

Liberty University School of Divinity

**A Practical Guide for Creating a Group Environment
to Reach a Postmodern World**

A Thesis Project Submitted to
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Doctor of Ministry

by

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ABSTRACT

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR CREATING A GROUP ENVIRONMENT TO REACH A POSTMODERN WORLD

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There are disturbing statistics about the number of young people who are leaving the church after they graduate high school and are no longer bound by obligation to the family to attend worship services. If the church does not begin to change its methodology, it will not be able to succeed in reaching this generation. This project seeks to help local churches create an environment in their groups that is comfortable and engaging to the postmodern generation. Churches must create a group environment that not only fosters true Biblical community but also engages our congregations in fulfilling the mission of the church. This project will provide a practical guide for creating a group environment to reach the next generation for Christ. In doing so, this project will examine research done on the postmodern generation to outline some common trends among postmoderns, explore churches all over the country that are having success in reaching out to the younger generations, and distill common principles that reach out to the heart of postmoderns.

For Dominique

Without your love and support I would not be the man I am today.

There is not sentiment enough to let you know
how truly blessed I am to have you in my life.

Special Thanks to Rod Dempsey

Thank you for your mentorship and friendship.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

What is the mission and the purpose of the church? This is a straightforward question, and when speaking about the church, it is perhaps the most straightforward question there is. Many would rightfully submit that the mission of the church can be found in Matthew 28. At the end of Jesus' time here on earth, he reveals to his followers his ultimate commission for the church. In Matthew 28, Jesus, who forty days prior was raised from the dead, is found teaching his followers. At this time, Jesus was instructing them on what the mission of the church will be. He says in verses 19-20, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age."¹ Over the next 2,000+ years, the church has been seeking diligently how to accomplish this mission in every culture, language, economic class, ethnicity, and generation. This project will examine the opportunities and challenges presented by the postmodern generation. The purpose of this project is to help churches understand the differences between the generation that is rising up, referred to throughout this project as *the postmodern generation*, and the previous generation. It will explore the example of the early church and how it sought to accomplish the mission that was set before them. Lastly, this project will learn from contemporary churches throughout the country and see how they are finding success reaching the postmodern generation in their communities. All of this will be done with

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

the goal of extrapolating some key principles that churches can implement in their groups and ministries to reach the next generation with the kingdom of God.

It is the belief of the author that with an appropriate understanding of these key principles that any church that truly wants to see the gospel move in the postmodern generation can do so. This project is designed to help churches and church leaders better understand what kind of environment is both appealing to the postmodern generation and healthy in their relationship with Jesus Christ, knowing that not all environments in the church that are appealing are healthy for the individuals. The goal of this project is to help churches create environments that truly see individuals from the postmodern generation transformed by the gospel and growing in their relationship with God, knowing that they must be appealing to the next generation for that transformation to have an opportunity to take place.

Statement of the Problem

In the past thirty years, there has been a distinct generational shift. With this change in generations, there have been some distinct changes in the way that those in the postmodern generation view truth, how they relate to community, and how they feel about religion. With every generational shift the church must examine its methodology to determine how it can effectively reach the new generation with the Good News of Jesus Christ. The challenge for the church today is that the way that the church has gone about expressing truth, community, and religion in the past will not continue to have the same impact it had with the previous generation.

This shift can be easily seen in the vast numbers of young adults leaving churches today. According to Lifeway, research indicates that seventy percent of young adults who

claimed that they attended church regularly for at least one full year during high school drop out of the church for some period of time.² The study continues that out of the seventy percent that dropped out, close to two-thirds of those young adults had returned to the church during the time line of the study. While the latter is great news for the church, that still leaves close to twenty-three percent of young adults dropping out of church. No organization can maintain that kind of loss if it wants to continue to be successful. More importantly for the church than the fact that it is losing twenty-three percent of young adults is the fact that number only reflects those who were in church in the first place. There are literally billions of people in this world who are under the age of thirty-five and are considered to be part of the postmodern generation, and it is the mission of the church to make them disciples of Christ.

The goal of this project is to be a resource to help churches and leaders reach the next generation with the kingdom of God. This project will explore the principles that a church can foster within its current groups structure to find success in bridging the generational gap with the postmodern generation. The idea is that by fostering these principles, the church can develop relationships with the next generation, express the truth of the gospel to that generation, and see the postmodern generation come into a life-transforming relationship with Christ.

Statement of Scope and Limitations

While it is easy to see the weight of reaching the postmodern generation with the kingdom of God, it would be impossible to create an all-encompassing and definitive

² Ed Stetzer, "Dropouts and Disciples: How Many Students are Really Leaving the Church?" *Christianity Today* May 14, 2015, accessed June 25, 2016. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2014/may/dropouts-and-disciples-how-many-students-are-really-leaving.html>.

work on how to interact with the next generation. This project will focus its efforts on the postmodern generation of American culture. The term *postmodern* throughout this project will refer to those individuals born in the year 1980 and following. Part of the research of this project includes looking into the practices of the early church. There is a limited view of the daily life of these first Christ followers and what is known is pieced together through looking at written scriptures and church tradition. The last limitation is found in the form of bias from those leaders chosen to interview. This bias can either be focusing on traits of their organization that could be considered good or desirable as well as not mentioning traits that could be considered bad or undesirable.

Statement of Methodology

This project first seeks to define the major differences between the postmodern generation and the modern generation (the previous generation). This is done through study of modern scholars and the current information about the postmodern generation and the modern generation. The second goal is to determine the opportunities and the challenges that face the church based upon these differences. This is done through continued study of the current scholars as well as extrapolating conclusions from that information. The third goal is to study the early church and how it sought to accomplish the mission of Christ Jesus for the church. This is done through study of scriptures referring to the life and activities of the early church, as well as study of scholars and traditions of the church. The fourth goal is to examine what churches today are doing to reach their generation for Christ. This is done through one-on-one interviews with five church leaders from across the country to see what they are doing to have success. The last goal of this paper is to determine principles that any church can use to better reach

out to the postmodern generation in their community. Examining all of the information gathered and compiling the principles that are found to be common among the different research methods accomplish this goal.

Review of Literature

There has been much written about the postmodern generation both in the secular and non-secular world. The idea of generational shifts are not a new topic, but rarely does a culture find itself in the midst of such a drastic and sharp shift in thought, perception, value, and community as is found in the shift toward the postmodern generation. Because of the dramatic nature of the shift, the potential windfall or fall out for companies, and the weight of the mission of the church, many are seeking to better understand this new generation. Following is a review of some of those resources written about the postmodern generation.

First is an article by Atul Gawande entitled “Hellhole.”³ In this article, Gawande outlines the effects of long-term isolation in prisoners of war as well as inmates found in long-term solitary confinement. The purpose of the article is to show the physical and psychological impact that is found in cases of extreme isolation. Shedding light on a human’s need for interaction, this article shows what happens when that interaction is severed. While showing the negative impact of lack of community in its most severe cases, it does not go into the benefit of community or how to foster it in any way.

Next is a book written by Robert Putnam called *Bowling Alone*.⁴ This book talks about the change in the American idea of community. Throughout the book, Putnam

³ Atul Gawande, “Hellhole,” *New Yorker*, March 20, 2009, accessed June 27, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/03/30/hellhole#ixzz2ISFz2PNA>

⁴ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2000).

raises the interesting point that there are more people in the world bowling today than ever before; yet, there are fewer people connected to bowling leagues than any other time. His basic thesis is that there has been a shift in the way this generation experiences community. While his grandfather's generation sought to connect through real-world interactions, today's generation favors online community. The premise of the book submits that an understanding of these new digital communities will help connect the world in a way that it has not been connected before, but at what price? Overall this book does a great job outlining a central change in community among the postmodern generation. While *Bowling Alone* is a good source about the changes in community, it does not offer any insight on how to foster community.

Also writing on the idea of community is Andy Stanley's book *Creating Community*.⁵ Designed to be a book centered around the context of small groups, Stanley does a great job outlining the basics of creating community. Throughout his book, Stanley outlines the biblical call to community, God's plan for it, and how to foster the context of a small group. Written as more of a general tool for churches, Stanley's book does not focus on the postmodern generation, but rather seeks to focus on the larger Christian community.

Another book written on the development of small groups is *Community*⁶ by Brad House. Throughout this book, House outlines the primary functions of small groups and how they should operate in the daily life of the individual. Written while serving at Mars Hill in Seattle, Washington, this book is the culmination of the principles learned by

⁵ Andy Stanley, *Creating Community: 5 Keys to Building a Small Group Culture* (Sisters: Multnomah, 2004).

⁶ Brad House, *Community: Taking Your Small Group off Life Support* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011).

House while serving a predominantly postmodern congregation. While the book does a great job expressing the principles that are effective in small groups for the postmodern generation, it does not take the time to explore the differences between the generations and how small groups may operate differently between them.

Next is a book that can easily be described as an essential book on small groups. Written by Bill Donahue, *Building a Church of Small Groups*⁷ is written as a telling of the story of Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago. Willow Creek is commonly associated with a shift in the way churches interact with the postmodern generation. Throughout the book, Donahue outlines the way Willow Creek changed the traditional methodology of reaching out with the kingdom of God particularly in the areas of discipleship and small groups. This book outlines principles that are effective in reaching the postmodern generation, yet it does not outline the differences of challenges associated with the new generation.

Shifting toward books that outline major differences found in the postmodern generation, the first to be mentioned is the book *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*⁸ by D.A. Carson. Throughout this book, Carson seeks to understand the next generation in the context of the emerging church. The emerging church is commonly associated with a shift in methodology that has had success in attracting the postmodern generation. Carson seeks to identify the changes in the generation and extrapolate their implications for the church as a whole. Carson masterfully outlines the change found in the postmodern generation but seeks to interact more with the emerging church

⁷ Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

⁸ D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

movement than establishing principles for the church to follow while reaching out to that generation.

Another book written to examine the postmodern generation is *The Postmodern World*⁹ by Millard Erickson. This book is an examination of the postmodern generation seeking to outline what this new generation looks like. Throughout the book, Erickson uses stories to highlight how those in the postmodern generation think differently than the previous generation. This book does a good job creating a profile of the postmodern generation, but it does not seek to outline principles for a church or individuals to implement in order to reach this generation for Christ.

In his book *Politics and Vision*,¹⁰ Sheldon Wolin outlines the major shifts found in the postmodern generation. Wolin explores history to examine the progression of culture to get to the postmodern generation, examining everything from Plato and the early church to economic changes and rationalism. This is a grand sweeping outline of where post-modernity comes from. Written to help readers understand how culture arrived where it is today, this book is designed to outline where culture is, not to outline how it should be engaged.

With a desire to outline the challenges the church faces in light of the postmodern generation, Gene Veith wrote *Postmodern Times*.¹¹ Seeking first to understand the current culture, Veith outlines the major challenges seen in the postmodern generation.

⁹ Millard J. Erickson, *The Postmodern World: Discerning the Times and the Spirit of our Age* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002).

¹⁰ Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Boston: Princeton University Press, 1960).

¹¹ Gene Edward Veith, *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994).

Taking an opposing view toward the postmodern generation, Veith does not outline how to work within the new generation, but rather how to counter the changes seen. While it has good content concerning the challenges the church faces, it does not spend as much time highlighting the opportunities.

Crystal Downing, in her book *How Postmodernism Serves My Faith*,¹² highlights the transition from modernity to postmodernity. Focusing on this transition, Downing highlights the changes happening within the postmodern generation, while examining the challenges and opportunities found within this generation. While the book does a good job simply outlining the generation, it does not go into how to interact with the postmodern generation.

Next is a book by David Wells called *Above All Earthly Pow'rs*.¹³ In a shift from other books, Wells seeks to find reflections of Christ in the postmodern generation. Outlining the differences that the postmodern generation represents, Wells examines the opportunity for the church with the new generation. While it does a good job outlining the opportunities represented, this book does not seek to examine how the church can interact with this generation on a deeper level.

The next set of books not only outline the differences found in the postmodern generation, but they also begin to interact with those differences in the context of the church. The first of these books is *The End of the World as We Know It*¹⁴ by Chuck

¹² Crystal L. Downing, *How Postmodernism Serves My Faith: Questioning Truth in Language, Philosophy and Art* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

¹³ David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Pow'rs: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005).

¹⁴ Chuck Smith, *The End of the Word as We Know It* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2001).

Smith. One of the most encouraging things about Smith's book is that he regularly expresses the fact that the church cannot rely on old religious structures to reach the new generation for Christ. This book focuses on the use of personal relationships and witness in order to better engage the postmodern generation with the gospel.

Continuing in the realm of books trying to approach the postmodern generation with new methodology is *Postmodernism*¹⁵ by Robert Brewer. One of the most unique traits of this book is Brewer's approach of combining apologetic with personal relationship and seeking to blend relational connection with defense of the faith. The goal of the book is to help equip the reader to develop these types of relationships.

Amy and Frog Orr-Ewing in their book *Millennials*¹⁶ take a look at the postmodern generation by examining the possibilities of equipping this next generation for Christ and sending them out to do the work of the ministry. They dream of a vision of the church where it understands the postmodern generation and utilizes that generation to reach out to their peers.

The last book covered here is by George Gallup Jr., entitled *The Next American Spirituality*.¹⁷ As a leading Christian pollster, George Gallup Jr. has a unique perspective when it comes to understanding the postmodern generation. As one would expect, Gallup analyzes statistics and polls to create a snapshot of the postmodern generation, seeking to outline what faces the future of the church. Creating a dynamic landscape of the next generation, Gallup seeks to inform the church about the challenges and opportunities

¹⁵ Robert Brewer, *Postmodernism: What You Should Know and Do About it* (New York: Writer's Showcase, 2002).

¹⁶ Amy Orr-Ewing and Frog Orr-Ewing, *Millennials: Reaching and Releasing the Rising Generation* (Gerrards Cross: Latimer Minister Press, 2010).

¹⁷ George Gallup and Timothy Jones, *The Next American Spirituality: Finding God in the Twenty-First Century* (Colorado Springs: Victor Cook Communications, 2000).

presented by postmoderns.

While there are many books that cover everything from helping the reader to understand the postmodern generation, seeking to engage the postmodern generation, to outright opposing the postmodern generation, there are not many books written with the purpose of helping churches understand this generation and helping them to instill principles to reach this generation. It is the goal of this paper to do that: to create a profile of the postmodern generation, as well as, engage the church in practical principles to reach their community in the light of that profile.

Biblical Foundations

Reaching the postmodern generation is not an option for the church. In fact, it is a biblical mandate. The mission and responsibility of the church is to make disciples and to help those disciples become more like Christ through their relationship with Jesus. Outlined here is the mission of the church and how it responds throughout the scriptures to that mission.

Matthew 28:19-20 states, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”¹⁸ Called the Great Commission, this is Christ’s plan for the church. This is the responsibility left to the disciples before Jesus returned to Father God in heaven, and it is the responsibility left to the church today. This is a non-negotiable for the church. Because of this, it is the responsibility of the church to reach every generation with the Gospel of Christ Jesus.

¹⁸ Matt. 28:19-20.

Mark 16:15-16 states, “And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”¹⁹ Recorded in Mark, this is a recording of the same mission given to the church. Along with the mission, there is also a reminder of what is at stake. Jesus understood that those who did not receive the gift he had offered would have to experience eternal separation from a relationship with God. The stakes have not changed. The church is responsible for the proclamation of this message and if it does not go out, there is a generation that will be eternally separated from their creator.

Acts 1:8 states, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”²⁰ Here is an outline of the plan that Jesus had to help the church accomplish the mission outlined. Jesus tells the disciples that the Holy Spirit would be coming to empower them to accomplish the mission of the church, not just a mission for the Jewish people but a mission for every culture, race, country, and generation. The same power given to the disciples is also given to the church today, and the same responsibility is also given to the church today.

Acts 2:42 – 47 states:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day

¹⁹ Mark 16:15-16.

²⁰ Acts 1:8.

those who were being saved.²¹

This is the initial response of the church to the mission that was left for them by Jesus. About ten days after Jesus gives the disciples the Great Commission, they found themselves at Pentecost. They immediately put into practice the teachings of Jesus and begin to live out the mission left for them. This can be a blueprint for the church to reach the postmodern generation.

John 17:11 states, “And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.”²² Part of the mission of the church was to experience unity with one another and to foster community among the followers of Jesus. Here, Jesus is about to be sent to his crucifixion. In his last moments praying to God, he expresses his desire for community among his followers. This is close to the heart and is inseparable from the ministry of Jesus, and it is the same heart that Jesus has for the church today.

Genesis 2:18 states, “Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”²³ The idea of community is so strong throughout the Bible that when God was going through with creating after everything he created, he stepped back and described it as good; up until he created man that is. When God created man alone, he saw that without community it was not good, and because of this God created a partner for man.

1 Corinthians 1:10 states, “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord

²¹ Acts 2:42-47.

²² John 17:11.

²³ Gen. 2:18.

Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.”²⁴ The idea of unity was a chief concern of the ministry of Paul as well. Paul was in a unique situation of constantly having to remind the followers of Jesus to be unified. As the Apostle to the Gentiles, he met constant opposition, and when people began to follow Jesus, they still had to fight through cultural barriers and traditions to work toward unification. Paul constantly wrote to remind the church of the importance of unity. Likewise for the postmodern generation, there is a call for unity among the church as it seeks to reach those in their community

John 13:34 states, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”²⁵ Love and unity is in fact a commandment given to the church by Christ Jesus himself. This is particularly important when interacting with the postmodern generation. This generation thrives on community, and the most important apologetic the church has is that of love.

Colossians 4:2 states, “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”²⁶ Prayer was an essential attribute of the early church. Paul describes the act of praying as something that the believer should always keep at the forefront of his or her life. Prayer is how the believer communes with God, and it is how they understand God and his will. It is through prayer that the believer can accomplish anything of spiritual worth. For the church to be successful in reaching the postmodern generation, they must be devoted to prayer.

²⁴ 1 Cor. 1:10.

²⁵ John 13:34.

²⁶ Col. 4:2.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 states, “Pray without ceasing.”²⁷ Paul continues on the importance and practice of prayer when he calls his readers to pray without ceasing. Meaning that through all things, the believer should be in constant connection and conversation with God. This is an expression of a close and personal walk with Jesus. It is the outpouring of what God is doing in the life of the individual.

Galatians 6:2 states, “Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”²⁸ Another mark of the early church was its desire to bear one another’s burdens, Sometimes this meant selling possessions to give to those in need, sometimes this meant taking others in and taking care of them physically, while other times it meant carrying the weight of someone’s sadness or helping them fight sin in their life. While the mode can manifest itself in countless ways, one thing remains the same, that it is the responsibility of every believer to help each other through difficult times. This is just as important when reaching the postmodern generation. Seeing how faith is lived out is one of the most powerful tools the church has. Also postmoderns have a desire to accomplish social justice throughout their community and one of the ways to do that is through meeting the felt needs of other.

John 14:23 states, “Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”²⁹ One of the marks of the early church was obedience to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. In fact, here Jesus says that anyone who would love him will obey his teachings. While obedience is a principle mark of a disciple of Christ, it is also how the

²⁷ 1 Thess. 5:17.

²⁸ Gal. 6:2.

²⁹ John 14:23.

world will see the church's commitment to Jesus.

Acts 9:31 states, "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied."³⁰ Another mark of the early church was its ability to multiply. A mark of healthy individuals and their walk with Jesus is their desire and ability to multiply themselves as disciples. The church should take multiplication seriously and seek to make disciples of the postmodern generation. A church that multiplies disciples will be a healthy church.

2 Timothy 2:2 states, "And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."³¹ Paul talks about how the church can go about the mission of multiplication. The idea is that leaders see potential in faithful men and begin to pour into their lives. As they pour into them this desire for multiplication, these men will go out and pour into others. For the church today, as they find these in the postmodern generation that are sensitive to the gospel, they can begin to pour into them and see them grow and reach furthering to their generation for Christ.

Acts 12:24 states, "But the word of God increased and multiplied."³² The word of God will never return void. While it is the responsibility of every Christ follower to proclaim the message of Christ to the world, it is God who does the multiplication. God is the one who draws people into his family. The key to reaching out to the postmodern generation is to realize that God has already claimed victory over this generation. It is the

³⁰ Acts 9:31.

³¹ 2 Tim. 2:2.

³² Acts 12:24.

responsibility of the church to be faithful to the proclamation of his message.

Conclusion

The church has a harvest field in front of it. Jesus tells his disciples in Luke 10:2, “The harvest is plentiful.”³³ It is easy to see the need for the gospel in the community today. This is heightened when looking at the postmodern generation. While the harvest may be ripe for the picking, there have to be people willing to go out in the field and do the work of harvesting the fruit. In that same passage, Jesus tells his disciples, “but the laborers are few.”³⁴ It is time for the church to step up and begin to engage this generation with the gospel of Christ. Jesus finishes this thought when he tells the disciples, “Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”³⁵ It is the earnest prayer of this writer that through this project, the church will be equipped and emboldened to reach out to the postmodern generation with the gospel of Christ Jesus. This will not be an easy task. It will take an understanding of the culture, a picture of what has been successful, and the implementation of principles found in scripture and in other churches to reach this generation.

³³ Luke 10:2a.

³⁴ Luke 10:2b.

³⁵ Luke 10:2c.

Chapter 2

Defining the Generation

Like Nailing Jell-O to the Wall

One of the hardest things about creating an environment to reach out to those in the postmodern generation is generating a definition of the postmodern movement. The term itself is heavy laden with misconceptions, misinterpretations, assumptions, and negative emotion. So often something is written about the postmodern movement one day and considered passé the next. For all intents and purposes trying to define the common elements that distinguish this new generation from the previous one is like trying to nail a piece of Jell-O to the wall.

In fact, over the past few years there have been a growing number of individuals who believe that postmodern culture is already on its way out of society or that it never really existed in the first place. The reality is that the postmodern culture is so common place today that we do not even notice it. Millard Erickson, in his book *The Postmodern World* submits,

Because it is so common and so present, we may not really be conscious of it. It is like the air we breathe. We are fully unaware of it. Perhaps when we move to a new area where there is a distinctive odor in the air (such as fumes from a paper plant), we initially notice the change in our environment. Yet we soon become accustomed to it and fail to be aware of it any longer. Likewise, Because of the spreading influence of postmodernism, we may hardly notice it.³⁶

The point is that the church is in danger of avoiding the conversation of change because it is becoming comfortable with how society is changing, and if it is not careful, will fail in its mission to reach a new generation for Christ.

³⁶ Erickson, *The Postmodern World*, 11.

The goal of this chapter is to begin to define some of the characteristics of the postmodern generation. The focus will be on those characteristics that are particularly important for the church to understand as it seeks to create a culture that is both comfortable and inviting for the next generation, but also effectively communicates the message of Christ in truth and love.

Truth and Metanarratives

John Keats in his “Ode on a Grecian Urn” famously wrote, “‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty,’ - that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”³⁷ In a way, this simple quote exemplifies the postmodern view of truth. The reason that this quote exemplifies the postmodern mindset is because the postmodern views truth in a similar way to beauty. When they think of beauty, it is understood that what is considered beautiful for one person is not necessarily what is beautiful to another. This is similar to how the next generation perceives truth. Unlike the generations before it, the postmodern generation struggles with the idea that there is one truth that is all-encompassing and can be applied to all cultures all of the time. This is where the church is having its hardest time reaching out to this new generation. Where some scholars have been mistaken is by submitting that the postmodern generation rejects truth, when in fact it is actually rejecting the metanarratives of the previous generation, and not the idea of being able to know and understand truth.

Metanarratives are over-arching systems that seek to define what is true or right. Often these metanarratives use human reason to argue truth and defend that truth from attack. In Christianity, it is similar to apologetics. It is the idea that truth is and can be

³⁷ John Keats, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, lines 49-50.

arrived at logically, i.e. by a proper understanding of a particular set of Bible verses, an individual will come to the truth that God loves them. One of the biggest differences between the modern generation and the postmodern is that the modern generation since the time of the Enlightenment has placed the highest value on reason, while the postmodern generation does not. Chuck Smith submits, "Postmodernity is not irrational; it simply does not believe that human reason holds all the answers to life's questions. There are other ways to know besides human reason. They include story, metaphor, feeling, experience, and intuition... Postmodern people are not moved by reason alone; they also want to know how an event or object is experienced."³⁸ So, while the Modernist generation could arrive at the truth of God's love by examining the biblical text through reason and logic, the postmodern generation needs to feel and experience God's love in order to consider it truth. The real crux of the matter lies in the fact that postmoderns do not trust human reason. David Wells argues that human reason has bias. He continues by outlining that it seeks to see certain things, and in fact can seek to see certain things that are not really there.³⁹ This is why personal experience is so highly valued on the journey to truth. While reason can make an individual see things that are not really in the text, no one can argue with how one experiences a personal truth, and there is no pressure to make others accept this experience. Thus, the metanarrative loses its impact when individual truth is preferred.

Where this all begins to get messy in the eye of the postmodern is that there are so many differing metanarratives throughout the world that either compete for attention or

³⁸ Smith, *The End of the Word as We Know It*, 48.

³⁹ Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers*, 87.

outright object to one another. Think about just the competing claims made about Christianity. Each denomination, church, and even sometimes person within the church has a different set of truths that they hold to. The postmodern sees these differences and, as a result, rejects them all because if they all seek to show one overarching truth that is true for all people at all times, then the assumption would be that the methods derived by the modern generation would have proven those truths by now.

So the question lies then, if the postmodern generation rejects the metanarrative of the previous generation, how do they view truth? Can they accept truth, and when they do, how do they communicate that truth with others? Here is the big secret why it comes to the idea of objective truth in the postmodern generation. It is not a question of if objective truth can be obtained; it is really that objective truth is not desirable. The hardest thing for some people from the modernist generation to understand is that unlike them, truth is not where value is placed. Instead, in the postmodern generation, the journey to truth is what is most valuable, and in fact even if the journey does not lead to truth, it is still viewed as being more valuable than the truth is was seeking.

The church then needs to learn how to help the next generation experience the journey of entering a relationship with Christ rather than seeking to express the truth of what a relationship looks like. This takes a change in the way churches interact with the new generation, but does not and should never lead to changing the message of Christ and the truths presented in the Bible. Dr. Elmer Towns is known for saying, “Methods are many; principles are few. Methods may change, but principles never do.” While truth is not always palatable to the postmodern generation, this does not mean that the church does not hold to it. In fact in a future chapter, the author will look at the opportunities and

threats related to the postmodern view of truth and how the church can effectively communicate truth to the postmodern generation.

Coca-Cola and the New Community

Back in the mid-20th century, a term began popping up. The term was “The Nuclear Family,” and this term was designed to define the primary family unit. The nuclear family has classically consisted of a mother, father, and their children. This term limited itself to those living at the same residence and did not include single parent homes or extended family. During the 20th century, this term truly defined the average family in America; however, there has been a shift over the past few decades, and the family unit as outlined by the postmodern generation has broadened its definition.

During the holiday season of 2008, Coca-Cola and Wal-Mart released a joint advertising promotion. As part of the promotion there was a commercial that showed a young man at a party with a bag full of Coca-Cola bottles that he was giving out to his “family.” He proceeded to give out these bottles to his mother, father, stepmother, siblings, stepsiblings, friends, coaches, and social media acquaintances. The point of the video was to spread joy during the holiday season; however, this commercial very accurately defines the postmodern mindset of community and family.

Unlike the nuclear family of the fifties where family was strictly defined as direct family members living in the same household, the definition of community and family has been undergoing a distinct shift with the coming of the postmodern generation. For the postmodern today, family includes a much larger group of people that one may or may not be related to. There are a number of reasons for this shift, and any number of authors have argued the reasoning behind this shift; however, this author submits that the

one of biggest reasons for a shift in the way the postmodern generation views community is the shrinking of the world.

Over the past few decades, there have been astonishing advancements in the way individuals travel. This has created opportunities for people to move away from home, has helped in generating metropolitan areas, and made it easier to go places throughout the world at speeds that previous generations could not have dreamed. With all of that advancement in travel, the thing that has done the most to shrink the world is the invention of fiber optics and satellite communication. Information is more accessible than any other time throughout human history. In the United States almost every person has access to computers and the Internet. New Internet communities have made it possible to stay in communication with hundreds of “friends” at once. The reason for the success of these Internet communities is this generation’s desire for community.

Bill Donahue submits that the desire for community is entrenched in the makeup of every human. Donahue writes, “This ‘relational DNA’ or ‘community gene’ helps explain why churches need small groups. People don’t come to church simply to satisfy spiritual needs. They come to us internally wired with a desire for connection...Their hunger for togetherness is an inescapable mark oh humanity.”⁴⁰ What online communities have done is created places where people from all over the world can come together to share similar likes and experiences. Where the previous generations had to find community within the context of their local circles, this generation can create a community with anyone in the world. These digital communities have made it possible for individuals to gather with people of similar interests and find like-minded people even

⁴⁰ Donahue and Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups*, 24.

if they do not live anywhere near each other. This shift has removed the desire to conform to the culture that an individual lives in and has allowed this generation to seek out interests that they would not have been able to do in the past.

While Donahue describes community as a desire of every person, community is in fact not only a desire for every human, it is actually becoming considered a basic need for appropriate development in children and something that is required to sustain a healthy mind in adults. In recent years, there have been studies on people who have to deal with extreme or long-term isolation.

In his article “Hellhole,” Atul Gawande explores the effect of isolation on the human mind by examining the stories of several men, including prisoners of war, astronauts, and prisoners, who have suffered from prolonged isolation. His most compelling interview is with a man who spent five years in solitary confinement in a super max prison. Gawande explains the effect of isolation where he recounts what happened to this man:

After a few months without regular social contact, however, his experience proved no different from that of the P.O.W.s or hostages, or the majority of isolated prisoners whom researchers have studied: he started to lose his mind. He talked to himself. He paced back and forth compulsively, shuffling along the same six-foot path for hours on end. Soon, he was having panic attacks, screaming for help. He hallucinated that the colors on the walls were changing. He became enraged by routine noises—the sound of doors opening as the guards made their hourly checks, the sounds of inmates in nearby cells. After a year or so, he was hearing voices on the television talking directly to him. He put the television under his bed, and rarely took it out again.⁴¹

While most will never have to suffer from extreme isolation, it is important to note the impact community can have on a person’s mind and life.

With such a desire for connection and community as part of the heart of every

⁴¹ Gawande, “Hellhole.”

person, the postmodern generation is seeking this connection out by utilizing technology in new ways. Gone are the days where community can only be found with those in one's family, school, or church life. Now the entire world is an open community for people to find others that share their interests.

This section began by talking about the broadening of the definition of family and community. Here is where the postmodern generation most differentiates itself from the previous generations. While the modernist sought to have a manageable number of deep relationships, the postmodern generation seeks to have an infinite amount of people associated with their particular community. These large circles, tribes, or followers are considered to be the individual's friends, confidants, and councilors. As mentioned earlier, another thing that separates the postmodern generation is that the individual will never have to meet any of these people in real life for them to become part of their community.

In fact, there was a story in the news about a college football player who after months of thinking his girlfriend had died found out that she never actually existed in the first place.⁴² Their entire relationship had been online, and as it turns out the whole relationship was actually a hoax from the beginning. Stories like this is something that the previous generation would have never imagined, while today it is the subject matter for a primetime show on MTV. The idea of community is changing and the church has to understand this shift in order to effectively minister to a new generation.

With a broader sense of community, there are some great opportunities for the church to become the life giving community that helps individuals grow to their full

⁴² ESPN.com News Service, "Story of Manti Te'o Girlfriend a Hoax," January 17, 2013, http://espn.go.com/college-football/story/_/id/8851033/story-manti-teo-girlfriend-death-apparently-hoax.

potential in Christ. There are also a number of threats associated with this new view of community that can dramatically affect the individual the church is seeking to minister. The next chapter will explore some of these opportunities and challenges.

Seeking Spirituality, Not Religion

Another major change from the modern mindset to the postmodern mindset is in the area of spirituality. Unlike the previous generation, which at times sought to purge the world from all things religious or spiritual, the postmodern generation is more inclined to adopt and defend spiritual things. Gene Veith submits, “Whereas modernism sought to rid the world of religion, postmodernism spawns new ones.”⁴³ The trend that was seen through modernity of seeking to quantify everything in rational terms that can be easily understood and accepted as truth has become antiquated and there is a surge of spiritual renewal penetrating the culture in new and exciting ways. Robert Brewer describes this resurgence when he writes, “Nietzsche was off... way off. Not only is God not dead, he’s big business. Just walk into any of your favorite secular bookstores and take a look at the number of books that are focused on spirituality. The typical secular bookstore has entire sections devoted to spirituality.”⁴⁴

Spirituality is alive and well in the postmodern generation; however, the truly unique thing behind this influx of spirituality among the younger generation is the fact they are a melting pot of theologies, religions, and practices. As mentioned earlier this generation inherently avoids metanarratives that seek to create one overarching worldview that can explain all things at all times. This aversion to metanarratives most

⁴³ Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 198.

⁴⁴ Brewer, *Postmodernism*, 37.

clearly presents itself in the spiritual ideologies of the postmodern generation. This new generation accepts multiple spiritual truths and is not held up on finding one religion to inform their daily lives. George Gallup describes this trend when he writes, “Indeed, it would be a grave mistake to conclude that everyone in our culture means the same thing when using the words *spiritual or spirituality*. Americans’ preferences as we will demonstrate, reveal a mixed bag of traditional and experimental, mainstream and fringe, Christ-centered and syncretistic.”⁴⁵ What has happened is that this generation is less concerned about being right and more concerned with doing what they like. Postmoderns will pull practices and theologies across denominational lines, and even across religions, in an effort to make a patch-worked theology that services their needs and makes them feel comfortable. Unlike the previous generation who sought out one truth that would inform and govern their beliefs, the postmodern generation will seek out multiple spiritual practices that make them feel more spiritual and add them to their spiritual life.

D.A. Carson writes. “Because postmodern epistemology does not rely so strongly on the kind of rigorous method inherent in modernism but encourages many presuppositions and methods and approaches, it turns out to be more open to mystical appeals, assorted religious appeals (provided they make not exclusive claims), or superstition.”⁴⁶ In fact the interesting thing about the postmodern generation is that they will accept competing claims (as long as they are not exclusive) and meld them together in order to make a holistic spiritual worldview.

This desire for spiritual connection has some exciting opportunities for the church

⁴⁵ Gallup and Jones, *The Next American Spirituality*, 42.

⁴⁶ Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church*, 98.

and can be the first connection point for many people toward a relationship with Christ. It can also be a burden on the church when trying to help those same individuals grow in their relationship with Christ. The next chapter will look at these opportunities and threats and see how the church can respond to this spiritual desire.

Conclusion

Understanding and reaching out to the next generation with the gospel is the principle mission for the church today. The importance of this task can be seen in a number of different areas. The first area is in the numerical magnitude of the postmodern generation. Just in America, there will be over 71 million postmoderns come of age, and their numerical significance will play an important part in shaping the church in the western world.

While this next generation will surpass even the number of boomers, it is not just their numbers that will change the face of the world. Just as their numbers are significant, their attitude and perspective of life and the future is vastly different as well. Unlike the modernist generation, postmoderns grew up in a world surrounded by financial and physical security. This stability has produced a generation of unprecedented optimists. This gives postmoderns a grander sense of confidence as they enter into adulthood and will increase the early impact of postmoderns in their culture.

The church has to realize that this generation is the future, and it is not going anywhere. Amy and Frog Orr-Ewing in their book on millennials describe it this way, “One thing is certain and that is that we are living in a time when young adults are bringing a fresh set of hopes, dreams and way of operating to bear on the society around

them.”⁴⁷ The culture is shifting, and the call to the church is to get on the front lines and begin to create communities to reach this generation.

While the numerical magnitude and cultural impact are important reasons to engage postmodern people with the gospel, the biggest motivation for the church should be out of obedience to the command that Christ gave to the church in Matthew 28. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus looks to his disciples and says, “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age’.”⁴⁸ Here Christ outlines the mission for the work of the saints, the mission for the church. He tells his followers to make disciples. This is why reaching this generation is so important. It is the mission of the church to fulfill Jesus’ command to help others grow closer to him.

⁴⁷ Orr-Ewing and Orr-Ewing, *Millennials*, 45.

⁴⁸ Matt. 28:18-20.

Chapter 3

Opportunities and Challenges of the Postmodern Generation

Truth, Justice, and the American Way

If there were ever a clear picture of modernity, it can be found in the popularity of Superman. Taken from a Nietzschean idea that man, at some point, will be perfected through evolution, the comic character called Superman epitomizes the idea of a perfected being. The Superman comics, for the most part, are pretty straightforward. Superman sees everything in black and white, good or bad. He is head strong in his own ability to decide what is right and wrong as well as his confidence that he can overcome any challenge through the use of his strength and abilities. His most known slogan was that he fought for truth, justice, and the American way.

The reason this so neatly outlines the worldview of the modern generations is in its premise that truth can be universally known, that the individual can know that truth, that the said truth is always applicable, and that the individual has the responsibility to stand up and fight for that truth. While Superman had mass appeal with the previous generation, there has been an interesting development in the past few years. Unlike the past, when Superman was one of the most popular characters in comics, merchandise, and movies, he is no longer at the top like he once was. Instead, he has been dethroned by the likes of heroes like Batman and Iron Man.

These characters exemplify more of a postmodern mindset. For them, truth is not always black and white. In fact, they are less interested in finding truth than accomplishing their more individual desires. The postmodern generation does not connect with “universal” truths, but instead they focus much more on the individual

truths that fit into their current worldview.

Because of this shift, the postmodern generation will approach many of the ideas held closely by the modernist generation in a vastly different way than ever before. These differences were looked at in depth in the previous chapter, and the goal of this chapter is to outline the major opportunities and challenges that will arise while trying to convey truth to the postmodern generation. It is important to note that while this chapter will outline challenges associated with reaching the next generation, it will also examine the opportunities that are arising as well. Gene Veith, in his book on postmodernity, writes, “The postmodern era hold promise for Bible-believing Christians. But it also holds different perils. Modernist heresies have floundered, but now postmodern heresies replace them...Both are hostile to God’s revelation but in different ways.”⁴⁹ The key for the church is not to simply complain about the challenges but to learn how to adapt to those challenges and to understand the opportunities that are on the horizon.

Challenges

The area of truth is often considered to be the greatest challenge area for reaching the next generation for Christ. As stated in the previous chapter Postmoderns are not as concerned with finding truth as some of our previous generations. This lack of interest in the truth comes from a variety of sources. This section will look at a number of challenges that the church will face in light of the differences previously outlined.

Rage against Metanarrative

The first challenge associated with reaching the next generation with the gospel is because of the rejection of the metanarrative. The Bible is, at its core, a metanarrative. It

⁴⁹ Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 192.

seeks to answer all of life's questions and help govern the individual life through one message that is applicable to all people at all times. While most fundamental Christians agree that this is the case, it is hard for the postmodern generation to accept any truth that encompasses all people at all time. Where the postmodern generation has broken off from previous generations is that they favor smaller narratives meant for individuals. Robert Brewer describes it this way, "Christianity is simply seen as another metanarrative that, like others, ignorantly claims to be able to give an account for the origins of life and creation. Only Fundamentalists (e.g. Christians) are arrogant enough to insist that theirs is superior to the metanarratives or mini-narratives of others."⁵⁰ The heart of the matter lies in the fact that postmoderns cannot assume that one truth for one individual can supersede the claims of truth that others proclaim.

Because Christianity does make universal and often exclusive claims about truth, postmoderns will view it as hostile or close-minded. What complicates this matter further is that when defending truth, Christians rightfully cite the Bible as their source of truth, but it also makes the same overarching and universal claims. Paul in his writing to Timothy even describes the scriptures as a metanarrative. In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul writes, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."⁵¹ The challenge then for the church is in its ability to communicate universal truth by using a text that by its own definition exclusively holds this truth to a generation that naturally rails against universal and exclusive claims. While this is not impossible to effectively communicate the

⁵⁰ Brewer, *Postmodernism*, 35.

⁵¹ 2 Tim. 3:16.

metanarrative of the Bible, the church must be intentional about how that truth is communicated.

The Problem of Human Intellect

The second challenge associated with the way the church communicates truth is in the area of the human intellect. One of the biggest ways the modern generation sought to understand and communicate truth is through the use of the human intellect. The challenge lies in the fact that the postmodern generation does not value the human intellect in the way the previous generation did. The modern generation viewed truth as completely rational, and because of that thought, that truth could only be arrived at through the use of rational thinking. The postmodern generation does not always equate truth with rational thought. David Dockery describes this idea in his book when he writes, “The postmodern mind refuses to limit truth to its rational dimension and thus dethrones the human intellect as the arbiter of truth. Because truth is nonrational there are other ways of knowing, including through the emotions and the institution.”⁵² The postmodern mind no longer views truth as objective but rather as relational and personal; therefore, rational thought is just part of the equation. Truth then is more of a personal journey, and when truth is personal, there is no desire to convince others that one’s personal truth applies to others.

Community over Truth

The next challenge the church will encounter in the arena of truth is that this generation holds community as a higher value than truth. It is important to note that while postmoderns can accept truth, it will rarely come at the expense of community. This idea

⁵² David S. Dockery, *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 94.

is most easily seen in the same-sex marriage issue. Recently the Public Religion Research Institute⁵³ came out with a study on the impact of American's attitudes on same-sex marriage and LGBT issues. From that study, MSNBC released that one out of three of millennials said that the one of the deciding factors in leaving religion was because of negative teachings on same sex issues.⁵⁴ This is not a survey of people who said that they would not engage in a religion due to negative teachings; this study focused on those who were connected to religion and said that negative teachings on same sex issues were one of the deciding factors for them leaving that religion.

While this study was not specific to Christianity it represents a dangerous trend in the postmodern generation and is a huge warning flag for the church and how it communicates truth to that generation. The same study revealed that two out of every three millennials have a family member or close friend that identifies themselves as gay or lesbian. The correlation between those two statistics represents a 27% increase in favoring same sex marriage among millennials.⁵⁵

It is easy to see when looking at these statistics that relationships have an enormous impact on how postmoderns value truth. The challenge for the church is presenting truth while valuing the relationships and community surrounding postmoderns. This is made difficult by the exclamation of Jesus in Luke 14:26, where he tells those following him, "If you want to be my disciple, you must hate everyone else by comparison--your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters--yes, even

⁵³ Daniel Cox, Juhem Navarro-Rivera, and Robert P. Jones, "A Shifting Landscape: A Decade of Change in American Attitudes about Same-Sex Marriage and LGBT Issue," accessed June 25, 2016, <http://publicreligion.org/research/2014/02/2014-lgbt-survey/>.

⁵⁴ Jane Timm, "Millennials Leaving Religion over Anti-Gay Teachings," accessed June 15, 2016, <http://www.msnbc.com/morning-joe/millennials-leave-religion-over-gay-issues>.

⁵⁵ Cox, Navarro-Rivera, and Jones, "A Shifting Landscape."

your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple.”⁵⁶ Jesus tells the listener that a relationship with Him is more important than any other relationship an individual may have, and in some cases, the relationship with Jesus will affect those other relationships. The problem is that this generation values community so much that they are not willing to allow anything to compromise that community, even in some cases their relationship with Christ.

The Great Spiritual Melting Pot

The term *melting pot* has been used for generations to describe America and its culture. The term itself originally described the process for taking different kinds of metals and melting them down to combine them to form some kind of new material. The term came to be synonymous with culture in America with the influx of immigration into the country. For decades, the idea of America as the great melting pot was widely accepted. In more recent years however this idea of America as a cultural melting pot has lost some steam. One of the main reasons for this change is because the term melting pot implies that each element that goes into the pot loses its part of its original identity.

When talking about the postmodern generation and the way they approach spirituality, the term melting pot is a perfect description of how they blend together aspects from different religions. The reason this term fits is because the postmodern generation is not afraid of destroying the original identity of the traditions that they are willing to add to their own spiritual system. Chuck Smith describes it this way, “Likewise, postmodernity combines ‘the old and new,’ not in an attempt to produce a “wonderful blend” but rather in a playful irony that tends to flatten the chain of

⁵⁶ Luke 14:26 NLT.

command, undermine power structures, and invent new realities. Unlike modernity, postmodernism rejects the integrity of a single style.”⁵⁷ The challenge for the church is that the postmodern generation will gladly accept teaching from Jesus; however, they will add those teachings to a patchwork of other theologies and philosophies in an attempt to create a belief structure that meets their personal needs.

Un-Organization

A large contingent of the postmodern generation naturally dislikes the idea of organization, especially in the area of spirituality and religion. This is not simply a turning away from ministry calendars or planning, but rather a distrust of organized programming and structures. The postmodern generation views systems as a way to uniform individuals to fit inside a pre-described box. While most churches utilize planning and systems to help individuals grow as an individual, the mindset of the postmodern generation looks at programming in a negative light.

Because of this aversion to organizations, the spiritual life of the postmodern generation looks more organic than previous generations. The challenge for the church is to create plans and systems that can operate through an organic structure. Instead of programmatic ministries and classes, the focus switches toward relational connection and guiding individuals down the path toward spiritual maturity. Rick Rouse writes, “The postmodern era has brought with it a resurgence of spirituality. This is occurring, however, alongside of a significant decline of commitment to institutional forms of religion, which is especially true for the emerging generation who often seek less formal

⁵⁷ Smith, *The End of the Word as We Know It*, 46.

expressions of the church.”⁵⁸

Opportunities

Throughout this paper, the idea of the postmodern generation’s aversion to truth has been unpacked. This paper has looked at the challenges of dealing with a generation that rails against human rationale and metanarratives. While there are challenges associated with how this generation looks at truth, there are also a number of opportunities for the gospel and truth in the postmodern mind.

Passion for the Journey

The first opportunity is in the passion and zeal that this generation has for learning and for the journey leading toward truth. While previously stated that the postmodern generation values the journey for truth over truth itself, it is an exciting opportunity because this generation has a passion for experiencing the journey of discovering truth. This passion can be seen in a deeper desire to study and research claims of truth so that truly understand what is being claimed. This process results in a better understanding of truth and a greater commitment to allowing that truth to transform their lives.

The second opportunity associated with truth is in the value placed on personal experience. While the previous generation sought reason and proof when dealing with truth, this generation also values the personal experience of the individual. Where this is beneficial for the proclamation of the Gospel is through the use of personal testimony. As stated above, the postmoderns look at metanarrative and view it as arrogant because they assert that their narrative is superior to any other narrative, especially individual narrative. However, for the postmodern, the individual narrative is valued and therefore

⁵⁸ Rick Rouse, *A Field Guide for the Missional Congregation: Embarking on a Journey of Transformation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008), 17.

heard. So when individuals share the narrative of God's work in their lives, it is seen as valuable in the eyes of the postmodern generation. This shift opens the flood gates for Christians to express the work God has done in their lives knowing that it will impact the listener on a personal level.

This creates more of a community for truth, where people are free to communicate and interact with others claims in a way that can help the individual on the path of knowing. David Dockery writes,

Community is integral to the process of knowing, communitarians argue, for crucial to the knowing process is a cognitive framework mediated to the individual by the community in which he or she participates. Similarly, the community of participation is crucial to identity formation. A sense of personal identity develops through the telling of a personal narrative which is always embedded in the story of the communities in which we participate.⁵⁹

Truth for the postmodern generation is in one sense very personal and individual, but at the same time, truth can only truly be experienced within community. This creates a dramatic opportunity for the church, in that the truth of Christ's transformative work is deeply personal but is lived out in the context of community. The spiritual journey of the individual is welcomed into community and given opportunity to express itself in this community.

Desire for Community

As stated before, there are challenges associated with the postmodern view of community, but this author would submit that this is one of the greatest areas for opportunity the church has for reaching the next generation. The biggest reason that this is such a vast opportunity for the church is because of the broader definition of family mentioned in the previous chapter.

⁵⁹ Dockery, *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, 98.

Unlike previous generations, the postmoderns seek to create family in the communities in which they are a part. This is an amazing opportunity for the church. The primary description of the church all throughout the New Testament is that of a family.

Paul writes in Ephesians 2:19-22,

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.⁶⁰

Here Paul says that the believers are no longer strangers but are part of the household of God. He continues by saying that the believers are being joined together into a dwelling place for God. This does not sound like a group of people who have similar beliefs meeting in a building once a week. Paul also writes in Galatians 6:10, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”⁶¹ This idea of family is a fingerprint throughout the New Testament. It was never God’s design to gather people to an idea, but rather to relationships. The reason this is so exciting when looking at how the church can reach out to this generation is because postmoderns are looking for that familial connection, and the church is designed to be a family.

The 24-7 Gospel Community

Another opportunity associated with the postmodern generation is that the gospel and their faith is not separated from their community. Because they have such a strong connection to their community, they are more likely to live out their faith in the context

⁶⁰ Eph. 2:19-22.

⁶¹ Gal. 6:10.

of that community. Because of this, there is a greater opportunity for believers to communicate the gospel to others in their sphere of influence. Not only will the postmodern bring the gospel into their community, but because of their aversion to hypocrites, the postmodern seeks to live out their faith throughout their lives and tend to be less segmented in their faith. Eddie Gibbs touches on this when he writes, “Drawing on the understanding that secular space no longer exists, church is a seven-day-a-week identification, not a once-a-week, ninety-minute respite from the real world. The church lives as a committed community *in* this world, which desperately needs redemption.”⁶² What Gibbs is getting at is the fact that the next generation coming up realizes that the church was never meant to be a meeting place for people with similar beliefs, but rather a community of believers who seek to live out their faith 24 hours a day no matter what situation they are in.

This sense of community does not come simply from proximity, but rather the postmodern’s willingness not only to know others but to be truly known themselves. Julie Gorman writes, “True community is more than being together. A person does not develop trust in others simply by being in a group where members study together, pray together, and share a common group leader. Trust involves relatedness. Relatedness is more than presence although that is the beginning. To relate, one must know, and to know one must work at being open to trust.”⁶³ Because this generation is more open to letting others in and being authentic with their lives, there is a greater opportunity for the church to create biblical community within the lives of the postmodern generation. As Gorman’s said,

⁶² Eddie B. Gibbs, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 90.

⁶³ Julie Gorman, *Community That Is Christian* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor, 1993), 98.

trust is the cornerstone behind true community and with a generation seeking to live authentically and other unapologetically, trust can be easier to foster and cultivate amongst postmodern communities.

Looking for Spirituality

As stated in previous sections and chapters, there is a growing interest in spirituality among the postmodern generation. While this can be dangerous when they meld conflicting spiritual practices together, it can also be a great opportunity for the church to interact with this generation in ways it could not with the previous.

The postmodern generation is open and looking for spirituality in their lives. While this is not the end all of opportunities for the church, it is a great place to begin. George Gallup writes, “The interest in spirituality in itself is not an unalloyed cause for rejoicing. But it provides a starting place for conversation; it can bring life and fresh energy to stale custom; it can open people to the transforming presence of an enduringly real God.”⁶⁴ Gallup understands that the opportunity for the church is great with this next generation. When people are open to spiritual things it makes it easier for the church to begin a conversation about their faith. This conversation, as it gets deeper, opens itself up for the proclamation of the gospel and ultimately life transformation. The process continues because this person who has been transformed is comfortable talking about spiritual things, and in turn continues to have spiritual conversations with others. The opportunity for the church lies in the fact that the postmodern generation is looking at Christianity, the challenge is that the church has to take the time to interact with the generation so they can understand it. Crystal Downing writes, “The problem with the

⁶⁴ Gallup and Jones, *The Next American Spirituality*, 46.

religious turn of postmodernity, then is not getting people to turn toward a Christian window but getting them to spend serious time looking through it so that we can explain to them the significance of what they see.”⁶⁵ The church has to be ready to interact with this generation as they look into Christianity and hold it in the light with other religions. Peter understood this idea: “but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,”⁶⁶

Unlike previous generations, the church has an amazing opportunity to interact with a generation that truly believes that spirituality can impact the world for the better. Robert Brewer writes, “An August 2000 poll by Gallup revealed that 85% of Gen-X respond and said religion was important to them personally and that religion could solve the world’s problems. Although the ‘Revival’ is in spirituality and not in Christianity per se, the church should recognize its unique position in being the only eligible candidate to truly meet this need.”⁶⁷ The world is looking for religion, and Christianity is the only thing powerful enough to fulfill this desire.

⁶⁵ Downing, *How Postmodernism Serves My Faith*, 217.

⁶⁶ 1 Pet. 3:15.

⁶⁷ Brewer, *Postmodernism*, 39.

Chapter 4

The Example of the Early Church

So far, this paper has outlined the differences between this emerging generation and the previous ones, as well as looked at some of the key challenges and opportunities in reaching this generation with the gospel. Because this younger generation is more like the generation of the New Testament Christians, the church has seen a resurgence of New Testament church practices. More and more churches are learning that the average young Christian is looking for the authentic life that they see lived out in the book of Acts. Paul Hartog writes this about young evangelicals: “Many Evangelical congregations are looking back to the patristic church for patterns of corporate Christian life and worship. These young Christians have become dissatisfied with church buildings that resemble malls, worship services that sound like rock concerts, and programs that are patterned after consumer-oriented businesses.”⁶⁸ This is an amazing opportunity for the modern church to look back at the church in its purest state and begin to implement New Testament practices in their local congregations.

This chapter will focus on the church in the book of Acts and look at some key practices found there. These practices will be a framework for principles that the modern church can implement to better engage a younger generation with the kingdom of God.

The Great Commission and Response

There are many commands and instructions given to followers of Christ. Jesus’ earthly ministry is filled with teaching on how to grow closer to God, and no

⁶⁸ Paul Hartog, *The Contemporary Church and the Early Church: Case Studies in Ressourcement* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 50.

commandment is a better summarization of the churches mission than Matthew 28:19-20. Here Jesus tells his listeners, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”⁶⁹ This passage has been the subject of countless studies, and nowadays, there are entire church conferences focusing on how the church can accomplish this mission.

What is interesting about this passage is that ten days after Jesus gives the mission of the church to his disciples, Peter preaches at Pentecost, thousands of people choose to follow Christ, and then the disciples have to figure out how they are going to live this commandment out. What is amazing is that the book of Acts begins with a snapshot of what fulfilling this commandment looks like.

Acts 2 begins to outline how the church responded to the mission laid out to them:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.⁷⁰

It is through this lens that this chapter will look at some of the practices of the early church and its success. The practices this chapter will look at are as follows: intimacy of the community, hospitality, charity, home gathering, devotion to prayer, and participation.

⁶⁹ Matt. 28:19-20.

⁷⁰ Acts 2:42-47.

Intimacy of the Community

The intimacy of the community found in the early church is remarkable. The kind of connection that is written about in the book of Acts is the kind of connection most churches wish they could foster. This kind of intimacy is especially appealing to the postmodern generation. This work has already looked at the broadened definition of family found in the postmodern generation, and this sense of familial connection is exactly the type of community the younger generation is seeking. The early church understood what it meant to be the family of God, and they were just that – a family. When looking through the book of Acts, one does not see a group of people who gathered because they had like beliefs; the reader sees a unique family connected at the very core by their relationship with their heavenly father.

When reading through the New Testament, this idea of the family of God is clear through the familial language used, particularly by Paul. Wayne Meeks writes it this way, “Especially striking is the language that speaks of the members of the Pauline groups as if they were family. They are children of God and also of the apostle. They are brothers and sisters; they refer to one another as ‘Beloved.’ The Pauline letters are unusually rich in emotional language – joy and rejoicing, anxiety, longing.”⁷¹ It is clear to see through the writings of Paul that the early church had a close-knit bond like that of a family. This language is evident especially in Paul’s greetings to his recipients at the beginning of his letters. When reading through these epistles, the reader can see how Paul’s heart breaks for those he is writing to, and one can experience his joy in their growth and his pain in their failures. It would seem as if Paul had a deep connection with his readers, beyond

⁷¹ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (London: Yale University Press, 1983), 86.

that of simple acquaintance, but rather that of an individual who deeply cares for those to whom he is writing.

Paul not only writes in such a way as to see his connection with the recipients, he also writes in a way to express the connection between other believers as well. Meeks also submits that, “The letters also reveal that those groups enjoyed an unusual degree on intimacy, high levels of interaction among members, and very strong sense of internal cohesion and of distinction both from outsiders and from ‘the World.’”⁷² The familial connection that Paul expresses throughout his writing is not limited to his feelings toward his recipients, but rather an expression of the body as a whole, and a continuation of Christ’s call for his followers to love one another. This sense of family is what drives all of the other principles that will be outlined throughout this chapter, yet at the same time, it is these principles that foster and encourage the sense of community and intimacy found in the early church.

Gathering in Homes.

While one cannot be certain about what truly drove the deep connection found by the early church, one thing is certain: the early church was at its core a collection of house churches. This model of meeting in homes is considered one of the engines for the deep sense of family connection found in the New Testament. The early church meeting in homes provided a unique community only found in the followers of Christ.

Unlike other religions, Christianity offered individual connection and interaction. Because house churches could only consist of smaller numbers, it allowed for interaction of individuals on a deeper level. Roger Gehring explains,

In a church that is continually growing larger, the house churches offered a

⁷² Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 74.

personal, family-style setting. In a house church consisting of about ten to twenty people, it was possible to get to know one another, to grow close and connect on a deeper level. Only in such a setting was it possible to become 'one in heart and mind' (Acts 4:32) in a practical sense. Only in this way could early Christians go beyond the superficial, cultivate deeper personal relationships, and support one another in a very concrete way, even in material matters.⁷³

It is the intimate setting of the home that allowed for deep connections in the early Christian community. Unlike other religions, Christianity did not have to rely on buildings or large crowds to have their gatherings but rather focused on gathering through the natural rhythm of life, in the natural place for a family to get together.

The home also provided a unique advantage for bringing others into community as well. The relaxed atmosphere provided the perfect place for others to experience what a Christian community could look like. The intimacy of the home also allowed for interaction between the teacher and hearer. This atmosphere allowed for advantages in evangelism, as those interested in community could ask questions to preachers and participate in discussion with one another. The home fostered a different kind of worship experience that allowed for the church to grow exponentially in a short amount of time, all the while helping it to retain the community that the world found so appealing.

While the use of homes throughout the New Testament was initially born out of necessity, it also served a theological and methodological role for the early church. The lack of a special meeting place helped to solidify the ideas of early church teaching. Ivor Davidson, in talking about the early church structure writes, "The lack of special public buildings underscored the sense that the church was primarily a spiritual community; its members were a pilgrim people with no fixed abode in this world,

⁷³ Roger W. Gehring, *House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 93.

worshipping a God who could not be confined to particular physical spaces.”⁷⁴ The idea of the church in the New Testament is uniquely individual and local in one sense, while universal in another, and the two cannot be separated. By meeting in homes, it broke down barriers between an individual’s personal or family life and their life in this spiritual community. Meeting in homes also affirmed that the church was in fact its people and not its structures.

This structure of house churches was unlike any other religion of the time. The early Christians developed a unique network that allowed for deep individual attention and discipleship, as well as a connection to the vast network of other believers throughout their world. Wayne Meeks examines this structure and writes that,

The local groups of Christians not only enjoyed a high level of cohesion and group identity, they also were made aware that they belonged to a larger movement, ‘with all who invoke the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place’ (1 Cor. 1:2). In time they would invent a unique network of institutions to embody and protect this connection, and the resultant combination of intimate, disciplined communities with a supralocal organization was a major factor in the social and political success of Christianity in the age of Constantine.”⁷⁵

As Meeks outlines, the success of the early church can be attributed, in large part, by its ability to be connected to the thousands of churches throughout the known world while keeping the focus on the individual and their deep connections with one another. It is this gathered and scattered mentality structure that was able to spread the kingdom of God at a blistering pace.

It is this same idea of gathering and scattering that is appealing to a young generation of Christians and those looking into Christianity. What this generation is

⁷⁴ Ivor Davidson, *The Birth of the Church: From Jesus to Constantine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 287.

⁷⁵ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 107.

seeking is a place where they are individually cared for, where they can develop familial connections, where they can bear their soul with others who care about them, and also a place where they feel connected to the big audacious mission of the global church.

Hospitality

Another contributor to the sense of community found in the New Testament is the early church's commitment to hospitality. As mentioned above, the early church relied on homes for its places of gathering, but beyond just a place for gathering, the Christian home played a vital role in the life of the early church. One of the biggest examples of hospitality can be found in the sharing of meals with one another. In Acts 2:42, Luke outlines that the early church regularly "broke bread" with one another.

This commitment to fellowship and provision through hospitality was an expression of the love that the early Christians had for one another. Abraham Malherbe explains it this way, "The Christian practice of Hospitality was not viewed simply as a means of overcoming a practical problem. Theological statements by different authors in the New Testament show that it was frequently viewed as the concrete expression of Christian love."⁷⁶ His idea of having an open life was viewed as a spiritual discipline in the life of the early believer. The church understood that the way they could show their love for others was through opening up their life to them. This included opening their homes, their kitchens, and their time. These early Christians devoted themselves to showing love to others, and this hospitality was an evangelistic engine for the New Testament church.

Not only was this hospitality beneficial for evangelism and connecting others into

⁷⁶ Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 67.

deep community, it also served to facilitate the growing network of churches throughout the world. As teachers and preachers traveled the ancient world spreading the news of Christ, the Christian home became a base for these travelers and facilitated the spreading of the gospel message and brought news from other spiritual communities. In her book on the impact that the early church had on the development of families, Carolyn Osiek writes,

We have already seen from the Pauline letters and Acts the significance for house churches of common meals and the granting of hospitality to traveling Christians, and their effect on families. Through these activities, Christian families received news of other churches, their horizons were broadened, they built up intercity networks of communication and concern, became a base for mission, and formed a sense of means, households were also drawn into inter-church conflicts.⁷⁷

The home became the central part of early church life. Every aspect of Christianity ran through the home and was facilitated by the hospitality of the family.

This not only helped to facilitate the spread of the gospel, it also impacted the life of the families. Being able to hear from traveling teachers meant that they became more educated in matters of faith and of the world. They regularly got news about how the kingdom of God was impacting others, and they were able to connect themselves to the greater mission of the church.

Charity

Another major contributing factor to the early church's success in spreading the gospel and the strengthening of deep community was the Christian's participation in charity and social action. There is often a fine line between hospitality and charity. Through hospitality, Christians shared their lives with one another, but it was through

⁷⁷ Carolyn Osiek, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 206.

charity that they shared resources with one another. Throughout the book of Acts, it is clear to see the importance the early church placed on charity. There are many stories that tell of Christians and their willingness to provide for those in need, even at the expense of their own possessions.

Attention was given to teaching the New Testament believers on the importance of helping those in need. Ivor Davidson describes it this way,

Caring for the vulnerable continued to be regarded as a very important Christian responsibility. Money was routinely collected at church services and given to needy Christians locally or farther afield. In a society in which the contrast between rich and poor was enormous and obvious signs of privation were seen on every street corner, believers were also encouraged to give to the poor, the hungry, and the sick, and preachers regularly reminded their hearers of their responsibilities toward the outcasts and untouchables of their world.⁷⁸

The teaching of giving to the poor and to the outcasts was regularly taught in the early church. The practice to providing for needs stemmed out of the ministry of Jesus and sought to engage the church with those who the world had written off.

The idea was so important in the early church that not only was it encouraged and taught that the individual should be helping others, the motivation behind that charity was also of vast importance. In the book of Acts, there is a story of a couple who decide to sell a piece of property they own and give the proceeds of the purchase to the church to help with the collection for the needy. Acts 5:1-11 outlines the story of this couple. The interesting thing about this couple is that they decide to sell this land, and they decide to give some of the money of the sale to the church. When asked about what they gave, the husband, Ananias, told the Apostle Peter that he had given the church all of the proceeds of the land, when he in fact had held some money back for himself. As Peter explained

⁷⁸ Davidson, *The Birth of the Church*, 289.

that he knew that what Ananias gave was not all of the proceeds from the land, Ananias fell dead in front of Peter. Later Ananias' wife, Sapphira, comes to the Apostle Peter. Peter this time asks Sapphira how much money they received from selling the land and how much they had given the church. Sapphira also tells the Apostle Peter that they had given everything to the church when in fact they had not, and she also falls dead in front of Peter. The Apostle Peter explains that what this couple owned was in fact theirs, and what they earned from the sale of the land was theirs as well, but it was the fact that they tried to lie to the church and wanted others to think that they had given everything was why they had been punished for their actions. What is interesting about this is the fact that it would seem that the motivation of charity was in fact more important than the amount of charity given by the individual.

This difference separated the church from being simply a social action organization into a community that truly cared for the individual in need. The church did not give out of obligation or expectation, but rather out of an overflow of love for others. This love is what was appealing to the larger community and in fact was a driving force for others to want to join Christianity. Henry Chadwick describes it this way;

The practical application of Charity was probably the most potent single cause of Christian success. The pagan comment 'see how these Christians love one another' (reported by Tertullian) was not irony. Christian charity expressed itself in care for the poor, for widows and orphans, in visits to the brethren in prison or condemned to the living death of labor in the mines, and in social action in a time of calamity like famine, earthquake, pestilence, or war.⁷⁹

While it is easy to see these expressions throughout the culture today, this was highly unique and mostly unheard of during the time of the early church. While it is true that

⁷⁹ Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church: The Story of Emergent Christianity from the Apostolic Age to the Dividing of the Ways between the Greek East and the Latin West* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 56.

individuals may have taken part in social action, no religious organization held it as a central tenet until the early church. It was Christianity that mobilized every member toward helping others, and it was the outflow of their love for others that motivated this action.

Participation

Another major contributor to the success of the early church was its ability to involve all of its members in active participation throughout the church. Unlike some other religions of the day, Christianity called each individual to personal action for the sake of the furthering of the gospel. When reading through the New Testament, one can see passages like Acts 1:8, where Jesus says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”⁸⁰ Also Jesus calls his listeners to action in Mark 16:15-16, where he says, “And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.’”⁸¹ This call to a common mission connected this spiritual community in a way other philosophies had yet to be able to accomplish. Sheldon Wolin submits, “Christianity succeeded where Hellenistic and late classical philosophies had failed, because it put forward a new and powerful idea of community, which recalled men [and women] to a life of meaningful participation.”⁸²

The idea of participation was strengthened through the unity behind a common mission. When a group of people have a similar goal and are all moving toward that goal

⁸⁰Acts 1:8.

⁸¹Mark 16:15-16.

⁸²Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 97.

together, they can form strong bonds quickly. Also because of the small size of the house churches, each individual was accountable to utilize their talents, abilities, resources, and spiritual gifts in a real and practical way. This gave ownership of the movement to the individual rather than a governing body or a priestly order.

While each individual was connected to their local gathering, the idea of participation also reached out into the church universal as well. The individuals were not simply working for the furthering of their personal house church or local gathering but rather were connected to the universal church and the mission to spread the good news of Christ. In fact, Paul never separated the individual local congregation or house church from the larger body of believers. Richard Longenecker writes about Paul, “He (Paul) appears to have made little distinction between what we would call the church local and the church universal. Paul seems to have viewed every congregation at whatever time and in whatever locality as an embodiment of the church universal – that is, to have viewed each particular congregation as *the* church of God.”⁸³ It is this interesting dichotomy of local and universal ownership that truly made the early church unique. It placed individuals in small groups that could meet needs, know individuals, grow deeply close to one another, and challenge each other to be more like Christ, while keeping them connected to a large group that could dare to do big things, impact whole communities, and spread countless miles.

The early church found a way to make the individual believers understand their importance to the body of Christ, which was exemplified through the ownership they had in the mission of the church. The kind of participation seen in the early church was more

⁸³ Richard N. Longenecker, *Community Formation: In the Early Church and in the Church Today* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 74.

than simple busy work, but rather a utilization of the gifting of the individual and a deep feeling that their participation was necessary for the furthering of God's kingdom.

Prayer

The last mark of the early church that this chapter will look at is the early Christian commitment and devotion to prayer. Prayer served multiple functions in the early church. The first of these functions was the unification of the body of Christ. There are no shortages of scriptures focusing on the need for unity among the body of Christ. One such verse is found in 1 Corinthians 1:10 where Paul writes, "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment."⁸⁴ With a continual focus on the unity of the body of Christ found throughout the New Testament, the early church turned toward corporate prayer to help unify those in their community. It is an amazing accomplishment of the early church that through trials, struggles, persecution, disagreements, triumphs, growth, and celebrations that the church remains unified throughout it all. It seems that the early church, no matter good or bad, continues steadfastly to corporate prayer. It is this commitment to prayer that is a contributing factor to the continued unity through some of the best times and worst times the church has ever seen.

Another major mark of prayer in the early church is the commitment to follow Jesus' example of prayer. All throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus shows a commitment to personal prayer, and he also encourages his followers to follow his example. In fact, in Matthew 6, Jesus teaches those listening to him how to pray. The early church held to this

⁸⁴ 1 Cor. 1:10.

commitment toward prayer and followed Jesus' devotion to prayer. Also the early church leaders continued to teach on the importance of prayer. Paul writes in Colossians 4:2, "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful."⁸⁵ Paul also encourages his readers in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 that they should, "Pray without ceasing."⁸⁶ This commitment toward prayer was a regular daily part of the early Christian's life. Edith Schaeffer describes it this way,

It is almost startling that the phrase, "I do not cease to pray," is so central. This continues the urging to keep on praying, to pray in the midst of all else throughout the days of life. Although we can be comforted and reassured that Jesus is interceding for us, we are meant to follow Paul's example and to always pray for fruitful lives, for ourselves and for the ones we love. This kind of continued faithfulness is meant to make a difference in many areas of history.⁸⁷

This is the kind of devotion found in the early church: a continual commitment to seeking God and bringing everything before Him.

The last lesson learned from the early church is that their prayers aligned them with God's mission and purpose. It is an incorrect assumption that prayer is the way the Christ follower can petition God. Prayer is not a way for an individual to simply call upon God to meet needs or provide desires, but rather a way for the individual to commune with God and to better understand his character and mission. The early church understood that praying to God was communing with the Father. It was the way that God revealed himself to his son or daughter. David Crump talks about it this way,

Prayer is the way for believers to find their lives realigned with God's redemptive plans. Luke-Acts describes no particular correlation between specific petitions (whether they are offered persistently, faithfully, or forcefully) and divine response. What is consistently portrayed is the Father's willingness to act on behalf of and to reveal himself among these men and women who regularly

⁸⁵ Col. 4:2.

⁸⁶ 1 Thess. 5:17.

⁸⁷ Edith Schaeffer, *The Life of Prayer* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1992), 158.

pray.⁸⁸

By refocusing prayer in the modern church to mirror the intentions of the early Christ followers, the church can engage the heart of God and see what work the Holy Spirit is doing in and around our communities. It is this commitment to prayer that will help the modern church not only connect with the next generation but will insure that the connection made is in alignment with the character and will of God.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to paint a picture of the early church and how its daily practices helped it connect with the generation in which it existed. While it is true that this generation now is vastly different from the generation of Christ, it is also possible to see how this generation is similar to the generation found in the book of Acts. It is by adhering to the principles found in the book of Acts that the church can engage this generation with the gospel in a way that is both appealing for those in the postmodern generation, but also healthy in how it relates the rich tradition of the church and the Word of God.

⁸⁸ David Crump, *Knocking on Heaven's Door: A New Testament Theology of Petitionary Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 195.

Chapter 5

Example from the Modern Church

So far, this paper has looked at the idea of the postmodern generation by defining the modern generation, identifying some potential opportunities and threats associated with furthering the gospel in this generation, and taking a look back at how the early church was able to flourish in a similar culture. This chapter will turn the focus of the discussion toward the contemporary church. Throughout this chapter, the author will outline five churches throughout the country that have found success in the area of reaching those in the postmodern generation. These churches are as follows: Calvary Chapel in St. Petersburg, Florida; Hope Church in Raleigh, North Carolina; Redeemer Fellowship in Kansas City, Missouri; Grace City in Las Vegas, Nevada; and Scum of the Earth Church in Denver, Colorado.

The purpose of outlining these churches is to begin to build a framework of principles for creating a group environment that is not only appealing to the next generation but also healthy and biblical. Each of the churches outlined were chosen because of the diversity of location, culture, and leadership. The principles outlined were derived from interviews with those in leadership within each church.

Calvary Chapel, St. Petersburg, FL

About Calvary Chapel and Pastor Danny Hodges

Calvary Chapel, St. Petersburg is the longest-established church interviewed for this paper. Started in the 1980s as a church plant, Calvary Chapel from its beginning was focused on reaching the next generation for Christ. In fact, the current pastor Danny Hodges came to Calvary in 1983 with the desire to start a middle school ministry for the

church. Upon arriving and serving at Calvary, Hodges was soon called upon to take the reins of the church. At that time, the lead pastor was leaving to move to New Jersey. With the senior pastor on his way out, Hodges thought that the church would not survive and when the leadership team met it was clear that if someone did not step into the lead pastor role that the church would dissolve. Those on the leadership team agreed that Hodges would become the lead pastor of the church. Soon after taking lead of the church, he led the church to become part of the fellowship of Calvary Chapels, a movement founded by Chuck Smith in the late 1960s.

The Calvary Chapel movement was founded with the intention of reaching the next generation for Christ, and Pastor Hodges found that in this fellowship, there were people of like mind and similar convictions to himself. He has been the pastor at Calvary Chapel St. Petersburg for over 30 years, and during that time, he has grown the church to a few thousand members. The focus of the church is, as it always has been, on reaching the next generation with the kingdom of God. Calvary Chapel now boasts impressive young adult and youth facilities, including recreation areas as well as an on-site skateboarding park.

About Church Systems

The first thing asked of all those being interviewed was, “What does it look like to be a disciple at their church?” Pastor Hodges outlines the five marks of a disciple at Calvary Chapel, St. Petersburg: a devotion to teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer and serving one another.⁸⁹ Pastor Hodges derives these five devotions from Acts 2:42, where it says, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the

⁸⁹ Danny Hodges, interview by author, June 24, 2014.

fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”⁹⁰

The first mark of a disciple is the devotion to teaching. At Cavalry Chapel, St. Petersburg, this is exemplified by an individual attending both worship services and small groups regularly. The second mark of a devotion to fellowship is seen through a commitment to engage the community of Calvary Chapel. The third mark of a devotion to the breaking of bread is seen through the taking of communion and community outside of church services. The fourth mark of a devotion to prayer is seen through a commitment to both corporate and individual prayer. The last of these devotions, a devotion to serve, is exemplified by the individuals using their gifts to serve within the church as well as the community.

The next question asked to Pastor Danny Hodges was how they cultivated these five marks at Calvary Chapel. The most prominent method for cultivating the devotion of a disciple is through relationships. Calvary Chapel seeks to cultivate relationships through two primary avenues. The first way they seek to cultivate relationships is through their formal group structure. Individuals at Calvary Chapel are encouraged to be a part of one of their discipleship groups. These discipleship groups are seasonal groups that go through the Bible book by book. While these groups are designed to only last a certain number of weeks and then break for a few weeks, some of these groups are encouraged to stay together throughout the breaks.

The other major avenue for cultivating relationships is through informal one-on-one relationships. At Calvary Chapel, there is a motivation for newer Christians to connect with someone who is more mature in their faith in order to learn from someone

⁹⁰ Acts 2:42.

else how to better cultivate the five qualities of a disciple. These one-on-one relationships, as well as the formal groups, serve as a basis for developing what it looks like to be a disciple at Calvary Chapel in St. Petersburg; however, they also serve another purpose.

These relationship models are also how an individual is grown in their ability to lead within the context of the church. Pastor Danny Hodges explains that the leadership of Calvary Chapel comes from those who are plugged into groups and are regularly serving within the church. In fact, Pastor Hodges explains that 99.9% of the staff of Calvary Chapel were hired from within the church. The model here is to help each individual grow into their full potential as a leader, this practice is seen even in the hiring of pastors at Calvary Chapel.

About Their Philosophy

As the interview moved on, Danny Hodges was asked about the philosophy of how they particularly connect with the next generation and what philosophies they are finding successful in their ministry. When asked about what philosophy Pastor Hodges attributes to their success in connecting to the postmodern generation, he explained that it was a commitment to giving over responsibility and ownership to the younger crowd that he has seen to be most successful.

One major theme in the ministry of Calvary Chapel, St. Petersburg is the idea that the only way to reach the next generation for Christ is with the next generation. Danny Hodges submits that the best way to connect with a postmodern generation is through giving responsibility and ownership over to those in the postmodern generation. The way they do that at Calvary Chapel is by finding committed and faithful individuals who are

connected to their ministry, who are coming regularly, and who are serving and being intentional about giving ownership and leadership responsibilities to them. As Calvary Chapel gives over ownership and responsibility to the younger generation, they evaluate the spiritual gifting of the individual in order to connect them in a way that fits and grows their gifts.

Through this process, Danny Hodges notes that it is important that if they are giving ownership and responsibility over to a new leader that the more mature leadership is there for support, but they are extremely intentional about not micro-managing new leaders. They give them room to try things, to succeed or fail, and then use that as a way to teach them about ministry.

What Would You Say to Others?

The last part of the interview with Pastor Danny Hodges was about what advice he would give to others about reaching the next generation. His advice was about the importance of staying true to the gospel and the Word of God. He explained that he believes if he lets the Word of God be the foundation, then the Spirit of God will transform lives. Pastor Hodges does this by being transparent and open as he communicates how the gospel is transforming his life. He submits that no matter the culture or generational divides, the Word of God changes lives, and part of communicating that is allowing others to see how it is changing his own life.

Hope Church, Burlington, NC

About Hope Church and Pastor Tadd Grandstaff

Tadd Grandstaff first connected with ministry while at Thomas Road Baptist Church, where his father was the high school pastor. From there, he served at a number

of churches before setting out into church planting. In 2006, he moved to the Raleigh, North Carolina area to plant Pine Ridge Church. As Pastor Grandstaff describes, Pine Ridge had some early success reaching a lot of un-churched people. They were seeing people connect to the church but were not able to find financial stability. As they continued to find success reaching new people, another church in the area Brook Wood Church was going through the process of looking for a new pastor and determining their direction for the future. Brook Wood was an established church with a number of facilities and a group of committed and mature Christians. Soon Brook Wood and Pine Ridge connected and the conversation of merging the two churches began, and eventually, the two churches committed to merge under the leadership of Pastor Tadd Grandstaff.⁹¹

The two churches planned to merge in January 2014. As they began the process of joining together, they had an initial meeting to have a preview of what the new services would look like. On November 17, 2013, the churches combined for the first time. During that meeting, over 900 people came to that first service. From there, the leadership determined to start the new ministry the next week. From that time, there have been around 350 people connected to the newly-named Hope Church.

With the combination of leadership and vision with the stability and maturity, these two ministries have found success reaching new people for the kingdom of God. They are seeing lives transformed and have a strong showing of young adults connected to the ministry. It is for this reason there is a desire to look at Hope Church and see what they are finding successful when reaching out to a postmodern generation.

⁹¹ Tadd Grandstaff, interview by author, June 24, 2014.

About Church Systems

Hope Church in North Carolina has a system for connecting individuals to the church and growing them both in their understanding and relationship with Christ and in their ability to serve within the church. This process starts with someone who is either curious about Christianity or is brand new in their relationship with Christ. For these individuals, Hope Church uses a group curriculum created by Andy Stanley's church North Point. This curriculum, entitled *Starting Point*, is an 8-10 week course that covers the basics of Christianity. At this point, Hope Church only asks that the individual commit to the class and not necessarily commit to the church.

When an individual has gone through Starting Point and is ready to commit to the church, they are then helped to connect with a group. At Hope Church, their groups are called *Community Groups*. Community groups are closed groups, meaning that once they begin, they have a period where new individuals can join, but after a few weeks, they will no longer accept new individuals and focus on growing deeper relationships with these in their group. These groups are designed to close because of a desire to grow deep relationships in which individuals can share their burdens with others. If there are new individuals coming throughout this time, it can be harder to form those bonds.

The average community group will form and meet for approximately two years. Throughout this time, those in the group are poured into so that they can grow in their leadership abilities. The hope is that at the end of the two-year time, there will be a new leader ready to begin a new group.

New groups are primarily formed through what Hope Church calls *Group Link*. This is a place where anyone not connected to a group within the church can come and

meet the groups that will be starting. At Group Link, an individual can get to meet new group leaders and see whom they may best connect with. From Group Link, an individual can visit new groups until the group closes and begins their next two-year cycle.

Philosophy of Hope Church

When asked about the philosophy of Hope Church, Tad Grandstaff expressed a number of principles the church has when trying to reach the next generation. The first of these principles is resourcing. At Hope Church, the principle of resourcing means that they spare no expense when seeking to reach the next generation for Christ. This first starts financially. Hope Church has a commitment to spend financial resources as needed when reaching out. This could be to buy curriculum, train leaders, promotional material, or training expenses. This also means that sparing no expense in utilizing their people. They have committed to focus the gifts and abilities of the people in their church toward furthering the kingdom of God. This means that people are asked and expected to serve within and outside of the church, and they seek to have individuals using their spiritual gifts to reach those around them.

The next principle Hope Church focuses on is doing things that are outside of the box. Tad Grandstaff expresses that the church cannot fall in love with how they do things, but instead must adapt their methods to be efficient and productive in the culture today. While there is a desire to continue to grow and change the methods the church uses to reach their community, Grandstaff also says that those methods have to align with the principles of the Bible.

The next principle is language. At Hope Church, language is taken very seriously. One of the biggest examples of this principle is in a conscious effort to avoid, clarify, or

define common language used within Christian circles, commonly called *church language*. Grandstaff expresses that when dealing with individuals who do not even have a clear understanding of the word ‘gospel,’ one cannot use church language and assume that others will have the same understanding of what those words mean. He mentions that at Hope Church they watch their words very carefully, and they never assume any knowledge that has not been communicated.

Opportunities and Challenges at Hope Church

When asked, Tadd Grandstaff expressed some opportunities that he sees in the postmodern generation as well as some challenges that are faced. First, he expressed the opportunities. The first thing that Pastor Grandstaff is excited about is the energy and excitement that the postmodern generation brings. This energy and excitement can be seen in the way they worship, serve, and study. That excitement and energy also bring with it a fresh perspective about what the church is doing and what it could be doing to reach the postmodern generation. The other thing that is exciting to Grandstaff is the potential leadership he sees in the next generation. This is fostered at Hope Church by listening to the ideas of young leaders and then letting them run with it. This also goes back to their commitment to resourcing, and they back these young leaders in their efforts to reach others with the kingdom of God.

Next, Grandstaff expressed some challenges he faces when dealing with the postmodern generation. The first challenge he expressed was a delayed maturity, and he sees this in a few ways. The first way is a lack of drive. The second way this is seen is that the postmodern generation expects things to be given to them and that they deserve those things. The next example is that the postmodern generation does not have a lot to

offer financially, but instead it has a lot of needs. The last way this is seen is that the individuals see themselves as most important.

What Would you Say to Others?

Pastor Tadd Grandstaff finished his interview by expressing a few more things about reaching the next generation for Christ. The first thing is that anyone wanting to reach the next generation has to be who he or she is. An individual cannot force himself or herself to act or present themselves in a certain way, because this generation values authenticity. The next thing Grandstaff adds is that the default position should be a desire to reach the next generation for Christ. The last thing he communicates is that the church has to balance other ministries in the church. The desire and focus should be on equipping and engaging the older generations to get involved in reaching the postmodern generations for Christ.

Redeemer Fellowship, Kansas City, MO

About Andy Bean

Andy Bean is the Director of Communications at Redeemer Fellowship Church in Kansas City, Missouri. He has been on staff of five years, and during that time, he has been responsible for communications and technology. Currently, he is responsible for anything people read, touch, or click dealing with Redeemer Fellowship. His primary goal was to make sure that the language is effective and understood by the people that Redeemer is trying to reach. In addition to his responsibility in communications, he is also responsible for event planning, annual reports, and hiring. ⁹²

⁹² Andy Bean, interview by author, June 20, 2014.

About Redeemer Fellowship

Redeemer Fellowship Church is a non-denominational church connected to Acts 26 network as well as Fellowship Associates. According to Bean, when it was started six years ago, Redeemer was the first church in the metro area that held to a historic orthodox understanding of the Christian faith and at the same time was culturally engaged. This philosophy has been one of the cornerstones of the success of Redeemer Fellowship in reaching the next generation with the gospel of Christ.

About Church Systems

As with the other interviews, Andy Bean was first asked what a disciple looks like at Redeemer Fellowship. He replied with four characteristics of a disciple at Redeemer. These are the four quadrants that they use to determine the health of the individual disciple. The first characteristic is worshiping together. Redeemer Fellowship holds the corporate gathering of the saints in high regard. For Redeemer, the worshiping together of the saints happens on Sunday mornings. They place importance on this meeting because it is where the saints can celebrate the sacrament of Communion, and where they can sit under the preached Word of God. Redeemer holds the gathering of the believers as the central means of grace in the life of the believer.

The second characteristic of a disciple at Redeemer is that they live in community. One of the principles at Redeemer is that the individual is not designed to go through life alone, and the mission of the church cannot be handled alone. Redeemer creates opportunities for individuals to live in community through their Life Groups. These Life Groups meet throughout their community and individuals are asked to commit to a group for two years. Throughout the year, there are on-ramps for others to join into

groups, and in the time between they offer short-term groups for new believers and new individuals. Life groups are designed for individuals to share the struggles and burdens of others at redeemer and are also there to support one another in the mission of the church.

The third characteristic of a disciple is that they are being equipped. Redeemer places a high value on the equipping of the saints to know Jesus and to make him known. This equipping is done through a series of classes offered by the church. Redeemer has an entire ministry just dedicated to equipping leaders by one of their full-time directors. These equipping classes range from Old Testament and New Testament surveys, books of the Bible, theology and missions, to classes on finance, pre-marriage, and theology of beauty. These are such a big part of the mission of the church that Life Groups often attend classes together as their regular group meeting time. On the other side, these classes work so well in tandem with Life Groups that they often are used as an on-ramp for individuals to connect to Life Groups.

This idea of equipping is also found in the leadership structure for small group leaders at Redeemer Fellowship. As of this interview, Redeemer Fellowship has between 80 and 90 groups with around 160 people in leadership positions. These groups are broken into what Redeemer calls *cohorts* of 5 to 6 groups. These cohorts are each overseen by a leadership coach, and these coaches are in turn under a staff member of the church. These coaching structures are in place to equip and communicate with their group leaders and ensure that each group is no more than two steps from pastoral care if needed.

The last characteristic is that a disciple is distinctively outwardly-focused. The mission statement of Redeemer Fellowship is, “We exist to create communities of

transformed disciples to live for the glory of God and the good of the city.”⁹³ At Redeemer, there is a high focus on talking about the good of the city all of the time. This is done through communicating that the church exists to bless and serve and exalt Christ to others. This idea is accomplished by providing opportunities for the entire church to get involved in the community, but more intentionally by holding groups accountable to going out and serving their community with others from their group.

Philosophy of Redeemer Fellowship

Next, Mr. Bean was asked about the philosophy at Redeemer Fellowship. The first thing asked about their philosophy was for him to explain a few principles that Redeemer has found that really impact the way they minister to the postmodern generation. The first thing communicated by Bean was the fact that what has disinclined the next generation towards the church and why people leave the church can be broken up into two attributes. The first of these attributes is a lack of authenticity, and the second is a departure from what the church is supposed to be. While these are two distinct attributes, they are really closely related, and in a number of ways, they outline the same issue. Because churches have strayed away from what they are called to be, there is a lack of authenticity that goes along with that departure from the churches’ calling.

Redeemer describes the job of the church as the mission to exalt Jesus as the hope of the world. They supplement that with the idea that there is no issue besides Christ that is worth uniting around. They take this idea very seriously at Redeemer. In fact, they strive to have a radical commitment to be the church and to exalt Christ in the community above everything else. It is this return to what the church is designed to be and living that

⁹³ Redeemer Fellowship, “About Us,” <http://www.redeemerkansascity.org/about>.

out authentically that Redeemer attributes to their success.

Another philosophy that Redeemer sees as important when interacting with a postmodern generation is the way they communicate and the language they use to communicate. This idea is lived out by making sure that everything that is heard, read, or seen has to be easily understood by the non-believer. When evaluating language at Redeemer, they regularly are trying to remember what it was like to be an unbeliever and craft their language with that mindset of making sure that what they are trying to communicate is what their listeners are hearing. This means that Redeemer stays away from language that would be considered “churchy” and words that sound right but have lost their original meaning.

Encouraging and Challenging at Redeemer

To finish, Andy Bean was asked some things about this next generation that Redeemer finds encouraging or exciting, as well as some things they find challenging. He outlined two things Redeemer has found to be encouraging and two things that can be a challenge. These encouragements and challenges can be coupled together. The first encouraging thing they see at Redeemer is a drive to be authentic. What Redeemer has seen is the willingness for the postmodern generation to share what is really going on in their lives. There is also a willingness to talk about the need for Jesus and the gospel in their lives. This is encouraging because the individuals are willing to express their need for Jesus and to confess their sins. The challenge associated with this is that while it is easy for the postmodern generation to confess their sins and acknowledge their need for Christ, they have a harder time repenting from that sin they have been confessing. The challenge is that confession is not the end step, but rather confession should lead to

repentance; however, the postmodern generation has a harder time making that transition.

The second encouraging thing that they see at Redeemer is that the postmodern generation is highly involved in the community, and the community appreciates Redeemer's impact on the community. Redeemer has seen the community accept and acknowledge that the social justice coming from their church has made the community a better place. However, the challenge associated with this desire to be out in the community and make changes is that the postmodern generation is having a harder time turning the corner from simply doing things for the betterment of the community to sharing the gospel with those in community. This has led to a lack of a proper understanding of evangelism from earning the right to share the message of Christ to mentioning Jesus if the topic comes up. Redeemer understands that being good in the community is not enough; they have to preach the Word of God.

Scum of the Earth Church, Denver, CO

About Fran Blomberg

Fran Blomberg has lived in the Denver, Colorado area for over thirty years. During that time, Fran has served as the Director of Global Outreach for Missions Hills Church and as a professor of Intercultural Ministries at Denver Seminary. Currently, Blomberg serves as one of the pastors at Scum of the Earth Church where she is responsible for the oversight of the Sunday morning congregation, Celebrate Recovery, preaching, and mentoring.⁹⁴

About Scum of the Earth

Scum of the Earth Church in Denver, Colorado started out as a Tuesday night

⁹⁴ Fran Blomberg, interview by author, June 9, 2014.

Bible study led by Pastor Mike Sares. The Bible study eventually began discussions about becoming a church, and it launched its first organized meeting in 2000. The church derives its name from 1 Corinthians 4:11-13. Their mission is to minister to what is considered by many to be “the least of these,” or as Scum refers to them, as “the right-brained” and the “let-out.” Scum of the Earth has a major focus on reaching the homeless, those with addictions, the un-churched, the disillusioned, and numerous other subcultures.

About Church Systems

As with all of the interviews, Fran Blomberg was first asked about what a Christ-follower looks like at Scum of the Earth. She expressed that a disciple, or Christ-follower, at Scum as someone who is maturing in their faith in Jesus. While this idea certainly includes seeing individuals growing in their relationship with Christ and growing in their obedience to the spiritual disciplines, it can look differently at Scum of the Earth compared to some other churches. At Scum, this maturity may be that an individual is becoming less antagonistic toward Christ or beginning to engage in a spiritual community for the first time.

Because at Scum of the Earth there is a wide range of where individuals are when they come to the church, there is a very individualistic system in place for helping people move toward a greater maturity in Christ. For some, the next step towards greater maturity may be to become less flaunting of their sin, while others may be ready to make a commitment to Christ for the first time or even submit to leadership within the church. While this can be confusing, in that each person is traveling at a different part of his or her maturity journey, Scum does look for signs of a biblical-based lifestyle when looking

for the marks of a disciple. At Scum, the marks of a disciple are in alignment with the National Evangelical Statement of Faith.

Because individuals come into the church from various backgrounds, discipleship is a very individualistic process, but this does not mean that it is unintentional. At Scum of the Earth, each new person is encouraged to join a set of classes to help individuals get a hold of the basics. These are a set of three classes offered by Scum of the Earth and revolve around three topics: basic hermeneutics, basic apologetics, and basic spiritual disciplines. While this is how they were classified during the interview, Scum of the Earth would not use those terms when communicating the classes to their members. These classes are designed to be very basic and are for the purpose of engaging people who are new to the church. In fact, Blomberg states that one-third of people coming into the church need classes to help understand the basics of Christianity, the Bible, and the individual's responsibility in a relationship with Christ.

Along with these classes, Scum of the Earth does offer several Bible studies for those who are a part of their community. These Bible studies meet throughout the week and are broken up in groups for men and groups for women. At Scum of the Earth, each small group Bible study is initiated by a staff member of the church, and the hope is to get others involved in varying degrees of leadership within the group as quickly as possible. The groups themselves are open groups and individuals can join the group at any time; however, the groups do not meet continually and are designed as a short-term group. Scum of the Earth asks for a twelve-week commitment for their groups, and this is done to help individuals connect to groups without the barrier of a long-term commitment. Each group does have the option to continue to meet after the initial twelve

weeks, and Scum of the Earth has several groups that are continuing that started as short-term groups.

While Scum of the Earth does have discipleship classes and formal small group Bible studies, they also give equal credence to their informal groups. One example of an informal group environment is in their bike shop. At Scum, they have a workshop for individuals to come in and work on their motorcycles. This shop has equipment for basic maintenance, welding, and even leatherwork. The reason Scum of the Earth places a focus on these types of informal environments is because many of the people they are reaching are not comfortable coming into a church setting; however, they have entered into the church and developed relationships with Christ-followers because of the willingness to come to an informal setting. The plan is as individuals develop relationships through these informal settings, that those who are not Christ-followers will enter the community of the church and eventually join them for a worship service. Scum of the Earth also has informal environments for writers and artists, neighborhood potlucks, and vegan community dinners. Each entry point is valued because it creates a thirst in the community to understand why the people at Scum of the Earth are the way they are, and this opens opportunities for these Christ-followers to share the gospel of Christ with those around them.

Philosophy of Scum of the Earth

As the conversation shifted to a focus on the philosophical side of what goes on at Scum of the Earth, Fran Blomberg was asked about the top principles they have found to be successful at Scum of the Earth when reaching the next generation with the message of Christ. She outlined that there are three ways to minister in a postmodern culture. The

first way to minister would be to minister *to* postmoderns, the second would be to minister *as* postmoderns, and the third would be to minister *with* postmoderns. At Scum, they try to find a balance in ministering *as* and *with* those of the postmodern generation. How this idea is summarized as a principle is in the idea that, as much as possible, they need to contextualize the way they do ministry. Blomberg admits that there are limits to this idea of contextualization, for one can never dive in 100 percent. The ministers, however, should make a real effort to contextualize what they are doing in their community.

The second principle when reaching the next generation explained by Pastor Blomberg was in the area of missional work and leadership development. She expressed that as soon as possible leadership has to be developed among the people, and the gospel has to be allowed to grow up as indigenous to the culture. Just like missionaries have been doing for years overseas, Scum of the Earth sees the benefit of raising up leadership within the context of the people they are trying to reach. She describes that this can be difficult. People can find themselves looking at an event or a way of doing ministry that they may not be completely comfortable with, yet they cannot deny that it is Spirit-led and has developed to meet the needs of the culture. It is at this point that it that discernment and listening to the Spirit becomes an essential tool of leadership. The uncomfortableness that Blomberg speaks of is not in the message, but in the practices used to communicate the message. This means that if the practices are healthy and the message of the gospel is not being changed from an orthodox interpretation, then those events and environments are cultivated and nurtured, even if it is not something that they leadership would enjoy or would have done themselves.

The third principle that Pastor Blomberg describes is their commitment to biblical teaching. At Scum of the Earth, they have eight different teachers. The founding pastor, Mike Sears, preaches around 50 percent of the time, and the other seven teachers preach the other 50 percent. All of the teachers are encouraged to preach in their own style, and each teacher has varying styles. First, Blomberg spoke about the preparation that all of the teachers commit to at Scum of the Earth. At the beginning of the week, the staff and teachers gather for a forty-five minute Bible study led by the one teaching that particular week. This Bible study is on the passage being preached. The one teaching is expected to come ready to deliver all of the study they have done. The rest of the staff help the teacher insure that the message is strong, and there is a sturdy application for those attending. This ensures that the message being delivered at Scum is communicated in a clear way that the listeners will understand and that the message is consistent with orthodox biblical teaching.

The atmosphere for gatherings at Scum of the Earth is informal. People can get up throughout the teaching, they can stand, sit on the floor, or involve themselves with artistic materials found within the room. Scum desires for the individual to respond to the message in whatever way is comfortable to them. They make sure that they have a meal at every gathering and seek to remove any form of pretentiousness from the building and their gatherings. Because they reach a very poor population, they have found that the more they look and feel like a church found in a middle class area, the more those attending can become uncomfortable. That means that they deliberately downplay the appearance of their facilities.

Also no children stay in the service until they are at least in middle school; this is

done because they strive to have very raw preaching where they openly talk about sin, struggles, and varying adult topics. Through their communication they strive for authenticity. This means that teachers can speak about things that they do not think the younger listeners should be hearing. Part of this raw and authentic style is a desire to closely monitor how language is used throughout their gatherings. Scum of the Earth watches language in two ways. The first is that language used is understood by those who do not have a background in any church setting. The second is that they watch for language from the perspective of those who have been burned by the church in the past. The way this plays itself out is that they make sure that any idea that is presented lines up with what is clearly presented in the Bible. If any other idea presented has varying opinions, they make a point to acknowledge those differing opinions.

Encouraging and Challenging at Scum of the Earth

Next, Fran Bloomberg was asked about what the next generation has to offer the church. The first thing she mentioned was a lack of fear when it comes to questioning and learning. With the next generation, she describes the idea that they do not hold anything as sacred, so each idea is explored and studied. This opens up some great opportunities in the areas of training, leadership development, and even in the ability to explain their faith to others. As an extension of this, while this next generation does not have fear in the realm of questions ideas and norms, they are also respectful of others and other's opinions and want to hear when others are coming from.

Blomberg also communicates that one of the biggest encouragements she finds in the next generation stems from an unusual place. She describes that there is a sense of lack of respect for authority. This seemingly negative trait actually lends itself into an

easier acceptance of the priesthood of every believer. She says that for the next generation, every person is given the opportunity to lead, and each individual is willing to try leading. This generation is not content in simply attending or being served by the church, but instead, they want to contribute and lead in meaningful ways. This desire makes it easier to develop leaders, because they are starting from a place of desire to lead and engage in serving.

Next Blomberg was asked about the challenges the church faces when dealing with the next generation. She began by describing the biggest challenge she sees in the next generation: an unwillingness or a fear to commit. Blomberg submits that with each commitment the individual makes, it will limit further options. An example would be if an individual is asked to be at a particular event on a particular day, one may or may not get a commitment because the individual wants to see what else is going on that day. This is straightforward and something that each generation struggles with, yet for the next generation it can be more complicated because asking for long term or repeated commitment over a period of time limits any future options that may arise as well. An example of this would be asking an individual to lead a Bible study group on Wednesday nights for the next ten weeks. The problem here is that the individual is fearful to commit because of the longevity of the commitment and the uncertainty of other options arising in the future. Blomberg describes it as individuals wanting everything on their own terms, and when confronted with choice, the next generation will not make a choice out of fear of missing out on something else.

What Would You Say to Others?

As the interview concluded, Pastor Blomberg had some final remarks. She shared

that it has been her experience that the most important thing in her ministry to the next generation has been her ability to build relationships. This seems simpler than it actually is, and she shared some principles for building and maintaining relationships that ultimately move toward the sharing of the gospel with the individual. The first principle she shares is that one cannot be shocked by the depravity of an individual. If there is a meaningful relationship to be had, she has to be willing to hear where the other person is coming from. This stems from a theological understanding of the full depravity of man and the full redemption available through Christ. This extends into a willingness not to set time limits on redemption and to understand and anticipate relapses in behavior. The next principle Blomberg shared is the idea of listening to an individual before being given permission to share. It is through building of the relationship that one can begin to speak into the life of another, and it is not until this permission into a person's life is given that change will be seen. The last thing Blomberg shares is the need for a group of strong and healthy Christians supporting the individual and his or her ministry. While it is important to reach out and to pour into others, it is also vitally important that others are pouring into oneself as well. This group is there for support, comfort, and accountability. If an individual does not have those things, they will not be able to stay effective for long, and they will run the risk of weakening their relationship with Christ and falling into their own depravity.

Grace City, Las Vegas, NV

About Grace City and Dave Earley

Grace Church in Las Vegas, Nevada was started by Dave Earley. Dr. Earley was the lead pastor of a church plant in Ohio before becoming the head of the Liberty Center

for Church Planting at Liberty University. While at Liberty University, Dave Earley was led to once again plant a church, this time in Las Vegas, Nevada. Naming the church Grace City in response to the popular nickname of Las Vegas “Sin City,” the mission of Grace City church is “being a catalyst for spiritual awakening and revival in Las Vegas and throughout the world.”⁹⁵ Through this ministry, Earley and Grace City have found success reaching the population of The University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), as well as a cross-section of broken people throughout the community.

Like with every interview, Dr. Dave Earley was first asked about discipleship at Grace City. When asked what a disciple looks like at Grace City, Dr. Earley outlined four distinctive traits of a disciple that He has seen in the ministry of Jesus.⁹⁶ The first distinctive is that the individual is immersed in a relationship with Jesus. This means that the individual has begun to follow Jesus, and they are seeking to develop their relationship with Him. The next distinctive is that the individual is immersed in community with other believers. This means that the individual is practicing the type of community found in the second chapter of Acts. The third distinctive is that the individual is immersed in the teachings of Jesus and the Word of God, meaning that they are reading the scriptures and seeking to apply them to their daily life. The final distinctive is that the individual is immersed in ministry, which means that the individual is sent out to under the authority of Christ to preach the kingdom of God.

The way this is accomplished at Grace City is through four experiences designed to move individuals toward becoming a disciple who makes other disciples. The first of

⁹⁵ Grace City, “About Us,” <http://www.gracecityvegas.com/about-us/>.

⁹⁶ David Earley, interview by author, June 24, 2014.

these experiences is a week-long Las Vegas Experience. This is an opportunity for individuals to come and experience the ministry that is happening at Grace City. The purpose is to attract individuals to commit and connect to the next experience. This second experience is a summer-long mission experience. This is an opportunity for individuals to immerse themselves in a place where they can be infected by real Christianity in a spiritually dark place so that they will never be the same again. The third experience is what Dave Earley calls a year-long *Jesus Experience*. This is where the individual is trained on how to become a disciple maker. This is an intense year of training and ministry. The fourth experience used by Grace City is what they call *the Bible Experience*, which is designed for ongoing growth and discipleship.

The purpose of these four experiences is to help individuals understand the natural progression of Christian growth by helping them experience it first-hand. Dr. Earley explains that the natural growth model for each individual is to start out as a seeker. This means that the individual is a friend with those who have a relationship with Christ and are interested in what that relationship looks like. The next step in the growth process is that the individual becomes a believer; they have entered into a relationship with Christ. The next step is that they become a disciple and they are seeking to follow the teaching of Christ in their life. The last step is to become a disciple-maker, meaning that the individual is helping others to become disciple of Christ, walking them through the steps from seeker to disciple-maker.

In conjunction with these four experiences, Grace City also has a system of groups in place for those who cannot commit to the intense ministry training done through the four ministry experiences. These groups are offered in three different ways:

seeker groups, outreach groups, and city groups. Seeker groups are six-week groups where individuals invite their neighbors and connections to gather together and begin the conversation about Christianity. These groups are designed to build relationships and begin conversations. Outreach groups are groups that go out and engage in outreach activities. They do things like backyard Bible clubs, events at UNLV, block parties throughout the community, homeless dinners, and other service-oriented projects. City groups are Grace City's Bible study groups and are designed to engage committed believers who are local in the Las Vegas area.

As Grace City sees individuals go through these experiences and groups, they are watchful for individuals to become leaders throughout their ministry. When an individual is selected as a potential leader, or an individual expresses interest in becoming a leader at Grace City, they are encouraged to go through a four-stage process for developing and preparing them for leadership. These stages are not a requirement for leadership, but Grace City and Dave Earley have found that the leaders who go through this process tend to be more successful when leading their groups. The first stage is to go through the four-week group that Grace City offers on baptism and becoming a Christ-follower. This is to ensure that the individual has an understanding of a true relationship with Christ and what baptism means. The second stage is what Dave Earley calls a *Freedom Experience*. This experience is where individuals can deal with their hurts, habits, and hang-ups. Dr. Earley actually encourages leaders at Grace City to go through this experience twice. He expresses that once an individual starts leading within the church that the enemy will expose any chinks in their armor, and he wants to make sure that they are ready for spiritual opposition. The next stage is what Grace City calls *Financial Freedom*. They see

this as important because of the prevailing culture of Vegas and the way it views money and success. The last stage is to be part of their leadership summit, which is the group leader training class at Grace City. It is designed to work with the leader on how to lead a healthy group at Grace City. Once they complete this process, they are connected to a leadership coach who continues to work with them as they lead their groups.

Philosophy of Grace City

As the conversation began to shift toward the philosophical side of what they do at Grace City, Dr. Earley was asked what principles they have found successful when interacting with the postmodern generation in Las Vegas. The first principle shared by Dave Earley was the importance of relationships. He describes that the principle mark of a disciple is love. This love is shown toward God, one another, and one's neighbors. According to Dr. Earley, love is the greatest evangelism strategy in all of history. This is particularly true when interacting with a generation that values relationships before truth in a lot of situations. At Grace City, they seek to develop a friendship with the individual before they move onto spiritual matters.

The second principle is a commitment to the hard things of Scripture. Dr. Earley outlines that the postmodern generation does not trust anything that is overly simplistic. They are skeptical of people who talk about things like "three ways to change your life right now." If the church tries to dumb down the scriptures, it weakens and lessens what the Bible says, and it cannot penetrate the darkness of its community or the heart of the individual it is seeking to win for Christ. This commitment garners respect from the postmodern generation.

The last principle shared by Dave Earley was that Grace City embraces the

supernatural aspects of Christianity. He shared that that the element of the supernatural is forgotten in many congregations. He expressed that the postmodern generation is comfortable with the supernatural, and that if the church does not understand the supernatural side of the world, it will be considered irrelevant by the postmodern generation. At Grace City, they see more impact from their prayer meeting than they do with their small group Bible study. These meetings are unscripted and are designed for individuals to experience God and allow him to change their lives. Because of this, Dr. Earley describes that they see the supernatural manifested in the lives of the people that come to these meeting regularly.

What Would You Say to Others?

Dave Earley sees that there is a bright future in the lives of the postmodern generation. When asked about what he is excited about, he describes two things: the passion that the postmodern generation brings to the church and their willingness to serve and get connected in practical ways. These two ideas work hand in hand. Because of the passion and energy that the postmodern generation brings, they do not just want to come and sit; rather they have a deep desire to do something. This passion and energy can spread among others and can energize other generations to get involved as well.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined what five very different churches are doing and how they have found success in five very different parts of the country. The purpose if this was to discover and highlight the similarities between what they have found successful and begin to outline a framework for the principles that each church can use to reach the next generation with the kingdom of God. It the next chapter, the things outlined here

will be compiled with the other ideas outlined previously including, the differences between the generations, the opportunities for this generation, the challenges they represent, and the example of the early church. The goal will be to create a system of principles that can be applied to any ministry to find success in reaching the postmodern generation.

Chapter 6

Practically Ministering to the Postmodern Generation

The purpose of this project is to help the local church establish ministry principles for reaching the next generation for Christ. Previous chapters have expounded on the major differences between this postmodern generation and the previous generation. It has outlined some key opportunities and challenges facing the church when seeking to see this generation connect to Christ and his church. It has looked back at the early church and looked around at the contemporary in order to see what has been successful in the past and the present. At this point, the reader may begin to ask himself or herself, “So What?” How does all of this change that way the church does ministry? What does this environment look like, and how can the church and its people produce an environment that will appeal to this generation and see them grow in their relationship with Christ? This chapter seeks to outline just that. Following are four principles and practical ministry applications for reaching the next generation with the gospel of Christ Jesus.

Relationships

Relationships and biblical community are the most impactful tools the church has at its disposal. There is no replacement for relationships or community when reaching the postmodern generation with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Building community is part of the biblical model of ministry that Jesus gave his disciples. It can be seen how much this was part of Jesus’ ministry in John 17:11. Here Jesus is praying to his Father before he is about to be taken to be crucified. One can imagine if this is the last time Jesus was going to speak with God the Father, then what he chooses to express would be significant to his heart and his desires. Here, Jesus speaks these words as he prays, “And I am no longer in

the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.”⁹⁷ The importance of this moment cannot be understated. Bill Donahue talks about this moment when he writes,

It is sometimes said that when someone faces death, ones’ conversation reveals his or her deepest passions, hopes, and dreams. That is why we go out of our way to honor dying wishes. In his final hours, Jesus gives us clues to his chief concerns... While conversing with his heavenly father, Jesus speaks penetrating words that show the magnificence he accords this thing we call community.⁹⁸

One must see that community was part of Jesus’ plan for his kingdom work. Below are some ways groups can build an environment that will foster relationships.

Moving into the Neighborhood

A modern term that has been popping up recently is the term *incarnational living*. The idea of incarnational living is simply this: Christ becoming incarnate literally means that he moved into the neighborhood. He left heaven and met people where they were; he lived live alongside of them; he came to live next door. Jesus moved into the community. It is the same way for groups seeking to reach the next generation; they must move into the community in some form or fashion. When a group meets in the home, something special happens. Suddenly, they are no longer behind the walls of the church; they can see those in the community, and they can be seen by the community. Practically, this means that when walking into a group, they may have an encounter with those around the neighborhood. For the writer, this happened one night before group. A girl was walking into the group of the author and noticed that the neighbor was on her front porch crying.

⁹⁷ John 17:11.

⁹⁸ Donahue and Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups*, 29.

The girl from the group was able to connect and talk with the neighbor, and the leader of the group and his wife were able to connect with that neighbor and begin to build a relationship with them. They spoke with the neighbor regularly and were able to clearly present the gospel over time. There are countless stories that could be shared, but there is one central idea: that groups that meet in the community will have a better chance to reach that community.

Not only should the group meet in the community, the individuals should seek to meet their community where they are. If the individual has a homeowners' association or neighborhood watch, they should seek to participate. If the individuals have children, they should seek to be at their activities, like games and productions. They should seek to be involved in the PTA and help the local school. Individuals can become regulars at their local restaurant or coffee shop and take time to interact and connect with the community around them in any way possible.

Party

The art of the party can be one of the most overlooked aspects of Jesus' ministry on earth. Numerous times throughout scripture, Jesus is seen at important moments in his ministry at a party. Jesus regularly made time to gather with the community. Some examples are the wedding at Cana, eating with the tax collector, and regular meetings at Mary and Martha's home. Jesus saw the importance of gathering socially with others in order to express truth into their lives. For leaders, this means that to reach the postmodern generation, they must connect with them on a social level. This generation seeks community and will connect with others who share similar interests. Often times, this generation's first connection to the church is through some sort of social gathering. To

reach this generation, the church will need to leverage the season. The group and individual should seek to host Super Bowl and other major sporting event parties. They can have cookouts for their neighbors and have people over for board games or coffee. There is no limit to how the group can connect with this generation on a social level; the most important thing is that they are connecting.

Practice Makes Perfect

While building relationships is important, it is all for nothing if the individual is not prepared to have spiritual discussions when the opportunities arise. Through all of the ways groups can connect with the community, they can easily be just social groups that are seeking to be friends. The group that truly wants to reach the postmodern generation will want to be intentional in the building of relationships so that the gospel can be proclaimed. That is why a portion of group time should be devoted to practicing how to share the story of what Christ did in their lives as well as how to share with someone how they can have a relationship with Christ. This can be uncomfortable at best with even a close group of Christ-followers, but the sense of uncomfortableness will wear off. The groups should seek to have individuals share their story with one another, and the group members should feel free to ask questions and should seek clarification as the individual shares. This will help them to be more comfortable when sharing in a real-world setting. The leader can also give tools to the group to help them to better articulate the gospel to those they are interacting with. All of this is done to make conversations with others more organic and more natural.

Authenticity

The third major principle in creating a group environment to reach the

postmodern generation is a commitment to authenticity. Much like the idea of building relationships and community, authenticity is commonly cited as a key to reaching the next generation with the gospel of Christ. Authenticity is the backbone of developing any culture that is appealing to the postmodern generation, and it is the key to any truly healthy group environment. Authenticity begins when an individual is willing to be seen as they are. This is scary, because with authenticity comes growth. The point of authenticity is to be held accountable to the Word of God, and when one is held accountable, growth is necessary. This is the model Jesus used with his disciples. He entered into this authentic relationship, he saw their weakness, and he sought to redeem it. Jeff Vanderstelt writes it this way,

Jesus lived with his disciples. He was close enough to really know them. He observed what they believed by watching how they lived. He became closely acquainted with their brokenness so that he could see their wrong thinking, wrong believing, and wrong acting. They were exposed. And as they were exposed, Jesus helped them to be restored.⁹⁹

Authenticity means that the individual is willing to be truly seen: faults, failures, and all. From here, they get help from others to see every part of their life transformed by the gospel. So how can this type of authenticity be fostered? Below are some options for a group to build authenticity.

Micro Groups

Authenticity and intimacy are nearly impossible to experience in large or medium sized groups. They are even hard to foster in what many would consider to be small groups. This kind of accountability and authenticity is best cultivated among a group of three or four individuals of the same gender. This is relevant because typically even for

⁹⁹ Jeff Vanderstelt, *Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 95.

postmoderns, it is hard to truly be transparent in a setting with multiple people, and particularly hard dealing with someone of the opposite gender. These micro groups can eliminate both of those roadblocks. This group time should be devoted to the study of scripture, particularly in the understanding of how the Word of God is lived out by the individual. During this group time, the members agree to a set amount of scripture that they will read, and when one fails to read the scripture for that week, they will reread the scripture. Each week, they should discuss how they could apply this scripture to their lives. They can also ask about common struggles dealing with sin and failures, as well as victories. The idea is to live transparently with those few people around them so that they can have the gospel spoken into their lives by others who know them and care for them.

Transparent Teaching

Authenticity is further cultivated by the leader of a group or even the leader of a church preaching and teaching out of personal experiences. Sharing with their listeners their personal struggles and how the gospel has transformed their lives can be a powerful tool in fostering authentic relationships. This is particularly important when reaching the postmodern generation, because they abhor perceived hypocrisy. The leader or pastor must be sure that they not only are living out the rest of the week what they talk about when they teach, but also teach out of what they have lived out the rest of the week. This means that they are open about how the gospel is moving and working in their own lives. This allows the hearer to see the teachers for who they really are: individuals in need of the transformative power God, just as they are.

Living an Authentic Life

One of the most important aspects of a commitment to authenticity is a

willingness for individuals to truly live lives that reflects what they claim to believe and teach. One of the most common criticisms from the postmodern generation about people who claim to be Christ-followers is that they are hypocrites. Nothing can be more damaging in a relationship than for one party to view the other as fake. This is heightened in the postmodern generation because there is such a high value placed on individuals being themselves. This means that for an individual to have a real relationship from the postmodern generation with someone, they must be sure to be as authentic as possible. This does not mean that one should always act increasingly spiritual in order to try to constantly portray himself or herself as a perfect person; rather it is a commitment to allow others to see that they are a person in great need of the transformative power of the gospel. If anything, this requires individuals to become more relaxed in the way they communicate their relationship with Christ and how they are trying to live their lives more like him every day.

Involvement

The next major aspect of creating a group environment for reaching the postmodern generation is making sure that each individual is involved with the mission of the church. As outlined by many of the churches interviewed for this project, those people from the postmodern generation that they are reaching are not simply content coming and being served; rather, they want hands-on involvement in the work being done. The postmodern generation will quickly tire of simply fulfilling a pre-prescribed role. This generation wants to utilize their gifts, talents, and abilities to be actively involved in a life-changing mission. They want to be able to dream about where the mission can go and how ministries could partner with the mission of the church. They

want to be part of creating vision and casting that vision to others. They want to sell others on the vision and get others energized about join the mission of the church as well. So how does the church cultivate this kind of involvement?

Leadership Development

The church must devote time, energy, and resources to leadership development. Leadership development is about passing along leadership to others so they can utilize their talents and abilities; it empowers them and fosters ownership of a particular ministry or mission. Throughout the life of Jesus, there is a pattern that can be seen in the area of leadership development. Jesus develops leaders by walking them through a four-step process. The first step in developing leadership is to allow the individual to watch the leader as they lead a ministry. This allows the individual to learn what all the event or ministry entails. The second step is for the leader to allow the individual to help them as they lead the ministry. This gives the individual an opportunity to learn while engaging in a hands-on way. It also gives the individual responsibility and allows them to feel what it is like to lead. The next step in the process is for the leader to allow the individual to begin to lead the ministry or group and to step into a support role. Here the individual begins to lead the group, but they are still able to lean on the leader for questions or concerns. The last step is for the leader to transfer leadership to the new leader and to take an observation role. Here the individual is fully leading the group or ministry. They feel the full weight of leadership and have taken ownership of the ministry or group, but the original leader continues to observe and can give advice to the new leader. This process is a way for leadership development to happen in a healthy way that engages potential leaders in the ownership of the group early and has a support system in place to

make sure that the new leaders can find success with their groups.

Meeting Felt Needs

One of the prominent characteristics of serving among the postmodern generation is that they want to be involved in seen and felt needs among the community. This means that those in the postmodern generation are not seeking to simply serve inside the walls of the church; rather, they want to make an impact in their community. This can be seen by the influx of social justice projects and initiatives throughout the country, both in secular and non-secular circles. To engage the postmodern generation, the church must think outside of its walls and seek to serve the needs of the community around them. This ties back to building relationships in the community. If a group is meeting in the community and developing relationships with those in their community, they will inevitably see the need in their community.

A group leader should seek to engage their group in meeting these needs throughout their community. A way to do this is that the leader may see by connecting with their local PTA that the school does not have the resources to clean up the grounds around the school, or they do not have enough workers to repaint the halls or playground. The leader can engage their group in volunteering to meet the needs of the school. They can empower their group to connect with the teachers and from that, they may notice that they school needs people to volunteer to read stories to the children in the after-school program. From there, the group can come in and help the teachers by reading to the children in the afternoons. From there, another need may arise and then another, all the while the group is meeting felt needs and building relationships. Meanwhile, they are practicing how to share their story in group, and they are then able to share their story

with the teachers they have connected with. The cycle is never-ending once the first connection is made and it all revolves around a felt need. It does not have to revolve around a school; it can come about through any of the connections made in the community.

Understanding and Developing the Spiritual Gifts

Meaningful involvement in the mission of the church flows first and foremost through the spiritual gifts of the individual. As stated above, the postmodern generation is deeply concerned with being involved in service, and that they see it as important and empowering to them as a Christ follower. This service is more than simply completing a task that needs to be done; rather, it is something that engages them at their spiritual core. The only way individuals will experience this kind of service is to first understand their spiritual gifts and how they fit in the mission of the church. The best way for church leaders or pastors to help individuals understand their spiritual gifts is by regular teaching on these gifts and how they can contribute to the mission of the church. Second, these leaders can help by working with individuals to help them discover their spiritual gifts, and also by expressing how these gifts will be used when approaching a service opportunity.

This means that there is a regular time set aside for leaders, pastors, or teachers to teach and explain all of the spiritual gifts. This should be done during church gatherings and small groups. One of the best ways to do this would be through a church campaign where each week the teaching pastor can begin the week during the Sunday morning gathering by expounding on a particular spiritual gift. Then, throughout the week each small group can discuss the same spiritual gift. While all of this is happening, children's

and youth groups study the same spiritual gift as well. This helps to solidify the information, giving everyone an opportunity to work with the topic on an individual level and creating an opportunity for families to discuss what they have been learning.

As individuals understand what the gifts are, the leader can then work with them to discover their own spiritual gifts. This is best done on an individual basis, where a leader can work with someone as they are learning about the gifts to help them discover what theirs may be. The benefit of working with a leader is that individuals may not always be able to self-reflect on something that another may be able to see. There are also numerous spiritual gift inventories that can be found online to help individuals discover their gifts.

To continue to express the importance of the spiritual gifts, the leader, pastor, or teacher should seek to talk about the gifts and how they actually work themselves out through service opportunities. For example, a group may start to work with the local homeless population. As people begin to serve, they may meet basic needs and provide basic amenities that the homeless may not normally get to experience. From here, the leader can approach an individual with the spiritual gift of teaching about starting a small group study with the homeless individuals with whom they have been working. From there, the leader may approach someone with the spiritual gift of shepherding about helping homeless individuals navigate what services are being offered in their community and helping them begin to get back on their feet. The leader can also approach an individual with the gift of hospitality about starting a collection of basic necessities for the group to pass out as they work with the homeless population. The options are limitless, and each gift has its own contribution to each ministry. It is the responsibility of

the leader to help others see the potential their gift has and help them to use that gift in a meaningful way.

Spirituality

The last principle that can be derived from the study to help churches create environments to reach the postmodern generation is openness to spirituality. Spirituality is one of the least-understood aspects of Christianity today. This could be for any number of reasons. Some churches have never experienced manifest spiritual movement and simply exist in an “out of sight, out of mind” type of mentality. Other churches overly rely on manifest movements of the Spirit, even to the point of it being a requirement of salvation. Others still believe that the time for manifest movements of the supernatural have ended. In all actuality, regardless of personal opinion about spirituality and supernatural experiences, there is a hunger in the postmodern generation to experience these types of activities, and there is a certain openness for allowing the unexplainable in the world. What is important for churches is that they too be open to discuss and even experience the spiritual in their groups and their gatherings.

To start, there should be a clarification of what is referred to spirituality, supernatural, or manifest movements of God or the Spirit. These activities include, but are not limited to, spiritual warfare (even to the point of outward expressions of oppression), healing (spiritually, mentally, and physically), hearing the voice of God, and even speaking and understanding tongues. This is a perfect place to make one important note. No church must experience these things in order to be considered healthy, and just because these things are present at a church, this does not mean that they are in any way closer to God because of it. What is being said is this: the church must be willing to have

the open conversation about the place and the purpose of these things in the church universal, and affirm that there is a spiritual aspect to faith that cannot always be explained. The church can do this through a number of different means, some of which will be looked at here.

Prayer and Worship Experiences

Part of cultivating an opportunity for individuals to experience the supernatural movement of God is by creating environments for individuals to experience God through prayer and worship. These environments should be organized by the church and should have individuals who are there to guide these times, but they should not be overly programmed. The goal is to allow the Spirit of God to move within those who have gathered. These are times of dedicated worship to God through the singing of songs, the reading of scripture, united and personal prayer, reflection on God, and expression of what God is saying to the individual. The best way to allow for expression is to have some sort of tangible outlet for individuals to interact with. It may be supplies for drawing or painting; it may be journals for writing; or it may be some sort of tangible symbol of a spiritual principle. These symbols can be to write out a sin that is holding the individual back from God on a piece of dissolvable paper. As they are writing, a leader could be reading scriptures about God's forgiveness. From here, there could be a worship song of how God forgives and the individual can place the paper in water and watch it dissolve just like God can dissolve that sin from their life. The mode by which the church seeks to do this does not matter, but the church must allow for personal interaction with the Spirit of God. These opportunities then make a way for group leaders and individual mentors to interact with the individuals about what God is doing in their life.

Practice of the Disciplines

Another way the church can cultivate this spirituality is through the practice of the spiritual disciplines. This can be particularly effective for the church, because there is no need to create another event like a time of worship and prayer. Rather, this can be done in the individuals group with those they are regularly meeting with. As a group, individuals can focus on one discipline at a time and dedicate time throughout the week to practice this discipline. A group could fast during lunch throughout the week and devote that time to prayer. They could memorize and meditate on the same scriptures or dedicate a section of the day toward reading the same scripture. These can be valuable tools in helping the individual understand their personal walk and connection with God, while allowing for the Spirit of God to move in the life of the individual and connecting them deeper within the community of believers they are gathering with.

Spiritual Conversations

As stated above, talking about the spiritual and the supernatural can be difficult for many churches, and in many ways can be detrimental to the usual church or group gatherings. Because of this, it can be recommended that the church create an opportunity for these conversations to take place. One of the most popular venues for more difficult spiritual conversations is to have regular question-and-answer times. This can create a safe space for individuals to come with their difficult questions in an environment that is not taking away from other meeting times. This is also a way for churches to better control the conversation so that proper theology is being taught when discussing topics that may be divisive or difficult. These question-and-answer times also build relationships between the teachers of the church and those in the postmodern generation.

As the next generation sees that the teachers are willing to have these conversations, individuals will feel more comfortable coming to the teachers on an individual basis.

Conclusion

Each church wants a program to put in place that is attractive to the postmodern generation and is biblically healthy. It seems like such a program does not exist, and in one very real way, it does not. No program or event is an end-all answer to creating an environment that will reach the next generation. While there is no one program that is the end-all be-all of generational change, the good news is that any program can be used to reach the next generation. What has been outlined through this project is that the church that is willing to understand the difference in this next generation and how they relate to God, who can leverage the opportunities and tackle the challenges that exist with the postmodern generation, who can learn from the example outlined by the early church, and glean principles from modern churches and what they are doing can begin to understand the principles that will reach the next generation for Christ. Cultivating these principles will help each group experience success reaching the postmodern generation, and if faithful, will see the next generation take the reins of the mission of the church and will create new and exciting groups that will have even more success.

As stated in the first chapter of this project, Jesus tells his disciples in Luke 10:2, “And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” It is easy to see that there is a harvest waiting within the postmodern generation; however, which churches are willing to put in the work to reach this generation with the gospel of Christ Jesus? The hope and the prayer of this project is to encourage each church or group

leader to look closely at their ministry and to begin to practice the principles outline here so that the next generation will be saturated with the kingdom of God.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Church-Wide Groups:

1. What does a disciple look like for your church?
2. What is your philosophy of ministry?
3. What is your group mission statement?
4. What is your discipleship method? Spiritual growth?
5. What does your group semester look like? Seasonal/ Year round?
6. How do you determine what groups people connect to?
 - a. Open / Closed
 - b. Church assigned / Suggested?
 - c. Placement process?
7. How do you find attendees?
 - a. Relational
 - b. Ad structure?
 - c. Web?
 - d. What has worked really well for you?
8. Multiplication structure?
 - a. Time frame
 - b. Force multiplication
9. Typical age range of people in groups?
10. How do you separate groups?
 - a. Men
 - b. Women
 - c. Married
 - d. Single
11. What gaps do you see that you are not reaching?
12. Process for applying / becoming leader
13. How frequently do you gather leaders?
14. Accountability for group leaders?
 - a. Coaching structure?

15. What is the balance between face to face communication and digital communication?
 - a. Where does communication become a detractor?
16. Percentage of budget reserved for:
 - a. Supplies
 - b. Advertisement
 - c. Training
 - d. Etc.
17. How are you striving to move beyond community?
18. What would you say are your top 10 keys to success for groups as a whole?

Postmodern Specific:

1. What have you found to be the best principles to reaching a postmodern generation?
2. How important is terminology and verbiage concerning group and church life to postmoderns?
 - a. What language attracts? Distracts?
3. How is the Gospel message impacted or presented differently in a context where the audience is:
 - a. Partially postmodern?
 - b. Fully Postmodern?
4. Distinctive traits of postmodern groups?
5. Transition from college / high school to adult groups?
6. How does the older generation connect with the younger generation?
 - a. Mentoring?
 - b. Relationally?
7. Postmoderns impact on the church?
 - a. What do they offer?
 - b. What do they take away?
 - c. Offering
 - d. Service
 - e. Evangelism
 - f. Future leadership
 - g. Leadership growth
 - h. Outreach

IRB APPROVAL

Dear Anthony,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases are attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.

Professor, IRB Chair

Counseling