These are stressors which are likely to contribute to an increased risk of conflicts in the family. One disturbing indicator as reported by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) is one-half of the reported spouse abuse cases among Asian Americans in Los Angeles came from Korean American families, according to the Chosen Ilbo (1992), a widely read local Korean newspaper.

The inter-generational members of the family confronted with belief (what one thinks is true), value (those things one holds up as necessary), and attitude (one’s predispositions to respond to given situation) seem to be divergent due to their narratives and understanding of immigrant experiences in connection to one’s culture, what lies beneath in one’s thought and how one chooses to live.⁵

There is an urgent need for someone or some entity to provide the mediation, to guide these families so that not only would they recognize the positive potential but also help them to realize the capacity “to lovingly relate to one another,”⁶ thus the covenant of love and the intimacy as reflected within God’s character may be restored and thoroughly enjoyed.

Carefully analyzing all the possible resources that are available within the community where many of these immigrant families resides and functions, the Korean American immigrant local churches, especially ministries designed to nurture children, youth, and families spiritually, are at the most “ideal place.”

It is a crucial point to remember that the mission or the calling of the church is not to replace nor substitute “the ministry of parents” for their children. More importantly, it is to ask how can the church most faithfully and effectively equip and empower these parents so that they can effectively provide faith formation in their homes.

This sense of call and mission of the church must be first restored with the body of Christ by continuing to strive in redeeming the relationship with the heavenly Father, and by doing so, the church can be a model of covenantal relationship by which a genuine and authentic partnership with their local immigrant families can also develop.

These local immigrant churches, not as a competing but rather as collaborating agents, need to embrace the call to investigate and implement a model which is theologically, philosophically and practically appropriate to achieve the goal in given context.

Many of these immigrant churches along with their pastors and leaders who may deeply care for these families often fail to recognize the impact of the cumulative effect of the changes as result of immigration because these experiences ought to be familiar and prevalent, thus limiting in their urgency in serving these families in their dire need.\(^7\)

As a result of such oversight, the trusting relationship that should have been one of many foundational elements between these local immigrant churches and these families somewhat damaged and to a certain extent, violated. One of the most crucial steps towards

\(^7\) Lee, “The Loss and Grief in Immigration,” 162.
equipping and empowering these families must begin by first openly admitting the lack of Christian characters by the church and its leadership while entrusting God’s redeeming power which continues to operate through the means of grace within the body of Lord Jesus Christ.

A portion of this paper will attempt to employ the fundamental theological and social perspectives of family life and its model as presented in the work of Drs. Jack and Judith Balswick’s book The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home.

In their book, Balswicks describe a theology of family relationships in the context of God as parents and the Israelites as His children, and from that particular understanding emerges a relationship that stresses “the elements of the covenant, grace, empower and intimacy.”

The purpose of this paper is to formulate useful and practical means by which church can equip and empower parents with these principles and understandings, and help them to integrate within the relational dynamics present in Korean American immigrant families so that they can thrive in their relationship with each other.

Again, it is an essential reminder that such endeavor must first begin in a relational context between Triune God and the church, and from that redemptive narrative, the church can mirror and model the enriched relationship to these immigrant families for them to emulate.

The paper hopes to discuss and address the following main ideas:

(1) Korean American immigrant families along with their history, values, and beliefs – how these have been shaped their culture along with how that particular cultural “norms” were translated as they discovered their identity in this new and unfamiliar land,

(2) the value formation of Korean American youth which is drastically different from their parents – it is often here that the family system usually experiences a great deal of cultural conflict between the acculturated children and their traditional parents. These families must be guided so that they are empowered to accomplish specific essential developmental tasks,

(3) the church and the leadership must be able to integrate these immigrant parents more fully into youth and family ministry and its programs within the church settings, and as they do so, they must continue to validate and reaffirm to their congregation theological and sociological insights found within the context of the Bible and Christian tradition as the basis for these practices, and finally,

(3) by applying the family relationship model suggested by Dr. Balswick in a local church context, it seeks to find practical ways that are both theologically and philosophically in line with the redemptive plan and the desire of God - by which the Korean American immigrant churches can equip and empower immigrant parents towards the growing and thriving relationship with their adolescent children.

Although these families in constant transition may be able to survive on its own spiritually, a supportive and an empowering spiritual community must come along for them to thrive and mature - a healthy degree of connectedness as well as a healthy degree of
“separation” found in secure identity in Christ at the congregational level is absolutely necessary.9

Before concluding with the last remark, one other aspect of the immigrant experience is brought to light. Most understand that the immigration is a life transition that involves a series of losses and changes where people often struggle with - a severing of family ties back home, a change in their job security and the loss of friendship support which has been nurtured over long period.

The immigrant experience as a psychosocial transition involves a variety of losses and hurts for these parents. A grief work must come into play to provide continual growth in their journey towards the restoration of meaningful relationships, the relationship restored and redeemed with God and their children, within the context of Korean American homes.

All the issues and challenges noted in these pages cannot be addressed comprehensibly in one single paper.

It hopes to begin developing a course of action while confronting some thoughts and concerns one may not be comfortable admitting and dealing with. However, it may help to usher in some concrete steps for these Korean American families and churches, to promote and be shaped by God’s Kingdom purpose for their lives, as well as for the lives of future generations.

The issues dealt throughout this paper have also been experiences I can personally identify with. It is my personal experience I have been part of and continuing as I continue develop my narrative since I had migrated to Los Angeles back in 1975 when I was an adolescent. Some stories and research findings that are shared by others are also my first-

hand encounter; therefore, I feel my experiences are closely intertwined within this paper as I continue to struggle to seek answers in my spiritual journey.
PART ONE: MINISTRY CHALLENGE

CHAPTER 1
MIGRATION IN WAVES

The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. (Genesis 12:1-6)

Going back to the very genesis of human history, wherever there has been unoccupied and desirable land filled with milk and honey, human beings have migrated. Different motives compelled these families to take this journey, but one thing is for sure; they were willing to embrace the risks and uncertainties.
Driven by want and oppression or attracted by the chance for a new beginning, migrants have moved in waves or in small bands into new territories. It is a truism to state that American is a land of immigrants, starting with the arrival of persons from eastern Asia, perhaps 20,000 years ago.¹

According to the historical account of Korean immigration to the United States, three distinct waves are considered - first, consisted of only 7,000 desperately poor farmers who came to Hawaii between 1903 and 1905, were contract laborers to work on plantations.²

Over 90 percent of the adults were between the ages of sixteen and forty-four, 70 percent of them were literate, and significantly, 40 percent of all Korean immigrants at that time were Christians.³

In contrast to Confucianism and Buddhism, Christianity, specifically, Protestantism was introduced to Korea from the West – arriving with the expansion of European power and influence to Asia in the late nineteenth century. During Japan’s colonial rule of Korea (1910-45) and the Korean War (1950-53), Korea’s traditional culture, including religious heritage, was severely undermined. Along with continual industrial and economic developments, the country continued to adopt Western culture, which included the Protestantism, which has taken its root and expanded its reach.⁴

1. Our Focus Group of Immigrant

Economic hardship due to poverty, famine, and drought were the primary reasons for the first wave of Koreans to embark upon this journey to the United States. However, in 1905 only two years after the arrival of the first Korean plantation laborers in Hawaii, Japan began to formalize its control over Korea by declaring it a “protectorate,” gradually prohibiting Koreans from leaving the country in 1910.5

After Japan took over Korea in 1910, Koreans were people without the “homeland,” which led Koreans to adopt a strong sense of nationalism. Organized movements for Korean independence were established, and notably, many of their activities occurred within local Korean American immigrant churches.

In the backdrop of this loss of identity, Korean parents were determined to instill “Korean-ness” to their children, but these children could not empathize with what their parents felt. This perceived lack of feeling for the loss of the homeland and the lack of understanding of the indignity of Japanese dominance by their children caused severe and intense relational strains with their parents.6

Even though there has been a tremendous improvement in the relationship between Korea and Japan, Koreans still have a sense of resentment and animosity towards Japanese, often translated into the competitive attitude in the area of economy and sports.

Within the narrative of Korean history, the theme based on one’s experience of “loss” (of their names, languages, and culture to survive) plays a significant role in defining Korean ethnic identity and its culture.

The second wave of Korean immigrants was prompted by the Korean War of 1945 when a significant number of Korean War orphans and “Amer-asian” children began to arrive as adopted children of American parents. The Korean War, the United States military intervention along with family reunification provisions of US immigration policy during this time allowed a rapid increase of Korean immigrants.7

With the passage of the 1965 Amendment to the Immigration and Naturalization Service Act, the United States provided many Korean to migrate, which ushered in the third wave. (Table 1)

The continual political and economic difficulties in Korea since the war made immigration to America more appealing alternative. Between 1965 and 1985, about three and a half million Asians came to the States.8

In over two decades, over 30,000 Korean have immigrated annually, accounting for the tenfold increase of the Korean American populations between 1970 and 1990.9

Korea was ranked as the 19th largest sender by 1970, and by 1980, as the 4th largest sender, while Korea had sent few migrants to the U.S. before the Korean War.10

8 Takaki, A History of Asian Americans: Strangers from a Different Shore, 7.
Koreans, in 1960, they represented only 1 percent of the total Asian population; however, twenty-five years later, they represented 11 percent.\textsuperscript{11}

By 1985, half a million Korean immigrant population emerged as a visible group in America, mostly concentrated in places such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles areas. In Los Angeles, the home of 150,000 Koreans, a new community has sprung up on Olympic Boulevard; it is called “Koreatown.”\textsuperscript{12}

Given so many factors and variances one can consider depending on which migrant group is in the discussion, this research will focus Korean families and their children who have migrated to the United States since 1970’s and later.

a. Their Characteristics

In contrast to the farmers and rural folk of the past, those who came around 1970’s and beyond were strikingly different - a significant number of them were professionals, and they were people from the cities. Surveys of Korean households in New York and Los Angeles found that about 70 percent came with college degrees,\textsuperscript{13} along with a broader range of socioeconomic status.\textsuperscript{14}


\textsuperscript{12} Takaki, \textit{A History of Asian Americans: Strangers from a Different Shore}, 436–37.

\textsuperscript{13} Takaki, \textit{A History of Asian Americans: Strangers from a Different Shore}, 437.

\textsuperscript{14} Kim, “Korean Families,” 282.
Also, unlike the previous migrants, they came as families rather than as single men and “as settlers rather than sojourners.” In 1975, 86 percent of Korean householders in New York married.\textsuperscript{15}

In mid 70’s into 80’s, Korea saw rapid economic modernization along with the country experiencing a population explosion. In 1986, Korea hosted Asian Games, followed by the Summer Olympics in 1988, and 2018 Winter Olympics. Many college-educated workers faced with insufficient employment opportunities, “forced” them to explore overseas’ job opportunities\textsuperscript{16} – during this time, many Korean migrated to North and South America, Middle East, and few other regions around the world.

For more recent immigrants within the last 20 to 25 years, they continue to emigrate as nuclear families. Close to three-fourths of them have relatives or close friends already living in the United States, who assist with their initial adjustment.

According to Kim in his research paper states, “Emigrating from a country that is modern, industrialized, and relatively affluent, they no longer see the United States as superior.”\textsuperscript{17} Koreans see American as a place that offers better business and career opportunities as well as superior education for their children.\textsuperscript{18}

It would not be a surprise to see Korean families concentrated certain parts of suburban areas knowing for their higher qualities of both public and private educational institutions.

\textsuperscript{15} Takaki, \textit{A History of Asian Americans: Strangers from a Different Shore}, 420–21.
\textsuperscript{16} Takaki, \textit{A History of Asian Americans: Strangers from a Different Shore}, 438.
\textsuperscript{17} Kim, “Korean Families,” 282.
Kim continues by stating that in recent times, the family patterns and cultural values of these Koreans in the United States and those in Korea have been remarkably similar. Along with the strong presence of community-based ethnocentric gatherings formed within the context of Korean Americans, the immigrants’ relatively recent history in the United States, daily contact with Korea through various media, and frequent trans-Pacific travel account for the “congruence of values.”

For these reasons, some case studies done with Koreans and their families in Korea would add invaluable insights in understanding various relational and cultural dynamics presented in Korean American families.

One example is as Korea is becoming more diverse ethnically as the number of foreigners living in South Korea has dramatically increased because of work, study, and marriage, the government is calling for school curriculums designed to promote ethnic, cultural and social diversity.

b. Their Development

Since 1975, there has been a steady influx of Korean immigrants, and again, it is worth mentioning that this has occurred in the backdrop of rapid economic modernization in Korea along with an “experience of population explosion and political instability.”

Those that came, even with their college degrees and professional experiences back home, were opted for low-wage labor works – in 1974, a knitting-machine operator at a

plant in Los Angeles (which was “easily” accessible work for immigrant women mostly) were about 90 percent Koreans with monthly full-time wage of $ 800 in cash.

One particular issue which will be discussed later in this section - for Korean migrants who were once professionals, the occupational downgrading struck the core of many Korean immigrants with a very sour note: only 35 percent, a 1978 Los Angeles survey found, were able to enter professional occupations.22

Formerly white-collar workers in their home country, Korean immigrants have become auto mechanics, welders, radio repairers, and television technicians as well as gas-station attendants, gardeners, and janitors. Some others also found work at wig shops, restaurants, liquor stores, dry cleaners, laundry mat, and green groceries.23

After gaining some experience as low-wage labor workers, they saw an “opportunity” for promotion, and many eventually started their small businesses.24

Careful analysis of trend and development occurred within Korean immigrants who later became shopkeepers and owners; it happened at a very opportune moment. Middle-class whites are relocating to the suburbs and walking away from the inner cities of blacks and Latinos, and older white merchants are closing their businesses to retreat from the growing ghetto or to retire, which gave an opportunity for Koreans to fill – to be self-employed.25

23 Ibid.
Many then opened liquor stores and clothing stores in the black and Latino communities. Most of their business transactions were in cash. Koreans and their families were robust and resilient. They thoroughly knew the risks they are taking with their lives—they truly lived in the mode of survival.

However, the payoff was significant and rapid. Families bought homes in affluent neighborhoods (especially, within top school districts for their children’s education, not minding high taxes they had to pay) and drove expensive European cars.

With the language barrier and lack of cultural understanding, many Korean shopkeepers rely entirely on the family to operate the business. By bringing in their family members including their adolescents into the labor force, this represented viable income. In a Korean-owned family business, every family member who can work worked.

For sometimes now, Asian Americans have been celebrated as America’s “model minority,” hailed for their successes in the field of business, academia, and general financial prosperity.26

Other minorities such as most Chicanos, Blacks, and Native Americans, “although fully in touch with the sights and sounds and promises of an affluent society,” are denied in attaining a certain level of achievement either by the discrimination of the dominant culture or by their responses to societal challenges.27

However, for many Korean immigrants, they were able to find ways and means to overcome such obstacles.28 Even though to a certain extent there might be some truths to

27 Simpson and Yinger, *Racial and Cultural Minorities; an Analysis of Prejudice and Discrimination*, 120.
28 Ibid., 123.
this claim and so-called the “American Dream” achieved by many families and individuals, these “successes” have come with some high price tags and often with irreparable damages and sacrifices,\textsuperscript{29} which is one of the main areas this paper hopes to address with honesty and transparency.

c. Their Challenges

As noted earlier, one of the main notable challenges faced by Korean Americans is the “downward mobility” for professionals and how that affects their self-esteem and self-worth.\textsuperscript{30}

For many who were college and post-college graduates, once professionals back home, the underemployment (or unemployment) leads to low self-esteem, insecurity and role reversal in families.\textsuperscript{31}

It is critical to note that the classification of social status within Korean society in Korea is somewhat different from what one can observe here in the United States; even tough financial attainment and other forms of wealth and power desired and pursued, there is still intrinsic value placed on one’s educational achievement. The financial success does not always translate into high self-worth for Korean Americans.

\textsuperscript{29} Yeh et al., “The Cultural Negotiations of Korean Immigrant Youth,” 173.


Along with underemployment, long working hours in dangerous and risky neighborhoods are highly stressful and constitute a significant source of personal and relational conflict, especially in the area of their marriage.32

In the absence of a clear boundary and separation between family and work life, tension in any one particular area easily spills over in the other area.33

For most families, there is a certain degree of emotional closeness, and in particular, the resilient families have a healthy degree of separateness while maintaining a strong sense of belonging, connected and interdependent. However, when each member is overly dependent on the family or other members, an entire family may lose proper perspective in dealing with challenges, unable to process through the problems towards finding a necessary solution.34

At one extreme, a typical Asian American small-business owner (i.e., laundry, grocery store) requires the whole family to spend long hours together, sometimes resulting in relationships that are intense and “too closely enmeshed.”

It is important to note that what American psychologist may define such relational dynamic as being “enmeshed” (dysfunctional and unhealthy), Asian families would consider it as being “connected” and place a positive connotation in such relational dynamic.

At the other extreme, parents apart from their children may work long and tedious hours (i.e., businesses where owners can afford to hire people other than their family

32 Kim, “Korean Families,” 286.
members). Either way, family members seldom have sufficient time together to communicate and connect.

One recent phenomenon is the so-called “astronaut” (for Koreans, they label it as “seagull” fathers) family, where the family resides in the United States and one parent (usually, fathers) still maintains his business or work in the home country to provide for the living expense.\(^{35}\)

Also, a large number of high-skilled immigrants in recent times, especially in science, engineering and technical fields, can acquire compatible jobs here as the computer-based technology revolution and globalization has occurred.\(^{36}\)

For first-generation Korean American parents, these mothers and fathers are more likely in a survival mode; more time invested in establishing their family as a “functional unit” in the United States (i.e., working and establishing financial security) rather than attempting to learn and process American cultural and societal norms, including the language.\(^{37}\)

For many of these Korean American immigrant families, as they continue to explore ways to adapt, there are confronted with numerous problems that provide fertile ground for stress and conflict.


In general, stress events tend to be less stressful when they are predictable or when the individual perceives that he or she has a certain degree of control over the stress. However, for most of these immigrant families, the elements of unpredictability related to their immigrant experience on top of a strong sense of being incapable of controlling their surroundings compounds in elevating their stress level.

Most studies done concerning Korean immigrant families’ stressors have listed limited English proficiency as the number one stressor. For “face” or appearance-conscious Korean adults, the limited language skill - inability to express and be understood - is a significant blow to self-esteem. The limited English proficiency of many immigrant adults, particularly men/husbands/fathers, causes them to feel exposed and humiliated in the English-speaking world.

Korean culture had instilled in these men such an exceptionally “superior status” that their loss at multiple levels is more profound.

Apart from issues that arise as a result of a generational gap, the conflicts due to varied interpretation and understanding of culture and its values have created enormous obstacles common to most Korean-American families - not only between children and their parents but also in a relationship with their spouse.

In discussing culture-related stress, the author indicates that there are three types: (1) cultural confusion – results from the inability to associate a define norm with one’s identity,

41 *Ethnicity and Family Therapy*, 232.
(2) cultural conflict – results when values and beliefs held by a person in a social transaction are perceived as unacceptable by others and the person must either change values or stop interacting, and (3) cultural alienation – refers to the loss of sense of personal continuity in times as result of the breaking up of cultural patterns.\(^{42}\)

For most contemporary American families, parents, and their children, they are dealing with conflicts that are often caused by polarized value systems – the modern versus postmodern ideas and values. However, for Korean American immigrant families, the approach this paper has taken is the conflicts resulted in the values and beliefs of the host country and country of origin come into the discussion.

In studying the family dynamics within Asian American families, it revealed that the role reversals created by their migration cause severe strain. When monolingual adults depend on their English-speaking children as cultural brokers and interpreters, the situation can cause anger and resentment, or at least, some sense of ambivalence.

Clear boundaries around the parental and sibling subsystem characterize strong families. For immigrant families, the boundaries often diffused when the particular situation calls for English-speaking children “to be in charge.” However, this role readily relinquished when the “normality” returns; if not, it becomes a problem, blurring necessary generational boundaries.\(^ {43}\)

Role reversals may also occur between husband and wife as well. Husbands who are socially isolated and are accustomed to male-dominated Asian cultures based on traditional patriarchal attitudes find it challenging to accept wives who may find work more smoothly


and become more financially independent and assertive. However, such tendencies within males should not be blamed on their wives who tend to be socially active and bold by nature.⁴⁴

For many Korean American families, it is difficult to assess various symptoms related to their family problems, for they rarely seek the public health services and if they do, it is usually court-mandated or at the time of crisis.⁴⁵

For what has been observed and reported, the common presenting family problems are usually parent-child conflicts, marital discord, in-law strains, and domestic abuse and violence. Presenting symptoms may include somatization, depressions and anxiety, adjustment disorder, schizophrenia, alcoholism, drug addiction, gambling, and suicide. Also, children and adolescent challenges may include learning disorders, attention deficit disorder, conduct and behavioral disorder, and gang affiliation.⁴⁶

One of the research journals assesses the family’s post-migration experiences. It is an accurate assessment to note that “the degree of cultural shock and its impact on the family” during the immigration process is rather significant.⁴⁷

As one can imagine, individual family members within one household may differ greatly in their rate of acculturation, or cultural assimilation described as “a process of

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⁴⁴ Min, “Changes in Korean Immigrants’ Gender Role and Social Status, and Marital Conflicts,” 301.
⁴⁶ Ethnicity and Family Therapy, 234.
⁴⁷ Ethnicity and Family Therapy, 236.
integration with and differentiation from the dominant culture” (Social Science Research Council, 1954). ⁴⁸

In general, the degree of acculturation depends on years in the United States, age at the time of migration, exposure to Western culture and people, professional affiliation, work environment, and English-speaking ability. ⁴⁹

2. Korean Families and the Cultural Adaptation

For Korean American families who have not successfully engaged in this cultural adaptation, the stressors are often extreme. In the absence of the support system they used to have back home in the forms of extended family members and/or long-time nurtured friendships, they often experience various problems which leads to dysfunction within the total family system. ⁵⁰

For most Korean migrant families, especially those who came in the early part of “third wave” migration, the resources that would guide their migration experiences were insufficient and very limited.

Individuals with good social support from close friends and family members back home would struggle in the absence of someone to talk to, receive advice from, and be affirmed during uncertain moments of decision-making. ⁵¹

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⁴⁹ *Ethnicity and Family Therapy*, 236.
⁵⁰ Ibid.
For some, even if there were limited availabilities of resources, these families did not consider the adaptation to the host culture as their primary concern or a matter of significant importance as mentioned before. In one study, it states that a great deal of research attention focused on the acculturation of Asian immigrants and youths to the U.S. host culture, but their “enculturation” which involves retention of the values and behaviors of the culture-of-origin are often neglected. The article states, “Understanding both aspects, i.e., acculturation and enculturation, of the immigrant experience is necessary, especially in the light of implications for fostering bicultural competence and subsequent well-being.” \(^{52}\) 

Overall, Korean American families have maintained Korean cultural and linguistic characteristics with importance and necessity placed on learning American values, customs, and English. This phenomenon is consistent with the concept of integration, where immigrants seek to balance mainstream and heritage cultures, an outlook that is considered most successful in adaption. \(^{53}\)

However, the challenge at different levels and stages by which parents and their children successfully undergo through these processes is noted and observed.

In a study done with families in Hong Kong where there is a constant mix of Western and Chinese cultures (East meets West), some results found can adeptly applied to Korean American families’ context. In the presence of bicultural landscape and experiences (the researcher uses the term ‘hybrid’), the parent-child relationship is described as “fluid”, “always changing and evolving” rather than “remaining fixed.” An agreeable parent-child

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relationship is extremely difficult to work out, “as the rates of accepting, rejecting, integrating and modifying new ideas and retaining old ones are different for different individuals at different times and in different situations.”

During the past 200 years, many Asian families have migrated to the United States. Repeated contacts with American values over a prolonged period have changed their outlook on certain cultural mores and values - family adjusting to the new culture. Many Asian American families are in transition while struggling to hold on to the old way they are trying to develop new coping skills at the same time. Some eventually succeed and accomplish this daunting task, whereas others develop symptoms of stress when attempting to force a blend between two seemingly “contradictory” sets of rules and expectations.

Already noted in the previous paragraph, people generally move closer to the dominant value system the longer they remain in the United States and the more they rise in social class. Families that remain within an ethnic neighborhood (“ethnocentric”), who work and socialize with members of their group, and those whose religion reinforces ethnic values, are observed to the tendency to maintain their ethnicity longer than those who live in heterogeneous settings.


In that sense, the Korean American immigrant churches have been one of the major factors contributing to this “resilience for integration,” briefly discussed in the last section of the paper.

As Korean Americans are trying to find their places in this “new” land of greater and broader opportunities while struggling with internal and external elements in the family system, it would be essential to revisit cultural and traditional values and norms that provide the strong current that runs underneath.

For Korean American families, the sense of heritage and cultural belonging (and identification) is vital to their well-being, which would be the same for all ethnicity.

a. Beliefs and Values within Korean Family Systems

Korean immigrant families can be categorized in multiple ways. Some families are living “between two worlds” and not fitting in either one. Some are “acculturated,” in which the immigrant gradually assimilates to mainstream culture. And then, there are those who live “in two worlds,” alternating their everyday practices, rituals and cultural codes depending on the context mixes over the generation. For immigrant families, the conflicts that are confronted with these families not only caused by the different degree of acculturation, but also by religious, philosophical, or political differences.

58 Ethnicity and Family Therapy, 232.
The fundamental philosophy of Confucianism includes explicit hierarchical relationships and obedience to authority; this philosophy embedded in everyday Korean customs, beliefs, and morals, communication styles, social structures, and family systems.\textsuperscript{59}

The agricultural background and teachings of Confucianism and Buddhism have had a profound influence on Eastern philosophical approaches to life and family interaction. The specific pattern that exists within the Korean work and relational ethics attributed to the presence of a Confucian ethic in their culture, with “its emphasis on industry, self-regulation, and family ties, working harder and lived more frugally than back home.”\textsuperscript{60}

Some traditional Korean values and customs established under Confucianism include the authority of fathers, wives’ obedience to husbands, children’s obedience to parents, filial piety submission of self to family, submission to civil authorities, and high expectation in education.\textsuperscript{61}

In traditional Asian families, the dominant relationship is more likely to be placed on the parent-child dyad, rather than the husband-wife dyad; however, this trend seems to gradually reverse as more parents are dealing in their relational “disappointment” with their children.

The husband assumes the role of leadership and authority and is the provider and protector of the family. The wife assumes the role of homemaker and childbearer. Physical and verbal expressions of love are uncommon. The traditional role of a mother is to provide

\textsuperscript{59} Kim and Wolpin, “The Korean American Family: Adolescents Versus Parents Acculturation to American Culture,” 2.

\textsuperscript{60} Takaki, \textit{A History of Asian Americans: Strangers from a Different Shore}, 441.

\textsuperscript{61} Kim and Wolpin, “The Korean American Family: Adolescents Versus Parents Acculturation to American Culture,” 2.
nutrients and support. The father’s role is to discipline. The father and mother’s functions tend to be complementary, rather than symmetrical. The strongest emotional attachment for a woman is sometimes not her husband, but her children (especially her sons). Most parents demand filial piety, respect, and obedience from their children. In many extended families, children are not solely raised by their parents, but are cared for by a wide range of adults (grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins). Parents expect to be cared for in their old age.62

Throughout life, the expected role between parents and children has continued to remain firm and well-defined. Parents are to support and guide, while children of all ages are to obey and respect, although their opinions now considered.63

For many Korean American families, it saw strong vestige of traditional Korean values appear all across in the views that parent-child relationships should be very close, harmonious and without conflict.64

For most Korean families, social expectation and proper behavior are seldom propelled by relational mechanisms such as obligation and shame. Shame is viewed as a negative experience to most Koreans. The shame accommodates with the sense of “being small, withdrawn, and feeling inferior.” It is also related to “fear of being constantly evaluated, blamed and stigmatized.”65

An individual is expected to function in his or her defined role and position in the family hierarchy based on age, gender, and social class. Again, there is a strong emphasis

62 Ethnicity and Family Therapy, 231.
on harmonious interpersonal relationship, interdependence and mutual obligation and/or loyalty for achieving peaceful coexistence, at the expense of community well-being over individuals.\footnote{Ethnicity and Family Therapy, 230–31.}

It would help to explore deeper the basic “power and control” mechanism behind the idea of “shame” for Korean families.

Intertwined within the moral code of Confucianism, there is a value system called “\textit{sam-king oh-ryoun}”, which consists of three Korean essences of the world (the father should be a model for the son, the husband should be a model for the wife, and the king should be a model for the servants) and also reflects five important ethics of human relationships (closeness between father and son, difference between husband and wife, respect between king and servants, order between the old and the young, and trust among friends). This principle teaches Korean people how to behave, the essence of Korean social life, and particularly Korean family life. When and if one violates the rules and meaning that is within, one would feel shame.\footnote{Yang and Rosenblatt, “Shame in Korean Families,” 365.}

How these values get interpreted and reassigned within the context of Korean American families, have remained as one of the significant challenges for parents and their children, especially when Korean American adolescents perceive their parents’ behaviors and expectations based on their power as more coercing and controlling.\footnote{Wansoo Park, “Parental Attachment Among Korean–American Adolescents,” Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal 26, no. 4 (2009): 316.}

b. Cultural Interpretations within Korean Family Systems
For many Korean immigrant families, the couples are often inexperienced in conflict management and resolution. Along with stress associated with acculturation -“feeling a loss of control, feeling helpless, having less self-confidence” - and role transitions that threaten the status of Korean husbands who lack sufficient and non-abusive coping skills, these relational tensions unfortunately often leads to partner abuse and domestic violence.

Couples most often perceive their problems to be a matter of right or wrong, to be resolved by proving the other wrong. Men also tend to invoke male superiority to win their point, and frequently, the frustration is handled with the use of alcohol and other substance abuse. Even though culturally expected, the immigrant wife no longer feels she has to tolerate this, and the conflict can quickly escalate to violence and abuse, condoned by most social classes. Historically, Korean women have been the victims of physical and psychological abuse by their domestic partners for centuries. Their experience of abuse may have started as early as in their young childhood. Specifically, the battering of women justified within the Korean culture, which is deeply rooted in the perspective of male domination. There is an old Korean saying, “Dried fish and women get softer with an occasional beating.”

Most Korean American couples expect faithfulness, mutual respect, and joint decision making. Money management (not necessarily means she can use the funds as she deems important) is usually the wife’s responsibility. The power relationship and work division for the couple sometimes depend on how close in age they are, their educational

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level, and their commitment to traditional values. Among older couples and more traditional families, the unequal division of responsibility and rights along with double standards still remain. It is not uncommon for an unemployed husband to expect his wife to prepare family meals after returning from a job.\(^{72}\)

Generally speaking, in Western cultures the nuclear family stresses independence and autonomy of the individual members. However, in traditional Asian families including Koreans, the family unit’s right and privilege - rather than individual ones - are highly valued. Each individual in the family is perceived as the product of all the generations of his or her family. This concept reinforced by rituals and customs. Because of this continuum, individuals’ action reflects not only on themselves but also on their extended family and ancestors. If one combines the traditional Korean ideas with western ideas, there needs to be adjustment and self-exploration in the finding new ways of interaction.\(^{73}\)

Most Korean American families tend to have a clear and rigid boundary as to who is “in and out” and what would be embraced or not, along with what information would be kept in secrecy and which ones may be shared with others. Whereas many societies conceal family problems and boast about successes, Koreans attach shame to such a wide range of problems that they are highly selective about what is revealed and discussed with the outsiders.\(^{74}\)

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\(^{73}\) Ibid., 284.

Some research findings tell that due to the absence of an extended kinship network, immigrant community boundaries are “porous and permeable”; however, for Korean American families, these boundaries continue to remain rather rigid.75

In Korea today, as a result of the rapid transformation of the economy and society in recent decades, there appears to be a conflict between traditional values and the Confucian heritage on the one hand and Western influence through economic and social changes on the other. That conflict is being played out among family relationships, depending on their viewpoint, traditional Confucian values or modern egalitarian principles – in the family, in the workplace, and in their actions as individuals. This diversity is generating a great deal of tension and threatens social harmony in Korean society.76

One study done with Koreans in Korea concerning multicultural education curriculum that needs to be revised and updated as other ethnic migrants move to Korea, the research notes the limitation of current attempt: the educational focus is on being cultural assimilation and the accommodation of minority groups (those who came to Korea from outside) to the mainstream society (Korean culture).77

This subtle resistance towards integration among Koreans can be seen among Korean Americans who reside here in the United States. Many national tragedies (years of civil wars, Japanese colonization, war resulting division of Korean peninsula, military coup that resulted in civil unrest) have made Koreans to emphasize “the uniqueness and

75 Kim, “Korean Families,” 284.
77 Choi, “Educating Citizens in a Multicultural Society: The Case of South Korea,” 176.
homogeneity of Korea-ness”, upholding that Korea should be a monolithic society with one language, one history, and one ethnicity.\(^7^8\)

For Korean immigrant families, it is a daunting effort to define where they are at in their understanding of “self.” Incorporating “shame” within Korean American family context, one discovers that Koreans do not want to be seen as “peculiar” in the face of the dominant culture; therefore, they have created the façade to “fit in and doing things” that are expected by others. Moreover, yet, whenever one realizes the artificial nature of such outward appearances, it results in tremendous anxiety.\(^7^9\)

There is a presence of different “self,” depending on in which context one finds him/her to function.

c. Call for Awareness and Sensitivity in Spiritual Arena

Human beings are organisms of incredible adaptability. They don’t just ‘make do’ with what they have to work with; they adapt to what is available sometimes by altering the environment to make it more livable. The capacity to imagine an environment better suited to our needs and the ability to create it are hallmarks of the human species.\(^8^0\)

To define one’s identity as belonging to a single ethnic group always oversimplifies matters, because most people reflect such cultural mixing, and no cultural process ever stands still, even for those from a single cultural background. For Korean American

\(^{7^8}\) Choi, “Educating Citizens in a Multicultural Society: The Case of South Korea,” 177.


immigrants, it would help them to realize that in a certain sense, most people are always evolving ethnically. Especially those who live in the United States, they have multiple cultural roots and are in the process of transforming the ethnic identity throughout their lives, influenced by the changing contexts in which they live.\textsuperscript{81}

Even though it may be considered as a tremendous challenge, Korean Americans, especially the adults, must acknowledge and understand the profound differences in the multi-cultural society. One needs to balance between validating one’s connections with his cultural heritage and negotiating and bridging the differences among those around him (namely, their children), and appreciating the common elements shared within the community. One would hope that such room for appreciation may occur as parents consider the “composition” of their children’s identity and its significance.\textsuperscript{82}

In a closer examination further developed throughout this paper, the spiritual journey for Korean American immigrant families in connection with local immigrant churches play a vital role in understanding the cultural and spiritual make-up of this community. Biblically speaking, the human family where every member made in the image of God and yet fallen and sinful creates a tremendous challenge in fully grasping the various dynamics that exist within the system. Even though the Bible “affirms a high view of the family as God’s creational context for human lives,” composed of sinful individuals, the family can undoubtedly contribute to societal issues and challenges.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{81} McGoldrick, “Culture: A Challenge to Concepts of Normality,” 245.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 236.
In the Scripture, honest accounts of families becoming an idolatrous substitute for the true worship of God, and a clear depiction of dysfunctional families recorded in the very first few pages of the Bible (Genesis narrative of Adam and his family) help church leaders to avoid a naive and simplistic view of the family relationship along its profound relational challenges.84

Therefore, as cultural variance and its challenges discussed in this paper, the spiritual arena in which many of these Korean American immigrants families live need to be brought into the focus to enrich the discussion.

One of the major aspects of adolescent development is the longing for a place to belong. There is ample evidence across centuries and cultures that children become adults via a system of rituals that celebrates the society they are entering. Because we have abandoned our young, we have effectively taken from them a formalized expression of communal celebration and left them to their own devices to celebrate the life they have.\(^1\)

1. Definition: Adolescence – Passage into Adulthood

Life is a process of continuous changes and choices. It is difficult to discuss precisely what it means to be (or being) adolescence. Researches with various claims presented in the academic world concerning this particular topic are overwhelming. Given the limited scope of this paper, a simple working definition concerning what it means to be adolescence would suffice.

\(^1\) Chap Clark, *Hurt: Inside the World of Today’s Teenagers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 164.
First of all, it is important to note that there is no clear-cut demarcation of the shift from adolescence to adulthood. It is not about reaching a certain age. However, by most psychologists and those who work in the fields related to adolescent studies define adolescence as “the period from the onset of puberty until the beginning of adulthood.”

Along with the drastic physical growth and changes, during the onset of adolescence, a relational priority is also impacted during this time. During this period of increased emotional experiences which often feels very confusing and chaotic, they consider the peer relationship to be more important than parents regarding attaching and influence. It is at this time parents may feel “betrayed and abandoned.”

It would be crucial for parents to have a certain awareness of these biological and psycho-social changes of their adolescents without feeling threatened or dismissed, but be able to place them in a proper context. Parents’ willingness to be patient during this process would lay a strong relational foundation for later years.

2. Their Journey and Their Story

Citing the study done by Urie Bronfenbrenner, DeVries notes in his book following point: Bronfenbrenner (Cornell University Study) mentions “nine cultural shifts” that have taken place during the past generation which have increasingly separated children and youth from the world of adults, especially the adults in their own families. Out of those nine mentioned, few are applicable within Korean American immigrant families’ context as well: parents’ vocational/work choices that remove them from the home for lengthy periods of

3 Ibid.
time, an increase in the number of working mothers, a critical escalation in the divorce rate, a rapid increase in single-parent families, decline in the extended family, and the replacement of adults by the peer group.\(^4\)

Some of these factors cannot be supported with clear data since it simply is not available, but specific indicators seem to support such a trend among Korean American immigrant families.

Enculturation again involves an idea of an immigrant adaptation of host culture while retaining the values and cultures of the country of origin. In some studies, it is called “integration,” which few researchers affirm that this would be an ideal way of immigration experience. The process of enculturation is both unique and challenging for adolescents born into immigrant families. When compared with adolescents born into nonimmigrant families, adolescents from immigrant families must acquire their ethnic heritage and language primarily from their familiar context, and, to some extent, from their family’s ethnocultural networks.\(^5\)

Most families travel through various stages of life development which tends to be more dynamic than static. With each stage, the healthy functional family accomplishes a specific critical developmental task which helps them to move on to the next. Developmental tasks not accomplished when the family is less prepared to move on.\(^6\)


\(^6\) Balswick and Balswick, *The Family*, 3rd ed:44.
For many of these immigrant families and their children who are confronted with the need for constant adjustments and recalibration as they move through major transitions, they often find themselves stuck at one particular place.

a. Korean American Adolescents’ Identity Formation

The notion of systemic abandonment is not limited to those external systems originally designed to nurture, protect, and help shape a unique adolescent. Another perhaps more subtle yet far more insidious form of abandonment has occurred that has had a devastating effect on the adolescent psyche and landscape. Adolescents have suffered the loss of safe relationships and intimate settings that served as the primary nurturing community for those traveling the path from child to adult. The most obvious example of this is in the family.⁷

Parents hardly have time to interact with their children. Moreover, the relatively young age of the children demands more time from the parents. Even though enough studies in recent times continue to support this need for children, many young parents are opting for child-care, whether public or private. Within Korean American communities, the child-care for pre-school and toddler children is thriving business along with the after-school care. Ironically, many of these services are provided within the confines of local immigrant churches.

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⁷ Clark, *Hurt: Inside the World of Today’s Teenagers*, 50.
On the other hand, when parents do spend time with their children, the time is mostly spent on supervising homework, owing to the examination-oriented education system parents are used to in their native country.\textsuperscript{8}

During adolescence, in particular, children of immigrants must begin to navigate across multiple cultural and social contexts as they interact more frequently with their peers and family members both in the host culture and the culture-of-origin.\textsuperscript{9}

Among immigrant adolescents, the question of “who am I” has been one of the significant topics of discussion for those who are involved in teen and parents’ education. Within the last few years, among many books and articles written about Korean American adolescents, the identity crisis of these teens has been one of the main issues that are brought up and dealt with; even though the community overall has raised the concern for this matter, the topic is still in the infant stage of development.

In most culture, adolescence experiences a challenging identity crisis, and during this particular developmental stage, it would be considered within the “norm” to journey through such emotional turmoil.\textsuperscript{10}

For many of these developing adolescents who are in the process of maturity, this stage in their life certainly presents itself with significant burden and confusion, and the immigration transition compounds these challenges; for many, in the absence of proper guidance and direction by adult members. As their social and cultural context change, these

\textsuperscript{8} Luk and Yuk, “A Search for New Ways of Describing Parent-Child Relationships,” 128.
\textsuperscript{10} Lahey, \textit{Psychology}, 348.
adolescents may find it difficult to fit in. The identity confusion can be experienced as grief unless one will to identify and journey towards the transition.\textsuperscript{11}

North Americans idolize youth and youthfulness, but not youth in their particularity. We may admire the athletic ability of a teenage gymnast or tennis star, but we also take public consolation in the disclosure of an eating disorder or drug abuse problem that demystifies and redefines these young people as “typical adolescents.”\textsuperscript{12}

To correctly understand Korean American youth’s identity formation along with their worldview, one needs to go back and examine the youth culture in Korea, for it is “loosely” linked to what has been occurring within Korean immigrant families here.

For young Koreans transitioning to adulthood, Confucian norms and schools have a substantial impact. In Korea, educational merit viewed as a highly distinguished achievement for the family considered as “an extension of the self.”\textsuperscript{13}

In addition to Confucian influences, “modernization after the Korean War strengthened Koreans’ educational ambitions along with exam-orientated education complemented by state policy and state-controlled educational system and culture has resulted in young people being defined predominately as students, at the expense of other identities.”\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11} Lee, “The Loss and Grief in Immigration,” 163.
\textsuperscript{12} Don C. Richter, Doug Magnuson, and Michael Baizerman, “Reconceiving Youth Ministry,” Religious Education 93, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 345.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
As a result of multiple factors (widening of deficit, rapid drop of growth rate, increase of foreign debt along with slowdown in exports), Korea was confronted with economic crisis when significant companies went into default, and the government asked the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other international agencies for standby loans, and the most extensive international financial rescue package to date approved by the IMF board during the first week of December 1977.15

The uncertainty and risk derived from globalizing forces experienced via the financial crisis of 1997 have strengthened both state and familial commitment to, and investment in, the education of young people.

Indeed, the recent rapid and unstable restructuring of the Korean economy as it has been managing globalization is said to have been strengthened “education fever” as a means of achieving reliable resources to cope with the uncertainty of future life security. In Korea, it would not consider as an oddity for elementary-age children to attend multiple afterschool programs on any particular day of the week.

Some surveys have also shown that after the IMF bailout of 1997, most families were spending the same amount or even more on a child’s private education, including payment for crammers or private tutors, than they had before, despite their increased financial difficulties.16

Koreans place such a high value on academic credentials that the parents’ self-esteem intimately tied to the academic success or failure of their children. The fiercely competitive nature of the Korean educational system has made successful education of

children an all-consuming enterprise for most families, requiring much time, energy, and money, with the mother assigned to this task full-time. This system not needed in the United States, and working mothers are not available to enforce it. Nonetheless, immigrant parents deprived of traditional resources of self-esteem and feeling undervalued by American culture, insist even more strongly that their children excel in school, as well as gain admittance to prestigious universities.  

b. The Relational Issues with their Parents

Many new immigrant families find themselves in a strange place and unpredictable environment. In addition to language barriers and homesickness, they have to adjust to physical, economic, religious, educational, and value orientations of the United States. For many, political as well as changes in a social relationship create tremendous strain and challenges.

Parents are the child’s first socialization agents and play a critical role in shaping youths’ cultural socialization process. For example, “the family values – the work ethic, honesty, clean living, marital fidelity, and individual responsibility- are, in fact, social, religious, or cultural values” which are transmitted by parents to their children.

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18 Takaki, A History of Asian Americans: Strangers from a Different Shore, 236.
However, for many Korean-American families, parents’ role in this area is often absent or very minimal, and if there are, it ends up being the “cause of tension and conflict.”

Healthy families have a degree of mutuality and involvement that is both supportive and encouraging, but not intrusive. Research shows that families with a low level of cohesion described as disengaged families, the members lack involvement, and family members do not contribute to or cooperate with one another. This attitude of indifference has been some of the key factors contributing to conflict these families often face.

An individual from nonimmigrant families who can acquire their cultural values and behaviors from the larger, mainstream society without relying solely on their kinship network stands in contrast with the “enculturation process of immigrant children.”

In talking about the relational strain between parents and their children as parents are both emotionally and physically inaccessible to their children, one specific area one can focus would be how language is learned and how it translated.

The pace at which adolescents increase their English fluency often outstrips that of their parents for various reasons including more significant opportunities for youth to interact with the host culture through socializing agents such as the public school system.

and the limited access to English-speaking environments for immigrant parents in the ethnic community.\textsuperscript{24}

Subsequently, adolescents and parents may perceive greater relational and emotional distance from one another, experience more conflicts, and engage in less communication.\textsuperscript{25}

Depictions of immigrant parents’ relationships with their preadolescent, adolescent, or adult children almost invariably include eruptions of conflicts of culture and ideology.\textsuperscript{26}

This conflict based on the fact that children, who learn to speak English and understand American ways much faster than their parents, become translators – entering into the role of liaison between their parents and other product/social agencies that may require their attention.

These children are often placed in a position where they are to act as parents to their parents (parentified), and the hierarchical reversal that ensues strips authority from the parents. However, with bigger companies opting to provide customer services through other minority personnel, it has helped these 1st generation parents immensely. This pattern observed many times, yet new studies reveal a much higher variety of outcomes. In some findings, acculturation per se does not create conflict and loss of parental authority so long as an explicit role assignment maintained in the home.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{24} Andrea Sobel and Eileen Gale Kugler, “Building Partnerships with Immigrant Parents,” \textit{Educational Leadership} 64, no. 6 (2007): 64.


\textsuperscript{26} Park, “Parental Attachment Among Korean–American Adolescents,” 309.

\textsuperscript{27} Min, “Changes in Korean Immigrants’ Gender Role and Social Status, and Marital Conflicts,” 301–18.
Many questions remain as to whether this trend is the result of life natural enculturation process for these migrant families, or a norm in which many families deal with as they find themselves transitioning from modern to postmodern value reorientation.28

While noting the necessity to provide tools by which both these parents and their children can learn to process their losses and hurts, it is also important to consider these struggles by the Korean American immigrant families in a particular framework noted in the introductory part of this section, citing the work of Minuchin in the book Normal Family Process.

Adolescents will show marked changes in the area of social relationships, almost unavoidable and also a necessary phase they need to pass through. They will “naturally” shift and drift away from the family unit, not because the family is considered less critical. This shift in orientation from family to their peer is one way by which they cope by conforming because of their sense of insecurity and low self-esteem.29

As friendships and romantic relationships become more prevalent and intense during this period, they may show less interest in family activities, may reject the values they once upheld and in some situation, they bluntly rebel and questions parental authority.30

Minuchin, however, cautioned therapists not to base judgments of family normality or abnormality on the presence or absence of problems. Instead, he proposes a conceptual schema of family functioning to guide family assessment and therapy. This structural model

29 Lahey, Psychology, 349.
30 Ibid.
views the family as a social system in transformation, operating within specific social contexts and developing over time, with each stage requiring reorganization.\textsuperscript{31}

Each system maintains preferred patterns, yet a functional family must be able to adapt to new circumstances, balancing continuity and change to further the psychosocial growth of members. Therefore, visible symptoms are most commonly a sign of a maladaptive reaction to changing environmental or developmental demands.\textsuperscript{32}

Even though this is beyond the scope of the paper’s framework, the marital conflicts and instability between spouses as result of role reversal, social and economic status considered as well.\textsuperscript{33}

Discovered as a study that was done to investigate the relations between family processes, ethnic identity, and native language fluency among Korean adolescents is following:

As a means of identifying one potential mechanism that might underlie the phenomenon of enculturation, it was found that the greater family cohesion was associated with stronger ethnic identity, which in turn was related to higher levels of Korean language fluency. This mediation effect is significant in revealing one possible mechanism through which perceived family relations are positively associated with adolescents’ use of their native language.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} Walsh, \textit{Normal Family Processes}, 29.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{33} Min, “Changes in Korean Immigrants’ Gender Role and Social Status, and Marital Conflicts,” 301–18.

For many Korean American families, there is a lack of “common” language spoken. The bilingualism of a child can reinforce the problem of role reversal and the monolingual parents’ sense of helplessness.

As one considers how language translates among family members, it is essential to recognize the communication style between Korean parents and their adolescents. Parents are traditionally taught to employ indirect styles of communication and to avoid confrontations. Adolescents are expected to read “between the lines” (noon-chi, literally means “to measure with eyes”) to grasp the intention of the speakers.

Parents may perceive the adolescents’ assertiveness and transparency to be too blunt, pushy, and insensitive in how they express their thoughts, desires and emotions. Negative emotions such as anger, grief, and depression may be discouraged. A culturally naïve clinicians who may work with Korean American families may mistake this style for denial, apparent lack of effect and the awareness of his or her feelings, as being deceptive.35

Even positive feelings, such as the expression of love, are frequently not expressed openly. Thus Asian parents misunderstood as unloving and uncaring by these clinicians.36

The tensions and conflicts caused by lack of communication between parents and their children examined on a deeper level by the discussion encompassing the aspect of confronted cultural variations.

Parent-child relationships have undergone rapid changes over the years, which reflect a constant mix of western and Korean cultures. For many Korean parents, their

35 Ethnicity and Family Therapy, 246.
undergirding value concerning parenting often lies within the traditional teaching and values of Confucianism, including the idea of shame discussed in the previous section.\textsuperscript{37} Many studies on changing parent-child relationships comprise discussions on values about children’s upbringing, the relationship between parental roles and work roles, the potential for action, room for negotiation and reflectivity in the relationship.\textsuperscript{38}

c. Intervention towards the Healthier Relationship

According to the family system theory, a healthy family is an unit that continues to develop and adjust by learning to embrace the changes, both anticipated as well as unexpected. The system also creates a space to tolerate and respond to the changing needs of its family members while providing a sense of belonging in the safe environment.\textsuperscript{39}

All cultures are valid and have value to offer. In order to guide parents to such awareness and to equip them to interact with their adolescents, and adolescents with their parents, this requires someone who understand both cultures and generations to intervene with values and beliefs that are shared and trusted: this is where church, especially youth and family ministry, comes into play and fill in this significant and vital role.

In this conflictual relationship, one must find rooms to negotiate and then, eventually connect:

Parents certainly cannot become adolescents again by incarnation in the same way that Christ became a man. Parents would be well-served to build their understanding of a postmodern adolescent

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{} Park, “Parental Attachment Among Korean–American Adolescents,” 309.
\bibitem{} Balswick and Balswick, \textit{The Family}, 3rd ed:47.
\end{thebibliography}
culture, and for that we apply the word “incarnate” rather than “communicate.” Doing theology in a postmodern youth culture requires not only effective verbal communication but the genuine personal embodiment of that Truth. Making the Truth know can no longer focus primarily on saying it with theological accuracy. The Truth must be experienced in theological accuracy, both in corporate contexts and in the individual relationships.\(^{40}\)

While maintaining the stability that can provide a firm foundation, the family members must learn to be flexible to adapt to changing situations. Given the enormous demands made on the family in this postmodern industrialized urban society, this indeed would not be an easy task to accomplish and to sustain.\(^{41}\)

In providing room to connect and engage, both parents and adolescents need to appreciate and even celebrate cultural variance. Perceiving any one culture to be inherently superior to another would most likely lead to destructive relational dynamics. The results of such an attitude include domination, competition, territorialism, and isolation. Adolescent rebellion is often fueled by an adult culture that presumes and judges, and comes to conclusion even before any attempts are made to understand cultural variance. Youth cultures must be understood as offering new – as opposed to better or worse – challenges and opportunities for living the gospel message, thus promoting transforming lives.\(^ {42}\)

In many research findings, it affirms that parents and adolescents are more alike than different. Both parents and adolescent long for, and share the desire for an authentic and genuine relationship of unfailing love. In this lies the dilemma that every person faces.


\(^{41}\) Balswick and Balswick, *The Family*, 3rd ed:47.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 57–58.
Although the availability of pure human relationships ceased in the Fall (Proverbs 20:6), God-given appetite for genuine relationships did not (Proverbs 19:22). Each person’s sincere desire for a relationship that is both complete and unfailing remains. Moreover, it is this desire by which God brings us into the relationship connects deeply and intimately.

Based on how Yao in her journal *Implications of Biculturalism* defines the “cultural conflict,” the underlying openness to making a space for those who are culturally different is the key to expanding the cultural understanding. One primarily learns about culture not by learning the “facts” of another culture, but rather by changing one’s attitudes about culture variations.43

Information one learns about cultural differences will expand the understanding, particularly concerning curiosity and humility about cultural differences.44

There is a Chinese saying, “to know oneself and others, seek commonalities and accommodate differences.” Knowing what one’s and others’ ideas about parent-child relationships is the first step towards a good parent-child relationship. Knowing the actual beliefs of each group is essential in trying to facilitate communication between the groups.

Based on their Confucian belief system, for Korean American parents, “harmony without conflict” is an essential condition for an excellent parent-child relationship; while most Western professionals seem to rely more on conflict resolution and anger management skill.


In ways of helping these families in tension, accommodation and giving in have been a significant mode of resolving differences, and at all cost, avoid conflict. However, given the broader social and cultural dynamics within the Korean American immigrant families where making negotiation based on that seems somewhat intricate and multi-layered, perhaps both ‘conflict resolution’ and ‘accommodation’ may be needed.45

One of the areas that have been in discussion in this paper is on “cultural conflict” Korean American families face, where the family system usually experiences a great deal of cultural tension between the acculturated children and the traditional parents. As the immigration history deepens, the families who may be more “bicultural” and “Americanized” still experience “cultural conflicts.” How can church ministry provide a useful direction for these families who are in this conflict?

Again, it would be an excellent advice Korean parents can live by when they realize that there are “aspects of American culture they should embrace, and there are aspects they should protest and redeem, and there are many aspects that are simply different from how other cultures live, neither expressly good nor expressly bad.”46

46 Livermore, Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World, 65.
CHAPTER 3
RETHINKING THE GOAL AND THE PURPOSE OF YOUTH AND
FAMILY MINISTRY

Humans, God’s image bearers, have universal needs and traits due to the divine imprint. God can be seen in every human community and, therefore, intercultural exegesis is theocentric as well as anthropocentric. It is not just one human observing another human, but a human observing God. Once again, the task is not to introduce the God of adults to the youth of today. Rather, the goal is to bring to light visions of their own Creator and Lord who has not only been witnessing to himself in the midst of their culture, but is witnessed to within the very being of the youth themselves. Such activity defines what we mean by doing theology in the midst of postmodern reality.47

In recent studies, it has been revealed that young people who are confessing Christians, and attend church regularly know little about faith traditions, and have difficulty perceiving or articulating the relationship between faith and their daily lives. Many parents, pastors, and lay leaders affirm this reality.48

47 Richard and James, “The ‘Fourth Wave’: A Theological Perspective on Youth Ministry,” 57.
In order to be faithful to the genuine call and purpose of youth and family ministry, there must be some radical changes in the theological and philosophical approach to the ministry, “being mindful as to what needs to be changed as well as what should be kept and affirmed, along with being able to effectively communicate such needs for changes.”

Contemporary theologians and ethicists in the past had a tendency to consider such issues as the nature and status of children, parental obligations to children, and the moral and spiritual formation of children and youth as ‘beneath’ the work of serious scholars and theologians, and as a suitable area of inquiry only for pastoral counselors and religious educators.

Thus, theological discourse in many Christian traditions has been dominated by “simplistic and ambivalent view of children and teenagers” that “diminish their complexity and integrity, fostering narrow understandings of parenting and other adult-child relationships.”

However, with the rapid growth of interest and concern for childhood and adolescent studies in the academy overall, this is beginning to change.

For those who are continually engaged in the youth and family ministry, one must seriously ask, “What would be the goal of youth and family ministry and what would be the theological and practical basis for such endeavor?”

As pastors and church leaders, the serious attempt has to made, to integrate parents more fully into their child and youth ministry programs. As these church leaders discern the

49 Powell, Deep Ministry in a Shallow World, 64.
51 Ibid.
best approaches to provide sufficient care for their particular congregations and communities, the body of Christ will mutually benefit by critically incorporating some of the fundamental insights from the Bible and the Christian tradition about the roles and responsibilities of parents, the complexity and dignity of children, and ways by which one can promote for spiritual nurturing and formation. By taking into account theological perspectives on parents, children, and adolescents, church pastors and leaders can better strengthen all areas of their work with or on behalf of children, whether in children, youth ministry or family ministry.52

As noted in the works of Drs. Balswick in their book The Family, the biblical perspective incorporated reflects expansive theological truths. The foundation of the theology of family relationships stresses the elements of covenant, grace, empowering, and intimacy. A theology of family relationships is based on what the Bible says about God as a parent in relation to the children of Israel, and about Christ as the groom in relationship to the church as the bride.53

The Scripture is filled with various examples of relationships; however, the relationship between God and the children of Israel powerfully narrated in the Old Testament has verified to be the most fruitful and useful model for the development of a theology of family ministry. Considering the fundamental and essential element in developing a theology of the family, the concept of covenant is viewed as the principal starting point.54

54 Ibid., 21.
1. Historically and Theologically Informed Perspective on Parents and Adolescents

The ministry of the gospel must be rooted in God’s covenantal relationship with His people. Within the context of pastor and a church willing to come and help to reconcile the relationship between parents and their adolescent, it must include the “biblically prescribed attitudes of mutual submission and reciprocal servant-hood” and it also embraces the following promise.55

It is to claim concerning God’s absolute sovereignty, sinfulness of man, Christ as the Redeemer, the active role of God’s Spirit towards redemption and healing, God’s desire to build His body, the Church, the power and promise given through His written Word, and the presence of our enemy to seek to destroy even though God who is omnipotent keeps him in check, so that the redemptive purposes of God will ultimately prevail.56

In the context of embracing the theologically informed perspective within the framework of rebuilding a positive relationship with parents and their adolescents, one must dwell within the foundational theological description of the imago Dei as imago relationis, by which adult leaders realize God’s call for a human to be in a covenantal relationship with God and others.57

This paper incorporates a theology of family relationships developed by Drs. Balswick which involves four sequential, nonlinear stages: covenant (to love and be loved),

56 Richard and James, “The ‘Fourth Wave’: A Theological Perspective on Youth Ministry,” 54–55.
57 Richter, Magnuson, and Baizerman, “Reconceiving Youth Ministry,” 341.
grace (to forgive and be forgiven), empowering (to serve and be served), and intimacy (to know and be known). Authors note that depending on how each family relates to one another based on these essential elements, their relational experiences will either be dynamic and maturing or stagnant and dying.\textsuperscript{58}

With unconditional love at its core, a covenant commitment is the logical beginning point of any family relationship. This unwavering covenant love develops a capacity to forgive and to be forgiven – how God’s grace is affirmed and experienced.\textsuperscript{59}

For example, the relationship between a parent and infant child begins as a unilateral (one-way) love commitment; as the parents live out that commitment, the relationship may grow into a bilateral (mutual) love commitment. In order for growth to take place in a relationship, there must be involvement by both persons. Growth in family relationships can be blocked or retarded at any point when one person in the relationship is unable or unwilling to reciprocate covenant love, grace, empowering, or intimacy. Thus, growth in a relationship can come to a standstill at any point in this cycle.\textsuperscript{60}

However, in the absence of a deeper level of commitment in a relationship, it can definitely “stagnate and fixate on (1) contract rather than covenant, (2) law rather than grace, (3) possessive power rather than empowering, and (4) distance rather than intimacy.”\textsuperscript{61}

\begin{itemize}
  \item a. Historical Narrative behind the Direction of Family Ministry
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{58} Balswick and Balswick, \textit{The Family}, 3rd ed:21.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 21.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 22.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
Those who are in the leadership position of youth and family ministry, the fundamental importance of how theological and philosophies of ministry directly influence the context, strategy, and structure of what one wants to facilitate or mediate in ministry must be recognized.62

Currently, there seems to be a strong push and plead for strategies in ministry that will help restore basic relationships, “helping to rebuild an alternative community which is called the church of Jesus Christ.”63

Embracing this trend towards the relational importance, any vision one may carry concerning the family ministry must be supported by a solid theological understanding of parents and parent-child relationships. Some of the rich languages of the tradition regarding parents and their roles can help strengthen youth and family ministry programs and help parents understand and articulate the depth and importance of their task and their role.64

Christian theologians in the past have understood the multifaceted and sacred task of parenting, and they have spoken meaningfully about it.

John Chrysostom spoke about the family as a little church or a ‘sacred community.’ For him, this means that parents should read the Bible to their children, pray with them, and be good examples. Being a little church also means that the family reaches out to the poor and needy in the community. Chrysostom ranks the neglect of children among the greatest evils and injustices. He also believes

that we neglect children when we focus on secular standards of success, which at that time, as today, means mainly financial success; or when we are preoccupied with accumulating possessions.\textsuperscript{65}

Another theologian, Martin Luther, has emphasized the importance of parenting by speaking of it as “a divine calling or vocations,” reflecting deeply on the central tasks and responsibilities of parenting.

Although he knew that parenting could be a difficult task and was often considered as insignificant and even distasteful job, he believed parenting is a serious and divine calling. Parenting is one of the particular vocations that serves the neighbor and contributes to the common good. According to Luther, as priests and bishops to their children, parents have a twofold task: to nurture the faith of their children, and to help them develop their gifts to serve others.\textsuperscript{66}

Followers of Luther also spoke meaningfully about the sacred task of parenting. August Herman Francke, the 18th-century German Pietist from Halle, claimed that the primary goal of parents is to lead their children to godliness. They are “to help children grow in faith, empowering them to use their gifts, and talents to love and serve God and the neighbor, and to contribute to the common good.”\textsuperscript{67}

Within the richness of these theological perspectives, one must be able to see that the goal of family ministry must move beyond simply conversion. It needs to travel through the process of being sanctified, and ultimately come to the place of experiencing God’s


\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 351–52.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 352.
glorification. The Church is called to make disciples – men and women who are experiencing Christian maturity through the life of faith, and of obedience. One cannot move toward Christian maturity alone. One cannot be a mature Christian adult in isolation from other believers.\textsuperscript{68}

Against the culture that promotes individualism and self-centeredness, the Church must invite our children and adolescents along with their parents to a genuine faith community, to the “community of discipline” and discipleship.\textsuperscript{69}

Some such as structural developmentalists would seek to accentuate individuation; however, what must be sought after is by understanding how adolescence develop the self in context of relationship, it would be more beneficial to consider individuation as a process of self-differentiation in relationship rather than as a matter of increased autonomy and separation. In more than one way this links up with a theological understanding of personality and identity formation. We do not minister towards individualism, but towards individuality within community.\textsuperscript{70}

The question one must ask in it strategies and structures in family ministry is whether the ministry is facilitating community that builds and encourages mutual accountability, especially in the context of a parents-children relationship.

The vital connection our children and youth needs starts within the context of their nuclear family, especially their parents, and the family ministry needs to “access the incomparable power of the nuclear family and connects students to an extended family of

\textsuperscript{68} DeVries, \textit{Family-Based Youth Ministry}, 165.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} Nel, “Identity Formation and the Challenge of Individuation in Youth Ministry,” 93.
Christian adults to the end that those students growing toward maturity in Christ,” and this is the way DeVries in his book defines as the goal of “Family-Based Youth Ministry.”71

For many Korean American Christians, the church becomes a second home to many Korean immigrants, almost like an extended family.72 However, it is important to note that not the church, but it is these parents who continues to be the single most crucial influence on the development of an adolescent’s personality.73

Various researches done in the field of psychology purports that even though peer pressure is a significant influence on whether one chooses to use drugs or engage in delinquent behaviors, parental disapproval of such activities has been demonstrated to reduce and deter these actions by youth, with increased parental supervision as a significant mediator of peer influence. Furthermore, parental support has been found to be one of the most powerful predictors of reduced delinquency in youth.74

Unfortunately, many parents do not realize this fact; parents feel their opportunity to be people of influence over children and adolescents have come and long gone. This misperception engrained in these parents’ mind is one area churches need to step in and indeed empower and encourage these parents to restore this role. Parents must recognize the importance of being encouragers, those who come alongside to empower their adolescents - to equip, strengthen, build, and nurture their adolescents. It calls for these parents to help

71 DeVries, Family-Based Youth Ministry, 176.
73 DeVries, Family-Based Youth Ministry, 62.
their adolescents to recognize their potential, and to provide the encouragement and
guidance so that they can achieve their full and maximum potential.\footnote{Balswick and Balswick, \textit{The Family}, 3rd ed:28.}

Most parents have difficulty embracing the concept of failure as means towards
maturity. However, they must be willing to step back and allow their adolescents to
experience life, with all its ups and downs. The proper way to implement this principle of
empowerment includes willingness by the adult to “step back and allow the one being
empowered to learn through experience and not by being over-dependent.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Parents must discern the uniqueness God has placed in their children, to recognize
God’s gifting in their lives. A biblical understanding of empowerment includes release,
“never involves control, coercion, or force. Rather, it is a respectful, reciprocal process that
takes place between people in mutually enhancing ways.”\footnote{Ibid.}

The supreme example of human empowerment is in sinful and
powerless condition, God gives the ability to become children of
God. Jesus redefined power by his teaching and by his relating to
others as a servant. Jesus rejected the use of power to control others
and instead affirmed the use of power to serve others, to lift up the
fallen, to forgive the guilty, to encourage responsibility and maturity
in the weak, and to enable the unable. His empowerment was
directed to those who occupied a marginal status.\footnote{Ibid.}

Children are shaped by their genetic make-up and influenced by their peers,
neighborhoods, schools, religious communities, and in broader arena, the political and

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\footnote{Balswick and Balswick, \textit{The Family}, 3rd ed:28.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
social contexts. Each of these influences plays a role in shaping a child’s character. Nonetheless, it is the parents or primary caregivers who are still the most critical shaping force (whether negative or positive) in a child’s development.\textsuperscript{79}

2. Youth and Family Ministry Driven by Informed Theological Understanding

If the covenant is the love commitment and grace is the underlying atmosphere of acceptance, then empowerment is the action of God in people’s lives which has been testified in the work of Jesus Christ. The celebrated message of Jesus is that He has come to empower – ‘I came that they have life, and have it abundantly.’ (John 10:10b)\textsuperscript{80}

Once again, it is an important question to ask: How can the church most faithfully and effectively equip and empower faith formation in the home, “intentionally attending to its critical role in the family-congregation partnership?”\textsuperscript{81}

The family-based ministry must be found in the context of God’s presence and His empowerment, the witness of Scripture to be valued and implemented to establish a strong foundational ground as theological consideration.

Considering the Old Testament foundations for youth and family ministry, one may remember words written in Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

Here, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them


\textsuperscript{80} Balswick and Balswick, \textit{The Family}, 3rd ed:28.

\textsuperscript{81} Wiersma, “Law and Gospel, and Youth and Family Ministry,” 321.
when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Faithful Jewish believers would recite this passage found in the Hebrew Scripture as a morning and evening prayer; however, for Christian parents, being aware of its necessity has not always translated into the transmission of its significance to their adolescents.82

Most of these Hebrew parents came to understand how the spiritual discipline is played out in the context of individual home – the worship becomes a lifestyle, not an event that occurs within the confines of specific times and places.83

These parents also knew the lessons of life which is found in the daily life experiences and they consider instructing their children as they are in contact day in and day out as one of their primary responsibilities. These commandments given to parents, when fulfilled, implied God’s covenantal promise of a blessing for both parents and their children.84

In our contemporary context, for most Christian teenagers, Sunday school and youth group have become a substitute for spiritual training in the home. Interesting enough, the Sunday-school movement itself began as an outreach to “unchurched” poor children. Its founders never intended for it to take over the role of Christian parents.85

83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 DeVries, Family-Based Youth Ministry, 162.
Again, it is important to understand that any strong Christian vision of parenting or adult-child relationships also must be integrally connected to a vibrant and complex theological understanding of children and childhood.\(^{86}\)

In the book of Proverbs, multiple key verses depict parents as the “key earthly source of wisdom,” “the parents-as-faith-formers,” which should be the strong undergirding emphasis of youth and family ministry.\(^{87}\)

In many ways, the family-based ministry is not a new model as much as it is a radical return to God’s original design.\(^{88}\) Christian educator John Westerhoff affirms, “No matter where you look in our Judeo-Christian heritage it is the parents who have the prime responsibility to bring up their children in the faith.”\(^{89}\)

Youth leader and writer Mike Yaconelli explain that he is reluctant to adopt the family-based approach because there are not enough parents available who place their faith high as a top priority for their children. They are in favor of Christianity; he says, as long as they think it is going to make their kid into a nice person. However, as soon as it becomes genuine Christian faith, they start to worry. This generation of parents is ambitious for their children, and cannot let anything get in the way of their future success.\(^{90}\)

Rick Harmon, who works with a family-friendly youth group in Vandalia, Ohio, has fewer reservations about the family approach and seems to endorse this model actively.


\(^{87}\) Wiersma, “Law and Gospel, and Youth and Family Ministry,” 323.

\(^{88}\) DeVries, Family-Based Youth Ministry, 163.


family is already fragmented,” Harmon says, “and then we bring them to church, the one place we expect to bring families together, and we separate them.”

David Anderson, at the Youth and Family Institute, thinks mainline and evangelical churches have “all slipped in reducing parents to chauffeurs and time managers.” He continues by saying, “It is time to stop giving in to the social trend of specialization. Pastors are not mean to be the experts in the spiritual life of other people’s children. Youth ministries must be redesigned to help parents do the wholistic job that they must do to be effective.”

Traditionally, youth ministry and youth pastors have viewed parents as an interruption, as obstacles to success in ministry. Alternatively, parents sense that they are not primarily responsible for the faith formation of their children. Programs for youth rarely include parents; and when they do, it is more to ‘inform’ parents about youth activities than to engage parents in meaningful conversations with their children about faith or service activities.

Youth leaders can no longer continue to view parents as neutral factors in the ministry to their adolescents. Simply by the way they encounter their children daily basis, parents will either empower or sabotage ministry. “Parents play a role second only to that of the Holy Spirit in building the spiritual formation of their children’s lives.”

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91 McCall, McCall, “All in the Family,” 23.
92 Ibid.
93 DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 67.
95 DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 68.
Many parents within the church are neglecting to speak to their children about their moral and spiritual matters or their beliefs and values. Even though many Korean American parents may feel certain handicap in guiding their adolescents through the intricate elements of culture, they need to recognize that youth needs adults to guide them “regarding manners and morals,” and not to isolate them in “moral vacuum.”

Parents must recognize God’s delegated authority over them, which flow into the lives of their children, being able to responsibly care for their physical, social, psychological, and spiritual development, catering to the importance of their wholistic being.

Parents need to embrace the central call to provide care for their adolescents so that they would be authentically nurtured in their home, for youth’s perceptions of mother and father are closely related to their perceptions of God.

Healthy parenting involves building a relationship in which adolescents gain personal power in the context of God’s biblical principle, and where parents also retain personal power throughout the process of empowering their children. There is no room for coercion or manipulation.

Once again, it is crucial for these parents to understand the covenantal relationship with their adolescents is a reflection of the covenant between Yahweh and His people –

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parents recognizing that the family is the primary place for the teaching of faith, history, laws, and traditions of God’s people.\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{101} Wright, “Family, Covenant and Kingdom of God,” 14.
PART THREE: CHURCH AS EQUIPPING AND EMPOWERING COMMUNITY

CHAPTER 4
KOREAN AMERICAN IMMIGRANT CHURCHES

It might be hoped that churches would stand in the gap and provide an environment in which children and youth could dialogue and collaborate with adults... even when families do worship together, almost inevitably the parents sit together, the children are shuffled off to “children’s church,” and the youth sit in the balcony. The church, the one place where teenagers could logically be linked to the world of adults, has missed the opportunity.¹

In some American gateway cities, religious observance rose in the 1990s, reversing earlier trends, due primarily to the faith of immigrants. Despite the appropriate attention given to non-Western faith traditions, it is Christianity that underwent the most significant numerical growth over the decade in the U.S.²

1. Its History and Place in the Community

¹ DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 41–42.
² Ley, “The Immigrant Church as an Urban Service Hub,” 2057–58.
Research on Korean Americans has reported that more than 70% in the United States are Protestant Christians and attend church regularly. In some other surveys, they indicate that approximately 75 percent of Korean-Americans are active participants in Protestant congregations. Half of the Korean Protestant churches in the US are Presbyterian.

Of the other 25 percent, some are Catholic, some other Buddhist and some have no affiliations. Since only a quarter of South Korean’s population in Korea is Christian, something is taking place in the migration and settlement process even if one assumes that a more significant proportion of those who chose to come to the United States are Christian.

Even though the nature of first-generation Korean immigrant churches is patriarchal and hierarchical, the strength of commitment is significant.

A survey by the denomination in 1997 revealed some relevant indicators of religious dedication. Respondents attended worship regularly, often more than once a week to participate in various activities, and over a quarter of them was donating more than $5000 a year to the church.

Why have religion and spirituality been so central to the approximately 1.1 million people of Korean ancestry in the United States?

The answer, in part, lies in their history – a history filled with pain, suffering, and loss. Spirituality and the worship of all kinds of deities firmly embedded within the tradition

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3 Ethnicity and Family Therapy, 229.
4 Ley, “The Immigrant Church as an Urban Service Hub,” 2060.
6 Ley, “The Immigrant Church as an Urban Service Hub,” 2060.
and culture of Koreans. As a means of surviving and negotiating an often harsh and hostile environment, many immigrant groups in the past have turned to their religious traditions as well.\(^7\)

One study notes how the Chinese with the most extended immigrant history among three major East Asian groups (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) also have suffered intense immigration discrimination. Local churches and pastors provided settlement services to new migrants, which became the great strength for the churches as they provided for the physical, emotional, social, spiritual supports: in Korean immigrant churches, this “role” assumed over the years has not changed.\(^8\)

Many of these immigrant families indeed relied upon the spiritual connection to deal with their experiences of hardship and suffering. However, such experiences also contribute to their low level of adaptability.

For the families to thrive in stability and security, they must learn to adapt to their given circumstances, especially during periods of immigrant change and transition. Lacking flexibility tends to create chaos and non-nurturing environment.\(^9\)

It has already been noted in the section discussing the Korean immigrant history that among the first wave of Korean migrants, 40 percent of all Korean immigrants were Christians. Converted to Christianity, many Korean had been encouraged to emigrate by

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\(^7\) Yoo, “Cultural Tug of War: The Korean Immigrant Family and Church in Transition/Korean Americans and Their Religions: Pilgrims and Missionaries from a Different Shore (Book),” 38.

\(^8\) Ley, “The Immigrant Church as an Urban Service Hub,” 2063.

American missionaries for an opportunity to live a better life “in the land of God,” and with that hope, the first group arrived in Hawaii in 1907.  

Even though Koreans have been in this country since 1903, they came in large numbers only after the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act. Only differentiated by era, Korean immigrant churches have provided a space for community development and identification by addressing a range of concerns and needs.

Language, ethnicity, a place of origin and time of arrival combined with their faith created “a singular identity and a strong inclination towards the trust and mutual understanding upon which bonding social capital readily come together.”

Thus, churches function not only as religious places but also as community centers where members can exchange information and advice, thus providing and meeting the multi-dimensional needs of its members as a newcomer.

Churches, in particular, have a long history of charitable work, and before the emergence of the welfare state were critical organizations in the development of education, healthcare, and welfare.

[My father] used to go to the airport whenever he had time, and would just wait for the plane to arrive from Korea, and would see if

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12 Ley, “The Immigrant Church as an Urban Service Hub,” 2063.
14 Ley, “The Immigrant Church as an Urban Service Hub,” 2058.
15 Ibid.
someone might need a place to stay or help in getting places. When the family first immigrated, they want information on schools, neighborhoods, and opportunities for the children to learn extracurricular activities. The church helped to find a home, a job, business opportunities and how they should learn English. Some are in need of real help because they contemplate suicide and come from broken families.16

For many immigrants, their ethnic church becomes a critical avenue for dissipating stress, where one’s cultural heritage, tradition, and identity affirmed.17 The church offers “home away from home,” “a safe place to grow and feel accepted,” “a non-threatening place,” “a refuge,” a place to establish security in supportive social context to continue the struggle outside, where “many are lonely and stressed.”18

One of the difficult questions asked in this paper has to do with whether or not these local immigrant churches have been faithful in embracing that call to serve. It is clear that the Korean ethnic church not only administers to spiritual needs but as important, it also provides support and a sense of belonging. “The church is both an acculturation agent and a resource for preserving the culture and ethnic identity.”19

Korean American immigrant churches here in the United States had enjoyed tremendous “success” and growth in comparison to other ethnic minorities since the mid-

16 Ley, “The Immigrant Church as an Urban Service Hub,” 2064.
18 Ley, “The Immigrant Church as an Urban Service Hub,” 2063.
1960’s when immigration restrictions were dramatically relaxed; however, the ministry to youth and children remains to be one of leading challenges in most immigrant churches.20

For many of these churches, ministering inter-generationally as well as ministering to congregations that are ethnically, racially and culturally diverse has remained as one of the primary challenges.21

2. Youth within Korean American Church Context
   a. Church’s Role as “Pseudo-Extended Family”22

   When we are pulling together a team or group, we need to seek ways to diversify it with people from varying cultural perspectives and domains. It grieves me to see a church where leadership team reflecting only one age group, ethnicity, or gender. To become more aware of ourselves and others, we have to pursue time with people of difference.23

   In most typical Korean immigrant churches, the leadership is formed distinctively by the first generation. The “main” adult worship held in the Korean language and the transmission of the Korean culture, tradition, and identity seems to be an integral part of the disciple-making process.24

23 Livermore, Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World, 154.
24 Richard and James, “The ‘Fourth Wave’: A Theological Perspective on Youth Ministry,” 48.
However, the 1.5 and second generation’s identity formation is decidedly shaped not only by American culture in which they function daily but also through regular religious experiences as well.25

To minister to this generation, many immigrant churches implemented English-speaking youth and children ministries within the church. They grow, inside and outside the church, into bi-cultural adults. They experience the benefits and the strains of being formed by two cultures, “at times with compatibility and at other times with incompatibility.”26

Within Korean immigrant churches, they are further divided not racially, but culturally, contributing to “most divided time of the week in many American cities” on Sunday morning.27

The Korean immigrant churches, reflecting and portraying the very make-up of Korean American families, are becoming increasingly bi-cultural. Since their children and adolescents heavily influenced by the postmodern saturation of their socio-cultural climate, the youth and family ministries will require greater depth in intercultural and especially, inter-generational competencies.28

For most Korean American churches, the inter-cultural context possesses an inherent potential for misunderstanding and conflict. Many adults and parents seem to develop a defensive posture against the variables (“difference perceived as being wrong”) found in youth cultural phenomena, creating a further chasm between them.

26 Richard and James, “The ‘Fourth Wave’: A Theological Perspective on Youth Ministry,” 48.
27 Livermore, Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World, 19.
28 Richard and James, “The ‘Fourth Wave’: A Theological Perspective on Youth Ministry,” 49.
Behaviors are reacted to rather than needs being responded to. Conformity is demanded rather than transformation empowered. The adolescent’s experience tells them that adults do not want to understand them, but rather want to change them. The gospel delivered in such a context leads to suspicions concerning the true agenda of the one bearing witness to Jesus. Cultural distance becomes synonymous with being a “religious outsider” in relationship to the community of faith.29

With any multi-cultural context, conflict is always a possibility, but also, it creates an opportunity for more significant and meaningful experiences for both sides. Successful relationships developed when the adult disciple-maker taps into the potential for interpersonal understanding and partnership with the youth while promoting not adult’s self-serving agendas, but for the well-being of adolescents.30

Rather than focusing on what is “perceived as” being wrong or unacceptable, the beginning point is to identify that which is trans-cultural, discovering the transcending Gospel message: those truths and experiences that are present because of the “Creator’s imprint on humanity in every culture.”31

One of the most critical ways to fortify the faith formation of children and young people, and child, youth and family ministries is by equipping and empowering parents or primary caregivers towards this critical and indispensable endeavor, which has been either lacking or not much concern raised by church leadership.32

29 Richard and James, “The ‘Fourth Wave’: A Theological Perspective on Youth Ministry,” 53.
30 Powell, Deep Ministry in a Shallow World, 71.
31 Richard and James, “The ‘Fourth Wave’: A Theological Perspective on Youth Ministry,” 53–54.
Family-based ministry seeks to empower and equip these parents while connecting adolescents to an extended family of Christian adults in the faith community.

b. Ministry to the Youth and Family, Its Current Condition

The term [youth and family ministry] implies a qualification of the word ministry, suggesting ministry of a particular sort, namely, a ministry focused upon youth and families. Qualified further, the term ‘youth and family ministry’ refers to an understanding of ‘teaching the gospel’ that emphasizes the participation of Christian parents, as well as stepparents, godparents, grandparents, and other caring adults. As such, youth and family ministry challenges the assumptions that a congregation’s youngest members ‘obtain’ faith by attending church and listening to the pastor, youth director, or Sunday school teacher. In challenging such an assumption, youth and family ministry practitioners appeal to the certain biblical material as foundational.33

Youth and family ministry in the context of Korean immigrant churches has followed what DeVries in his book calls as “traditional youth (& family) ministry” model. DeVries notes that “the ministry has little to do with style or programming or personality, but it has to do with the place of teenagers in the community of faith – the isolation of teenagers from the adult world and particularly from their parents.”34

DeVries states that the urgency faced by youth and family ministry is, “We are not leading teenagers to mature Christian adulthood.”35 Children and youth attendance remain

34 DeVries, Family-Based Youth Ministry, 21.
strong, and every summer and winter, they have their retreats and short- and long-term missions, both overseas and domestic.\(^{36}\)

However, many disaffiliate with the church by the time they graduate from high school, seeing their immigrant churches “irrelevant, culturally stifling, and ill-equipped to develop them spiritually for life in the multi-cultural” setting.\(^{37}\) Although some later return as members of the church when they have children, overall, membership in many mainline churches continues to decline.\(^{38}\)

In one of the articles written during the turn of the century claims that there is an enormous spiritual awakening occurring in postmodern culture among the contemporary adolescents; however, it is an “awakening largely dissociated from the church and the Christian faith. Adolescents have rejected the culture of their parents, a culture they perceive as lacking integrity and spiritual vitality. Wrapped within that rejection are the forms and norms of their parents’ generational expressions of the Christian faith.”\(^{39}\)

Youth and family ministry within Korean American immigrant churches struggles with similar issues experienced by American churches: in comparison to other areas of adult ministry, there is definitive lack of fund allocation and priority, high turnover ratio of youth staff and volunteers, making it impossible for youth in church to develop meaningful and growing relationships between adults-teenagers.


\(^{39}\) Richard and James, “The ‘Fourth Wave’: A Theological Perspective on Youth Ministry,” 49–50.
However, as mentioned by DeVries, the primary cause of the current crisis in youth and family ministry is in the way local churches (and culture overall) have systematically isolated young people from the very relationships that are most likely to lead them to maturity.\textsuperscript{40} Granting our children the “privilege of being left alone” has served, in part, to create a wholesale epidemic of adult neglect of the next generation.\textsuperscript{41}

Despite the recognition of the influential role of parents and other primary caregivers in the faith formation of children and young people at home, many congregation still fails to emphasize the importance of engaging parents in their children, youth, and family ministry programs.\textsuperscript{42}

Without a doubt, social and religious institutions play a vital role in inculcating morals and values to our adolescents, and yet, it is ultimately parents who are the ones that need to direct and train children in the right way, affirming a conviction that spiritual formation begins in the home through everyday interaction, practices, and patterns of modeling.\textsuperscript{43}

Churches must stand between the gap and promote an atmosphere in which children and youth can engage meaningfully and collaborate effectively with significant adults. However, sadly enough, for many teenagers active in church, this is the one place where

\textsuperscript{40} DeVries, \textit{Family-Based Youth Ministry}, 41.
\textsuperscript{41} Patricia Hersch, \textit{A Tribe Apart} (New York: Ballantine, 1998), 22.
\textsuperscript{43} Balswick and Balswick, \textit{The Family}, 3rd ed:145.
they may be the most segregated from the world of adults. Ironically, the more “successful” the youth program, often the more exacerbated the isolation becomes.  

Religious education programs in many immigrant churches often operate in isolation from home, not as an extension of the home. Many parents do not know what their children are learning from their Sunday schools, let alone participate in inter-generational and family religious education programs. It is often time amazing to see school parking spaces packed for the PTO nights while these churches activities sparsely attended.

Even when families gather to worship “together,” they are sent to all different places around the church facility designed to meet their “specific” needs, based on their ages and life-stages. The church, the one place where teenagers could plausibly link to the world of adults, has missed the opportunity.

Oneness which reflects the very nature of God becomes so vulnerable and most fragile; a precious commodity so rare to experience.

For Korean American churches, a difference of primary language spoken by parents and adolescents has further contributed to factors towards the Sunday morning “isolation” and division. Few churches attempt bi-lingual family worship service for special occasions, but the effectiveness of such attempts limited. Adolescents sit in the sanctuary with disbelief, disinterest, and indifference.

44 DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 41.
46 DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 42.
47 Bilezikian, *Community 101: Reclaiming the Church as Community of Oneness*, 52.
As noted earlier, the less capable the church is at programming or simple lack of available resources, the more responsibility the youth and adults in the church will be required to take, and the more time they wind up spending together to make the worship services and programs work. There are worse things a church can do for its teenagers than providing miserable programs for them – isolating them from Christian adults is at the top of the list.48

When it comes to building positive character and moral fiber in adolescents, the influence of their parents is both indispensable and irreplaceable. In the context of their homes, how parents live out their faith in the full view of their adolescents will have a tremendous impact either positively or negatively. Their worldview shaped and aligned based on their interaction with the parents. In a safe and trustworthy environment, adolescents will experience God’s grace and intimacy.49

48 DeVries, Family-Based Youth Ministry, 43.
Youth and family pastors who grew up and have been educated here in the United States must be aware of the differences between the approaches they would take versus the experience many first-generation Korean parents may embrace.⁵⁰

Youth pastor’s approach (based on traditional Western approach) based on the assumption of individuation, independence, self-disclosure, verbal expression of feelings, and long-term insight counseling may go counter to Asian American values of interdependence, self-control, repression of emotions, and short-term result-oriented solutions.⁵¹

However, in the final analysis, family-based programs within Korean American immigrant churches must be able to transcend some of these cultural limitations and challenges: being able to implement to provide the context and the atmosphere for healthy connections of the covenant, grace, intimacy and empowering among family members,

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⁵⁰ Livermore, Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World, 141.
⁵¹ Ethnicity and Family Therapy, 239.
especially between parents and their adolescents, as noted by Drs. Balswick in their book *The Family*.

For growth and maturity to take place in a meaningful relationship, both persons must be involved and engaged. Growth can be hindered or slowed when one person in the relationship is either unwilling or unable to “reciprocate covenant love, grace, empowering, or intimacy.”

It begins with a change in attitude and perspective. It is a willingness to be available to provide attentive care by parents and older generation to the younger that is likely to make the most significant differences in the lives of the teenagers that are touched, an attitude that can affect the youth much more deeply than the programs, where these pastors must play roles as bridges and connectors.

As pastors and church leaders continue to evaluate programs and honestly ask one’s motive and agenda, finding ways to engage children and parents, they must exemplify and provide modeling for these practices of God’s covenant, grace, intimacy and empowering in the home and in the congregation that nourishes faith formation. A faith community must be invested in the spiritual maturity of all believers, especially children and youth (1 Cor. 12:7-12). Members acknowledge their interdependence and mutual submissiveness as one body baptized by one Spirit (Eph. 5:21).

The church must be an equipping and empowering community that models the very nature and character of Christ that is covenantal (to love and be loved), filled with grace (to

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53 DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 181.
forgive and be forgiven), empowering (to serve and be served), and authentically intimate (to know and be known).

Pastors can remind their congregations that all members, whether or not they are parents themselves, need to work diligently on many levels and in many ways to nurture the faith of children and adolescents in their midst. At the same time, to be open to subtle ways by which children and adolescents themselves challenge and strengthen the spiritual formation of adults, thus promoting the spirit of mutual accountability and accessibility.

The challenges, as well as the conflicts, resulted from diverse cultural values, and spiritual experiences are catalysts to help pastors to continuously rethink theology behind youth and family ministry if church leadership genuinely believes that what they do and how they want to do ministry must be informed by the firm theological foundation along with its understanding.

In the Old Testaments, the description of serious conflict within families along with acts of rebellion involving whole families well documented. Aaron and Miriam opposing Moses’ leadership (Numbers 12), the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and their families (Numbers 16) and various tragedies confronted by David and his descendants all point to the fragility of human relationship apart experiencing God’s covenantal love and grace.

The elements and practices for stronger family relationships derived from the understanding of biblical truth on how God enters into and continues to sustain relationships with fallen humanity.

56 Wright, “Family, Covenant and Kingdom of God,” 15.
There is a sense in which no individual can ever make a covenant commitment in the way that God covenants with His people. However, despite all the flaws found within the very nature of human being, God continues to invite His creature and fosters an atmosphere of grace. Moreover, God’s grace manifested fully through His Son Jesus Christ, “our model and enabler as we live out our lives and relationships according to God’s purpose and His design.”

What kind of a young adult does the Church want to deliver for society? What can the Church do to equip and empower parents to be disciple-makers for their adolescents? How can church leaders discern God’s call in learning what it means to live out their faith in the context of a believing community?

Schools, colleges, and universities can give God’s world good scientists and handymen and women – the church should mediate the character formation and individuation of all these people as “representatives of God’, created for the purpose. Are the churches facilitating the becoming of all the beautiful creatures of God to become self-reliant spiritual functioning human being or are they becoming more and more ineffective in carrying out their calls?

While one ponders theologically about the process of empowering both parents and adolescents so that they can move toward Christian maturity, the centrality of God must be embraced and more importantly, practiced in its full context – that is, to realize that one

59 “Nel, Malan; Source Info: Spring2003, Vol. 1 Issue 2, P79; Subject Term: Youth in Church Work; Subject Term: Theology; Su,” n.d., 97.
cannot make parents and adolescents into anything, particularly into mature Christians. That power for transformation in the lives of these families comes through the personal experience of God’s covenantal love, His grace to forgive, His servanthood in the act of empowering, and to be known through the intimate relationship with God, nothing less and nothing more.\(^6\)

The church is imperfect, and the spiritual journey is a process. Each member of the family has individual temperaments and experiences, and their rate of maturity differs for various reasons. However, if the faith communities which stand to enable and equip these parents are moving in the direction of healing and redemption, they will grow, and the family will benefit. A capacity to follow God’s way, however, limited one may feel, is determined not by the strength each person possesses, but rather the presence of God’s spiritual power that dwells within.\(^6\)

1. The Redemptive Work within the Body

The breakdown of traditional communities such as the families and the churches has been grieved by many as the crisis of the post-modern era. Multiple reasons attributed as to why such breakdown may have occurred. To the disintegration of traditional communities, there is a vast and varied range of responses by both the individuals and groups.\(^6\)

One example is what many Korean American church leaders have labeled as “the silent exodus” of young people, the departure of many Korean American adolescents from

\(^6\) DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 160–61.

\(^6\) Balswick and Balswick, *The Family*, 3rd ed:34.

\(^6\) Ibid., 283.
church communities once they graduate from high school and leave the nest of their parents. This act of self-contained individuals which “denies dependence on others and makes no commitment to them” is also a notable character of the post-modern generation.\textsuperscript{63}

These adolescents and young adults, however, would often say that even though they are leaving a local church, they are not leaving from their faith-relationship with God. Many choose something other - various forms of communities focused around shared values and mores which includes religious devotion are explored and experimented among these individuals.\textsuperscript{64}

One cannot blame any one particular reason which may have contributed to such trend; however, the lack of Christian characters by local church leadership and the adult congregation cannot readily overlooked. While acknowledging such discomforting and unsettling fact, the church leadership must seek to find ways towards redemptive and restorative pathway even before considering how to equip and empower these families towards reconciliation and healing.

Apart from the God’s redeeming power in the life of Lord Jesus Christ, the church cannot honestly and authentically become the center of Christian witness. Only when the church aligns with the centrality of the Gospel message can families may reflect and nurture from a useful model.

2. Practical Application of Balswicks’ Model

\textsuperscript{63} Balswick and Balswick, \textit{The Family}, 3rd ed:283.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
This research paper has gleaned a proposed theological model suggested by Drs. Balswick in their book *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home*. In most local Korean immigrant churches, the relational health between 1st-generation Korean senior pastor and 2nd-generation pastoral staff (children, youth, and English-speaking pastors) is often less than ideal. The visual sign of strained relationship persists, and most often, the stories of their negative interaction are either witnessed or heard.

To a certain extent, a conflict that is persistent between two generations of pastors serving any particular local church somewhat reflect relational issues and strains present between parents and their adolescents in Korean American immigrant families.

In their book, Balswicks notes that for the family relationship to grow into deeper levels of mutual commitment, grace, empowering and empathy, the relationship must grow from unilateral (one-way) love commitment to a bilateral (mutual) love commitment for one another.65

One of the examples they give reflects the dynamic between the parents and the infant child. The relationship between a parent and infant child begins as a unilateral, one-way love commitment, where a parent unconditional loves an infant child. However, as time progresses and for growth in a relationship to take place, both a parent and a child became mutually involved and engaged, willing to reciprocate covenant love, grace, empowering, or intimacy as needed. The growth in a relationship may come to a standstill at any point of this growth journey if, for some reasons, either party is unable or unwilling to engage in this meaningful activities.66

66 Ibid.
For most Korean American immigrant churches and their “leadership” consisted of multiple generations of pastors and lay leaders, the quality of relationship has not spiral into deeper levels of mutual commitment, grace, empowering and intimacy. As noted in this book, they remained stagnant and fixated on (1) contract rather than covenant, (2) law rather than grace, (3) possessive power rather than empowering, and (4) distance rather than intimacy.67

What does God’s redemptive work in the life of His body look like, and how does it translate in actual practice, so that it may eventually influence and impact of the life quality of these immigrant families the churches are called to serve and to minister?

a. Contract vs. Covenant (to love and be loved)

[Case Study] SPRC (Staff Parish Relational Committee* - a lay member committee in local Methodist churches responsible for caring for the pastoral staff, including hiring practice) chairperson calls a senior pastor for a consultation. The church was in the process of interviewing candidates for a potential lead pastor for youth ministry. One of the candidates with a strong resume and good reference walked into an interview room, not dressed in suit but somewhat casual, a polo t-shirt tucked into a jean. Most members of the committee were willing to overlook the appearance since the members were mostly parents of adolescents and young adults, and they discerned the cultural difference. However, a discomfort and easiness arose when a candidate inquired about his salary and benefits upfront along with his specific work schedule and job description. None including the chairperson were in a position to respond to such questions, for these matters were usually shared after the hire has been confirmed by the committee and the senior

pastor. Committee members were baffled and confused as to how they should process and interpret his forthcoming. Some committee members questioned his call to ministry and the depth of his commitment in serving at their local churches.

A relational dynamic between 1st- and 2nd-generation pastors must revolve in the covenantal rather than contractual commitment. Senior pastor along with lay leaders among 1st-generation Koreans must affirm these young pastors as co-laborers in Christ who are there to be faithful to their call by their personal Lord and Savior.

Even though these young pastors may walk into the initial pastoral interview with “culturally inappropriate” appearance, and questions concerning their salary and job description, which often leaves a distasteful initial impression to senior leadership, one should not minimize or even question the depth of these young pastors’ covenantal commitment in loving the Lord and His body.

It is often true that many of these young pastors have grown and educated in the contexts which are very different from the 1st-generation pastors and they may not be keen to the usage of specific jargons and expressions familiar within the walls of local immigrant churches and their leadership. However, their outer appearance and attitude should not be the bases of any undue presumption which may end up harming and severing a relationship that could be potentially effective and mutually beneficial.

One must be opened to entrust God’s faithfulness in His call for these young individuals - God’s invitation to an unconditional commitment which was demonstrated supremely by Him, and to which, they have responded with a deep and unwavering commitment to serve in response to God’s covenantal love.

To question young people’s commitment in loving and in serving God by adults would definitely cause a deep schism in the relationship. Even though the apparent
challenges may be present, adult leadership must model the nature of God’s covenant relationship with His people, especially with young ones.

Throughout the Scripture, one can note that God’s offer of love is in no way contractual; not based on the response of the recipients. However, the benefits or blessings of the covenant are determined by the response even though the covenant itself is not conditional. In the book, it summarized as such: “Although the continuation of God’s love not conditioned on their response, the blessings of the covenant are conditional.”

Unconditional love proceeds and encompasses before the response of obedience and not the other way around. Senior leadership within the body must practice this particular Christ-likeness as they engage in a meaningful relationship with the pastor of the next generation.

As God continues to pursue the children of Israel with love in the face of their continuous rebellion, if the senior leadership is willing not to deter from the path of unconditional love and reconciliation, they will respond. By doing so, both parties involved can encounter the incredible blessing of being in a relationship with God and with each other.

Senior leadership should not be discouraged or disengaged because their experience with these young pastors seems only unilateral. As one observes the biblical references as to how God Himself initiates a covenantal relationship with His children, an unconditional commitment towards relational maturity will eventually be reciprocal and mutual. Most of often, it is a matter of being in a relationship based on the mutual trust and love.

69 Ibid., 24.
b. Law vs. Grace (to forgive and be forgiven)

Family life based on contract leads to an atmosphere of law and is inconsistent with the Gospel message. However, a family life based on covenant leads to an atmosphere of grace and forgiveness.\textsuperscript{70}

Local churches ought to embrace the call to live in the atmosphere of grace; however, what often observed is the complete opposite in its spectrum. Where the supreme act of God’s grace manifested in the incarnation of Lord Jesus Christ should be practiced; instead, there are rigid rules and regulations, promoting legalism and hypocrisy.

In the atmosphere of grace, there is always a room to forgive and to be forgiven. The indwelling love of God present in the heart of every believer makes it possible to be faithful to that witness and testimony.

It is important to recognize, as noted in the book, “Although the covenant of grace rules out a law as a basis for family relationships, family members living in grace accept structure, forms, patterns, order and responsibility in relationships. In reality, much of the daily routine of family life must be performed accordingly to agreed-upon rules, regularity, and order.”\textsuperscript{71}

However, one hears stories of local immigrant churches’ experience of chaos and division due to unhealthy boundaries and inconsistency in implementing agreed-upon rules which govern the routine of church life.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 27.
[Case study] Church is in the process of searching for a new youth pastor. Educational department coordinators along with Sunday School pastors were also a part of search committee along with a couple of lay elders from Korean-speaking congregation. After few weeks of extensive search, they could not agree upon a potential candidate. One of the lay elders who was also a member of this search committee has a son who just graduated from the seminary, and was seeking for a position. Since the youth department is not small in number, most department coordinators and Sunday School pastors who were aware of this particular needs as well as the scope of ministry, they mostly felt that this particular lay elder’s son does not have enough experience to serve. However, a lay elder was quite determined for his son to be hired for this position. Also, there is a section in a church by-law which specifically notes that pastor staff cannot be someone closely related to the lay elders and others in a leadership position, which does seem to carry certain vagueness. Search committee is torn with varying opinions as to how that by-law could be interpreted and applied.

For some churches, this is due to lack of clear documentation indicating rules and orders governing the church body. For others, they do have agreed-upon rules and written orders; however, specific individual or a group of people presume these rules and orders should be perceived as “simply a guide,” calls for wisdom to apply with flexibility and leniency – they consider this to be a proper means of understanding the act of grace. If anyone disagrees, he or she perceived as being too legalistic and too rigid.

In times when church leadership and congregation are in relational conflict in a matter about the interpretation, understanding, and application of church policies, rules and orders, there must always be God’s grace practiced, a willingness to forgive and be forgiven.

Again, a practice of God’s unconditional grace does not minimize the importance of adhering agreed-upon rules and order. For the church body to function with clear vision and goal, there must be unwavering commitment to be governed by rules set forth, being
impartial and without prejudice in its practice. Wisdom is learning how to balance between the two without leaning to one side.

For many church bodies experiencing the tension and hurts due to the inability to reach a workable solution, the result is church split. Sometimes, bitterness and unwillingness to forgive within the heart are harbored for many years to come even though they claim to know and love God while serving the body. Some would continue to fight and stay in that tension firmly believing they are standing their ground for the sake of God’s Kingdom.

As the incarnate Christ came into the world to reconcile the world to God, a church body must submit to God’s call for the ministry of restoration and redemption through this act of divine love and forgiveness. It is the hope of the God-fearing and God-loving church to be a powerful witness of God’s transformational power as “we forgive others as we have been forgiven.”72

c. Possessive Power vs. Empowering (to serve and be served)

Empowerment involves coming alongside a person to affirm the gifts and enable him to become a confident person. It is helping a person achieve his or her full potential. Sometimes the empowerer must be willing to step back and allow the one being empowered to learn through experience and not by being over dependent. Empowerment never involves control, coercion, or force. Instead, it is respectful, reciprocal process that takes place between people in mutually enhancing ways.73

73 Ibid., 28.
[Case Study] Every year on Thanksgiving Sunday, a senior pastor along with adult leadership (mostly, parents) wants to plan joint family worship. However, for both a youth pastor and an English ministry pastor, this creates a tremendous burden, and they would prefer having a separate worship service. Not only does this create tension with their senior pastor, but also, with parents who want to worship with their children and adolescents. In the past, various attempts were made by the adult leadership for this joint worship service to be more inviting to the younger generations. The order of worship along with its format and structure were geared towards both Korean and English-speaking congregation. However, for these young people, it still felt as if the worship format catered more for Korean-speaking adults. The English-speaking members perceived themselves as “spectators.” Sometimes, a senior pastor’s motive for a joint service was brought to question by the younger pastors. Was it an attempt to fill those empty pews during these special seasonal services?

In connection with the understanding of the principle of empowerment, a church scene described above is somewhat familiar among Korean-American immigrant churches. In an attempt to narrow the apparent gap between two cultures and two generations, various attempts are made by church leadership, one is a joint service during special Sundays such as Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year.

Those in charge of “designing and formatting” a joint worship service claims that as much as possible, English-speaking congregation’ needs are noted and addressed. Unfortunately, few essential considerations often dismissed.

While the service order itself might be in English, (1) songs chosen for opening worship might be songs more familiar to Korean-speaking adult congregation, (2) Sunday worship bulletin (newsletter, program, any publications) might only be written in Korean, (3) if a choir happens to sing before the service, it may be sung in Korean.
In order to empower youth and young adult in local churches in context of these unique worship experiences, Korean-speaking leadership including a senior pastor must be willing to recruit and meaningfully engage these young people in the planning stage of these events – by having them involved in the planning as well as executing some aspects of the worship service. An intentional effort placed by allowing these young people to engage and be involved in every aspect of actual worship celebration – combined praise team, choir, and usher – perceived as concrete ways to nurture them towards service in the local body.

In most cases, Korean-speaking senior pastor preaches while one of the English-speaking associate pastors stands alongside to interpret. For some churches, to save time allocated for Sunday worship (which should not be considered a significant factor of importance), senior pastor would preach in Korean while slide images with English translation are projected on the rear screen.

For these special worship services, one sure way of empowering these young people to recognize the potential and to affirm the gifts and to build their confidence might be by allowing a preaching opportunity to one of the English-speaking pastors, and perhaps, a senior pastor, if he is able, to translate alongside. It would be much more empowering for these families if the worship service order was more geared towards children and adolescents. This would undoubtedly create a space for positive engagement and a healthier nurturing environment.

According to the definition used by Balswick’s, the empowerment is “a biblical model for the use of power, the process of helping another person recognizes his or her potential and then reach that potential through one’s encouragement and guidance.”

For many pastors and those lay members who are in the leadership position, one of their struggles might be willing to step back and to coach them as to how they may learn to handle and manage power and control responsibly. For some adult leadership, in a frivolous attempt to maintain control and power, they frequently engage in unhealthy behaviors such as manipulation and coercion. They often feel threatened when their decisions questioned, and their authorities challenged. Similar experiences observed in the context of many Korean families.

As noted in the case study, a senior pastor’s willingness to “yield the responsibility of the pulpit preaching” to one of the younger pastors for these special joint services would speak volume to the younger congregation and set an example and a model for these many of these families to follow.

Rather than having the direction and the vision of the church determined by the group of people who gives most offering, it would send a healthy message consistent with their vision to invest in the nurturing of young people in the education department when the church is willing to place their resources for such endeavors.

According to Drs. Balswick’s understanding of empowerment, it is, in an authentic sense, a love in action. Empowerment is “born out of God’s covenant love, and the incredible grace one finds in Christ Jesus.” Moreover, when the mutual empowerment occurs among the members of the community, the extraordinary ways of servant love and humility would be stretched in each one.\(^{75}\)

In Korean-American immigrant churches, the practice of empowerment in the church has been either minimal at best or distorted at worst. To be set free from the sense of

insecurity due to a misunderstanding of power and control in the relationship, church leadership needs make an intentional effort in pursuing restoration of love commitment with God and nurture the atmosphere of acceptance through God’s grace. Only then, God’s people may faithfully live out the call to the life of empowerment.

d. Distance vs. Intimacy (To know and be known)

[Case Study] A couple with a marital issue decided to ask a senior pastor for some advice. After the first initial meeting, both a pastor and a couple decided that it would benefit to continue regular weekly sessions for a few more times. Each time they met, struggles in the past shared, and some secrets told. Every time those stories were shared, pastor reassured them everything would be kept in confidence. As time progressed, the pastor felt a couple’s marital relationship was improving. After having spent 10-week sessions, both the pastor and the couple felt that they could terminate the session, and both were pleased with the result. The pastor was especially thankful that as a result of this encounter, he felt a closer relational bond with a couple. However, a few weeks later, pastor found out that a couple left the church without any prior notice.

For most Korean-American immigrant churches, tremendous needs for encouragement and support families with their marital and parental conflicts noted for many years, and yet, programs or events within the church geared towards the ministry of these families have always found its challenge and limitations.

Even though there are definite needs for pastoral counseling and intervention for these families, some theological understanding and training discourage pastors from engaging in any types of counseling; instead refer them to professional therapists and counselors.
Some pastors intentionally distance themselves from providing any meaningful counseling for families; for they fear negative consequences, such as families leaving the church. An important question is this - a real reason for these families leaving directly correlates with the counseling provided by the pastor?

Culturally, the understanding of intimacy for Koreans is not only complicated to define but more challenging to practice. As noted in their book, Drs. Balswick, explaining the principle of intimacy, considers it as “a major theme that runs through the Bible – God wants to know us and to be known by us.”

Within this understanding, Christians are encouraged to share one’s most profound thoughts and feelings through prayer, continuing to engage in a meaningful relationship and fellowship with each other – to walk in steps with the working of the Holy Spirit as He intercedes and intervene among God’s people.

One element that hinders the practice of intimacy, as noted by the authors, is the fear resulted from the sense of shame.

In most Korean-American immigrant churches, in the context of regular worship service and especially in a smaller group setting, an individual and family prayer requests, are shared. Congregation collectively expects to “intercede” for the prayer requests presented. However, too often in the process, an individual or family shared their prayer end up being hurt and ashamed.

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77 Ibid.
Alternatively, when the specific personal information shared with church leadership or few individuals not kept in confidence results a trust violated in the relationship, causing a sense of nakedness and shame.

When shame is present in the community, people begin “to put on masks,” and chose to relate to each other in superficial ways. In the presence of mistrust, the honest and transparent communication breaks down, creating distance from one another. In today’s modern society, there is an increasing sense as well as the practice of alienation and loneliness. 78

Because the capacity for members to communicate their feelings freely and openly with one another is contingent upon trust and commitment, when the problems within the church arise, it often results in church split or dissolution of the community.

Inability to communicate confidently and express themselves freely without fear stems from the lack of genuinely embracing and experiencing God’s covenant love, grace and empowering.

Many local churches, congregation often feel unsafe in sharing their most intimate struggles and challenges. Continued experience of trust violated, and confidence betrayed end up creating a more profound gap and schism among the families and individuals. Not only there is mistrust with each other, but in some churches, there is a definite mistrust of church leadership.

In a culture where family shame is often kept hidden due to fear of unworthiness and rejection by those around them, the church needs to operate in an atmosphere that embraces God’s grace of healing, God’s closeness in a relationship that nurtures intimacy.

It is important for the churches to show these families the pathway towards an authentic and genuine relationship, helping them to nurture a place of refuge where they can retreat for comfort, care, and intimacy.\textsuperscript{79}

CHAPTER 6
KOREAN AMERICAN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES
– AN EVOLVING COMMUNITY

The commitment and the dedication Korean American parents have for their children are unquestionable and undeniable, and yet, a certain degree of ambivalence does exist, and this is one of many challenges that are faced by these families.80

Even though churches have occasionally shared and emphasized the importance of parents’ involvement in their children and youth programs, they have found this not an easy practice to implement for many reasons.

One particular reason as noted from the previous chapter has to do with these immigrant churches and their leadership unable to fully develop and nurture a relationship that spirals into a deeper level of covenant, grace, empowering and intimacy. For so many years, they have been stagnated and fixated on unhealthy relational experiences. Korean-American churches, to help those suffering and struggling families, must be willing to pursue a life of restoration and redemption first in their relationship with God and then, with each other.

Many Christian parents are indeed reacting to their fear – about the kind of society in which they are raising their children and adolescents. As these parents continue to understand the life stage of adolescence, much of their perception concerning the life of youth stems from such fear and uncertainty, which often leads to misinterpretation resulting in conflict.  

Once again, it is crucial for the church to help these parents harness God’s covenant love and the incredible grace found in the relationship with Christ Jesus. As the Spirit of God empowers them, they can indeed empower others. Parents need to envision how God can stretch them in the extraordinary ways of servant love and humility as they are willing to submit to the power of the Holy Spirit – bearing the fruits of God’s character nurtured in their daily life.

Action speaks louder than words. A failure by the church has incapacitated the effectiveness by which these families may be helped. Churches established with the strong biblical perspective must not only reflect profound theological truths found with the contexts of Scriptures but also, allow the working of the Holy Spirit to help them practice this truth faithfully and authentically in their mutual relationship.

One of the ultimate goals is to nurture healthier communities in which these hurting families may be able to witness the positive modeling, and by application, can nurture their own families towards spiritual and emotional restoration.

1. Ministering the Hurts of Immigrant Families

81 Richter, Magnuson, and Baizerman, “Reconceiving Youth Ministry,” 346.
In examining biblical themes that have a bearing on the nature of family relationships, (1) commitment should be based on a mature (i.e. unconditional and bilateral) covenant love, (2) family life should be established and maintained within the atmosphere of grace, which embraces acceptance and forgiveness; (3) the resources of family members should be used to empower rather than to control one another; and (4) intimacy based on a knowledge that leads to caring, understanding, communication, and communion with others.83

Drs. Balswick note that these four biblical themes that have a bearing on the nature of family relationships are part of a continual process – “intimacy can lead to deeper covenant love, commitment fortes the atmosphere of freely offered grace, the climate of acceptance and forgiveness encourages serving and empowering others, and the resultant sense of self-esteem leads to the ability to be intimate without fear.”84

However, for many Korean-American families, the presence of past hurts, unresolved anger, and deep shame may have hindered and paralyzed them from moving towards the direction of healing. Rather than being committed to investing in nurturing behavior, they often lean towards hurtful actions and choose to live a life different from their spiritual conviction and commitment. Such inconsistency has provided fertile soil where doubts and mistrust towards organized religious practices shunned by their adolescent children.

These hurting families embrace specific characteristics detrimental to their spiritual and emotional well-being. For these families, since the focus is on self rather than the best

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83 Balswick and Balswick, The Family, 3rd ed:34.
84 Ibid., 33.
interests of the other family members, the hurtful interactions continue with more profound pain and agony.

Integrating the works of Drs. Balswick, here are some particular areas of hurts need to be addressed among these Korean-American families.

a. Tendency to Withhold Grace

Hurting family tend to withhold grace, often demanding unreasonable perfection, blaming those members who do not measure up. For Korean immigrant families, the undue stress for perfection and high achievement placed upon these adolescents by their parents are often overwhelming.

With hard work and strenuous effort, many of these adolescents do indeed enter into respectable and reputable colleges and universities. However, once they have achieved this goal, news of these young adults struggling with emotional depression, some engaging in various sorts of harmful behaviors - substance abuse, gambling, pornography, and risky sexual relationship.

Many of these adolescents grow up in families that induce fear and rejection for their mistakes and failures. Specific expectations and standards always communicated through both non-verbal and verbal expressions. In times they need acceptance and affirmation the most, replaced by guilt and shame.

Parents who feel they have sacrificed so much to come to the States with the sole purpose to provide an opportunity for their children to thrive and succeed, it is challenging to imagine and accept anything less than what they feel they are entitled. Also, being so

entrenched in communities (including churches) where the success highly applauded while the failure disgraced, these parents often feel an equal pressure to make sure their adolescent succeed in the eyes of others.

One local church I am aware lists senior high students graduating from high school and highlight their achievements in their Sunday worship bulletin insert. In it, it also includes colleges or universities they will enroll in fall, along with any notable extracurricular activities and awards received in school. Moreover, one particular Sunday designated as a promotion Sunday to acknowledge these graduates with church scholarship.

Even though the intention by the church leadership may be far from causing any hurts or pains for these families, it may undoubtedly contribute to added shame by creating an atmosphere contradicting and misrepresenting the very nature of God’s unconditional love and His grace.

b. Tendency to Control

It noted cross-culturally and regardless of their familial structure or economic status, hurting families tend to control rather than empower their members. Individuals in these families lack the confidence – not only do they fear that they may be dismissed or discredited because of their incompetence and inadequacies, but also lack the confidence in believing that they can positively influence others.86

As noted in the earlier section of this paper, for many Korean fathers, having to downgrade their status from white-collar jobs and occupations in Korea to work in the physical labor field is somewhat of a very harsh reality to accept and embrace.

Their self-image and self-confidence are also affected. In contrast, wives and children seem to “thrive” in their new environments, gaining both social adaptation and language skills. With many of these women now creating various income sources, the financial power and control seem to shift from fathers to their mothers in the eyes of their children.

The overturning of conventional gender and parental roles perceived by these unsettled men, in particular, they felt depressed and stressed because they can no longer ‘properly’ be the head of the family household. These immigrant men “feel ashamed that they have no real status in this society.” Such a drastic shift amplifies the struggle of these fathers with the issue of power and control.\(^7\)

Being able to balance between the power and the control in a relationship takes a good measure of practice. In the absence of such learning and training, many of these fathers struggle at home.

In the absence of self-confidence, these fathers are not able to allow other family members to thrive in their full potential. Instead, they use power to “ensure the maintenance of their own more powerful position.” Fear of setback is real for these men. It is challenging for their seeing the uniqueness of each, and giving them the permission for their learning through personal experience.\(^8\)

Unfortunately, many of these men are leaders in the local church, where the congregation has bestowed upon them the power and the control they may not know how to manage correctly. Problems in many immigrant churches are directly related to people in

\(^7\) Ley, “The Immigrant Church as an Urban Service Hub,” 2065.

leadership who lack certain qualities which enable them to serve both with confidence and humility.

A desperate attempt to regain and restore power by coercing and controlling “seemingly” less powerful family members usually met with resistance and open rebellion, which in turn create more frustration and anger. This vicious cycle of unhealthy interaction keeps some family ever experiencing much need peace in the home.

Even though the journey towards healing may not easy, some affirmation and validation by other family members for the struggle these fathers are experiencing would be an excellent place to start. It will undoubtedly help these fathers to build confidence so that everyone may reach their highest potential. 89

c. Tendency to Deny their Emotions

Hurting families are characterized at the individual level by their members not being in touch with their feelings. Their fear of rejection keeps them in denial of their emotions. 90

Drs. Balswick suggests “what they need most is a safe atmosphere in which they can express their feelings, thoughts, wants, and desires and be heard and understood by the other family members.” 91

Culturally speaking, the emotional spectrum for most Koreans is somewhat limited, and many factors contribute to that challenge. However, for Korean Americans born and

89 Balswick and Balswick, The Family, 3rd ed:35.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
raised here in the States are confronted with two contradicting understanding of emotional expression.

At schools, these young ones are taught to be assertive in their speaking and active in their listening, and they trained continuously in that setting to help them thrive in society they are often exposed to.

At home, however, they are expected to follow the rules, guidelines and social mores, limiting the expression of their emotion and opinion. Certain restraints expected, and when one speaks, it is a commonly accepted one should be able to “read between the lines.” For the younger generation, unclear and mixed messages often heard and seen bring tremendous stress and confusion, which eventually contribute to conflicts with their parents.

As this relational dynamic continues, members of the family feel unsafe and uncertain as to how they should express their feelings. It becomes more challenging to be honest and transparent with each other.

The clarity of perception and clarity of expression is ways one communicates to build a healthy relationship are essential elements. Excellent listening skills, the ability to perceive the meanings behind particular body language, and the willingness to be transparent and empathic all contribute to ensuring effective pathway to communication.92

The communication is often closed rather than open. Each person is discouraged from sharing honestly, opting to hide their feelings and thoughts. In turn, this experience deters one’s capacity to be known by others and to know oneself at deeper levels.

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Many of these family members are “emotionally detached” or “emotionally disengaged” from one another. They move around the house in silence, and if there are any communication and a need for expression, it is often very shallow and constrained.

Lacking the capacity to be bi-lingual and bi-cultural, it often creates misunderstanding and mistrust that would hinder in promoting vital spiritual and emotional relationship while fulfilling a gap between parents and their adolescents.

Every Sunday, all family members’ experience of worship should be open and vibrant. Pastors need to encourage these members to be honest and transparent in their relationship with God and with others. However, in many subtle ways, even the church and the leadership seem to discourage such practices.

Rather than finding ways to break this perpetual cycle of a damaging relationship, church along with the leadership continue to promote their selfish agenda, fearing that any changes that may threaten the “stability of church life.”

One cannot give what one does not have. An individual who has experienced unconditional love can only share and express the love that is unconditional to others. One cannot know what real commitment looks like unless he or she has experienced such commitment in his/her relationship with others. The ultimate breakthrough comes when one receives and experience God’s unconditional love and His unwavering commitment to His children.

The restoration for the church and the families that are part of the local church body begins by reclaiming the redeeming work of our Lord Jesus. Korean-American immigrant churches along with their leadership must be bold enough to acknowledge how far they have
strayed away from the very core of the gospel message once received and sought for God’s redemptive power in restoring the authentic and real identity of the spiritual body.

Intimacy should be pursued in marriage and family relationships “not only as a refuge from the impersonality of society but also as a reflection of the biblical idea.” This is an example the church should be able to model so that families can emulate.93

Once church begins such a journey, only then church may be in a position to help and guide these families who are in crisis. If the church can empower these parents and their adolescent children to learn to use their areas of strength to build each other up, the Christian unity and mutual respect along with healthy interdependency can restore in the heart of their relationship.

Rather than being so focused and overwhelmed with what may be insufficient in their relational elements, they can engage more meaningfully by embracing critical biblical principle – “Yes, we know that we all know this issue. However, while knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church (and the family).”94

Throughout this research paper, the powerful influence of parents upon the faith development of the young has been strongly highlighted and emphasized. However, for adolescents who do not come from Christian homes, the influence of a community of believers considered as an extended Christian family who provides affirmation and encouragement for these adolescents can be equally as powerful.95

94 Ibid., 29.
95 DeVries, Family-Based Youth Ministry, 85.
Even when the parents are “antagonistic to the Christian faith,” adolescents may continue to grow in their faith. Almost always such growth and maturity may or may not be contributed to the excellence of Sunday School programs and youth pastors, but because of the strong connection to an extended Christian community that offers invaluable relational needs for these adolescents.  

2. Promoting Healing within Local Church Community

After these things, Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of a hundred ten… Israel served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the LORD had done for Israel… After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what He had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. (Joshua 24:29, 31; Judges 2:10, 11a)

For Korean Americans, if the churches are indeed considered as the “knot” of many strings coming together, providing a network for the Korean immigrants to socially, spiritually and physically connect to share their life experience meaningfully, why does it seem that there is a definitive lack of character and moral, spiritual fiber as a genuine community?

Homogeneity of background and experience shaped a common understanding and the bases of mutual aid; however, as the Korean American church history deepens which in turn creates diversity (in culture and ethnicity) within the congregation, the discomfort is once again created, with the needs for reevaluation.

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96 DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 88.
97 Ley, “The Immigrant Church as an Urban Service Hub,” 2063.
Korean American immigrants face a significant challenge. With the continued maturity of second-generation Korean Americans who vocally object to tradition, to hierarchical and formal social relations, and mainly to use of the mother tongue, how can first-generation Korean Americans process such challenges and changes? Within immigrant church history, Korean churches have responded two different ways:

To draw in the wagons ever more closely and pretend nothing has changed. Another is a containment strategy, the development of a parallel and usually subordinate English-language congregation. With ethnic, immigrant churches that are more deeply rooted in history, such as German-Canadian, they are undergoing something most traumatic, what German-Canadian pastor eloquently called “a cultural funeral” and make a full transition from an ethnic to a Canadian congregational identity, rupturing the tight bonds between faith, language and identity.

Even though Korean churches are not there yet, a full transition of congregational identity that has faced the German churches for some time with the end of German immigration and the rapid Canadianization of the second generation may occur sometime in the future for Korean Americans as well.

The Korean immigrant churches are at a place where denial and sometimes uneasy accommodation with cultural diversity are taking place. For second generations and beyond, many are deciding to demote use of the native tongue, perhaps even abandon it, and then move towards the model of a multi-ethnic or multi-cultural congregation. Abandonment of the mother tongue is the symbolic heart of cultural adjustment.

99 Ley, “The Immigrant Church as an Urban Service Hub,” 2068.
100 Ibid., 2070.
Perhaps, a conflict in cultural values between the first generation Korean parents and their 1.5 and 2nd generation children may find a place of convergent.

“While Jesus walked among humanity, He did much to impact the culture of his day. However, he did not try to change the culture as the primary focus of his message.” Our focus as a youth and family pastors working in this multicultural setting may not be to change all of life but to communicate the gospel to the students and their families so that they can embrace differences and have developed enough capacity to “dwell” harmoniously in the Christian community.

Even though cultural differences may have attributed to this conflict, they may not need to stay there too long to provide an undue platform to continue unnecessary and prolonged ache.

The core and deeper issue that have prevented these two groups of people coming together to a place of reconciliation and healing might be something other. The four elements of the parent/child relationship as noted by Drs. Balswick reclaimed and redeemed in a continual process of maturing – “intimacy leads to deeper covenant love, which enhances the atmosphere of grace, which strengthens the empowering process, which leads to deepened intimacy, and so on.”

It is important, primarily by the parents, to intentionally nurture efforts to invite unwavering commitment and nurture an accepting environment where both children and parents can be transparent before God and honest with one another. Only in such an

atmosphere can the empowering process can thrive, and intimacy continues to be developed and experienced.102

Multiple passages found in the books of Joshua and Judges, one reads about the legacy left behind by God’s great servants such as Moses and Joshua, and those generations of Israelites. They were undoubtedly imperfect, and their flaws and shortcomings recorded in the Testament. Moreover, yet, God honored their life of obedience, a willingness to follow the path God has outlined in their long and tedious journey and dwelling in the Promised Land.

However, the narrative of their journey recorded in these pages shows that the faith tradition was not faithfully transmitted to the next generation of people. Something got lost. The generation who knew what God has done in their midst now forgotten, for they “knew neither the LORD nor what He had done for Israel.” (Judges 2:10)

What lies in the future of Korean American immigrant churches and their families? What legacy left for the future generation of young people? What would they remember? It is of a significant importance to be reminded once again that the core issue behind the conflict experienced at home is not about the cultural difference as a result of immigration, but rather, it may stem from the deep seeded spiritual and emotional wounds and hurts which can only be healed in relational connection with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Churches and the families must return and seek to restore God’s covenantal relationship, with Him and with each other. As churches equip and empower these parents, parents must be willing to locate themselves in the forefront nurturing and empower their

adolescents; it is their primary call - a divine call placed upon the life of these parents and their adolescents.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

FINAL THOUGHTS

In the backdrop of Korean American churches to stay homogeneous to create the sense of belonging and identity, this “ethnic bubble” is being challenged as time passes – even though first-generation and recent migrants have continual need to create co-ethnic connection and network, the arrival of second-generation Korean Americans creates tension and conflict.¹

This is difficult social and cultural achievement as it means a wholehearted engagement with difference, a commitment to multiculturalism that requires considerable movement beyond a cultural comfort zone.

“Cultural diversity is consistently associated with lower levels of social capital, especially regarding the interpersonal trust,” which might be something these immigrant churches and their congregations are unwilling to walk away from.²

² Ley, “The Immigrant Church as an Urban Service Hub,” 2067.
However, it is important to remember that both Korean American parents and their adolescents are taking “a flight, fueled by anxiety, in search for safety, belonging, and acceptance,” and such commonality may create room for mutual understanding.³

For Korean American families, learning to allow cultural values and norms to successfully intersect their lives inter-generationally so that parents and their adolescents can fully engage in meaningful and “loving” relationship, it is a challenge that needs further exploration and investigation.

For churches and the Christian community, the keys to reaching these parents and adolescents with the gospel of Jesus do not lie “simply” in the books, successful programs, or experts.

In fact, the goal should not be “figuring out what to do.” The right answers for the future lie in the doing of theology alongside these adolescents and the generation that follows closely behind;⁴ to continuously ask what would be God’s plan and purpose for these families as He faithfully walks in the midst of their hurts and pains.

It would be imperative for pastors to recognize the desperate need of these parents along with their adolescents to restore their personal and individual relationship with Christ first, which then reflected in their covenantal relationship with one another.⁵

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⁴ Richard and James, “The ‘Fourth Wave’: A Theological Perspective on Youth Ministry,” 60.
⁵ Clark, “Youth Ministry as Practical Theology,” 29.
Pursuing towards the restoration includes strength to walk away from an environment that may deter healthier relationship: conditional love, self-centeredness, perfectionism, efforts to control others, and lack of communication.\textsuperscript{6}

It must arise out of pure and unselfish desire to see God’s Kingdom and His righteousness established first. Churches along with its leaders must set an example in their character as well as in their life-experience.

Throughout this paper, biblical themes that bear the nature of family relationship covenant love, grace, empowerment and intimacy have been discussed and applied at various places at multiple levels. These four elements of Christian family relationships are part of a continual process – “intimacy can lead to deeper covenant love, commitment fortifies the atmosphere of freely offered grace, the climate of acceptance and forgiveness encourages serving and empower others, and the resultant sense of self-esteem leads to the ability to be intimate without fear.”\textsuperscript{7}

The relationship is complicated. There are risks involved with any movements and any attempted changes. However, we remind once again that as believers experience Christ at a different pace and during various phases of our spiritual journey, we recognize the presence and the availability of God’s power. As parents look upon their children, one of the most treasured gifts of God, may faith, hope and love continue to abound in the heart of these parents.

\textsuperscript{6} Balswick and Balswick, \textit{The Family}, 3rd ed:33.

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
APPENDIX

Fig. 1

A Theological Basis of Family Relationships\(^1\)

Table 1

Immigration into the United States for Selected Countries before and after the 1965 Immigration Act (in thousands)²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Great Britain</td>
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</tr>
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<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China &amp; Taiwan</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
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<td>Philippines</td>
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<td><strong>26</strong></td>
<td><strong>153</strong></td>
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<td>63</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
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<td>India</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Vietnam</td>
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<td>162</td>
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</table>


Table 2

Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe’s Social Readjustment Scale[^3]

A measurement of the degree of stress related to various life changes (out of 100)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Scale of Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major business readjustment</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major change in financial status</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change to different line of work</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in number of arguments with spouse</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking out mortgage or loan for major purchase</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major change in responsibilities at work</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble with in-laws</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse beginning or ceasing to work</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning or ceasing formal schooling</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major change in living conditions</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revision of personal habits</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major change in working hours or conditions</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in residence</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change to a new school</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major change in usual type or amount of recreation</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major change in church activities</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major change in social activities</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking out mortgage or loan for lesser purchase</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major change in sleeping habits</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major change in eating habits</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major change in number of family get-togethers</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor violations of the law (e.g. traffic tickets)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
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</table>

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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Vita of
James Gi-Sung Lee

1) Present Position:
   Pastor
   Bethany United Methodist Church, Wayne, New Jersey

2) Personal Data:
   Birth Date: June 2, 1963
   Marital Status: Married
   Family: Alisa Lee (spouse) Faith, Hope and Joy Lee (children)
   Denomination: United Methodist, USA
   Ordained: United Methodist

3) Education:
   1982 - 1986   University of Southern California
   Bachelor of Science (BS) in Biomedical Engineering

   1987 – 1992   Fuller Theological Seminary / School of Theology
   Master of Art in Theology, Pastoral Counseling

   2002 – 2004   Fuller Theological Seminary / School of Psychology
   Master of Science in Marriage & Family Therapy

4) Work Experience:
   2014 – Current   Bethany United Methodist Church, New Jersey
                    Senior Pastor

   2010 – 2014   Bethany United Methodist Church, New Jersey
                   Education/Family Ministry Pastor

   2006 – 2010   Korean Church of Queens, New York
                   Education Pastor

   2003 – 2006   World Vision Church, California
                   English Ministry Pastor

   1987 – 2002   World Agape Mission Church, California
                   Youth Pastor & English Ministry Pastor