

Liberty University

**Developing Reciprocal Community in Jackson Baptist Church**

A Thesis Project Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Rawlings School of Divinity  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Ministry

Department of Christian Leadership and Church Ministries

By

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March 27, 2020

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## Doctor of Ministry Thesis Project Abstract

### DEVELOPING RECIPROCAL COMMUNITY IN JACKSON BAPTIST CHURCH

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Liberty University School of Divinity, 2020

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Jackson Baptist Church lacks reciprocal community amongst its regular attendees and visitors. The focus is on the large group gathering on Sundays which has developed a consumer-based culture within the church. In both the Old and New Testaments, there are examples of reciprocal community. Acts 2:44(NASB) it states, “And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common.” The church in the first century developed an active reciprocal community.

Strategies laid out in scripture and church history can assist building community. This project by taking those strategies will conduct an awareness campaign at Jackson Baptist on reciprocal community. This will be done through a pre-test of fifty questions to be taken prior to a class on community. Following the class, the same survey will be filled out again to gauge if the class had a direct effect on the responses from the participants. The data collected will be analyzed using the Paired-T Test. Using the Paired-T Test an average mean will be discovered to show if the course had a direct effect on the responses and it was not by chance. Following the results, the purpose of the research is to begin developing reciprocal community within Jackson Baptist Church.

Abstract Length: 203

## **Acknowledgements**

I thank God for the opportunity to achieve this goal in my life. Apart from Him nothing is possible, so all glory and honor goes to Him alone. My wife Katie Wilson my answered prayer. You never complained at the time you had to sacrifice for me to achieve this goal. You are the reason I believed in myself to finish this project. To my four kids Hunter, Dylan, Savanna, and Kyla there have been missed dances, games, recitals, and other events because I was working on this project; however, you never complained, you just encouraged me. I'm the luckiest husband and father in the world, and I love you so much. To my father, Philip Wilson dad, when no one else gave me a chance you did. You taught me over the next four years more than I could learn in a lifetime and the memories I now have I would never take back. To my Stepmom Debbie Wilson, thank you for being way more than a stepmom and always giving me so much love and support even when I made it hard. To my mom, Tish Rose, Mom, you are the mightiest prayer warrior and woman of God I know. You love God with a fire and passion like no other, and you passed this on to me, which is the greatest gift.

Pastor Ken Underhill and my church family at Jackson Baptist Church, you gave me this chance. I can never repay you for helping me complete my dream. I love all of you. John Smith "The General" you sacrificed so much time in assisting me in this project.

Dr. Jason Mitchell, my mentor, you encouraged, assisted, guided, and challenged me in this project. I thank you for everything. To my reader, Dr. Rod Dempsey, you placed a passion in my heart for discipleship that will never go away. I thank you for sharing that passion with me and assisting in my dream of completing my doctorate.

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## **Abbreviations**

<b>DMIN:</b>	<b>Doctor of Ministry</b>
<b>NIV:</b>	<b>New International Version</b>
<b>JBC:</b>	<b>Jackson Baptist Church</b>

## Thesis Chapter One

### Introduction

In many churches throughout the United States, reciprocal community is missing among the church attendees. For this project reciprocal community is when members are seen as equals united in a vision, joined as one, and directly involved in meaningful fellowship with both God and man. The definition is further described starting on page nine of this report. The idea of equality as it pertains to reciprocal community will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three is the New Testament understanding as being one body with equal importance within the Church. People are often excluded from intimate relationships with fellow attendees, while others treat the church as a consumer-based religion in that they come in for the service and leave without saying a word. It leaves many people thinking they have no place in the church or that the relationships they have are shallow. People leave the church daily with these thoughts, seeing no reason to continue as part of that church body. This is an epidemic that is running rapid in American churches. Bryon Yawn says, “Superficial relationships in the church are a tragedy. The church is the last place humanity should be allowed to anonymously pass by each other.”<sup>1</sup>

Research shows that 1.2 million people leave the church each year.<sup>2</sup> One reason people are leaving their local churches is due to a lack of community. Contradictory to this is the study by the Barna Group that showed that only 10% of people expect to find community in the

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<sup>1</sup> Yawn, Bryon. 2014. “All Alone Together: The Tragedy of Superficial Relationships at Church.” Christianity.com, Accessed May 31, 2019., <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-life/all-alone-together-the-tragedy-of-superficial-relationships-at-church.html>

<sup>2</sup> Sheehan, Ryan. 2015. “3500 People Leave the Church Every Day.” ChristianPost.com. Accessed May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/3500-people-leave-the-church-every-day.html>.

church.<sup>3</sup> The church does great things, but the one complaint that people should not have about the church is a lack of community. This researcher believes that people are leaving churches today because of the lack of community in the church. With no authentic community in the life of a believer meaningful relationships appear absent leading to someone feeling as if they are not a part of the genuine community that exists in their church.

Reciprocal community is vital so that people are all treated as equals, and the local church should seek to ensure that their people are engaged in community with others in the church. Some churches, in the United States, are being plagued by shallow religiosity and the lack of a common bond amongst believers to have both communion with God and their fellow believers. In an article with the Washington Post, Rachel Held Evans wrote about this disconnect as it pertains to the younger millennial generation in the church today. She says, “millennials exhibit an increasing aversion to exclusive, closed-minded religious communities masquerading as the hip new places in town.”<sup>4</sup> In striving for churches to become relevant in the culture today, they are driving a wedge between the culture and the church. Evans using research from the Barna Group, said, “Recent research from Barna Group and the Cornerstone Knowledge Network found that 67 percent of millennials prefer a “classic” church over a “trendy” one, and 77 percent would choose a “sanctuary” over an “auditorium.”<sup>5</sup>

Today’s churches being preoccupied with religious traditions and lack the community that comes from unity. This is a problem across multiple age ranges. In a study by the Barna

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<sup>3</sup> Barna Group. “Americans are Divided on the Importance of Church.” Barna.com. May 24, 2019. <https://www.barna.com/research/americans-divided-on-the-importance-of-church/#.UzwMlqldW7o>.

<sup>4</sup> Evans Rachel Held. . “Want millennials back in the pews? Stop trying to make church ‘cool.’” Washingtonpost.com. Accessed June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/jesus-doesnt-tweet/2015/04/30/fb07ef1a-ed01-11e4-8666-a1d756d0218e\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.5626f3b946f4](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/jesus-doesnt-tweet/2015/04/30/fb07ef1a-ed01-11e4-8666-a1d756d0218e_story.html?utm_term=.5626f3b946f4).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Group, they found that amongst Millennials; they sought community over privacy with a 78% over 22% longing for community.<sup>6</sup> Churches have lost focus on what seemed to matter most to the early church.<sup>7</sup>

Lifeway Research conducted a study similar to Barna, but focused on Generation Z kids, which are people born between 1995-2015 and millennials, which are people born 1981 to 1994. In this study, the younger generations also sought meaningful relationships in their churches through community. Thom Rainer says, “Even with an increased digital presence, younger generations still need in-person community.”<sup>8</sup>

In an examination of scripture, three descriptors make up the ideal behind reciprocal community that is found throughout the book of Acts. These descriptors are unity, togetherness, and fellowship. Thorough examination of these three terms reveals that Godly community is evident not only in Acts but also in both the Old and New Testaments. All three of the descriptors must exist in order for a church to have and maintain reciprocal community. Along with these three terms, there are three methods that can help facilitate and gauge the community in a church.

Modern churches attempt to develop meaningful relationships with God and fellow believers; however, many of them only look at a portion of methods to develop community and leave out other needed methods. In America, methods that seem to help foster community are small groups, church involvement, and discipleship. However, these methods must be utilized

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<sup>6</sup> Barna Group. “Designing Worship Spaces with Millennials in Mind.” Barna.com. Accessed June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2019. <https://www.barna.com/research/designing-worship-spaces-with-millennials-in-mind/#.VS0dfxPF-4O>.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 2:42-47, New International Version (NIV). Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references in this thesis project will be from the New International Version of the Bible.

<sup>8</sup> Rainer, Thom. 2019. “Five Findings about Gen Z That Will Impact Churches.” Thomrainer.com. Accessed May 25, 2019. <https://thomrainer.com/2019/03/five-findings-about-gen-z-that-will-impact-churches-rainer-on-leadership-516/>.

together and not as a stand-alone ministry. By using these three methods, it can help facilitate a strong sense of community in a church.

## **Ministry Context**

Jackson Baptist Church in Jackson, NJ, was started in 1971. They planted the church after a group of people in the community began meeting in a small group and wanted to establish a church where the principles from Acts 2:42-47 were being lived out. This group of people began door-to-door evangelism while, maintaining the close bond that they all had with each other from the beginning. Through their community, they impacted the people of Jackson rapidly. With most people being raised in a Catholic church that often-left people desiring more personal relationships, this appeal to communion with God and fellow believers was appealing. This drive for community would continue for close to 30 years, but the dynamic would change.

The church followed the format of older churches and became inundated with programs. These programs overtook the desire for a close community with the desire for strictly head knowledge and time-consuming ministries that have no time for fellowship. This new effort for more ministries soon affected the people by allowing them to think the most important part of church was ministry service instead of building community. The D.N.A. of the church changed until community was lost and the business of ministry took over. This was a problem because program driven churches often exhaust the 10% working people in the congregation and should not be used as an indicator of health. Thom Rainer says, “Program-driven churches give the appearance of growth, but programs are not a good measure of church health. More church activities do not necessarily mean more church ministry.”<sup>9</sup> This mindset of more programs is

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<sup>9</sup> Rainer, Thom. 2017 “Why so Many Churches are too Busy.” Thomrainer.com. Accessed June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019. <https://thomrainer.com/2017/06/many-churches-busy-rainer-leadership-334/>.

the driving culture of the church right now. Being an activity-driven church can cause a church to lose its purpose and miss out on God ordained opportunities. Thom Rainer wrote that two things happen to an activity-driven church; first, they miss out on building relationships with other Christians and second, lose their effectiveness in their community.<sup>10</sup> This seems to be where Jackson Baptist Church is at this point because they lost their focus on community and placed it on activities and programs. The church has physically exhausted members with too many church activities that when invited into community groups and ministries they say they lack the time needed to develop meaningful relationships.

With this mindset, the church bases its understanding of what a functioning member should be doing. The church sees that if people are not engaged in the ministries of the church, then there is a disconnect. However, even those involved in ministries lack the community with fellow believers. In an article on Sharefaith.com about churches having too many activities and concentrating on areas that lack focus on community Daniel Threlfall wrote, “Church” is not just about sermons; it’s about people engaging with people—a living, growing, organic, dynamic, authentic community of people.”<sup>11</sup> This misguided view of Jackson Baptist Church has led to a congregation of people who lack meaningful relationships within the church.

Recently, while speaking to a well-established leader in the church, she mentioned community. In the conversation, she read a quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer who said, “Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. The more clearly we learn to recognize that the

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<sup>10</sup> Rainer, Thom. 2018. “Seven Problems with an Activity-Driven Church.” Thomrainer.com. Accessed August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019. <https://thomrainer.com/2014/02/seven-problems-with-an-activity-driven-church/>.

<sup>11</sup> Threlfall, Daniel. 2011. “Too Many Activities.” Sharefaith.com. Accessed August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019. <https://www.sharefaith.com/blog/2011/06/death-church-programs/>.

ground and strength and promise of all our fellowship is in Jesus Christ alone, the more serenely shall we think of our fellowship and pray and hope for it.”<sup>12</sup> After reading, she sadly stated she does not have real community in her life and does not even know the people intimately that she has sat beside for years in the church. The researcher spoke to her about how even in the New Testament scriptures God had a design for community. It was shared with her that in the early church in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles reciprocal community existed. Acts 2:44 shows the reciprocal community amongst the first group of people; it states, “All the believers were together and had everything in common.” This was a remarkable discovering and enlightening to the conclusion that the researcher had come to that active reciprocal community was missing in Jackson Baptist Church., in terms of the church’s idea of a practicing member, she was exemplary. She is remarkably active in attendance and volunteering with programs, but according to God’s plan of community laid out in verses like Acts 2:42-47, she lacked community and the genuine fellowship of fellow believers.

The church that will be studied is located in central New Jersey about an hour from New York City. Many people that attend the church either work in the city itself or the large neighboring areas that surround it. With these types of jobs and often traveling an hour or more for a commute, people are unwilling to spend the time to build genuine reciprocal community in the church. This is brought up because, compared to "traditional" Southern Baptist churches, many people in the Northeast seem to stick to themselves because they have little free time and family time. Because of these time restrictions and the importance of having a daily routine, people often because of exhaustion go straight home, which eliminates the opportunity for a small group or social church gathering. This hinders the church's attempt at socialization and

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<sup>12</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1954) Chapter One, Kindle.

fellowship because people work long hours and spend time with family when they are not working.

Looking historically and in the present, the congregation is very loving and including of people from any race or socioeconomic background which is unique; however, in situations just like the woman above these relationships are shallow and not in-depth. The retirees of the church are very open to each other but many being “Snowbirds” which are people who travel south in the winters. As a result of the “Snowbirds,” leaving it creates long gaps of times that were once dedicated to communal activities and creates a time gap for those left behind in New Jersey. This has presented a problem in getting people out of a routine, and as a byproduct, there is a break down in the community of the church.

The one activity in the church that has been very effective in the congregation was the implementation of small groups two years ago. However, this reaches a minimal number of the congregation, probably around 35%. In the small groups, only two of them seem to operate in a productive capacity in that the people truly know each other and support them in every walk of life. The other groups, which are around ten groups, are just shallow relationships bent on learning more Bible knowledge and not the healthy balance of knowledge and community.

### **Problem Presented**

Jackson Baptist Church is increasing in regular church attendance but seeing limited sustained growth. In the church, new people will attend, and then old members will leave. It is essential to understand the background of the church to see part of the reason community was shattered among the congregation. Jackson Baptist Church in 2016 suffered a slight church split. The church hired an assessment group to discover ways to become relevant in their community. During this assessment, the group attempted to recommend the senior pastor begin



the process of retiring and giving more responsibility to the youth pastor who would become an executive pastor. The problem arose when the youth pastor started the process sooner and forced out the Senior Pastor. The youth pastor left along with about 75-100 people. Many people who stayed did not fully trust the senior pastor because of hurtful words that were spoken, but the senior pastor stayed and is still at the church.

Slowly, over the next two years, more people left. Regular church attrition is expected, but the problem lies in why many of the people left. Members had hurt feelings related to personal unhappiness or ill feelings toward leadership; however, the most significant complaint is that those who left felt that they had no one to connect with or no one they were close to.

In his book, *When the Church was a Family*, Joseph Hellerman attributes the individualistic consumer-based mentality of the western church to the decline of community. This project focuses on how a lack of reciprocal community in the church body at Jackson is related to a lack of sustained growth even when new families come each month. Hellerman asks the foundational question, “What would Christianity look like if we truly recaptured Jesus’ vision for authentic Christian community?”<sup>13</sup>

The reciprocal community in the early church that is shown in Acts and the Epistles will be examined and analyzed for application at Jackson Baptist Church. Part of the research will be philosophies of community from the early church and throughout church history that can be used not only by Jackson Baptist Church but other churches. These principles of community would vary from church to church, but the focus will primarily be on Jackson Baptist Church and ways to implement community in all of its ministries and members. Over the last year, JBC

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<sup>13</sup> Joseph Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus’ Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 144.

has experienced an increase in attendance but has struggled in connecting with visitors once they become regular attendees. This is in direct correlation with a lack of community amongst its members. The Barna Groups research shows that one reason people stop attending church is because of a lack of community.<sup>14</sup> Jackson Baptist Church by implementing the community practices of the early church and translating them into twenty-first-century church methods can develop a structure that fosters reciprocal community.

### **Purpose Statement**

This project will attempt to offer methods that can be used in ministry that can connect people of a church in meaningful relationships that foster community within the congregation. Also, this project will develop an understanding through an awareness campaign of God's design for community within the church by examining Old and New Testament scripture. This community will not just comprise meaningless relationships but focus on developing deep and intimate relationships with God and fellow believers.

### **Basic Assumptions**

The assumption is that a portion of the declining numbers in churches are linked to the declining trend of community in those churches. In the early church rapid growth took place, and the close-knit community that was shared with the Christians seemed to result in the growth. Without meaningful relationships with fellow believers and God that stems from community, a church will not reach its potential for true discipleship and evangelism.

### **Definitions**

Based upon the discussion that follows, the researcher is defining reciprocal community

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<sup>14</sup> Nieuwhof, Carey. 2016. "5 Reasons People Have Stopped Attending Your Church." CareyNieuwhof.com. Accessed July 1st, 2019, <https://careynieuwhof.com/5reasonsmillennials/>.

as when a church has equal members in value united in a shared vision, joined as one people, and in true meaningful fellowship with both God and fellow believers. This idea is explained in both Old and New Testaments as community found in unity, togetherness, and fellowship.

In the Old Testament, the word “*Chabar*” is used for the act of joining together or having something in common, but it was used differently than in the New Testament. The Israelites were God’s chosen people. Abraham had a covenant with God that called him out of Ur (Gen. 12), when God promised Abraham children (Gen.15), last, while Abraham obediently went, brought his son to sacrifice but God stopped him (Gen.22). Also, God established a covenant with Moses in the people of Israel in Exodus 19. These covenants signified them as God’s chosen nation. In the Old Testament, the focus of unity was primarily shared between the Israelite people. Throughout the New Testament, it takes on a new meaning in that people of different backgrounds would become one in Christ Jesus regardless of who they were in the past.

Community defined through unity, togetherness, and fellowship is displayed in the Old Testament. As explained above the definition for community in the Old Testament differs slightly because it pertains to only the Israelite people, however, God’s design for His people to have unity, togetherness, and fellowship is the same. The first word, the word for unity, “*Chabar* or חָבַר,” means to join or have fellowship with one another.<sup>15</sup> Strong’s describes *Chabar* as “to join (literally or figuratively); or have fellowship with.”<sup>16</sup> This is a word that is used often in the Old Testament speaking of joining two things together like fabric. Exodus 36:10, “They joined five of the curtains together and did the same with the other five.” Also, the

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<sup>15</sup> James Strong, *The New Strong’s Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 2266, Logos Bible Software.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 2266

word is used for being joined together with people as seen in Ecclesiastes 9:4a (NKJV), “For to him is joined to all the living there is.” The act of joining together either literally or figuratively is vital in establishing reciprocal community in a church.

The secondly key term regarding reciprocal community is the word “togetherness.” Community in the Old Testament also comes from the word, “*Yachad* or יחד” meaning join or unite.<sup>17</sup> Brown-Driver-Briggs describes “*Yachad*” as union, unitedness and together, altogether, all together, alike.”<sup>18</sup> Isaiah 43:9a describes this togetherness in speaking of the coming Savior. “All the nations gather together, and the peoples assemble.” God’s people the Israelites united through the covenants with their ancestors as spoken above, but would fulfilled through the Messiah.

Lastly, the third term used concerning community in the Old Testament is “fellowship.” Fellowship in the Old Testament as it relates to community comes from the word “*Echad*” meaning assembly or a congregation of Israelites.<sup>19</sup> An example of “*Echad*” meaning the whole assembly or group of Israelites comes in Leviticus 19:2, “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.’” The fellowship experienced in the Old Testament was between Israelites or Israelite converts. “*Echad*” also shows that the fellowship that God desires of His people is with both God and fellow man. Psalm 111:1 (Contemporary English Version CEV) says, “Shout praises to the Lord! With all my heart I will thank the Lord when his people meet.” Intimate fellowship exists when God’s people join together to praise Him as one united group.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 3161.

<sup>18</sup> Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1906), 403.

<sup>19</sup> Strong’s, 5712

In the New Testament, the idea of church community is illustrated from the Gospels to Revelation. Jesus laid out for the church the example of community. First, to arrive at the place of Christ's vision for the church, just like in the Old Testament, the word unity needs to be applied. In Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed that not only His Disciples, but all future believers would be one. John 17:21 says, "I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me." Jesus' desire for His new church was for them always to stay united and not just a casual unity but the same deep connection as He had with His Heavenly Father. The Greek word for unity is "*hēnōtēs or ἐνότης*," meaning unity or oneness.<sup>20</sup> Unity is the state of being one as a church. The actual state of being together is togetherness.

Second, the word togetherness in the Greek the word used is, "*hōmōthumadōn or ὁμοθυμαδόν*," combining two words to mean unanimously with one accord or (mind).<sup>21</sup> The combination of togetherness and one accord are used many times in the first two chapters of Acts. In Acts 1:14 while gathered in the Upper Room the Bible says, "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers." When discussing community in the Body of Christ, it is essential to combine these three: unity, togetherness, and fellowship.

A study of scripture shows that Jesus Himself was in community while on the earth. The word in the New Testament that is used to express community is, "*Koinonia or κοινωνία*," meaning communion and fellowship. Fellowship scripturally as it pertains to community is the shared time with fellow believers being in one accord. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "And let us

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 1775.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 3661.

consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Fellowship strengthens believers through unity existing to develop the individual and corporate Christian maturity, building an active community in a church body.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Since the beginning of this church, leaders have struggled to create an environment of reciprocal community. This project will focus on the lack of community in Jackson Baptist Church in Jackson, NJ. Jackson Baptist Church through a lack of mutual community has led to a decline in church attendance and the spiritual growth of its members. One will see that because of different cultures, and backgrounds language will cause limitations because of a different understanding of key terms. Jackson Baptist has many Jamaican Americans who understand the English language from the word usage found in Great Britain compared to American colloquialism.

This project will focus solely on Jackson Baptist Church and its current members. The church has a very large base of people from various backgrounds with Asian Americans, African Americans, Haitian Americans, Jamaican Americans, and Caucasians. About 75% of the regular church attenders come from a Catholic background. To get a complete understanding of reciprocal community amongst other churches and people groups would be very beneficial to the study; however, it is beyond the scope of this project because of time, expense, and traveling distance.

The focus of this project will be limited because of the concentration of one church. It will not focus primarily on small groups as the primary source for community. The small group

movement is one way to build a reciprocal community; however, it only focuses on a portion of the congregation this project will focus on developing active community in the whole congregation.

With a limited sampling pool, it will prevent gathering a complete picture of the present state of community in the church or the knowledge of community in the whole congregation. By ensuring that all areas of the congregation are researched limitations could exist following the awareness campaign and the post-test due to the whole leadership of the church not being researched which could cause a smaller buy in for change.

### **Thesis Statement**

Reciprocal Community was the vital piece to the success of the early church. This research will give an enhancement of the participants' understanding and desire to practice reciprocal community in Jackson Baptist Church. The project will offer ways from church history and scripture that will build reciprocal community once again among the people at JBC.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Foundations**

#### **Introduction**

Reciprocal Community is a topic that has extensive research conducted mainly from a theological perspective; however, what is missing is the practical ways a church can develop and gauge community within the church. To arrive at those deficiencies, a study must be conducted on the current research on community, and a study of the scripture in both Old and New Testaments. In modern writing today most research comes from the New Testament, but as this project shows to arrive at God's plan of community in the New Testament Church research must examine the Israelite people from the Old Testament. In this chapter, a literature review, a theological foundation, and a theoretical foundation. Through this research, the information gathered will be used to gauge current community and conduct an awareness class on community at Jackson Baptist Church.

#### **Literature Review**

##### **Books**

One of the most foundational books for this research project is *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Community* by Joseph Hellerman articulates an understanding of the role of community in the church. Hellerman explains how the early church functioned and explained the faults of the current church in its lack of community. It explains how in Jewish and Roman culture that the family dynamic differed from what it is today. In the early church, familial bloodlines mattered in relationship preference. However, the standard was that the family and group was the priority for people in those cultures. He wrote, "In the ancient world, a male regarded as immediate family (a) his father (from whom he had received



his blood), (b) his brothers and sisters (with whom he shared his blood), and (c) offspring of both genders (to whom he passed on his blood). Females, like males, viewed fathers and siblings as blood kin.”<sup>22</sup> This explained that within the First Century Jewish Culture that the family unit was vital and influenced the decisions of a person. Hellerman explains that this is the condition that Jesus had in mind when He established the church. The priority would go to the group over personal interests. This book is a beneficial study on Biblical community with an application for the modern church.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Christian who stood up to the Nazi regimen during World War II and paid for it with his life. In and out of concentration camps and other holdings Bonhoeffer penned many brilliant works mostly about discipleship. However, one of his books entitled, *Life Together*, is about the importance of community in a Christian's life. Bonhoeffer in this work shows that through community that the things of God will become more apparent to the church. This call of unity will bring about the heart of God. In Chapter One, Bonhoeffer explores unity and togetherness, and through his guidance can help a church be more effective in completing God's vision for it.

Gilbert Bilezikian is an excellent resource for community within the church; he like Hellerman examines the Biblical definition of community by looking at where the modern-day church gets it wrong. In *Community 101: Reclaiming the Church as a Community of Oneness* Bilezikian details how a church can efficiently and effectively incorporate community through a small group community. He believes that small groups are the most effective method to maintain closeness and togetherness. This is true as long as a large percentage of the church is involved in small groups. Bilezikians' idea of small groups being the only effective method is

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<sup>22</sup> Joseph Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 37.

limiting and hinders the usefulness of this book. Bilezikian also shows that by name Satan is a divider and as members of Christ's body, we should keep in mind by knowing it is Satan's goal to break the community of the church up and maintain divisions and dissensions.

Jerry Bridges is a great writer because of his ability for simplicity and directness of the topic. He, like Bonhoeffer, was a strong proponent of discipleship. Bridges ministered with the Navigators organization. In his book, *True Community: The Biblical Practice of Koinonia* Bridges explains how God Himself is about relationships and community and has created man to do the same. This is a complete portrait of how the church under the image of God was made to be in fellowship with each other through authentic, meaningful relationships and not the casual relationships that are in so many churches today. It is about partnerships with each other as Bridges says. This is a reliable source for this research because it explains that through union with God, we have union with man by the Holy Spirit.

Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson are the pastors in charge of the small group ministry at the mega-church Willow Creek in Illinois. Within Willow Creek, they have over 2700 small groups. In their book *Building a Church of Small Groups* Donahue and Robinson detail how Willow Creek went from a church with small groups to a church of small groups. This book explains how Willow Creek placed the small group ministries as a priority to build community. These men explain how humanity is instilled with a deep longing for community, and that small groups can help fulfill this desire. By looking at how small groups can help build reciprocal community in a church, this book proves to be a valuable research.

Mark Devers book, *The Compelling Community* describes how churches often build community apart from the Gospel. A fault that Devers finds with community-focused churches is that they often base the community off of common interest vice unexplainable relationships

that are started by the Holy Spirit. Dever explains that one can see in scripture how the Gospel and the Holy Spirit enabled people from opposite spectrums or lifestyles to unite under the cause of Christ. To have a compelling community, the Gospel must be center in all relationships within a church.

*The Trellis and the Vine* by Colin Marshall and Tony Payne is a call to pastors to take the focus away from programs and focus on discipleship. Marshall and Payne do a great job in stressing that discipleship is an essential part of God's plan for the church. They point out that the most important call in the Great Commission is not to go but to make disciples. This book is beneficial to the research in that Marshall and Payne detail a plan for the whole church to be involved in discipleship, even where the pastors are guiding while being a part of the disciple-making themselves. Taking a quote from Richard Baxter by saying that a pastor should focus on "personal catechizing and instructing the flock."<sup>23</sup> Through this pastor driven discipleship, it helps facilitate community by ensuring that all areas of leadership, as well as church attenders, are involved.

To lead the nation's largest small group ministry is a daunting task. Saddleback Church in California has over 3500 adult small groups, and Steve Gladen is the pastor of small groups. Christians often ask Gladen questions about small group, but as he mentions he never has the adequate time to answer those questions, and this was the driving force behind his book, *Small Groups with a Purpose*. Gladen can define small groups in a simple scriptural approach that shows that small group community fulfills both commandments by Christ, which is the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. This book is vital to the research because it makes a

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<sup>23</sup> Marshall, Colin, and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and The Vine* (Kingsford, NSW: Matthias Media, 2009) Location 1289, Kindle.

connection between community in a church and an active small group community.

Apathy and comfortability have plagued the church in America. Francis Chan, in his book *Crazy Love*, speaks about the dangers of comfort, “But God does not call us to be comfortable. He calls us to trust Him so completely that we are unafraid to put ourselves in situations where we will be in trouble if He does not come through.”<sup>24</sup> *Crazy Love* is unique to this project because Chan illustrates how, as believers, we are called into a discipleship relationship by God, and complacency is not an option. It connects an understanding that through an intimate relationship with Christ feeds into relationships with other believers.

Stepping out and following God with a whole heart is what makes Mike Breen's book so crucial about discipleship. In *Building a Discipling Culture*, Breen explains how the church has gone away from the discipleship that Jesus called all believers to and began focusing on churches and church attendance. To truly arrive at the discipleship of Christ and to maintain community, Breen explains that classroom-style discipleship is not the intended method of scripture, but a Christian should have a master or mentor that they learn from. Having active mentorship can assist the church in building intimate relationships that can help foster community.

*The Lost Art of Disciple Making* by Leroy Eims is often thought of as having a “cookie-cutter” approach universal for anybody to follow and have success. However, Eims details in this work that a personal touch must be added to every disciple-making process. Eims wrote, “True growth takes time and tears and love and patience.”<sup>25</sup> Careful attention to scripture is the defining piece of this book. This book supports the research because it gives the Biblical

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<sup>24</sup> Francis Chan, *Crazy Love*, (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008), 122.

<sup>25</sup> Leroy Elms, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 12

foundation for disciple-making, and disciple-making is a characteristic of community that is found in portions of the Bible like in Acts 2:42-47.

Bible engagement, obeying God and denying self, serving God and others, sharing Christ, exercising faith, seeking God, building relationships, and unashamed transparency are the attributes of discipleship that are laid out in the book *Transformational Discipleship*. This unique book is a take from over 4000 responses sent to people who practice daily discipleship. The researcher sees this book to be helpful to the study in that they study the common traits of an individual disciple in-depth. By using this book, it helps to see if the people of Jackson Baptist Church consider the same traits to be important in their lives.

Society today seems to be heading toward an individualistic culture. Bursch writes, “With each generation, there has been a greater rejection of group identity and a stronger codifying of the priority of individuality.”<sup>26</sup> As an introvert, Douglas Bursch was one that struggled with the desire to stay away from fellowship with other believers. In *the Community of God*, Bursch said, “For humans to be fully human, we must be in community.”<sup>27</sup> The book draws from Genesis to Revelation the importance and design by God for His followers to be in community. *The Community of God* assists this research by using the information on both the Old and New Testament community.

The saying “disciples who make disciples” is a trendy statement in churches today. This statement is used in many mission statements. The mission statement at Jackson is love God, love others, and make disciples. However, the disciple-making process is missing in the church. Discipleship is often discussed but often not carried out. However, this is not only a problem

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<sup>26</sup> Daniel Bursch, *The Community of God: A Theology of the Church from a Reluctant Pastor*, (Seattle: Fairly Spiritual, 2017), 16.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 43.

with the churches but also individuals. Gallaty wrote, “While the shortcomings of the church in discipleship cannot be overlooked, it is also true that many professing Christians never commit to a growing relationship with the Lord.”<sup>28</sup> In his book, *Growing Up*, Gallaty explains the scriptural background to discipleship but also discovers spiritual disciplines that help drive discipleship in a church. This book assists the research in showing Gallaty's discipleship methods, which he describes, should be in everyone's life. He explains that the believer should be in a relationship groups of 3-5 people for 12-18 months. These types of mentoring relationships are assisting building community at JBC.

The essence of the church has seemed to change since the days of the early church found in passages like Acts 2:42-47. People stay to themselves more as culture is becoming individualistic. Van Gelder writes, “It is a people of God who are created by the Spirit to live as a missionary community. As such, the church is both a social organization and a spiritual community. (Note that the word ‘social,’ as it is used here and throughout the rest of this book, refers to a ‘human community of persons in relationship with one another.’)”<sup>29</sup> As the researcher has pointed out JBC is struggling with shallow relationships as they lack true reciprocal community and *The Essence of the Church* by Craig Van Gelder has assisted the researcher in finding ways to bring back the essence of the Jackson Baptist that once existed in the 1970s and '80s which was built on strong community.

Human beings are born with a capacity for relationships. Humanity is not meant to live in isolation. In the beginning pages of scripture, God gave Adam a helper named Eve. This helper was created to build a relationship with Adam. God said, “It is not good for the man to

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<sup>28</sup> Robby Gallaty, *Growing Up: How to be a Disciple who makes Disciples*, (Nashville: B&H Academic., 2013), 10.

<sup>29</sup> Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of Church*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 25.

be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” (Genesis 2:18) God has designed us to be in relationship with Him and other humans. Steve Chalke wrote, “if God is community, a person can never become his or her true self in isolation apart from society. Humanity is designed with not only the capacity but also the need for community.”<sup>30</sup> Using *The Intelligent Church* by Steve Chalke develops the research by providing a scriptural background on God's design for community in the church looking through the lens of how to apply it in the twenty-first-century church.

In a culture riddled with individualism, many believers miss out on the call by God for the church to be in community. *Jesus and Community* by Gerhard Lohfink were written to establish the overall belief of the church becoming the new Israel. This research does not pertain to that topic and will not address it; however, this book spends a considerable amount of time on showing that as a community a church should be a counter society compared to the world around them. God established the church to serve as an indicator of the life-changing power of the Gospel. Through the research on community that is found in this project, the focus was in the certain areas on how community is lived out in the societies around Jackson Baptist.

Robert Banks, in his book *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Cultural Setting*, draws out many ideas that are detailed in the New Testament of community in the church. In one section, Banks explains the number of metaphors that Paul uses for community in the church. One that Paul used was a family Banks describes this by saying, “So numerous are these, and so frequently do they appear, that the comparison of the Christian community with a ‘family’ must be regarded as the most significant metaphorical

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<sup>30</sup> Steve Chalke, *The Intelligent Church: A Journey Towards Christ-Centered Community*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 19.

usage of all.”<sup>31</sup> This book supports the research in that in the early years, it drew people to Jackson Baptist because of the family type atmosphere; however, over the years, this has decreased. As alluded to earlier in the project after a failed assessment, the church divided, which is a reliable indicator of a lack of community because, in genuine community, people work through trouble. This philosophy will be explained in more detail later in the project.

Real community in the church rests on people, not just having certain commonalities or shared interests. The New Testament shows intimate and personal relationships like the one found with Paul and Timothy. A monk from Northern England Aelred of Rievaulx wrote this book of three short dialogues that explains the deep personal relationships that God calls us to. *Spiritual Friendship* explains how true spiritual friendship is built on “agape” love and is Christ-centered. One fault that current attenders have at Jackson Baptist is shallow friendships. The research will show how people believe that their intimate relationships are found outside of the church. *Spiritual Friendship* helps develop methods and concepts of building and maintaining intimate relationships amongst the attendees of JBC.

Self-segregation is a problem in many churches in North America. As we seek to maintain unity and togetherness with fellow Christians, often unaware people migrate to groups similar to them. *All Together Different* by J. Brian Tucker and John Koessler is a unique approach to unity in that the book addresses race and ethnicity as it pertains to unity within a church. As stated earlier in the project, Jackson Baptist is a diverse church with groups from Jamaica, China, Japan, Haiti, the Philippines, and others. This is special because to have community at JBC care must be given to the various cultures but not allowing cultural differences to be a dividing factor. However, these differences can be embraced, but they must

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<sup>31</sup> Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Cultural Setting*, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), 48.



not be form division. Pastor Tony Evans speaking on this book states, “The church is the place where racial, gender, and class distinctions are no longer to be divisive because of our unity in Christ (Galatians 3:28). This does not negate differences that remain intact—oneness simply means that those differences are embraced.”<sup>32</sup> In Jackson Baptist Church, it is essential to understand the cultures of the attendees while ensuring that those backgrounds are embraced while at the same time, ensuring that Christian unity is maintained. This book develops ways to embrace cultural identities while ensuring unity and togetherness are in place.

*Communitas* is said to be a deeper form of community and one that mirrors that of the relationships and ministry of Jesus. The word *communitas* signifies a strong bond that is developed in people with similar transitions. Alan Hirsch is one leader within the church today of the missional movement. Hirsch and others attempt to bring the New Testament understanding of the church back into the church of today. In his book, *The Forgotten Ways* Hirsch describes ways that people can become missional in building strong relationships with fellow believers and the lost. This book is vital in this research by developing an understanding of *Communitas* and compare it to the real reciprocal community that will be discussed in this project.

### **Journal Articles**

In the book of Acts, the church multiplied exponentially. Chapters like Acts 2 details that fellowship and community were integral pieces in that growth. In *The Depiction of Church Growth in Acts* by Benjamin Wilson, the author dissects the growth in Acts 2 as it relates to community. This article is a detailed study of the whole book of Acts and details the growth

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<sup>32</sup> Tucker, J. Brian, and John Koessler. *All Together Different: Upholding the Church's Unity While Honoring Our Individual Identities* (Chicago: Moody, 2018), Location 1655, Kindle.

that took place in the early church.

Michiels writes an article that is masterfully put together by examining the first Christian community in Jerusalem. *The Model of Church in the First Christian Community of Jerusalem: Ideal and Reality* looks at how the Christian community in Jerusalem grew following the Resurrection of Christ. The church pastored by Jesus' brother James grew to a hundred thousand in a brief time, and as Michiels explains, community aided this growth.

*Calvin, Luther and Church Unity* by I.W.C. Van Wyk takes the perspective of two church fathers instrumental in the Protestant movement and examines their teachings on church unity. This article assists the research by giving examples of church unity and community that existed amongst cultural divides. These men in leading the Reformation helped people from many countries become one in the church. The people would not have been very familiar with community as they just left the Catholic Church who was dealing with much corruption.

From South Africa, Takesure Mahohoma is written an article on Acts 2:42 and looking at the Key Greek Word Koinonia. *Difficult Texts: Koinonia Acts 2:42*, examines the effectiveness of the early church to reach people because of the community that they all had. He links it to deep friendships that were developed to help the church grow. This article is useful to the research because it examines how all the activity shown in Acts 2:42-47 of the church was directly related to their community as a people.

The critical element that should be at the center of spiritual friendships at the church is one's relationship with Christ. In the research, discipleship is one of three methods that are used to foster and measure community, however, often in churches, people are friends, and their relationship with God is not a part of the relationship. Lifeway Research conducted a study and produced an article from the research entitled, *Churchgoers, Build Relationships, but Often*

*Without Discipleship*. This is a problem as well at JBC; there are a few people who are engaged in small groups or a mentoring/discipleship relationship. Scott McConnell writes, “For much of church history, small groups or classes have been one of the most effective ways churches offer for attendees to connect with others, study the Bible and serve together,” said McConnell. “This avenue of seeking God together is both relational and devotional.”<sup>33</sup> The goal of this project is to develop the relationship that McConnell speaks of by deepening their relationships with God first and then with fellow believers.

The current state of discipleship in North America seems to either be struggling or flourishing depending upon who is asked. Barna group research showed that people in churches see the current state of discipleship through a different lens. In *New Research on the State of Discipleship*, Barna surveyed both church attenders and church leaders. These two groups had opposite views on discipleship. In the group of church attenders, they said, “Additionally, two-thirds of Christians who have attended church in the past six months and consider spiritual growth important say their church places ‘a lot’ of emphasis on spiritual growth (67%).”<sup>34</sup> However, the church leaders had a different perspective, “Church leaders, conversely, tend to believe the opposite is true. Only 1 percent say, today’s churches are doing very well at discipling new and young believers.”<sup>35</sup> The research in this article shows that regardless of how people feel about spiritual maturity and growth discipleship programs in churches are at an all-time low. With true discipleship not taking place in most churches to include Jackson Baptist,

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<sup>33</sup> Earls, Aaron. “*Churchgoers Build Relationships, but Often Without Discipleship*,” Lifeway Research, May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019, accessed August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/05/08/churchgoers-build-relationships-but-often-without-discipleship/>

<sup>34</sup> “*New Research on the State of Discipleship*,” Barna Group, December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015, accessed July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <https://www.barna.com/research/new-research-on-the-state-of-discipleship/>.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

intimate relationships cannot take place. Real spiritual community is found within both relationships with God and other believers. Having this statistical evidence supports not only the research but the awareness class each participant of the research will take.

Various groups have conducted much research about church involvement and the factors that make up those who are heavily involved. The Barna group in *Who is Active in "Group" Expressions of Faith? Barna Study Examines Small Groups, Sunday School, and House Churches* examined people from across the United States and surveyed whether they attended these different forms of church involvement. The factors studied were regions, gender, age, and denominations. Following all the research, Barna found that the person who would fall in the category of most involved would be a married woman in her fifties. The largest group of those involved in church ministries at JBC are women over 50. It is imperative in this research to get younger people, especially the men under fifty to be more involved in church activities which can help build community.

The amount of play that people have in their lives has a direct influence on the togetherness that's shared in a church community group. Barna defines that play is activities that are shared with other people like watching TV., sharing breakfast, and other shared things. Barna's explains this in his article *The Link Between Fun and Faith in Our Homes*.

"Welcoming guests, watching TV, sharing breakfast, and other routines and rituals are also common in households that carve out time to read the Bible, pray or talk about God together. Conversely, households that do not engage in faith-based group activities are much more likely to say they do not do anything together (31% of those who do not have spiritual conversations,

23% of those who do not pray or read the Bible together).”<sup>36</sup> Togetherness is missing in many churches, especially at Jackson Baptist, there is a connection; however intimate, deep relationships are missing. The church families benefit by developing “playtime” in their homes and become more welcoming to people in the church and community.

The Barna Group researched in 2016 and developed the article *The State of the Church*; there was some alarming research conducted on born-again believers in America. Although 73-75% claim to be Christians and even pray to God, the relationships and church attendance is dipping lower.<sup>37</sup> “When a variable like church attendance is added to the mix, a majority becomes the minority. When a self-identified Christian attends a religious service at least once a month and says their faith is vital in their life, Barna considers that person a practicing Christian.” Using these criteria, only 31% would be classified as a practicing born-again believer. This decline is evident in Jackson Baptist. People that have been part of the church place a small priority on church attendance and church involvement. It is challenging to develop community within a culture that does not place a significant emphasis on attending church and involvement in ministries. The numbers at JBC are off from the number of members to the actual amount of true church attenders. The article shows if the trend of declining church attendance relates to a lack of community at JBC.

Millennials are people born from 1981 to 1996. This age group is often missing in churches across the nation. Jackson Baptist has a group of young adults and young families; however, the problem is that these people are not highly involved outside of the Sunday service. It is vital to develop a sense of need for community within these young people. The Barna

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<sup>36</sup> “*The Link Between Fun and Faith in Our Homes.*” Barna Research, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019, Date Accessed July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019.

<sup>37</sup> “*The State of the Church.*” Barna Research, September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Date Accessed August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019.

research group conducted a study on what millennials look for in the church and community was listed in the study. *Designing Worship Spaces with Millennials in Mind* offers some great insight into the mindset of the Christian millennial. Within the research, it was discovered that 78% of millennials crave community over privacy.<sup>38</sup> It is interesting to see that the push for most churches, as Barna points out, is often aimed at privacy like loud and dark services which this research shows is not valid. It is important to see in Jackson Baptist Church why the millennial generation is lacking in church involvement outside of the Sunday service.

Godwin Sathianathan, a pastor in Massachusetts, wrote an article for the Gospel Coalition entitled *Grow a Disciple-Making Culture in Your Church*. This article explores the how-to on making disciples within a church. Sathianathan explains ways that a church can become a disciple-making place. One method is people to people ministry. Discipleship is one method in measuring community within a church. Jackson Baptist implemented two years ago, a small group ministry; however, true discipleship is often found in mentoring type relationships, as Godwin argues. He also describes in this article the importance of having a small group ministry. At Jackson Baptist, only 50-60 people are active within groups, and this cuts back on building community as it reaches only a small number. Godwin explains to develop community that the second most crucial ministry next to Sunday service should be small groups. In this article, Sathianathan explains ways to foster community through discipleship and small groups. This helps identify ways to build stronger groups and foster mentoring that will build community.

Community is related to unity within a church. Community is common unity meaning

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<sup>38</sup> “*Designing Worship Spaces with Millennials in Mind*.” Barna Research, November 5th, 2014, Date Accessed August 1st, 2019.

that the group of believers joined together as a whole. In an article In Die Skriflig entitled *Calvin, Luther, and Church Unity* is beneficial to the research by describing the effects of church community during a pivotal time in the church history when the Protestant Church was forming from the Roman Catholic Church. The article explains that John Calvin and Martin Luther longed to see the church unite even to where Calvin stated he did not desire to see the Catholic Church split but be cleansed of its sin. This article promotes a one universal church. Although this article is not about denominations, the researcher feels that denominations can be a reliable source of building community; however, it should not be built solely on people in the same denominations. Denominations should work together to be the body of Christ as a big community.

Acts 2:42-47 is the beginning of the New Testament Church following Pentecost. Once the roughly 100 people received the Holy Spirit and began speaking in known tongues, Peter would deliver a fiery message about Jesus. Three thousand people came to Christ following that sermon. This new church began fulfilling all that Jesus spoke of. Within this new church, we see an example of a Godly community and the effect that it had on everyone in Jerusalem and the outlying areas. James Dunn wrote an article about the *Model of Christian Community in the New Testament*, which shows the community in that first church to the examples of other New Testament churches found in scripture. This is an excellent resource in that Dunn “combs” through scripture to draw out the times that the Biblical writers were discussing community. The article supports the researcher in the Theological foundations.

### **Dictionaries**

*New Strong's Dictionary of Hebrew and Greek Words* is a resource by James Strong. This resource is a detailed look at the Hebrew and Greek words of the Bible. This project used

Strong's work to examine keywords on unity, community, communion, fellowship, and togetherness from the original writings. Often in English translations, words lose their power from the original writings of the Bible in an attempt to find an English word equivalent. Strong's provides the researcher with the ability to view the words related to this study in the original language, and this assists proper exegesis.

### **Dissertations and Theses**

In today's church, people often use technology as a means to be a part of the church. The technology often used is watching worship services online, and also some churches are using online small groups. Joel Peter Jupp wrote a dissertation for Asbury Theological Seminary examining the practices of having online small groups and how they affect community in a church. This will be an essential piece to the research to discover these new practices of using media to attend church services and studies while examining their effects on community.

Consumerism in churches has assisted in the decline of community in churches like Jackson Baptist. People often arrive at the church late and leave before the services are over. In Craig E. Peters dissertation at Northeastern Seminary, he examines moving past consumerism and recapturing the "power" of the church. There are people in the church at Jackson Baptist who leave no time for fellowship and togetherness as they sit for the service, and they immediately leave. This dissertation will assist the research by discovering methods to get away from consumerism and back to community.

### **Theological Foundations**

The basis for this project is the reciprocal community where among believers, mutual giving is experienced by every member of the church body (Acts 2:44). This includes the



theological and theoretical basis for community. One can see the beginnings of God's design for community from the beginning of scripture. God set a precedent at the beginning of humanity for the need for community; Genesis 2:18 says, "The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'" God establishes the need for community because God is in community with Himself. Genesis 1:26 reveals that while God made Adam, He was in community with Himself. The Trinity details that God is in community. The Nicene Creed explained the relationship of the Trinity. It stated:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.... And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified.

God detailed that when someone is in relation with Him, they must live in community with like-minded people.

In the Old Testament scripture, one can see God's call for His people to live in community. Even as early as the time of Abraham, God spoke to His people, explaining the importance to be with like-minded people in different forms of community (Gn. 12:5). This desire of God to establish community would be furthered with the nation of Israel. Now God had a people that He would stay in community with for thousands of years. However, in the Old Testament, the people of Israel had different standards for community. The people of God in the

Old Testament were the nation of Israel. If an outsider wanted to join their community, they would have to proselyte or be a newcomer to Israel. How community existed through the Israelite people was through fellowship, togetherness, and unity.

An example of fellowship in the Old Testament is found in Psalm 102:22. In this passage, God is establishing His call to fellowship with both Him and the fellow Israelites for the people. Psalm 102:22 “when the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship the LORD.” This passage of scripture showed the fellowship that comes through a relationship with God as God’s people come together in community to worship Him. Through a relationship with God, one can have fellowship with others, and this applies to believers today. By the Holy Spirit, we have fellowship with other believers.

Fellowship was a big part in various holidays for the Israelites one being Sukkoth or the Feast of Booths. Within this holiday the Jewish people were to live in outside booths and share a communal meal every evening. Leviticus 23:41-42 describes the festival, “Celebrate this as a festival to the Lord for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month. Live in temporary shelters for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in such shelters.” It was through various festivals that the Jewish people would also fellowship outside of the temple. This fellowship would carry over to the days of Jesus as you can see within His first miracle that a community of people fellowshiped at a wedding. (John 2) Fellowship with fellow believers is essential to God's people with evidence given in both Old and New Testament scripture.

One of the most beautiful examples of unity in the nation of Israel in the Old Testament was a tradition during the three pilgrimage festivals, which are Passover, Pentecost, and Feast of the Booths. The city of Jerusalem was set upon a hill. Upon traveling up the hill, the people

of Israel would sing a group of songs that are recorded in Psalms 120-134. What a beautiful image of spiritual unity. Psalm 133:1 says, “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!” When the people of God are united, God can complete His plan for that group of people. This is why the Devil is motivated to prevent unity amongst God's people. King David knew of this pleasant atmosphere that takes place when believers are united.

Also, within the Old Testament prophets, we see that Israel was being punished for their sins and was taken captive. Following the death of Solomon, the kingdom divided; however, God longed for Israel to be united as one again. Ezekiel 37:19 shows this, “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am going to take the stick of Joseph—which is in Ephraim’s hand—and of the Israelite tribes associated with him and join it to Judah’s stick. I will make them into a single stick of wood, and they will become one in my hand.” It was God’s plan for Israel before the time of Christ to be united as one, and this plan is clear in New Testament scripture as the research will show later on.

Togetherness differs from unity in that togetherness is the act of being together. To examine this in Old Testament scripture, one should look at two things. The first being together in worship of God. Psalm 95:6, “Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.” God desires that His people gather to worship Him. In ensuring that worshipping and honoring God is a church’s top priority God will be able to utilize that church according to His purpose as He did with Abraham when he was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac. Genesis 22:18 says, “and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.” Second, Proverbs 27:17 says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” Through togetherness, God's people can strengthen each other. The New Testament mentions this mindset as well to encourage and strengthen each other in our

Christian walk when a believer is in need. Galatians 6:2, “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.” Togetherness through worshipping as one and supporting fellow believers is essential in building community.

The Israelites took their togetherness further than acts of worship these individuals spent significant time together or assembled. They fought wars together, shared meals and homes, and often conducted daily activities in community. The early church showed this as well in Acts 2. They were together, and as a result, multitudes were saved. The same Spirit that inhabited the early church is available for God’s Church today.

God's own son would come in the form of a man to live a sinless life to be the propitiation for humanity’s sin. While on the earth, his Son, Jesus established a community with twelve chosen followers called disciples. (Lk. 6:13-14) The disciples and Jesus would over three years grow in unity with one another. The teachings that Jesus gave to His disciples were passed down following the Ascension. Peter as the leader of the disciples and the new Church stated in his epistle regarding unity, “Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.” (I Peter 3:8) He spoke of togetherness in I Peter 4:8 by stating, “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.” The beloved Disciple John spoke of the fellowship that the church should have with each other and God in I John 1:3. The principles stayed the same; however, God, through the death of His Son, would establish a new community with His church or called out ones. These new chosen ones were commanded to remain in community with each other. (Heb. 10:25)

A great example of community is found in Acts 2:42-47. This passage of scripture shows God's desire for His Church. In this passage, there are many principles taught; however, for the sake of this project, the focus will be on community:

<sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

In this example, one can see a church body who daily devoted themselves to learning and being with fellow believers daily. These people shared everything, even if it meant selling personal possessions. This is the very beginning of the early church after the Ascension of Christ. As in the Old Testament, the makings of real community revolve around three other words that reinforce the idea of community in the Bible. These three words, unity, togetherness, and fellowship are evident in this passage. Verse 44 details how the early church was together and had everything in common. This was a practice that showed the church was unified in the care of the church and its people. Ajith Fernando, in his commentary using Acts 4:32-35 and relating it to Acts 2:44 to further understand the benefits of the shared property. The benefit was a deep unity. "Luke first presents what was at the heart of the practice of sharing—a deep unity. In the Gospels, the disciples often quarreled among each other and had to be corrected by Jesus; but in Acts, the Twelve are a unified group, and this unity now spreads to the entire church. This is often the case: When the leaders are united, it helps the members to be united too."<sup>39</sup> This early

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<sup>39</sup> Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 131.

church also spent everyday day together learning the Apostles teaching, in the temple, and each other's homes. Verse 46 says, "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts." This group also fellowshiped with each other in verse 42; one can see that they fellowshiped together through Bible study and sharing of meals. One should examine these three words in the Gospels and Epistles.

Reciprocal Community can be defined as when a church has equal members in value united in a shared vision, joined as one people, and in true meaningful fellowship with both God and fellow believers. Further definitions of the three following terms can be found in the key terms section of this project in Chapter 1. First, unity is derived from the word "*Henotes*." Unity also means oneness, "*Henotes*" is manifested through the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. Ephesians 4:3 says, "Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace."<sup>40</sup> Unity became a reality with believers through the work of Christ. Christians have the unity of Spirit in that through the death of Jesus, unity and peace have been accomplished. However, this unity of Spirit must be attained. Ephesians 4:13 says, "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."<sup>41</sup> When people attain the unity of the faith, God can use that church according to His plan.

Paul even warned the church to stay united and to ward off divisions. It says in I Corinthians 1:10, "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you,

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<sup>40</sup> Ephesians 4:3, New Living Translation

<sup>41</sup> Ephesians 4:13, English Standard Version

but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.” Divisions take away from the effectiveness of the church because when believers fight and divide, then the church's effectiveness suffers. Jesus even warned of this by saying that when a kingdom is divided, it will fall. (Mark 3:24)

Churches often lose their unity because of selfishness that eventually causes divisions. It was divisions like this that caused a split at Jackson Baptist Church four years ago that resulted in one hundred people leaving. The researcher feels that the community of JBC suffers because of this division and split. Chapter 1 discusses this in detail.

Togetherness is an essential part of community in the church of Jesus. Togetherness is when united believers are assembled with one mind. The Greek word used is *homothumadon* meaning unanimously with one mind. Jesus, in His actual prayer before his arrest asked the Father to make all believers one as He and God were. The disciples were a close-knit group that remained together after the Ascension of Christ in Acts 1. Acts 2:1 finds them at Pentecost gathered in the Upper Room praying. It says in Acts 2:21, “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place.” The mighty movement of the Spirit would fill the room, and the Church of Jesus would start from these believers who were gathered together.

Throughout Acts and the Epistles, the togetherness of the church remained. In Acts 4, through the act of togetherness, God moved in the group of believers that were gathered in prayer. Acts 4:31 says, “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” When the early church met and united in one purpose and physically together, the power was on them. Paul even spoke of his desire to see the church together physically and united spiritually. Philippians 2:2 says, “then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in

spirit and of one mind.” Paul found joy in seeing the church together, and God used the togetherness of the church to do extraordinary things.

Last, fellowship with God and fellow Christians is part of the definition of community. The Greek word for fellowship is “*Koinonia*.” I John 1:3 says, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” Fellowship in the English language is when people commune together who share a common interest. The common interest of the church should be to have fellowship with both God and man. This call to two modes of fellowship has been ordained by God since before the Israelites crossed into the Promised Land and also reiterated by Jesus as the greatest commandments. To love God with your everything and to love your neighbor as yourself. (Deuteronomy 6:5-6 and Matthew 22:39-40)

Peter, in his epistle, also instructed the people of the church to be in fellowship outside of church gatherings. I Peter 4:9 says, “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” Peter longed to see the church being hospitable to those in need, but at the same time to each other. It will be presented in the research on how taking the principles of hospitality shown in the New Testament that a church can develop a stronger community.

Jackson Baptist Church is missing reciprocal community amongst its members. The theological basis that was just discussed shows that there is a deficiency in the congregation of unity, togetherness, and fellowship. Following a split within the church several years ago, the people that remained seem to be shy of going all-in as they did at first. The review of the data will show the ramifications of the split. This will be discussed in Chapter Four of this project. At Jackson Baptist Church community is experienced amongst a select few in the congregation; however, many people seem left to themselves. It is easy for one to see in scripture from start to



end that God desires for His people to be in community through fellowship, unity, and togetherness. As a church, the people of Jackson Baptist should follow the outlined plan of community established in the scriptures and become intentional in establishing reciprocal community amongst all of its members. The theoretical basis for the paper will explain the current trends of community and a basis on how to implement among the people of Jackson Baptist Church.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Looking at the definition of reciprocal community, there are many facets and methods that people have used over the years. Most research in the area of real church community revolves around small groups, discipleship, and church involvement. As stated in the statement of the problem above this ideal of community is what this researcher believes is aiding in the decline of churches. Community should be found in more than small groups, as groups only reach a percentage of the church and not the whole. Although, these methods help build community true reciprocal community goes beyond just discipleship and church involvement.

Small groups are an essential way to introduce community in a church. These groups allow people to come together under the common goal of growing in relationship and knowledge of the Lord while growing closer to the people within their group. The problem is that even though this is a way to build community; the reality is a small number of a church will be involved in groups. There are roughly 500 members of Jackson Baptist Church. Out of those 500, only 20 percent are in small groups, which is slightly higher than the national average of 16%.<sup>42</sup> This equates to 100 members and regular attendees in small groups.

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<sup>42</sup> "The State of the Church," Barna.com, Google, last modified September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016, <https://www.barna.com/research/state-church-2016/>

There is also an area of concern in relying on small groups for Jackson Baptist Church in that the average age of regular attendees in the church is over 50. The Barna group researched to show that older Christians attend most small group ministries nationally in churches. “One of the challenges for churches that rely on small group strategies is that they are the ‘oldest’ form of participatory faith expression (median age of 56) and they are least likely to include parents of young children.”<sup>43</sup> Only using small groups as an indicator of community at Jackson Baptist Church presents a problem in that 65% of small group members are over 50 and a large piece of the lack of community exists in members under 50.

There are inherent benefits to small groups within a church, and research has been conducted on the benefits. Small groups within a church are intentional in building relationships as long as the leader ensures the participation and group building with all the people in the group. Groups can be a way to strengthen Sunday services as many churches use the Sunday morning message to be studied within the groups the week that follows. Rod Dempsey wrote, “Your pastor's sermon (which is a great way to reinforce and live out what is being taught and ties your group to the church's weekend services and larger church body).”<sup>44</sup> This connection can assist in conversations leading to more in-depth community amongst the believers in a church. As Michael Lawrence wrote in an article for 9Marks stated how small group leaders could assist a larger church in shepherding the church when the numbers get too large for paid staff and church leaders. Lawrence wrote, “As a church grows, small group leaders increasingly

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<sup>43</sup> “Who is Active in “Group” Expressions of Faith? Barna Study Examines Small Groups, Sunday School, and House Churches,” Barna.com, Google, Last modified June 28th, 2010, <https://www.barna.com/research/who-is-active-in-group-expressions-of-faith-barna-study-examines-small-groups-sunday-school-and-house-churches/>

<sup>44</sup> Dempsey, Rod, and Dave Earley, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups* (Lynchburg: Liberty University Press, 2015), Location 1127, Kindle.

do important ministry and pastoral care. Less and less is it possible for staff elders, or even all the elders, to know everyone in the church.”<sup>45</sup> Even with the weaknesses, small groups if appropriately conducted, can assist in community. This is discussed in Chapter One.

Discipleship is also a problematic stand-alone indicator of community. Often in discipleship group settings, it becomes more about the knowledge and not about relationships. Dynamic discipleship groups can assist the believer in their fellowship with God, but they lack in the second part of the Great Commandment in loving others. In a study on discipleship conducted by Lifeway Research, they found that most churchgoers have built relationships with others in a discipleship setting; however, they would not classify them as a significant relationship. Scott McConnell said, “In an American culture in which significant relationships are hard to form, most churchgoers have had at least some success at making friends at church,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. “But the majority are not as confident as they could be about the significance of those relationships.”<sup>46</sup> The discipleship groups at Jackson Baptist have been more about building a foundation in fellowship with God, but they often do not foster an environment for significant relationships to be built with fellow believers in the church.

One of the strongest parts of discipleship is being able to foster relationships built upon the Spirit. These discipling relationships help foster a relationship that is built upon the Holy Spirit and can overcome any roadblock in personalities that exist. One can see in scripture that God used relationships like John and Peter or Paul although, personality-wise they were

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<sup>45</sup> Lawrence, Michael. “Using Small Groups to Cultivate Fellowship,” 9Marks.org, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010, accessed June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019, <https://www.9marks.org/article/using-small-groups-cultivate-fellowship/>.

<sup>46</sup> “Churchgoers Build Relationships, But Often Without Discipleship,” Lifewayresearch.com, Google, last modified May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/05/08/churchgoers-build-relationships-but-often-without-discipleship/>

different but were brought together by the Holy Spirit. Mark Devers speaks of this “supernatural” type of discipling community that is built by the power of the Holy Spirit by bringing people together who ordinarily have nothing in common but now do because of the Gospel. Devers wrote, “When community in the local church defies natural explanation, it confirms the supernatural power of the gospel.”<sup>47</sup> Discipleship is one way to build community within the church. Effective methods of ensuring discipleship groups are also producing an environment for community are explored in Chapter 1.

Church involvement is also a problematic philosophy alone to determine community in Jackson Baptist Church and most churches in the United States because the older generations often are the ones that are more involved. The Barna group discovered this in their research on church involvement; they state that “Conventional wisdom suggests that older adults are more likely to participate spiritually, and the Barna research confirmed such thinking. Two-thirds of small group attendees as well as house church participants and three-fifths of church volunteers and Sunday school goers were ages 45 or older.”<sup>48</sup> Regarding church involvement problems arise using this method alone to gauge community is that women are the ones likely to make up the numbers involving church involvement. “A majority of weekly churchgoers are women (53%). Small groups that meet for prayer or Bible study (60%) and Sunday school programs for adults (59%) are also more likely to be attended by women. Similarly, a majority of church volunteers (57%) are females.”<sup>49</sup>

In a study conducted on church involvement within the African-American Church,

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<sup>47</sup> Devers, Mark and Jamie Dunlop, *The Compelling Community*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 40.

<sup>48</sup> Barna, “Who is Active in ‘Group’ Expressions of Faith.”

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

research showed that “Religious organizations can also help individuals to develop a personal and social identity. In a congregation, people can experience a sense of belonging, of being valued, of being protected and of being “at home.”<sup>50</sup> This research shows that church involvement can help build community resulting in people feeling at “home.” Church involvement is a portion of the ways to measure community, and those methods are shown in Chapter One.

In this research, work will be done to examine if all three factors, small groups, discipleship, and church involvement, are useful in developing community, while seeking to discover places and people who lack unity, togetherness, and fellowship. The existing resources suggest the need for a study on reciprocal community in a whole church, and therefore this researcher led a project like this at JBC. It will research church leadership, long-time servants, and casual worship service attendees. The lecture and interactive-participative methods will be used. It will be the goal to offer this class only live and not in video. The reasoning behind this is through interactive methods like ice breakers and practical application through these examples it will show active togetherness. The video method will not be used as the class attendees will see that togetherness is an effective method in building community. Once the two-hour class is concluded, the participants will retake the same test that they took before the class, and data will be reviewed and presented.

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<sup>50</sup> Chaney, Cassondra, “The Benefits of Church Involvement for African-Americans” *Journal of Religion and Society Volume 10* (2008): 1-23, accessed May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019, <http://moses.creighton.edu/JRS/2008/2008-7.pdf>

## **Thesis Project Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

After a thorough study of scripture, journal articles, and books, these resources will build a basis on what real Biblical reciprocal community looks like. It will be imperative for functional questions for the pre-test/post-test to be derived from this comprehensive study. Working off this definition of reciprocal community, the researcher will ensure that proper attention is given in developing the means to make the church body aware of the Bible's actual definition of community. Also, in the awareness campaign, it is imperative to ensure that research is conducted on the knowledge before the class on community through the pre-test. After the class, an analysis will then be conducted, which is the post-test. The methods on who, how, and what will be furthered discussed within this chapter. The working definition of reciprocal community can be defined as when a church has equal members in value united in a shared vision, joined as one people, and in true meaningful fellowship with both God and fellow believers.

### **Explanation of Chosen Subjects**

In the initial process of this research, a study was conducted on the leadership of Jackson Baptist Church about their knowledge, ideas, and current participation in the reciprocal community at JBC. After some examination, it proved that this could be problematic because traditionally, leaders in the church are heavily involved and typically have relationships built with other leaders within the church. Lifeway Research with Aaron Earls serving as the editor found that the more one attends church functions directly relates to the significant relationships

that they build in the church. Speaking on significant relationships amongst churchgoers, Lifeway research states, “Unsurprisingly, those who attend worship services more frequently—four times a month or more—are more likely to confirm strongly they have developed such relationships than those who attend less frequently (47% to 33%).”<sup>51</sup> In conducting this research with only the leadership at JBC, would present a problem because most of the leaders have developed intimate and lasting relationships within the church. Only researching leaders would not give an accurate “snapshot” of the reciprocal community in the church.

Without the study being done on different groups within the entire church body, then as the researcher, the findings would have been flawed and also not an accurate sign of the present state of community at Jackson Baptist Church. Three groups would be formed to attempt at gathering an accurate vision of the current state of reciprocal community within the church. Stated in Chapter One JBC is seeing new visitors attending every week, but the problem lies in keeping not just the visitors but also the casual attendees that have been coming for a while; however, they are not involved in church functions, i.e., small groups, discipleship groups, and serving in ministries. This played an essential part in identifying participants in that this group needed to be included in the research. Participants in this study would come from three groups these groups were leadership, long-term servants, and frequent worship service attenders.

Once the three categories were established for where the participants would be chosen from, the researcher began looking over the database at Jackson Baptist. JBC uses a database of visitors, regular attenders, and members through the software company Servant Keeper. Servant

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<sup>51</sup> Lifeway Research. “Churchgoers Build Relationships, but often without Discipleship.” Lifeway Research.com November 25, 2019. <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/05/08/churchgoers-build-relationships-but-often-without-discipleship/>

Keeper allows a report to be formed based on the criteria that the user chooses, for the research, three forms were utilized. One form was for an attendee that comes to church at least two Sundays a month. Second, a form was used to identify the long-term servants that Servant Keeper has listed as regular attenders, and last, the list for current church leadership was used. These lists assisted the researcher in attempting to ensure that there would be a group of participants that represented the whole church body at Jackson Baptist.

Jackson Baptist is a church that its average attendance is only 250-265 for a Sunday service. This allowed the researcher to know all the people on the list from the casual attendee to the leaders. Thought and prayer went into the selection of those who were asked to take part in the study. Care had to be given in figuring out the participants due to a church split just a few years ago. As stated in Chapter One, the church hired an assessment team that eventually caused the three pastors to be at an impasse that caused people to leave, and many that stayed still are nervous when asked to give opinions or take a survey. This results from the assessment team publishing people's remarks after they told them it would be anonymous. Because of this past, it was important for the research to choose some people that went through this split and even gauge if any animosity that members might have from this split is causing a decline in reciprocal community.

There were over 65 people that were identified through this church database that would benefit the research. Care was given in the selection of this group to assess their current understanding of community. Also, by selecting this broad group from the church body, a complete evaluation could be done by examining the personal practices of community that these individuals have. The analysis of the test subjects must include how they carry out community within their lives, both individually and corporately. Through the selection of these people,



attention was given to ensure that out of the three groups of people being researched, that no one group would outweigh the other which would lead to cause inaccurate data to ensure a proper analysis was done on the entire church body.

A letter was drafted to be sent through the mail system. The document that was sent can be found in the appendix section of this project. The contents of the letter explained the purpose of the research and detailed the methods for obtaining the data that will be used for the study. Last, within the correspondence, it explained that all information to include names would be confidential.

A set number of written communications were sent out at different times. With the initial mailing, the letter went out to 30 people. Once a response was given to either take part in the study or deny being in the research, the letter was then sent to a select few at a time. As stated above, there were over 60 people identified from the start that allowed careful consideration to be given to those who would participate. The researcher feared that if all 65 letters went out, two things could have affected the research. First, there could have been too many people for the research itself or people from a specific group like church leadership could have dominated the findings, and it was imperative to capture reciprocal community in the church there needed to be as close to an equal number out of the three groups.

### **Participant Buy-In**

The researcher has been serving in ministry at Jackson Baptist since March 2017. Discipleship has always been a passion of the analyst that conducted this study. One reason that JBC called the researcher to their church was to start a small group ministry with the desired outcome of developing deeper discipleship and community amongst the members. This background information helps explain how buy-in was achieved by showing the importance of

community. Since 2017 the researcher has been showing the church that to achieve an authentic and intimate community, it would be vital to study examples from within the Bible. Once the examples of the Bible were identified, extensive time was spent on explaining to the church body that without real community in their individual lives, they would not be living out God's intent for them as His Body. God's intent for community within the church is laid out in Chapter Two of this research.

Although this was not directly part of the research that is used in this project; however, it laid the groundwork for what would become the start of making the church aware of Biblical community and the deficiencies that exist at JBC. Attention had to be given to help the people see the benefits of reciprocal community with both God and fellow believers, and this would assist in the buy-in of the participants. This process allowed the people to see the importance of community. Hopefully, they would then desire to have this in their lives. One example that was often used when speaking of community at JBC was a quote from Francis Schaeffer. In his book, *The Church at the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, speaking about the importance of community in every believer's life said, "Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful-Christian community is the final apologetic."<sup>52</sup>

Passages like Acts 2:42-47 assisted the researcher in creating an awareness of community that is detailed throughout the New Testament. To assist in creating a desire for participation in the study by providing scriptural evidence, an outline of community throughout the New Testament with the various churches, the Old Testament relationship between God and Israel, and throughout church history. In passages like Acts 2 there is evidence of a direct

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<sup>52</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Wheaton, Crossway Books, 1985) 14-15.

correlation between community and exponential growth. Because of the reciprocal community of the early church that balanced an intimate relationship with God and fellow believers this moved the surrounding people in such a way that they saw a rapid increase in salvations. One could say that the church community in Acts 2 spread the Gospel like an “epidemic.” The researcher desires to make this known and be something that is believed in. By causing reciprocal community at Jackson Baptist to lead to richer relationships with God and each other, and by doing this spark salvations in the church's local area. This drive of the researcher would establish a push to community within the church, which would lead to a desire to learn and grow regarding community. A community-driven focus started within the church and its ministries, and this would eventually result in participants willing to be a part of the research with a strong desire to develop reciprocal community both individually and corporately.

As stated above, the researcher feels that buy-in was successful because of the training and education that has taken place about community. The explanation of the buy-in will now be shown. As described, the experimenter started working at JBC in 2017. He was hired as the family pastor. The primary focus was youth and family ministry; however, as he was studying discipleship and small groups, the church asked him to help start a small group ministry. After a couple of months of settling in, he began branching out from youth ministry and began training the church in community. It would be over a couple of years that the researcher could implement small groups and even discipleship groups to help build community. These groups would be referred to as community groups. An extensive background of the awareness campaign about building community is essential to see the picture leading up to the study itself.

When the analyst began establishing these community groups, a different approach was necessary. JBC had implemented small Groups in the past as another program in the church and

not a way to develop reciprocal community. To have true acceptance into the need for community, the people of the church needed to know how community groups would directly benefit them. The church in the past had a small group ministry, but they were poorly run, and even the individual groups become so large that they become more of a little church than community groups. Many challenges arose, and people left groups because others gossiped about things that were going on in people's lives. The people who still attended JBC following the split were a little reluctant to getting involved in small groups again.

In July 2017, meetings took place about the coming of the community groups. Within these times of instruction, the researcher began laying out the plan to start community groups. Acts 2 became the cornerstone that was used to show how God designed the church to be in community. Within these meetings, the analyst of this study used writings and training that revolved around creating community groups.

One such session was conducted by using a video lecture from Rick Warren. Warren created a segment called, *Biblical Basis for Small Groups*<sup>53</sup>. In this video, Warren explained the exponential growth of the early church in Acts and linked this growth to the community found in both a large group and small group format. The information in this lecture was essential to the buy-in of the project because this was what opened the eyes of many within the church to the need of community and the power that comes when a church has community.

Describing the rapid growth that began in the church following the ascension of Christ. Acts 1:15 shows that following the Ascension of Christ, the group of believers that gathered in a room total was about 120. Days later, during Pentecost, which was 50 days following the

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<sup>53</sup> Rick Warren. "Biblical Basis for Small Groups." SmallGroupChurches.com November 30, 2019. <http://www.smallgroupchurches.com/small-group-theology-with-rick-warren/>

Passover while in this upper room, those gathered received the Holy Spirit. Peter, who now would serve as the leader of the group, preached and led 3,000 people to Christ. This was a tremendous growth going from a small group to over 3,000 people in a matter of days.

Interestingly, the Bible says in Acts 2:47b, “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (More will be shared on this later in the chapter.) The accelerated growth of the church continued to where in Chapter Four of Acts, one can see that they grew at least 66.67% from 3,000 to 5,000; however, as in the time's culture in this passage the 5,000 that were counted were only men. Acts 4:4 says, “But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.” Most scholars argue that this number likely counted only the men. Darrel Block, in his commentary, wrote, “If only men are meant, then the actual number of respondents could be even larger. It is hard to be certain, however, who is included in the count.”<sup>54</sup> Rick Warren believes that this number is only men, so he believes the real number to be closer to 15,000, which would then be a 400% increase. The important thing is to notice the exponential growth. In passages like Acts 5:14, Acts 5:28, Acts 6:1, Acts 6:7, the Bible continues the growth of the church by using the term multiplied. In the early church, it had gone from addition to multiplication because the growth was that rapid. Towards the end of Acts in chapter 21 verse 20, it says, “Everyone who heard this praised God and said to Paul: My friend, you can see how many tens of thousands of our people have become followers! And all of them are eager to obey the Law of Moses.”<sup>55</sup> Exponential is when something grows at a rapid rate. One can easily see that the early church experienced accelerated growth, and their community assisted this.

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<sup>54</sup> Brock, Darrell, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Acts (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) Location 5034, Kindle.

<sup>55</sup> Acts 21:20 (Contemporary English Version)

As stated above, it was imperative to examine the foundation that started the process of establishing awareness of community within Jackson Baptist. Buy-in began when through sermons and discipleship classes, the Senior Pastor and the researcher implemented this topic into the DNA of the church. With the start of small groups, community was on the minds of many people. However, as it will be discussed later in Chapter Three, many people had a skewed idea of what Biblical community looked like. Although the members and attenders of JBC began to grasp the community that they developed within their groups as discussed in Chapter Four with the results of the study, the community existed primarily as fellowship. Many of the members at Jackson Baptist lacked significant and meaningful relationships within the church. Despite the general understanding of community, the existing community was lacking the intimacy of the groups found in the Book of Acts. Albeit the more reciprocal community that was illustrated through scripture and examples in church history and today, the more the people longed to discover real community. This longing that many people had now for genuine and authentic community was directly correlated to the buy-in for this research.

### **Materials Produced for the Research**

The materials that were produced and used for this research was a consent form, a pre-test/pro-test both with the same fifty questions, a recruitment letter, a class outline that helped guide the material for the two-hour class, and a permission letter from the Senior Pastor allowing the research to be conducted. Most of these materials assisted in the research by providing documents needed to gain permission to conduct the research on the participants. Also, the class outline allowed the analyst to use the two-hour class to deepen the knowledge of the participants as it pertains to reciprocal community. The most crucial piece to the research would be the fifty-question pre-test and post-test. Through this piece of material, the research

will be built on the knowledge and awareness of reciprocal community before the class and then given again right after the class to see if the information that they received changed any of their prior responses.

### **Progress of the Research**

Two dates were set up to assist the 34 final participants. Being in the Northeast and in close proximity to both New York City and Philadelphia this leads to many people within the church that work within these two cities and have extensive travel time home in the evenings. Having two class dates allowed those who took part in an opportunity to choose which day worked best for their schedule. The first date that was scheduled was October 28<sup>th</sup> on a Monday evening, and the second date was November 3<sup>rd</sup> on a Sunday right after church. As per the IRB application, the participants were required to complete a pre-test before the class date that they chose. The recruitment letter, as shown earlier in this chapter, contained detailed instructions on the pre-test and post-test included when to take the test and how to turn it into the researcher. Also, contained was a consent form. This form discussed background information on the purpose of the research procedure (which included instructions for tests and the class), benefits, compensation, confidentiality, and a signature portion allowing the participant to sign if they agreed to be part of the study. Once the preliminaries were explained, and the participants signed up, the next step was the pre-test survey.

The fifty-question pre-test and post-test were made available in written and digital format. The preferred method is written. The responses were written with a numerical format, with one being strongly disagreed through five being strongly agreed. Regarding the completion of the tests for the participants, they were asked to complete it without a Bible or notes. This was requested because it was imperative to accurately gauge the knowledge of community from

the participants that were from their attitudes and understanding. Also, the Biblical and cultural background would be extensively discussed in the two-hour class. The test was comprised of questions on the scriptural basis for community, unity within Jackson Baptist, togetherness (which is the actual act of being together), fellowship habits, current practices of community, personal opinions of what they define as community, and meaningful relationships. Coupled with the surveys and the class will be a desire to see what direction and desired ways the participants would improve community at Jackson Baptist.

The two-hour class that is required will be over the subjects that made up the survey. The beginning of the class started by examining closely Acts 2:42-47. The research that was brought from this passage would focus on the family type atmosphere that the early church had. In the researcher's opinion, the church in Acts 2 and throughout Acts maintained a family atmosphere because of their group first mentality. Joseph Hellerman said, "Collectivist societies value the group over the individual. And ancient Mediterranean society exhibits a strong-group social outlook. For people in the world of the early Christians, the survival and health of the group took precedence over the desires or preferences of individual group members."<sup>56</sup> This mindset led to the family type atmosphere that was felt in the early church. Through devotion to God that resulted in daily time spent with God and believers allowed the Christians to stay connected to God and other Christians. Even Acts 2:47 says that as a result, rapid salvations took place. For the understanding of the process of research, this was vital to see because this understanding is what the researcher used to base the rest of his research on.

Also, from the class unity, togetherness, fellowship, and practices of community were

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<sup>56</sup> Joseph Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, 37.



explained. With the topic of unity, the class covered the special unity that God, and Christ shared. John 17 is when Christ prayed in Garden of Gethsemane prior to His arrest and He prayed for unity in the church the same unity that He shared with the Father. Togetherness as it pertained to the research and the class presentation had to show the time that was shared amongst Christians in the church of Acts resulted in the close-knit community that they had. Fellowship is the time that believers spend together. In the research a correlation was explained of how time spent together strengthened their relationships with God and other believers. The exact data analyses of the pre-test and post-test surveys and the difference that took place after the class will be examined in Chapter Four. It was worth noting that through the course some participants were astonished on how many people within the congregation at Jackson Baptist have no fellowship and they are often left in isolation. Later within this chapter, some initial responses will be shared, but in-depth analyses will be in Chapter Four.

As stated earlier in this project, Jackson Baptist started small groups two years ago in the summer of 2017. Small groups, church involvement, and discipleship groups were part of the research to determine whether these three factors can measure a members community within the church. As shown in the next chapter that these three things can be beneficial when used together in weighing reciprocal community in the lives of church members. Conversations took place in the first part of the class because of information that was explained showed that small groups are often comprised of older people, and the current group of attendees at Jackson Baptist is comprised of senior adults, but new younger families are coming weekly changing the make- up of the church. However, these younger families are not part of the small groups. One participant stated that in order for us to see a complete picture of community in the church, the small groups would not be a good indication on its own.

Discipleship groups are present at JBC in a format more of a Bible study than a small group. The study groups are defined by the knowledge being taught over a more fellowship oriented ministry like small groups. These discipleship groups are leftovers from old Bible studies that existed prior to the researcher coming to Jackson Baptist. The studies are not the issue themselves the problem is the true focus of the group itself. In the conversations with participants, some suggested that the problem with these groups at the church was that they have shallow teachings and seem to be exclusively comprised of a few closed-off friends. However, one participant who has been in a group like this stated that she has no meaningful relationships with anyone else in the group. She says they do things together like lunches and shopping dates but that she does not consider any of the other ladies as someone she can confide in. The data that will be analyzed in Chapter Four will show this deficiency in meaningful relationships at JBC.

The most prominent discussion in the initial conversations with the participants and the class centered on everyone being treated as equals. The researcher's definition of reciprocal community states that to develop community within a church, all people must be treated equally. In the grand scheme of the process of research, this would prove to be the most significant hurdle. Until the analyst had conversations with people and administered the pre-test, it was discovered that some people have felt unimportant stemming from a lack of equality amongst members of the church. One participant said that even something as small as announcements is not even done through equality as certain people in the church have more leeway than others. They made several comments saying that until church leadership treats everyone the same, then they feel we cannot have genuine community. One person in the study stated that the church needs her so desperately that it could not function without her. This

attitude showed the researcher that equality will be a roadblock in the quest to develop a genuine and authentic community; however, equality is an issue; but it is not a deal-breaker in developing community.

### **Initial Responses from Participants**

There was some great feedback that came from the individuals who took part of the research. In this chapter, there will be a brief discussion of some initial casual feedback, and the in-depth comments and feedback will be in Chapter Four with the data analysis. Some of those comments will be shown now and broken down into the categories of the pre-test/post-test surveys to understand the context of the comments.

### **Unity**

One individual that has been in the church for many years and is a church leader who will be referred to as participant 8 had several initial comments coming into the class time following the pre-test. Regarding unity, this person felt that many relationships were superficial, and often in public, the church puts on a good face but has significant discontentment among the members of the church. Participant 2, at the start of the class, lacked a real understanding of unity within the church. They felt as if unity would take away from the diversity in the church, and this person seemed to that of military-type uniformity and not Christian unity. One church leader fears that having unity that the church is moving in too many directions, with some leaders just striving to ensure that their “agenda” is at the forefront of the church’s ministries and functions. While focusing on significant individual relationships within the church, most people felt that they lack those types of relationships, but all stated that they only blame themselves for not seeking deeper relationships.

### **Togetherness**

Conversations involving togetherness was not much talked about at the beginning of the research. Most people felt that a lack of spending time together was likely the fault of individuals and not a corporate issue; however, in Chapter Four, this will change according to the data. One problem that a participant identified was when a person comes to the church after a couple of months they get lost in the crowd. Having a church service that is attended on average by 250-275 people, this individual thought being a smaller church this should not be as big as a problem as it is. However, a good deal felt that the church is moving in a positive direction in achieving more times of togetherness as a church body.

### **Fellowship**

Small groups at Jackson Baptist have begun to establish fellowship amongst the participants of the groups; however, as stated earlier, small groups only affect a limited amount of people in the church. This led several of the participants to comment that they feel small groups is the best method to establish fellowship with others of the church. One small group leader that was part of the research stated that when they have approached others about joining their groups, they stated that they did not have time. Chapter Four will show that one major problem within the church is overwhelming attendees and volunteers with too many activities taking place and leads to burnout. In Chapter Two, the book *Building a Church of Small Groups* was discussed with Saddleback Church used as the example of how they transitioned from a church that just had groups as another program and eventually led to making groups a part of their DNA. Later in the project, it will be discussed that church leadership desired to become a church of groups and focus on spiritual growth and discipleship.

### **A Baseline for Measuring Change**

In Chapter One, a guideline was set for this research with the primary function of the

project being to build awareness of reciprocal community among the participants at Jackson Baptist. To do this, the fifty-question pre-test and post-test were designed to base a data analysis on the change of responses from the pre-test to the post-test. Awareness would come from the two-hour class that was given on community. In the purpose statement of this project, it was explained that methods would be presented to help foster meaningful relationships that would allow the church to build community. This data would be collected in both the survey responses and the comments made by the participants in the class. Within this recorded data from researcher notes and the individual's survey's information was recorded about the existing relationships and the deepening of some of their more causal existing relationships.

The consent form and pre-test surveys were collected at the start of the class of the date that the participant was scheduled to be in. When the contributors of the data finished their perspective two-hour class, they left with a copy of the post-test and given a week following the class to finish the survey. The post-test was turned in the Sunday following the class. All information that was collected was immediately placed in a binder that was stored in a locked desk. The pre-test and post-test responses were then placed on Microsoft Excel. All the data was placed on several worksheets on Excel.

The first sheet comprised of both pre-test and post-test responses were placed on a sheet side by side, with every participant listed with their corresponding response for all four sections. The responses were also collected without the names but with a number that corresponded with the participants given pseudonym. By the pseudonym was the specific answer for each question. Last, two individual sheets were created in a collection of the data with all pre-test responses divided into the four sections, and then a sheet with the pro-test responses listed in the same format. The data was placed electronically in Excel and saved on a

password-protected computer with the hard copies stored in a locked drawer.

Using the data that was collected, the researcher used data analysis using the *Paired-T Sample Test* to ensure an accurate depiction of the results. Data was collected from the thirty-four participants who took the 50-question pre-test and post-test. During the two-hour class, the researcher took notes of comments that were made. Lastly, the mentor for this project, Dr. Jason Mitchell, asked a business associate to serve as an independent expert.

### **Data Analyzation**

Making use of the *Paired T-Sample Test*, the researcher will examine the recorded differences from the pre-test answers to the post-test answers. The reason for this test is to examine if the awareness class affected any of the answers. These two variables were examined as time and training separated the responses of the attendees of the research. Chapter Four will give more detail of the actual *Paired T-Sample Test*; however, through this data analyzation, it was the goal of the researcher to establish that the difference of the two variables is not zero, but there is an average difference between the two. The test was performed for all four sections and every question.

Throughout the collection of the data and the class itself, there seemed to be a few themes. As stated above, one of the prevailing trends in relation to the comments was the thought that everyone is not viewed as equals. Unfortunately, as stated above, this church has some issues stemming from inside conflict. This conflict was never honestly handled, leading to forgiveness of the church and the leadership. Equality is improving; however, some people in the church are treated differently than others. There will always be pockets of people who feel that some get better treatment than others, but the goal should be to not view some people as more important than others.

This also led to a slippage. As the researcher, there was a lack of explaining before the class of what was meant by equality. In the preparation and buy-in throughout the weeks leading up to the class, equality was being viewed to some as a negative thing and some an unachievable thing. The negative views so this as a thing that could hinder the roles of leadership in the church, and the ones who thought it impossible lacked the knowledge of the definition of the researcher on what equality meant. However, due to the class it should be evident in the data that their understanding changed. The class, explained equality from an understanding that regarding spiritual gifts, there is no gift more important than the other. By working through this understanding, people's comments and answers seemed to change.

Another theme evident in the answers was a genuine lack of personal time spent not only with other believers but with God as well daily. This was alarming to the researcher as some church leaders did not seem to practice daily time with God either through prayer or Bible study, which leads to personal spiritual growth. This became a trend within the church as discipleship has not been stressed in the past. Some participants felt that once someone is saved and baptized that they are often abandoned and left to figure out their own Christian life. They felt that this contributes to people never being taught the proper and effective methods of Bible study and prayer. However, interestingly the ones who did not have a solid daily quiet time with God and others did not blame the church; they only blamed themselves.

In referencing small groups, it seemed to be a theme, but after an investigation by the researcher it led to the understanding that it was more of a slippage. Small groups and their importance were not perceived the way the analyst felt it should be. However, by looking at the participants, a small pocket of people within that group actively takes part in a small group. Some of those who attend small groups felt that they could not have community without their

current group. Following the class through the information provided and the conversations of the small group attenders, people's ideas changed. It is also essential to notice that the language used in the class led to some confusion regarding small groups. It was taught that small groups are essential; however, they could not be a stand-alone criterion of measuring reciprocal community. It is possible that in the data, silence will be discovered that through the lack of a clear understanding of the importance of groups themselves and how it helps contribute to the community of a Christian, they will view groups in a negative light. Within Chapter Four, the data that has been discussed in this chapter will be analyzed through Microsoft Excel using the *Paired T Sample Test* to discover how the awareness class changed people's responses and understanding of real Biblical reciprocal community.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Results**

#### **Problem Represented**

The overall purpose of this research was to run an awareness campaign at Jackson Baptist Church for the education of reciprocal community. The desired outcome achieved was a strengthened understanding of the holistic Biblical understanding of community and how unity, togetherness, and fellowship factor into that understanding. By enlightening the participants of the church of these principles, the researcher would aspire to see the group united as one, actively together in different methods of community groups (i.e., small groups, discipleship groups, and Bible studies), and a new passion for meaningful relationships with God and their fellow believers. Reciprocal Community in Jackson Baptist Church should be compared to a chain in that each link will be equal in the importance of carrying the weight or in fulfilling God's design for the church. Each person must see themselves as equally important as the other, with no position or ministry being considered more vital. It will encourage less committed individuals to develop in the Biblical practices of reciprocal community and can aid church leadership in identifying barriers and implementing practices across the life of the congregation.

#### **Results**

As outlined previously in this chapter, the purpose of this project was to gauge through a fifty-question survey the current knowledge and practices of reciprocal community within Jackson Baptist Church. Once this survey was administered to 34 people, a class was presented to the group on various areas of community within scripture. The intervention plan is described in Chapter Three. Within that chapter, details are given on how this was carried out, even including initial comments from the participants.

## **Class Material Analyzed**

The material for the class was presented to the participants via the lecture method. In Appendix D of this project the teaching outline can be found. This class covered the in-depth analysis of the components that were outlined in the working definition of reciprocal community developed by the researcher. Chapter Three explains what material was covered in the class. The purpose of this class was to conduct an awareness campaign through the two-hour instructional period. This would be measured by a fifty-question survey to be taken before class attendance and the same survey to be completed after the course to see if the information provided helped to increase their awareness of reciprocal community. The mentor asked the researcher to send all the class information to Dr. Michael Kennedy, a pastor in Florida, to analyze and give his opinion on if he felt that the material presented in the class could increase the knowledge of community to the participants. This is his analyzation:

I have read through chapter one which details the need for reciprocal community in the local church, the ministry context at Jackson Baptist Church, and the desired outcome of the proposed project (to help members “develop an understanding through an awareness campaign of God's design for community within the church by examining Old and New Testament scripture” and “connect people of a church in meaningful relationships that foster community.”) I have also worked through the proposed teaching outline for the class on community as well as the follow-up survey that will be administered after the class.

It is my belief that the teaching outline aptly explains the need for reciprocal community in the local church. Jamie offers a clear definition of reciprocal community, grounds the need for reciprocal community in scripture, and offers practical ways that church members can cultivate and evaluate reciprocal community at Jackson Baptist Church. The follow-up survey that will be administered measures class participant’s understanding of reciprocal community in light of these primary categories: unity, togetherness, fellowship, and community as a whole. It is reasonable to expect that class participants will have an increased awareness/understanding of reciprocal community after having attended the proposed class.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Kennedy, Michael. External Review by Expert, email, 2020.

Through the professional opinion of Dr. Kennedy, it shows that the material in the course would raise awareness of reciprocal community within the participants. That all the data collected, which was stored and analyzed via Microsoft Excel, will also show how the change in scores was, in fact, not by chance. This collected data will be discussed, and information shared later in this chapter.

### **Results of Intervention Plan**

Using the purpose of the project, which was discussed in Chapter One, the intervention plan of this research was to develop an understanding through an awareness campaign of God's design for community within the church by examining Old and New Testament scripture. Also, the plan was to show established methods in church history around the globe of "success" stories of community. In these samples, reciprocal community was clear in the congregation. Several of these places existed in the Book of Acts and were discussed. Other pieces of church history were shown through what the researcher shared as three methods of gauging community within a church, which are small groups, discipleship groups, and church involvement. Churches like Saddleback Church in California were used as an example of having deep community that exists because of their emphasis on discipleship and small groups. This is just one small example of churches that are successful because of the closeness of the group found within the church.

## **Developed Understanding**

### **Tests Ran on Data**

From the pre-survey to the post-survey, one area that seemed to be a more significant change in scores was the reverse scoring. Later in this chapter, the researcher will show why he felt this happened. A quick synopsis was a lack of knowledge on how to answer those. This will be discussed along with more discrepancies later in the chapter. The data was collected and stored on a password-protected computer, and each participant was given a pseudonym. This confidential information was shared with a statistician within the church. His name is John Smith, and he is the chairman of the elders at Jackson Baptist. All information was divided into specific combinations of data in individual responses for each of the four sections, pre-test, post-test, and reverse scoring questions only. Also, data was placed into the four sections by all the questions in that given segment.

As stated in Chapter Three, a Paired-T test was used to analyze the data. Graphs were created by doing a histogram, which included the set of numbers found within a designated range. These histograms were conducted automatically via the data analysis function in Excel and manually as the researcher was instructed by Mr. Smith on how this test is conducted without using Excel to formulate the answer. Manually the histogram used the same data; however, the math was conducted via a formula. Automatically this is done by highlighting the two sets of numbers and select histograms on the data analysis tool within Excel.

Following the initial paired-t-tests the expert developed a t-distribution graph to measure the curve in the difference between pre-test to post-test responses. If the result of the t-distribution remained under the given alpha of 0.05, then it was found that the data change was not by chance. The results that were formulated through these tests significantly showed that the

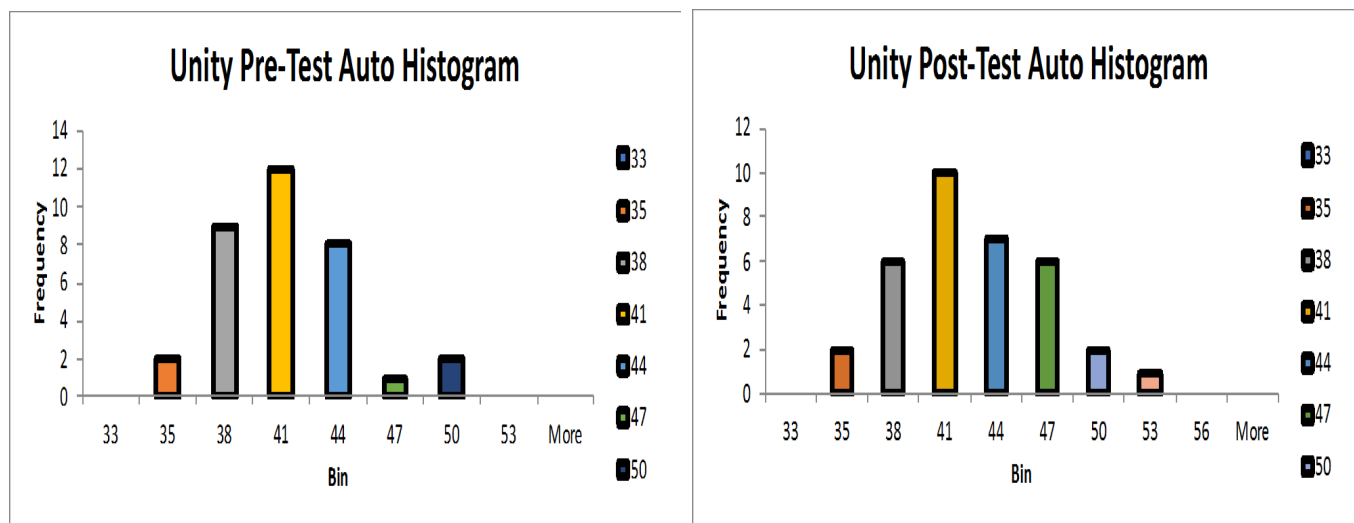
class affected the responses of the participants. The data that will be shown in the next section was based on a 95% confidence interval with an alpha of 0.05. Within the data, if the p-value is under the alpha while not containing the hypothesized mean difference of 0, then it is confirmed that the data changed because of the class. In the section below examples of how the data changed following the course from the pre-test to the post-test will be given. Showing that at  $p < .05$  that the changes in the responses were determined with 95% confidence that it did not happen by chance.

### **Excel Statistics Analysis**

In the sections that follow, results are presented in visual form along with a corresponding explanation for the tests that were conducted. Within these tests, the information given will show whether the null hypothesis will be rejected signifying a change, but if the null hypothesis is not rejected, then it cannot be said with 95% certainty that the course had a direct effect on the change within the answers. The goal of this project was to develop an awareness of reciprocal community. It is through this data that will show if statistically this goal was achieved.

### **Unity**

Within the section of unity, it can be observed that the scores increased because of the course. The bell curves and the t-graph show that from the pre-test to the post-test in the unity section, the scores of the participants increased. Here is the automatic histogram for both pre-test and post-test responses.



*Figure 4.1: Unity Section Histogram*

Source: (Survey Data, 2020)

Evident within these two bar graphs, the pre-test had more responses in the range of 41 as is also in the post-test; however, as the graph shows, the responses in the 47-53 range grew exponentially from the first survey to the second survey. It shows this increase to result from the course that the participants took.

The automatic histograms that were generated through the histogram in the data analysis tool were similar to the manual histogram, with very little to no significant change in the manual graph the researcher created. One difference in the manual and automatic histograms is Excel produces a table of the bin which is the set of numbers within a given a range determined by the researcher and the frequency, which is how many times the scores fell within a bin set. It is shown within these two generated tables that there was a change in the responses of the participants.

Unity Pre-Test	
Bin	Frequency
33	0
35	2
38	9
41	12
44	8
47	1
50	2
53	0
More	0

Unity Post-Test	
Bin	Frequency
33	0
35	2
38	6
41	10
44	7
47	6
50	2
53	1
More	0

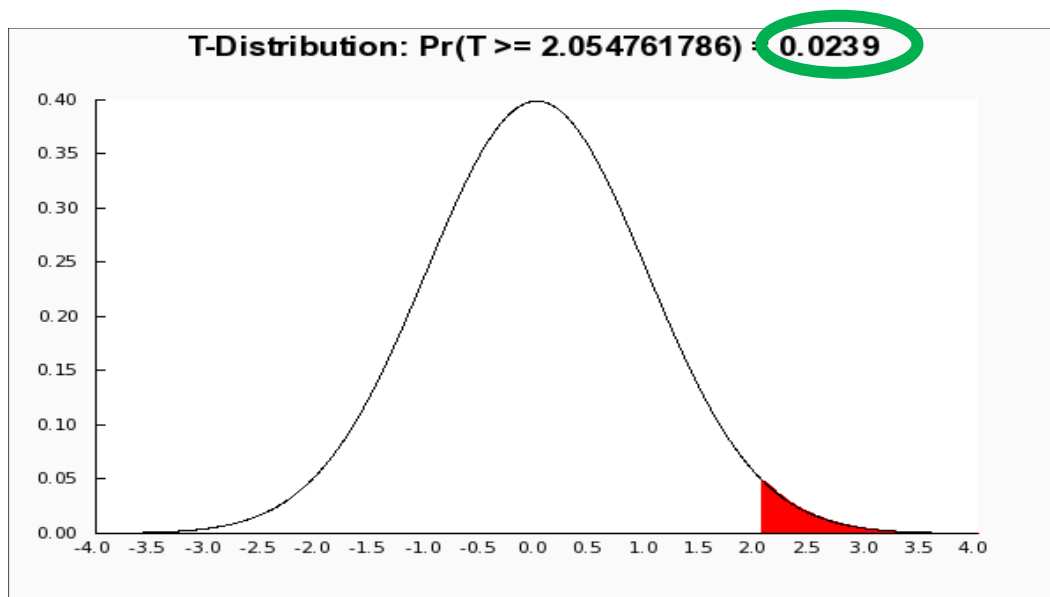
*Figure 4.2: Unity Section Bin and Frequency*

Source: (Survey Data, 2020)

In the above tables, the post-test survey responses raise by 5 in the bin of 47 and 1 in the 53 bin. Shown so far with the histograms and the two tables that there was an increase in the responses of the participants in this section. It is in the researcher's opinion that the increase in this section was due to a lack of understanding by the participants of unity before the class. Some responses by the participants said that questions confused them before the course in this section. As stated in Chapter Three, some people thought unity was a call to uniformity. The confusion seemed to be related to the background of those participants as it pertained to denominations of churches attended prior. Unity within the church seemed to confuse those from a Catholic background and a German Lutheran background. This would be an area for future research that will be discussed in Chapter Five. In their understanding, they were afraid of the differences between cultures, backgrounds, and to an extent, beliefs within the church were inherently wrong. One can see that

following the class and the definition of unity and how it relates to community being understood, their responses were affected.

This data was examined through a paired-t-test through Excel. To see if the class had a direct effect on the participants responses, there was a confidence interval established at 95% that and the alpha was 0.05, as discussed in more detail earlier in the chapter. Through the unity section, the paired-t-test that was performed established the p-value as 0.0239, and this is shown in the chart below that calculated the t-graph.



*Figure 4.3: Unity Section T-Distribution*

Source: (Survey Data, 2020)

With the p-value below the alpha that was set at 0.05, then it can be said with 95% that the class had a direct effect on the participants. The following is the analysis for unity, the Null Hypothesis is equal to 0 and the Expected mean difference is 0. In the experiment, our alpha value was 0.05%, which corresponds to a CI of 95%. The Alternate Hypothesis equals the Expected mean difference after the course  $> 0$ . The Actual Difference Mean is shown to be 1.294117647. After arriving at the p-value of 0.023944739, the conclusion is that with 95%



confidence confirm that the course taken by the participants had a significant effect upon their responses. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it is evident that the course had a significant effect on the participants. Following the data analysis for this section, the researcher, statistician, and expert conclude that for the unity section, the course helped elevate the score showing a better understanding of the survey questions.

### Togetherness

Togetherness was a section that the responses from pre-test to post-test changed but not as drastic as the section on unity. This section, which was discussed in Chapter Three, had the most feedback from the participants. There was confusion in this section on the understanding of equality. As outlined in Chapter Three, most of the participants felt that equality canceled out the ability of leadership from within the church. Participants that were older and had experience in other churches felt as togetherness in the church is much higher than other churches that they have been a part of. The data from the surveys will show that the questions evened out in the middle of the bin range from pre-test to post-test. Here are the histograms for togetherness.

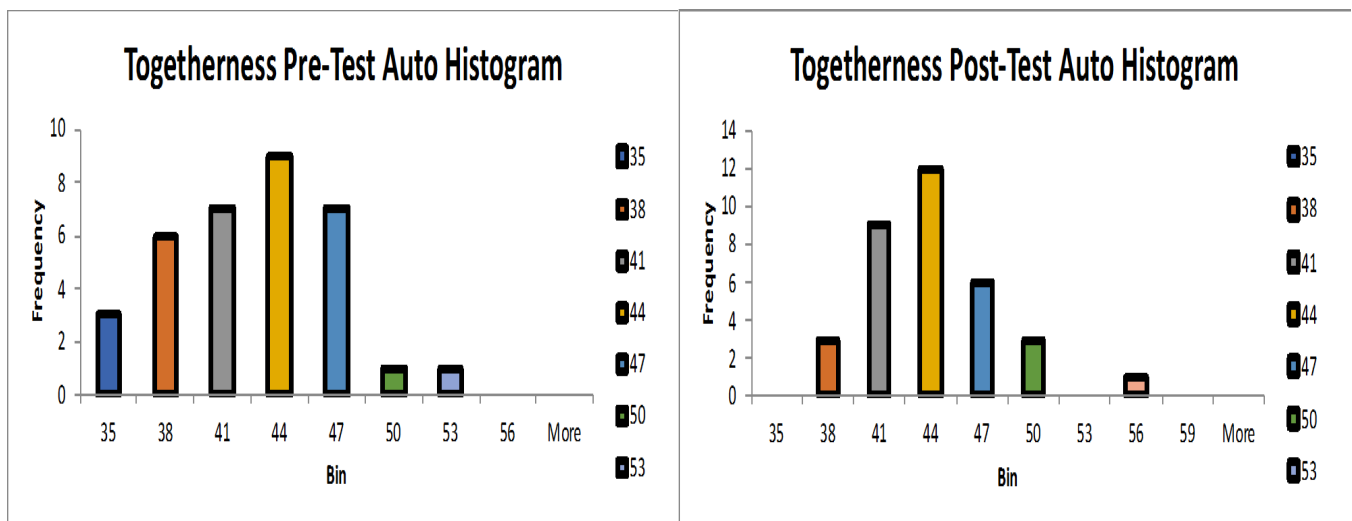


Figure 4.4: Togetherness Section Histogram

Source: (Survey Data, 2020)

Found in these histograms, it shows that the responses from pre-test to post-test surveys had a shift from more towards the lower numbers and the post-survey to the middle to higher numbers. In the researchers opinion, the response change came when equality was explained as being a way that all people, regardless of spiritual gift, are equal in that no higher gift exists. Togetherness was also told to encompass time spent in groups. Participant #9 explained that the best relationships that he has at JBC had been originated out of small groups, and Participant #4 felt that within the groups, more time spent together could foster people wanting to spend time with each other more. Within this section in the pre to post-test surveys, the average number shifted to a lower number as displayed in this chart.

Pre Average	3.583333333
Post Average	3.473039216

*Figure 4.5: Togetherness Section Average*

Source: (Survey Data, 2020)

which caused the middle shift in bins on the two histograms. Below are the tables from the automatic histogram.

Togetherness Pre-Test	
Bin	Frequency
35	3
38	6
41	7
44	9
47	7
50	1
53	1
56	0
More	0

Togetherness Post-Test	
Bin	Frequency
35	0
38	3
41	9
44	12
47	6
50	3
53	0
56	1
59	0
More	0

Figure 4.6: Togetherness Section Bin and Frequency

Source: (Survey Data, 2020)

Looking at the two tables above within the pre-test, the responses were almost even across the board by the participants, not favoring a central response on the scale of 1 to 5. In the post-test, there was a shift in responses resulting in a change in frequency within the bins of 41 and 44. An example of this shift can be seen in the sum and mean of question one from pre-test to post-test.

	Pre	Post
Sum	140	131
Mean	4.11765	3.85294

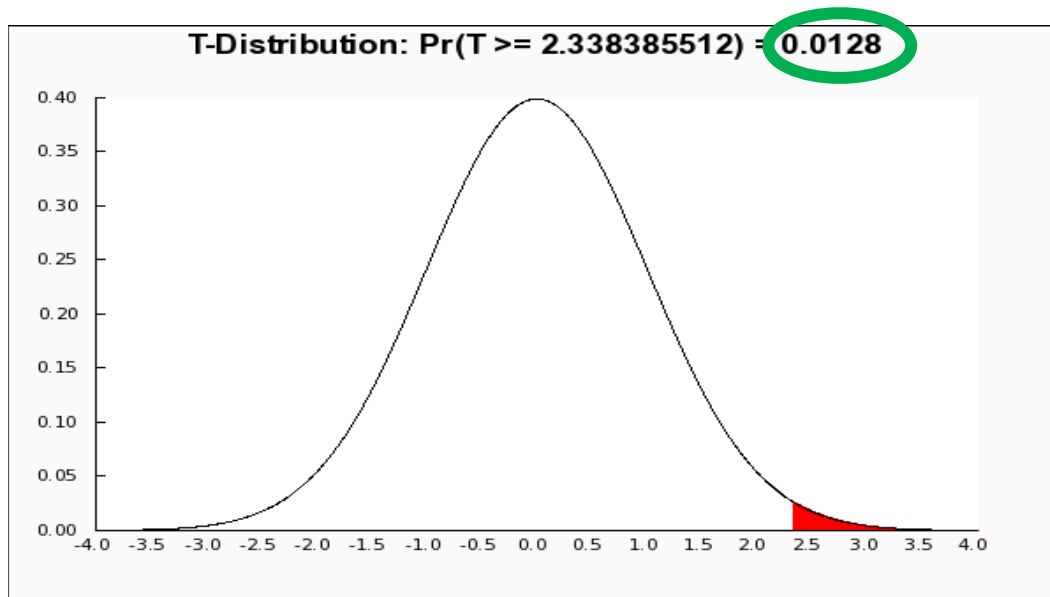
Figure 4.7: Togetherness Section Question One

Source: (Survey Data, 2020)

In this example, the numbers on the left are the pre-test and the right the post-test. It is evident in this line of questions that a shift went from higher numbers to a lower set of numbers. Question One that is given in this example asked, “The current worship service at Jackson Baptist Church fosters togetherness.” Participant #8 explained that when understanding togetherness that it was actual time spent with others, stated that we do not allow enough time to socialize within the church. There is a brief two-minute time to greet each other set aside in the service, but she stated, “The few minutes fellowship time can be embarrassing, maybe even hurtful when no one

says hello to them.” She believes that the short two minutes do not allow enough time to speak to several people. This ideal is an example of the change in scoring for this section. This was because the researcher did not word the questions in order to show a clear picture of what togetherness is.

The data shows that the class had a significant impact on the togetherness section. The t-graph shows that the p-value was found to be 0.0128. This value is below the alpha of 0.05. Despite some questions showing lower scored responses on the post-test, the overall score on togetherness increased by a statistically significant amount.



*Figure 4.8: Togetherness Section T-Distribution*

Source: (Survey Data, 2020)

With the p-value below the alpha and the two confidence intervals not containing 0, it is not likely chance that the class had a direct effect on the responses from pre-test to post-test.

Analyzing the data for the section on togetherness, the following was found to be true. The following is the analysis the Null Hypothesis is equal to 0, and the Expected mean difference is 0. In the experiment, our alpha value was 0.05%, which corresponds to a CI of 95%. The

Alternate Hypothesis equals the Expected mean difference after the course  $> 0$ . The Actual Difference Mean is shown to be 1.323529412. After arriving at the p-value of 0.012787832, the conclusion is that with 95% confidence it is confirmed that the course taken by the participants had a significant effect. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it is evident that the course had a significant effect on the participants.

### Fellowship

The fellowship section had the most significant increase of the other three sections. In this picture below it shows the overall sum for pre-test and post-test along with the difference. There was an 86-point difference between them.

<b>Sum</b>		<b>1317</b>	<b>1403</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Difference MEAN</b>		<b>38.7352941</b>	<b>41.2647059</b>	<b>2.52941176</b>

*Figure 4.9: Fellowship Section Sum and Mean*

Source: (Survey Data, 2020)

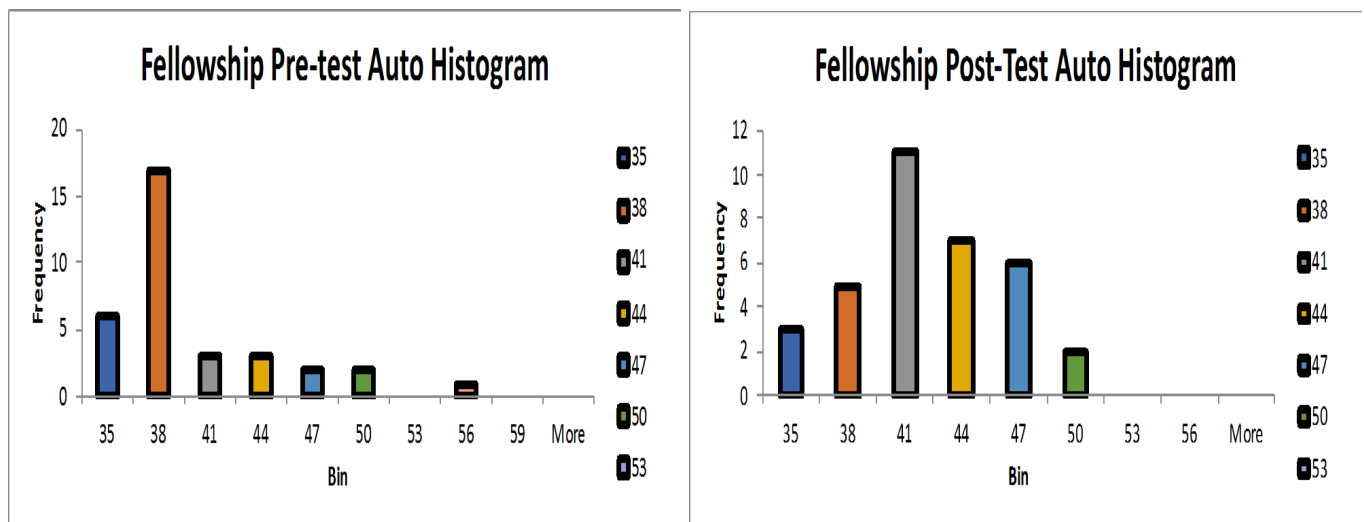
With a 2.5 point jump in average scoring shows the significance of the two separate surveys. Participant #2 had a significant change in this section from the responses from pre to post. The researcher sees this change because before the class; there was an overall lack of understanding as it pertained to fellowship and ways that fellowship exists in the church. Question Four in this section was an example of a lack of clarity on how fellowship can exist in ministries of the church. Before the class, limited knowledge existed on how individual ministries can help fellowship or even how being involved in church ministries fosters a closeness to those who seem to be more involved.

Pre #4	Post #4
114	127

*Figure 4.10: Fellowship Section Question Four*

Source: (Survey Data, 2020)

In this one question there was a thirteen-point change between the two surveys for all the participants. As a section of instruction in the class was that the more a person is involved in the three areas of small groups, discipleship, and church involvement helps gauge community in that if an attendee of Jackson Baptist is involved in these three, it is highly probable that they have developed meaningful relationships because of these ministries. Following the discussion in the class, it seems that through a clear understanding of what meaningful relationships are and how those three areas mentioned above contribute to fellowship; it assisted them in increasing their responses. The histograms performed in this section show the change from the first survey to the second survey.



*Figure 4.11: Fellowship Section Histogram*

Source: (Survey Data, 2020)

With this set of data, as explained above, the answers changed drastically to improve the responses of the participants. It would appear that the misunderstanding or a lack of knowledge of this section before the class directly correlated to a deficiency in answers. The increased seem to come as participants realized that they genuinely do have some meaningful relationship with other believers at JBC and spend time with them during the week.

Fellowship Pre-Test	
Bin	Frequency
35	6
38	17
41	3
44	3
47	2
50	2
53	0
56	1
More	0

Fellowship Post-Test	
Bin	Frequency
35	3
38	5
41	11
44	7
47	6
50	2
53	0
56	0
More	0

Figure 4.12: Fellowship Section Bin and Frequency

Source: (Survey Data, 2020)

The bin range and frequency of the responses in that range shown above that the responses went from the most significant response being around the 38-bin range; however, following the class it changed to the 41-bin range with a more even distribution for all the responses. This is shown in the tables above and the two histograms that are shown above for the fellowship section.

95% CI[Lower Limit]			1.3130644
95% CI[Upper Limit]			3.74575913
95% CI			[1.313, 3.746

Figure 4.13: Fellowship Section Confidence Intervals

Source: (Survey Data, 2020)

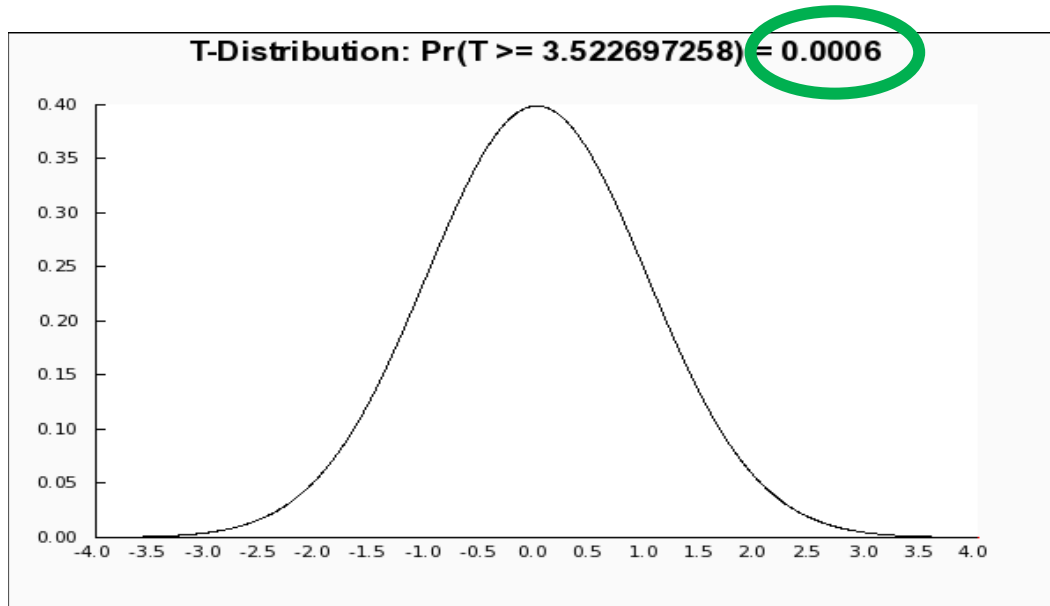


Figure 4.14: Fellowship Section T-Distribution

Source: (Survey Data, 2020)

The fellowship section responses from pre to post surveys were directly affected by the class. As stated above, the researcher feels that a deficiency in a clear understanding of what fellowship was before the class led to lower scores. Post surveys were different because of a clearer understanding of fellowship as it relates to reciprocal community.

In this section, the following data was collected and analyzed to come to this finding. The following is the analysis for fellowship the Null Hypothesis is equal to 0 and the Expected mean difference is 0. In the experiment, our alpha value was 0.05%, which corresponds to a CI of 95%. The Alternate Hypothesis equals the Expected mean difference after the course  $> 0$ . The Actual



Difference Mean is shown to be 2.529412. Arriving at the p-value of 0.00064 the conclusion is that we are with 95% confidence confirm that the course taken by the participants had a significant effect. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected, and it is evident that the course had a significant effect on the participants.

### **Practices of Community**

The name of this section was changed per guidance of Dr. Jason Mitchell, the project mentor. Along with the researcher, the information that was contained and what was expected for this section stating “community as a whole” was too vague; however, with practices of community, it helped define this section and the understanding of the practices needed to have reciprocal community. A substantial increase existed for this section. As detailed throughout this project was the past issues that resulted in a church split. One participant stated, “We are still in a state of flux still hurting from past events and fearful of it happening again.” Conversations during the surveys and class revealed that many people in the church believe that church leadership does not foster an atmosphere of community. People feel as if the direction of the church is not communicated clearly, and ministries seem to run on autopilot. The researcher felt that this was important to mention along with the statistics because past pain from the church attempting to change caused reluctance from some older members to try new things even if they are right and biblical. Past problems arose when the old elders were making decisions and never gave the people of the church a chance to voice their thoughts and opinions. Therefore some participants were timid about change. Practices of Community was the second largest growing data from pre-test to post-test surveys.

<b>Sum</b>		1236	1292	56
<b>Difference MEAN</b>		36.3529412	38	1.64705882

Figure 4.15: Practices of Community Section

Source: (Survey Data, 2020)

With a 56-total increase from pre to post and an average of 1.67 increase per answer, evidence shows that the class had a direct effect on the responses of the participants. Discussed in the class were six ways to incorporate reciprocal community within Jackson Baptist. These areas were equality amongst members, individuality, community, gospel centrality, small group prioritization group mentality over the individual, community, the ministry is done in collaboration, not a competition, and to foster an environment of encouragement. Discussion in the class took place within these categories and how they contribute to community. Some participants understood following the class that using these given factors community within JBC can develop deeper than what it is. One participant felt that a way to achieve this would be equality amongst the people, that encouraged all within the church to use their spiritual gifts. This concentrated effort of equality within the roles of people in the church would help develop significant relationships. Ideally, most thought a coordinated effort from leadership getting everyone to move as one unit will contribute to developing community while also improving the overall success of the church.

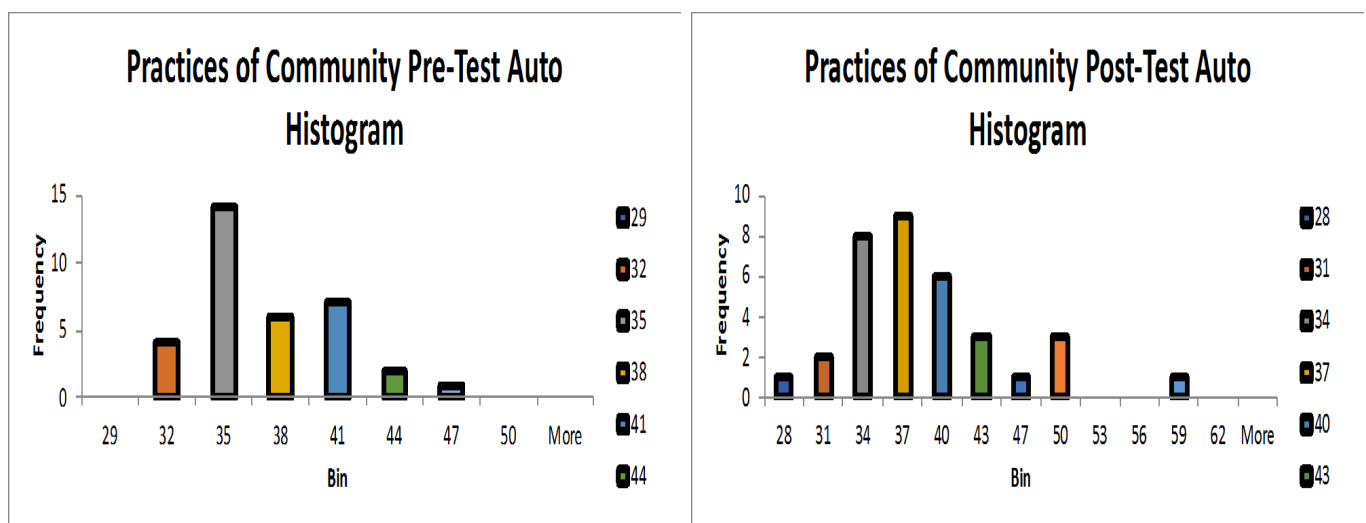
Prac. Of Comm. Pre-Test	
<i>Bin</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
29	0
32	4
35	14
38	6
41	7
44	2
47	1
50	0
More	0

Prac. Of Comm. Post-Test	
Bin	Frequency
28	1
31	2
34	8
37	9
40	6
43	3
47	1
50	3
53	0
56	0
59	1
62	0
More	0

Figure 4.16: Practices of Community Section Bin and Frequency

Source: (Survey Data, 2020)

Just like in the fellowship section, the answers that were given in the pre-test to that of the post-test went from being 14 frequencies in the 35-bin and shifted to the evenest amount of responses out of every other section. This was an indicator of the freedom of thinking amongst the participants and allowed a clear vision of the current practices of community within the pool of participants and gave them an understanding of how to develop more intimate relationships, in turn, developing richer communities.



*Figure 4.17: Practices of Community Section Histogram*

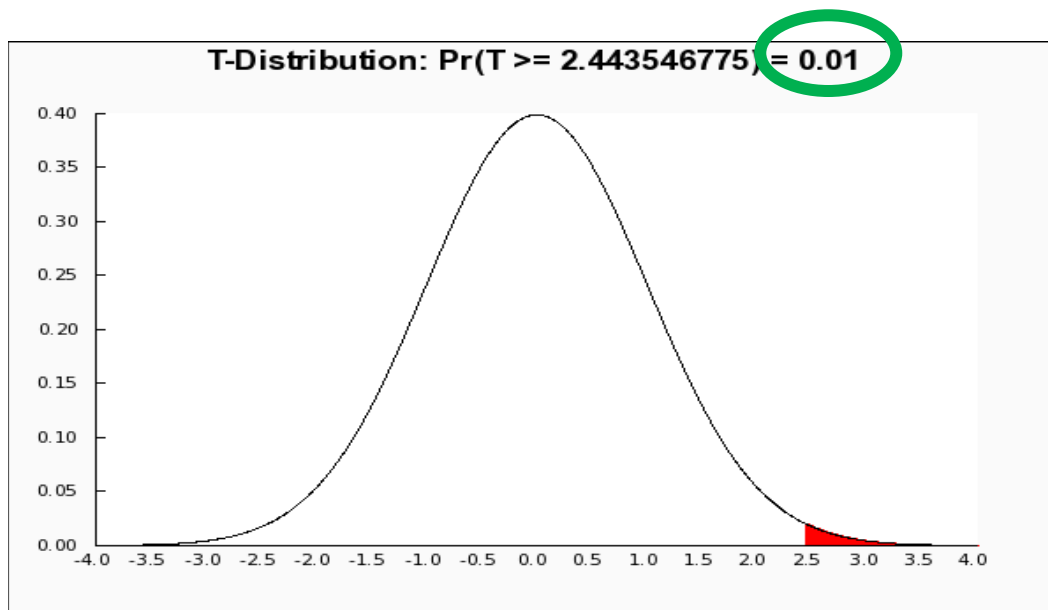
Source: (Survey Data, 2020)

In these histograms, it gives a visual representation of the leveling out of the responses. One factor that the researcher feels that assisted this change was the time for in-depth discussion within this section compared to the others. Participants were encouraged when discussing the six ways to incorporate community to give their thoughts and ideas. The responses seemed to be affected more by those participants that take part personally in the three methods of gauging community, that the researcher defined. These gauges are small groups, discipleship, and church involvement. The participants that were involved in these three different groups compared to those who are less active had a greater understanding of the importance of these six factors to develop community. The regular attendees seemed to feel more left out of church community and lacked genuine significant relationships from within the church.

p-value = $P(T \geq t)$				<b>0.01002919</b>
95% CI[Lower Limit]				<b>0.50522775</b>
95% CI[Upper Limit]				<b>2.7888899</b>
95% CI				<b>[0.505, 2.789]</b>

*Figure 4.18: Practices of Community Section P-Value*

Source: (Survey Data, 2020)



*Figure 4.19: Practices of Community Section T-Distribution*

Source: (Survey Data, 2020)

Having a p-value less than the alpha of 0.05 at 0.01 shows that with 95% confidence that the class had a direct effect on the participants and their responses. Through analysis of the data within the practices of community section, the following was determined. The analysis for the Practices of Community section is as follows the Null Hypothesis is equal to 0 and the Expected mean difference is 0. In the experiment, our alpha value was 0.05%, which corresponds to a CI of 95%. The Alternate Hypothesis equals the Expected mean difference after the course  $> 0$ . The Actual Difference Mean is shown to be 1.647058824. After arriving at the p-value of 0.010029188, the conclusion is that with 95% confidence that the course taken by the participants had a significant effect. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected. It is evident that the course had a significant effect on the participants.

### **Unexpected Results**

As stated throughout this chapter so far, there were a few discrepancies the researcher identified. In the reverse scoring questions prior to the class some participants had a lack of

understanding of how to properly answer those questions. The researcher neglected to have an explanation or a legend to describe this. Reverse scoring was annotated, but many of the participants stated they did not understand this. After explaining the way reverse scoring worked time was given to allow them to adjust their questions if needed before turning in the pre-test survey before the class started. As most of the group was told by the researcher beforehand, it was not a drastic change; however, there was evidence of a difference in responses from pre-test to post-test. Due to the oversight by the researcher in not offering a better explanation it affected some reverse scoring questions. Here is a sample from question eight in the unity section. The average mean changed from the pre to post.

Unity Question #8 Paired-T				
t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means				
	<i>Pre #8</i>	<i>Post #8</i>		
Mean	2.794117647	3.147058824		
Variance	0.895721925	0.97771836		
Observations	34	34		
Pearson Correlation	0.51905115			
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0			
df	33			
t Stat	-2.166945356			
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.018778679			
t Critical one-tail	1.692360309			
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.037557358			
t Critical two-tail	2.034515297			
p <= 0.05 therefore we reject the null hypothesis. The class had an effect of the result on the participants.				

Figure 4.20: Practices of Community Section Paired-T

Source: (Survey Data, 2020)

Also, an unexpected result was found that a married couple that was involved in this project was going through a difficult season in life and at the church with some hurt feelings. Their responses in almost all the questions from pre-test to post-test seem to change because their troubled relationship in the church was restored. This was an unforeseen circumstance that

directly affected the responses by two of the participants on the pre-test. Human error is expected in projects, and personal feelings can come into the responses on the paper. The researcher explained to the participants to give honest assessments and not the response that they know is right. By giving this freedom to respond, it opened up the possibility for hurt feelings to affect responses.

Lastly, the wording of some questions should have been written more precise, meaning that a brief explanation could have made the questions better understood. Some questions seemed vague, which led to some confusion in the questions. This was expected as the intervention plan was designed to gauge present knowledge of reciprocal community and through an awareness campaign to see if a two-hour class and the information passed on there would cause the responses to change. As seen in this chapter, as expected based upon the expert opinion offered by Dr. Kennedy, the data analysis compiled with the assistance of John Smith it showed that they saw significant statistical changes in the scores of each area. The intervention plan that was laid out by the researcher, with the overall purpose being to run an awareness campaign at Jackson Baptist Church for the education of reciprocal community seemed to be a success. Overall success would be better understanding of the holistic Biblical understanding of community and how unity, togetherness, and fellowship factor into that understanding. The collected data in this project showed that the intervention plan was a success.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Conclusion**

With the current research methods often only examining community in either small groups, discipleship, and church activity, it was one goal of this research to develop ways to use these three things as a parameter to gauge the reciprocal community in Jackson Baptist Church. The overall success of this research was determined by measuring a change in attitudes and desires about building reciprocal community within the church. In this project, the higher goal will be for the carrying out of these actions for the glory of God and the good of the people that will not be measured in this project.

### **Where to Go from Here**

Within Jackson Baptist Church, it will be imperative to take the information in this research and apply it to the whole church. This can be achieved through various platforms. It would be beneficial to have sermons, classes, and training on implementing community within the church. One thing that could be beneficial is to take various groups within the church and give them the survey to get a complete understanding of the knowledge of community and practices of the whole church. This would allow the survey and feedback to include those who are often outcaste or even more spectators than attendees. This is vital to further this research within the church because, to adjust the DNA of the church it is important to get everyone involved. Getting the information from those less involved with ideas on how they view community within their lives can assist the researcher by helping use this on a grand scale. Also, to take this information and implement the philosophies and ideas found in the scriptures, and also the feedback of the people who took part.



The researcher understands that to implement the information from this project the first step must be leadership buy-in. The leadership needs to understand how to develop better community, and the benefits related to it. At Jackson Baptist, difficulty comes in trying to get something new started because of communication challenges. It is without saying that something like community is known or understood by many in the church, but the question lies in why has it not been started? Through the discovery of this project, it has shown that reciprocal community was something God designed for His Church. However, this concept has been lost in this church. In the earlier chapters, the church split was discussed. This split resulted from a failed assessment which pitted the church staff against each other. Many people that filled out surveys and answered questions during the assessment their responses were publicly shared. With this project care had to be given to ensure any information gathered was confidential. In doing this, it will help people open up without concern for retribution. It will be imperative to utilize this data to implement growth within the three areas of community which are small groups, discipleship groups, and church involvement.

### **Small Groups**

Within this project it has been shown that small groups are a vital piece of developing community within a church. However, what has to happen is the people within the church have to see what the value of the groups are within their own lives. As shown in Chapter One living near New York City people need to be picky with their commitments due to long commutes to and from work. Offering the survey to the church and leadership this greater awareness will allow them to see that apart from groups they have a void in their personal and spiritual life. Also, within this material it will show how group ministry is so conducive to building community.

## **Church Involvement**

Taking the information gathered in the research and also found in scripture JBC must develop a way to get more people if not everyone using their spiritual gifts. Within, the researchers working definition in order for a church to have community they must have equality of gifts within the body to ensure that everyone is doing their part to serve the Lord with the common goal of glorifying the Lord. This will also need to be a change in attitude in some leadership. As shown in areas throughout the project some people's hearts are not in the right place and pride has caused them to elevate themselves over others. A lack of humility is a stumbling block to unity.

## **Discipleship Groups**

In the New Testament the word disciple derives from a Greek word meaning student or learner. The word Disciple and Christian terminology became unique following the Gospels as following the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, became a term for a follower of Christ who strived to model their life after their teacher which to a believer would be Jesus. This is important to note as Jackson Baptist took the information from this research and has started a women's and men's mentoring program with the intent on discipleship aimed at building relationships first with God and then with fellow believers which was one of the researchers goals for the project.

## **Comparing the Project**

Literature and projects similar to this work often take an individual ministry, like small groups, and expect it to build community. Throughout the past decade, there has been a push towards small group ministry vice traditional classes like Sunday School. Many churches

scrubbed programs like Sunday School to facilitate small groups. This is not a bad thing to do; however, the good intentions of building community within small groups have faded. As shown in the research using just small groups to build community is problematic due to a lack of participation of all age groups. Mega churches like Saddleback and Willow Creek have flourishing communities through a highly successful group ministry. This is because these churches made their groups a part of their identity. In most churches throughout America, small groups have become just another program resulting in a lack of participation and not benefiting the church's inner community. Current studies and a lot of literature on community is built only on small group ministry. Some responsibility in this is the problem that has plagued the American Church in that all churches regardless of identity, size, background, and current ministry attempts to implement the stuff of successful churches, but the way things are done at Willow Creek and Jackson Baptist are fundamentally different.

By examining the literature that relates to community in churches, most writings are geared at establishing the Biblical backgrounds of community. Other Christian writings pertaining to community focus on how the Global Church practiced community throughout its history. One great work by Joseph Hellerman that is referenced throughout this work is *When the Church was a Family*. Hellerman details the community-first mentality of the First Century Church. The deep relationships of the early church resulted in rapid evangelism, significant relationships, and time spent with each other daily. The problem is the likelihood of churches being able to have a church that implements all the practices of the early church would be slim to none. American culture is so drastically different than First Century Rome that by implementing their practices could prove detrimental. However, to conduct the church in a way that puts the group first could be accomplished. The research that was conducted in this project can assist

churches in building a ministry that equally views its people while building a culture that thinks of the church before individual needs. Laid out in the paper and the two-hour class the church must see every ministry and every spiritual gift as a group collaboration and not a competition. This way of thinking can develop a group first mentality by seeing each other as equally vital to the mission of Jackson Baptist, and without everyone being directly involved, the mission can fail.

Also, missing from the current work conducted by the theologians and Christian authors are direct ways or successful strategies to implement community in the church. There is material on the success of a few mega churches, but neglects to have scriptural facts and truths on community that could be used by the church of 10,000 and the church of 100. One unique approach to building community is detailed in the book *Compelling Community* by Mark Dever. Dever explains how the intimate community of the early church was based on certain practices. As Acts 2 shows, the church prayed, studied God's Word, fellowshiped, and had togetherness throughout. These works show how, through developing these practices, that community can exist in today's church. Guidance like this is beneficial to grow the church spiritually and with other believers. However, what the researcher of this project contributed to this was to break down how each factor from Acts 2 can be used in the Twenty-First Century Church. Also, this project assisted the work on community in the church by showing how these factors alone will not directly build community as they become programs and not a way of life, meaning that they take out the fellowship aspect out and focus directly on Biblical head knowledge. This is a problem because reciprocal community involves having intimate relationships with both God and man. In things like fellowship, it allows not only Biblical studies but also helps the people in a church develop real and lasting relationships together. This push by the church to only focus on

Biblical Studies vice Bible studies with building community with both God and fellow believers. The desire for an individual Christian life focused on knowledge alone has been a leading factor in the consumer-based mentality of the American Church.

### **Lessons Learned**

Throughout the last year, as preparations began for the researcher to start the thesis writing for the Doctor of Ministry degree, various topics and ideas were formulated. It was the idea of the researcher to begin a study on discipleship principles of the First Century Church and how they can be implemented in the Twenty-First American Church. Within the start of the DMIN 880 class, this idea was discussed with the staff at Liberty University; however, this is where God intervened, and an idea was hatched. The researcher, with the help of the professor, developed the idea of community as it pertains to a specific research group. At first the plan would focus on Conservative Baptist Churches but after working it out the church of the researcher became the test subject. In speaking of lessons learned this is important to be included because God orchestrating these events set in motion the people and things to be researched. The researcher through studying had a heart deeply passionate about community. Once a mentor was to be assigned, then God through His Sovereignty had chosen a Godly person who had a heart for the things outlined in the Thesis proposal. Starting in May 2019, their relationship started, and the researcher would experience highs and lows adding the research.

The highs that the researcher experienced were found in the research portion of the project. Taking the time to discover the views of the attendees at JBC was rewarding. In this the people felt comfortable in speaking their ideals and the researcher was blessed in getting to know the good and bad things happening in the church. The researcher grew to be a better leader by taking the time to hear people's viewpoints without always coming to the defense of the church.

leadership. Just like Christ in order to be a servant leader one must take the time to hear not only the good things happening in the church but the bad as well. Focusing on serving those God had given the leader to shepherd.

With the highs also came the lows. It was a great challenge at first to find people willing to participate in the study. The researcher experienced some disappointment as several people declined and cast doubt that people would not be interested in taking part. As stated in all the chapters because of the church split people were very apprehensive at first; however, the Lord had chosen those who would take part and the thirty-four were found. The stress of finishing the project or being able to get an array of people in the three different groups concerned the researcher; however, with solid faith trust should have been that in the sovereignty of God everything would work out according to His plan.

Community in the church was something that seemed a need but not something that would hinder a church and its mission. This idea changed through the intense studying of scripture, church history, and literature to see why God stressed that His Church should be a people built on strong relationships with Him and each other. Acts 2:42-47 became the focus passage of the project and it opened up things that the researcher had never known before. Through this first group of Christians on the Day of Pentecost a movement started and spread throughout the Roman Empire. This early church would conduct themselves in a way so foreign from the church in America today. The researcher began by looking throughout the book of Acts to see how this community was achieved within this group of people. This group of people conducted their daily lives in a way to develop their spiritual lives. This small house group assisted in learning God's Word, the teachings of Jesus, the Apostles teaching, observance of the Lord's Supper, prayer, and relationship building. The researcher learned that by looking at these

various growth factors of the early church, when applied to a church today those three factors could develop community within a church.

The first factor is small groups; to have community, the church would need to devote time each day to build relationships with each other and also with God. The second was discipleship; these people daily devoted themselves to learn the things of God, and lastly, in the Book of Acts, all these people served the Church in various ways with the gifts that God had given each one of them.

These observations became the background for the whole study. It was learned that these three factors could help develop community and assist the church in gauging the community within their members. The spiritual growth principles of the early church could be classified into three ministry tools. Foundationally this would be the most important lesson learned by the researcher because through these three ministries of small groups, discipleship, and church involvement church community hinges.

Taking these three ministry programs the researcher studied and developed what these activities attempted to accomplish. Through these practices the early church successfully established community. The researcher discovered that in these three ministries of small groups, discipleship, and church involvement they developed community through unity, togetherness, fellowship, and practices of community. It was in God's people serving Him by using their spiritual gifts, practicing humility in understanding that all people were needed and essential to the ministry of the church, and set aside time daily to commune with God and other Christians that community was built. In order to build the community that is shown in Acts 2 and other passages throughout Acts time and dedication was required. Discovering these lessons and principles, the researcher embarked on an awareness campaign of the people of Jackson Baptist

Church to see what people understood on community and if they could learn ancient practices to implement today. Through this work, the researcher discovered that the principles found within scripture were not commonly practiced at Jackson Baptist; however, all of the thirty-four participants understood they needed this type of community. By being a dedicated church who desired intimate relationships with God and fellow Christians this group changed the world. If Jackson Baptist wants to be a world-changing church they too needed to be a people just like in Acts 2 who through passionate living and dedication to God saw people saved daily.

### **Application for Other Settings**

The setting that was chosen for this research needed to be small enough to discover if the class would cause a change in responses. However, the principles that were developed in this project are not “tailor-made” just for Jackson Baptist. The ideals in this project are Biblical, and the success of the past is evident historically that it is easy to see that it is designed for all churches. Various churches throughout the world have active groups of community that are often a product of small groups or shared interest groups. However, as the research in this project showed, this does not represent the whole church. Churches in America, even those with flourishing numbers, lack real Biblical community in that the people would say that the significant relationships in their lives are not a product of the church. In this research it was discovered at Jackson Baptist, over 75% of the people lacked intimate defined relationships with others in the church. It was said that even within small groups that the focus is Bible study and only a small amount on relationship building. Biblical studies are vital in the life of a believer; however, even in the early church, relationships were built through study and fellowship doing things like sharing meal. Churches like Jackson Baptist attempt to remedy this by having fellowship functions or even fellowship time in the service, but even as the project participants



stated, it leads to shallow relationships. Using the findings of this project and the analyzed data found within; churches not only in America but throughout the world could likely enhance reciprocal community in their congregations.

As shown in Joseph Hellerman's book *When the Church was a Family* the community that existed in the early church differed from today as Christianity was a minority in the Roman Empire and was not highly influential. This was the case until around A.D. 380 when through the Edict of Thessalonica Christianity became the chief religion and this began to change. In Twenty-First Century America in most parts of the country Christianity is the top religion and very influential. The researcher lives in the Northeast and Christianity is slowly starting to decline and is much less influential as compared to the Southeast where the researcher is from and spent many years in ministry there.

Community is something that churches need to make a heavy emphasis within their ministries and central to their DNA. Within churches often priorities are placed in other things and emphasis on numbers or having the most people within their church. When the focus of the church is to have a large congregation and not on the spiritual growth of their people essentially what happens is a push for seat fillers and not for developing people spiritually through their relationship with God and other Christians. This has led to the consumer-based faith in that people occupy seats but do not get involved directly. By using the three ministry focuses of small groups, discipleship, and church involvement with a concentration on developing unity, togetherness, and fellowship within them reciprocal community can be established in any evangelical church.

## **Further Research**

After the study was conducted the researcher discovered different areas to further this research. While the participants filled out the survey and sat in the class, it showed that certain things helped contribute to the knowledge of community and its practices. It would be beneficial to separate the participants into other factors, not just on their role in the church. One way will be to discover if gender plays a role in developing community in the church. Found in the study was that within Jackson Baptist, the women seemed to have more significant relationships with other members compared to the men. Women also desired to have significant relationships with other attendees than men as the men seemed to be okay without these types of relationships. By studying the effects of gender as it pertains to the practice of community would be interesting to discover ways to make men more open to intimate relationships with other Christians.

In this study, further research would be beneficial to examine if racial and socioeconomic groups contribute to the community within the church. While preparing for this study and having conversations with some participants, a few observations were made. Certain ethnicities seemed to desire community with other Christians more than others but also became more of a desire for intimate relationships when broken down into nationalities. Within Jackson Baptist, the Jamaican community has a close bond as well as Asian attendees. This is not a negative because it is not caused by some groups being left out because, in JBC, all groups spend time with each other; however, having common backgrounds and experiences seem to contribute to the real intimate and close relationships. Also, on this background, research should be conducted on the different people even to the location of where they live in America. In the researcher's opinion, the churches that was served in the southeastern portion of the United States those churches communities had more significant relationships in the church but also experienced that people

get left out more due to family ties or years of friendships amongst families these bonds often resulted in new people feeling left out.

Further research, if time would have allowed the researcher, would be to examine if socioeconomic levels contribute to the relationships and community in the church. Would those with less money desire these relationships more than those who have large amounts of money that have the potential for more relationships outside the church? it appeared throughout the study that often those who had business associates or worked more “white-color” jobs tended to not place as much emphasis on relationships within the church as those who worked more industrial type jobs.

In the researchers area of ministry there is a large base of people who used to attend a Catholic church prior to attending Jackson Baptist. There are also some people who took part in the study coming from other more traditional denominations like Lutheran and Presbyterian. As stated in Chapter Four this led to a different idea of church community prior to the class. Some felt that church was not for community but to learn or be fed by the pastor. Further research could be conducted on those who have a background in other denominations to see if this affected their desire to develop community from within the church.

Prior to the research, the researcher believed that community would be a desire for people that identify as extroverts as it fit more to their personality characteristics. However; the researcher found that personality types did not seem to play a factor in the desire to have community. Although, within the research no data was collected on community and how it effects personality. If time would have been permitted further, research would have been beneficial in developing a section of the survey on personality traits to see if they factor in on the way a person desire Christian community in their life.

Lastly, as discussed in this chapter the change in the Twenty-First Century American Church there is a decline in Christianity leading to a culture that does not seek the influence of the Christian faith as was evident in the history of the United States. Research could be conducted on community found within post-Christian nations like England and other countries in Western Europe. Research could examine if like the early church since Christianity is no longer having an influence in the culture do churches in England long to have more community and even the group first mentality. This research should also be conducted in Israel for the Christians in this Jewish nation, or even in Islamic dominated countries. Does a sense of oppression and persecution led to people desiring community and the greater good of the group over personal needs?

### **Measurable Markers of Success**

The researcher feels that effective change ultimately needs to be measured. There were a lot of positive signs in the research. The participants seemed to realize the need within Jackson Baptist to change the way normal ministry happens. The change would be from a consumer-based service to a more interactive and social service. Time could be established for groups prior to the worship service itself. Also, fellowship with coffee and pastries could allow a time to foster fellow people within the church. In JBC it is easy for people to hide in the crowd and without deliberate methods to combat this while not making people uncomfortable to the point they do not come back. The methods for achieving these types of meaningful relationships with God and fellow Christians will be measured by using the same methods the project did the class and the survey.

## **Class**

Within this project the two-hour class that the researcher developed will start a training session that will be offered for a six-week class starting in June 2020. This will run once every quarter. The object of this class is to build a larger base of those having a strong awareness of community within the church. The researcher will teach the first course and periodically here on out. However, various leaders will also help teach this course. The leaders that have been chosen are those who have been a part of Jackson Baptist for at least 25 years. This was designed to assist in explaining how the church's community has changed throughout the decades. Also, the last class a forum of the founding pastor, and three charter members who still attend the church will be there to speak and answer questions. This class will be mandatory for leaders (elders, deacons, deaconesses, and trustees). Small group leaders will also be asked to take this class. It will be the goal of the church to keep the class going until everyone is trained and offer on a need be basis as new people come into the church.

## **Survey**

With the class as it was with this research the church members will complete a pre-survey and a post-survey. This survey as mentioned earlier in this chapter will remain anonymous in hopes to get honest feedback. As it is with the class, the goal is to administer before every class, and after every class until everyone within the church has taken part. When new people come to the church, dates will be set up for them to take the class and the surveys. However, the difference from the class will be that the researcher will be responsible for the surveys. The measurable outcome with the class and survey will differ from the research in that the goal will now be application. The researcher alongside church leadership will use the data to recognize deficiencies and strengths to establish ways to foster an environment that creates relationships.

Relationships can be created through the small group ministry of the church, promoting a culture at the church that encourages people to use their gifts no matter what God has called them to, and last to use those relationships they build to learn and grow from each other with one common goal. The common goal of living a life to glorify God which is done through living a life like Him.

## **Groups**

Within this project examples have been given in scripture and church history how group ministry strengthens relationships both upwardly with God and outwardly with both saved and unsaved. As shown the church must develop its ministries to foster a group mentality in that the emphasis of the church is on small groups and not the Sunday morning service. This is a measurable outcome that will be gauged each year. With an active church attendance of 250 people on Sunday to develop 5 groups over the next two years will be the desired outcome. The groups as the previous chapters showed must switch from placing sole emphasis on doing a study and limiting interaction. Yes, the study is important but in order for community to grow and develop the leaders must allow this time to happen when it needs to and it must be organic. This can be developed through leader training with the researcher who is also the church's small group pastor.

## **Church Involvement**

Jackson Baptist uses a certain company's spiritual gifts inventory. The church using this spiritual gifts inventory could make those who are taking the course along with the pre-test and post-test surveys aware of their spiritual gifts. During this time the church within 12 -18 months should transition their ministries to foster an environment where people are serving in places God has equipped them and they are passionate about. Often at JBC people have been tasked to

fill in a position for what was supposed to be a short time but turned into a permanent position. To see 50% of the active church attenders serving in church ministries in 18 months would be a step in a positive direction from where it is now at around 15%-20% depending on the older members who travel to Florida during the winter months.

## **Discipleship**

Earlier in this chapter the researcher had mentioned that following the data collection portion of this project the church began a women's and men's mentoring program to strengthen its discipleship. Within the church as Chapter One showed there is not only a large cross-cultural group of people but also a cross-generational group. Through this project those in leadership roles felt that the church should embrace these relationships and allow the young and old to learn from one another in mentoring relationships. The desired outcome of the discipleship groups within the context of community is to continue with these mentoring relationship to where we have at least 75% of the church in 2 years match up in a mentoring relationship.

To change the culture of the Jackson Baptist will take time and as stated in this chapter it will need to be intentional. When studying churches with rich community and thriving groups like Saddleback and Willow Creek, it took them 20 years or long of this intentional style of ministry to get to where they are. As a leader within the church the researcher must ensure that the church does not lose their focus and motivation as the high and lows happen over the years and encourage one another to keep their eyes on the prize.

## **Summary**

This project on reciprocal community detailed how in the early church community with an intimate relationship with God and fellow believers was vital to the success of the Church. This research gauged the knowledge of community within the participants and deepened their

knowledge of community with the practices to help achieve it in today's Church. This was shown in examples from church history and scripture that how reciprocal community was part of God's plan for the church and He desires for it once again among His people to include the people of Jackson Baptist Church.

It is when believers live like Christ did seeking to have unity, togetherness, and fellowship with fellow Christians then we can be the Church that God wants us to be. I John 1:7 (The Living Bible) explains this, "But if we are living in the light of God's presence, just as Christ does, then we have wonderful fellowship and joy with each other, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from every sin."<sup>58</sup> It will be through the community that is established at JBC which is empowered by the Holy Spirit that God will truly be glorified through the unity, togetherness, and fellowship of His people. Romans 15:5-7 says, "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God." May God forever be glorified at Jackson Baptist Church and all throughout the world.

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<sup>58</sup> The Living Bible, The Living Bible (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), I John 1:7.



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## Appendix A: IRB Approval Document

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY<sup>®</sup>

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 24, 2019

Jamie Wilson

IRB Approval 3924.092419: Developing Reciprocal Community in Jackson Baptist Church

Dear Jamie Wilson,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. 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 were attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

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

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**

*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*

**Research Ethics Office**



*Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971*



## Appendix B: Survey Questions

### Unity

1. Having a common goal of reaching the lost is important to establish unity.
2. The unity you've experienced at Jackson Baptist Church is supernatural.
3. The unity at Jackson Baptist Church seems to be superficial. **(reversed scoring)**
4. As a groom and bride become one physically, Jackson Baptist is united as one, spiritually.
5. All people at Jackson Baptist Church are dependent on each other.
6. There is evidence of division within the church at Jackson Baptist. **(reversed scoring)**
7. Jackson Baptist Church is moving together wholly, as one people.
8. Many people at JBC have personal agendas that hinder unity. **(reversed scoring)**
9. Without unity the church can't fulfill our mission statement, "love God, love others, and make disciples".
10. The Gospel is the cornerstone of the unity that is evident at Jackson Baptist Church.
11. Many of the relationships that you have at Jackson Baptist Church are deeply intimate.
12. Jackson Baptist Church struggles in attaining unity amongst all of its members. **(reversed scoring)**

### Togetherness

1. The current worship service at Jackson Baptist Church fosters togetherness.
2. Small groups or Bible studies help strengthen your personal walk with God.
3. It is easy to see that Jackson Baptist Church has a family type atmosphere.
4. Most people are left feeling isolated at Jackson Baptist Church. **(reversed scoring)**
5. To have togetherness, a church must have equality amongst all people.

6. The more times a Christian is with fellow believers, the stronger their community is.
7. Without togetherness, the church can still have evangelistic success. **(reversed scoring)**
8. Jackson Baptist Church has the characteristics of having one mind.
9. Jackson Baptist Church is in one accord.
10. A lack of passion has no effect on the togetherness of the Jackson Baptist Church.

**(reversed scoring)**

11. The togetherness at JBC is better than other churches you've attended.
12. Your prayer life is made up of both personal time and corporate time as an attender at Jackson Baptist.

### **Fellowship**

1. Your Christian fellowship at Jackson Baptist Church is more important than the fellowship you have with non-believers.
2. Church attendance doesn't affect one's fellowship with fellow believers. **(reversed scoring)**
3. Fellowship with other believers strengthens a Christian's faith.
4. Serving in church ministries is a good indicator of one's fellowship.
5. Fellowship at Jackson Baptist Church plays a huge role in the spiritual growth of the attenders.
6. Fellowship isn't needed to join believers together spiritually. **(reversed scoring)**
7. Fellowship with other believers is vital to your walk with God.
8. Faith is deepened at JBC through the fellowship of its people.
9. You have been in fellowship with other believers at Jackson Baptist Church outside of church activities. (i.e., dinner, movies, etc.)

10. The fellowship at Jackson Baptist doesn't help develop meaningful relationships.

**(reversed scoring)**

11. You have fellowship with God and fellow church members on a daily basis.

12. Small groups are the best method for Christians to have fellowship.

### **Practices of Community**

1. Everyone is treated equally at Jackson Baptist Church.

2. There is a close bond with everyone at Jackson Baptist.

3. You feel closely connected to everyone at the church.

4. You have no close friends at Jackson Baptist Church. **(reversed scoring)**

5. The relationships that you have at JBC are meaningful.

6. Most relationships at Jackson Baptist are shallow. **(reversed scoring)**

7. You have personal fellowship with God right now.

8. People can have meaningful community through online church. **(reversed scoring)**

9. You often feel left out while attending church or church activities.

10. Small groups at Jackson Baptist Church are an example of authentic community.

11. In order for someone to have community, they must be involved in discipleship.

12. Church involvement is an effective measure in ensuring that a member of Jackson Baptist

Church is in community.

13. Your relationships are not significant in the assisting of your personal spiritual growth.

**(reversed scoring)**

14. The current structure of Jackson Baptist Church helps foster an environment for authentic community.

## **Appendix C: Recruitment Letter**

Jackson Baptist Church Attendees  
Pastor Jamie Wilson  
Jackson Baptist Church  
360 Bennett's Mills Road  
Jackson, NJ 08759

Dear :

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research is to discover what type of community people look for in a church and to discover the different levels of church involvement as it relates to one's understanding of community, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are 18 years of age or older, a church leader, long-term servant, or frequent worship service attender of Jackson Baptist Church, and you are willing to participate, you will be asked to take a 50-question pre-test prior to attending a Bible class on the topic of community, attend the Bible class , and immediately following lunch on the day of the class, complete a post-test prior to leaving. The pre-test will be mailed to you prior to the class, and you will need to complete it and bring it with you to the class. It should take approximately 30-45 minutes for you to complete the test each time, and the Bible class will last approximately 2 hours. Your name will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at the phone number or email address included below, and I will send you the pre-test and provide information about when the class will take place.

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research, please print and sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the class.

If you choose to participate, you will have a catered meal for lunch.

Jamie Wilson  
Pastor of Youth and Families  
Jackson Baptist Church  
609-351-8768  
jbcpastorj@optimum.net

## Appendix D: Class Outline

### Class on Community

#### I. Reciprocal Community Defined

- A. (Slide2) Reciprocal Community is when members in a church are seen as equals united in a vision, joined as one, and directly involved in meaningful fellowship with both God and man.

#### II. Greatest Example of Community in the church

##### 1. Acts 2:42-47

- a. It's essential to break down the passage and discover the components of God's design for the church as displayed in the early church following Pentecost.
- This group of people that comprised the church in its beginning were deeply committed to the group.
  - C.K. Barrett, in his commentary on Acts, spoke on this commitment by stating, "The meaning is that they continued in faithful adherence to the newly formed community."
  - In the early New Testament Church, people would be considered a collectivist society. (Slide 3) A collectivist society is defined as when people identify themselves with the goals of the group more than the goals of the individual.
  - (Slide4) Joseph Hellerman, in his book "When the Church was a Family," said this, "The collectivist mindset of early Christianity is

particularly evident in the attitudes of church members toward their material goods. In harmony with the “group comes first” principle that characterized the Mediterranean world.”

- Vs. 42 shows four things that this church devoted themselves to while in community with others.
- The word for devotion used here is *proskartereo* meaning constantly. This carries with it the idea that constantly, this new church met daily and constantly devoted themselves to the four things discovered in verse 42, and they are:
  - 1) Apostles Teaching
  - 2) Fellowship
  - 3) Lord’s Supper
  - 4) Prayer
- Verses 43-45 details a church that was filled with vigor for the things of God and a deep excitement that stirred not just the church but the unbelievers in their city as well.
- (Slide5) Ajith Fernando, in his commentary, alluded to the possibility that the excitement in the church also included the unbelievers in the city of Jerusalem as well. He said, “Everyone” here could refer both to the believers and to outsiders who saw and heard what was happening in the church. These people could sense that God was at work.”

- This community was unique in that they developed a way to learn how to love and live together. Verse 44 explains that they were together and had everything in common. This was unique for this new group of believers.
- This togetherness that they shared changed even the social matters in the community. The believers voluntarily sold their possessions to assist everyone. It's important to remember that this act of helping the people in need wasn't forced upon the people.
- Giving away possessions to help the ones in need demonstrates that to have fellowship with God and man, the believer must be willing to share out of their pocketbooks.
- Verse 46 shows the commitment that these believers had in that they fellowshiped together every day. This priority was effective in transforming believers and unbelievers.
- In their meeting daily, it allowed them to fulfill God's desire for fellowshiping. They would open up their houses for the believers in Jerusalem. This caused the Christians to show hospitality.
- The togetherness that was displayed is from the word *homothumadon*, meaning in one accord or one mind. Having oneness of mind allowed these Christians to begin transforming their neighborhoods, which will be seen in verse 47.
- A radically changed group of people would change the world forever. This group was excited and motivated to share their faith

with others. In doing this, they saw God daily bringing people into their assembly that would be saved.

- For everything that they witnessed and believed praise was given to God, and when the glory goes to God, we see the beginning of the church growing numerically. They truly had a real and authentic fellowship.
- Fernando wrote, “True fellowship focuses on God and helps people to remember the good things he has done, which, in turn, causes praise.”
- Through the favor that the believers had in their areas allowed them when asked to explain the transformation that took place in their lives. (Slide6) The community found in the church stemmed from three words: unity, togetherness, and fellowship. We will now examine these three words.

### III. Unity, Togetherness, and Fellowship defined

#### A. Unity

- Jesus in John 17 prayed that His Disciples and all future believers would be united. This unity prayed for by Christ was real unity as He asked that they be one like Him and His Fathers is. (Slide7) He prayed in John 17:21a, “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you.”



- The word one in this passage is from the Greek word (Slide8) *Heis or Henotes*, meaning unity or oneness. Unity is essentially being one as a church.
- In the prayer that Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane that is listed above the unity that is described is a deep and intimate unity. One can see this in His desire to see the believers be one like Him and His Father. This is unique because the unity that Jesus had with God was special and displayed throughout the Gospels. In one instance, when Jesus was speaking to the unbelieving Jews, (Slide9) He said this in John 10:30, “I and the Father are one.” This unity in the relationship between Jesus and the Father couldn’t be broken.
- In speaking of this unity displayed in this verse, (Slide10) Roy Zuck says, “He was saying They have the closest possible unity of purpose.” The keywords in this statement are unity in purpose. Unity in purpose should be a driving force for any church. With this unified purpose, a church could strengthen its community by being of one mind as it pertains to the mission God has designed it that church.

#### B. Togetherness

- The actual state of being together is togetherness. In the Greek, the word used is a combination of two words that makes up the word (Slide13) *Homothumadon*, meaning “unanimously with one accord or mind.”

- In the early church, scripture shows that this group of believers practiced togetherness. (Slide14) Acts 1:14 shows the followers of Christ gathered in the upper room following the ascension of Christ. It says, “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”
- The difference in the togetherness of this group of believers gathered in the upper room compared to many modern churches is that they sought after spending time with other believers.

### C. Fellowship

- Fellowship relating to community in the church can be defined as shared time with fellow believers. (Slide13) Hebrews 10:24-25, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”
- This meeting together was foundational to the writer of Hebrews. The ideas shared here shows that when the believers would give up meeting together, then it would leave others isolated.
- Verse 25 is connected to verse 24 in that if God’s people are not in fellowship or shared time with other believers than as a result of isolation, people could not be encouraged.
- In the American culture today often, people neglect attending to an “Actual” church as they rely upon television and internet churches

to be their source of fellowship and church attendance. Without the direct and intentional fellowship with other believers' isolation can cause problems in a believer's life as they have no shared time where encouragement can take place.

- (Slide14) George Guthrie, in his commentary, said it like this, "Whatever the reason, the author sees their discontinuance of common fellowship and worship as fatal for perseverance in the faith. Encouragement cannot take place in isolation."

#### IV. Three Methods of Gauging Community

A. There are three effective methods of gauging community in your church; they are small groups, discipleship, and church involvement. The critical thing to remember is that these methods have to be viewed together and not alone as that could cause a false sense of community in a church.

##### 1. Small Groups

- First, let's look at small groups. Small groups are a popular method of community in churches today. Through a small group, people can grow closer to God and other believers. However, the problem with small groups as a stand-alone gauge to community in a church is the fact that a limited number of people will be active in a churches small group ministry.
  - Look at the church here at Jackson Baptist, (Slide15) we have roughly 500 members, and only 20% are actively part of a small group.
- Another problem that has been researched is that older Christians tend

to be the ones active in a small group. The Barna Group discovered that 56 is the median age for people who take part in a small group ministry. Also, problematic is that young families are often the ones who don't take out the time to be a part of a small group.

- (Slide16) Here at Jackson Baptist, 65% of our small group is comprised of people over 50, but the problem lies in a lack of community felt in younger adults and families.
- However, though small groups coupled with other methods of determining community can be useful.

## 2. Discipleship

- Discipleship is essential in the life of a believer and the community of the church. Jesus spoke to His followers by saying, (Slide17) "In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples." (Luke 14:33) Jesus calls all believers to a life of abandonment for Him and His cause.
- Discipleship is a combination of several things. (Slide18) D. Mike Henderson lists these five things that comprise discipleship: placing Jesus first, following Jesus' teachings, fruitfulness, love for other disciples, and evangelism. Reciprocal community, as defined earlier, seems to be missing from Henderson's and other writers idea of discipleship. Are loving disciples enough or should relationships be a part of discipleship?

- Lifeway Research conducted a study on discipleship and discovered that people in discipleship training and instruction stated that they built relationships in this setting; however, they wouldn't call them significant relationships. Could this be because many classify discipleship as just head knowledge training?
- Looking at the life of Paul and the discipleship relationships that he had you can see that it goes beyond head knowledge and should manifest itself in relationships as well.
- (Slide19) Stacy Hoehl in the *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* pointed out the relationship that Paul had with Timothy by saying, "Throughout the duration of this relationship, Paul ensures that Timothy is the right person for the job, equips him for ministerial tasks, empowers him for success, employs him in a challenging environment to develop effectiveness, and communicates to Timothy the value of their relationship." Even though Paul disciplined and mentored Timothy, they maintained a significant relationship with each other.
- The discipleship training that goes on at Jackson Baptist would not typically be a place that would foster significant relationships; however, solid Biblical training does take place, but it would be important in a quest to build community to foster an environment in our discipleship groups that allow for deep relationships to be made.

### 3. Church Involvement

- The involvement that a person has in a church could be a useful gauge in combination with the other two because likely that a person is heavily involved in church ministries than they will have some significant relationships as a result of shared interests and experiences.
- Like small groups, if you used church involvement as the only method to gauge it could be problematic as research shows that church involvement is conducted mostly by older people. (Slide20) Lifeway Research found that three-fifths of people involved in ministries at a church are likely over the age of 45. Also, 57% of church workers are women.
- Small groups, discipleship, and church involvement while used together and not alone can be useful in determining the community in the individual and the church as a whole.

## V. Six ways to incorporate community in the church

### 1. Everyone is treated equally

#### (a. Same Gifts by the Same Spirit

- For a church to have sincere community, everyone, regardless of spiritual gift, should be treated as equal or a better word equal importance. Throughout the New Testament, we see through the Apostles that God does equip people to lead churches; however, as an example, a pastor is on equal playing grounds with the janitor in the eyes of God. No spiritual gift should be seen as more important.

- (Slide21) Romans 12:6-8 says, “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.” (Discuss)
- (Slide22) I Corinthians 12:7-11 says, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 8 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines. (Discuss)

(b. Favoritism

- Lastly, James 2:9 says, “But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.” (Discuss)

2. The Group is more important than the Individual

- In the New Testament Church, the way that an individual made decisions often was for the better of the whole group. Joseph Hellerman, in his book, *When the Church was a Family*, details these

relationships during the First Century. He wrote about the group first mentality by saying, The most salient difference between our social outlook and the cultural orientation of ancient persons is to be found in the degree of loyalty that people express toward the various groups in their lives. People in the New Testament world put the group first. We give the individual pride of place.”

- It would be valuable in the church to take some of these principles and apply them at Jackson Baptist. Many believers have consumer-type mindsets of people looking out only for what benefits them. Many people in this church will often only commit to something if there is a direct benefit to them.
- (Slide23) Mark Devers, in his book, *The Compelling Community: Where God's Power Makes a Church Attractive*, wrote, “Consumerism is dangerous. Healthy churches need providers, not consumers. After all, if consumers fill our pews, who's going to turn on the lights? Who's going to staff children's ministry? Who's going to welcome people at the door? Advocating for commitment in a local church would seem as controversial as advocating for Jesus.”
- It is crucial to create an environment where the thought of the group comes first over thought for self.

### 3. Community stems from the Gospel

- There are many organizations or fraternities that have a sense of community. While I served in the Marine Corps, some of the best



friendships that I had were a result of our shared experiences.

However, the thing that separates community amongst brothers in arms to that of the church is the Gospel.

- In Acts Chapter Two people were committed and lives changed because of the Spirit of God and the life-changing power of the Gospel. It is vital at Jackson Baptist Church that the driving force behind our community is the Gospel and empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- Using methods like small groups if not carefully examined, can result in superficial friendships or just shared interest relationships. These are the relationships that started over a shared interest like parents of kids, single moms, men's ministry, and other ministries in the church.
- (Slide24) Gospel revealing community as Mark Devers wrote about is different. He says, "In gospel-revealing community, many relationships would never exist but for the truth and power of the gospel—either because of the depth of care for each other or because two people in relationship have little in common but Christ." The hallmark of Gospel-centered relationships is those that wouldn't exist without the changing of one's life with the Gospel.
- A prime example of the Gospel changing friendships would be with Paul and the Apostles. When Paul was first saved many people to include church leaders were afraid of him; however, when they

witnessed his changed life through Jesus, friendships began to be sprouted.

#### 4. Make Small Groups a Priority

- Churches that focus on small groups often have a better sense of community. In dealing with the problem that we have here at Jackson Baptist of our life groups lacking significant relationships, small groups can be the method to assist people in growing in the knowledge of God and also fosters relationships. (Slide25) Ed Stetzer wrote on the dangers of head knowledge minus relationships. He said, “I find that a lot of Christian discipleship deals with what you need to know, not who you need to be with. That is sad because if we get the relationships right, the information will follow. If we connect people in real gospel community, they will learn. But the opposite is not always true.” Real Gospel community can help drive the discipleship of the people of a church.
- (Slide26) Stetzer writes that four factors show a value of small groups as it relates to community and they are: personal discoveries, smaller groups are more effective, deeper friendship, and maximum participation. (Discuss)

#### 5. It's not a competition but a collaboration

- The church is often plagued with people who think they can do everything on their own. Conversations have been overheard of people saying things like, “This church couldn't function without me.” This is

a wrong mindset because every person within a church has been placed there by God to do a specific work.

- (Slide27) I Corinthians 12:18-19 confronts this type of mindset, "But in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body." Every piece of a church body has been sovereignly placed and when people are guilty of doing things out of selfish ambition to receive praise destroys the plan of God for that church by gifting people in specific ways to allow collaboration of work.

#### 6. Foster an Environment of Encouragement

- In a consumer-based congregation, one of the primary purposes of the church is missing in that close relationships hardly exist, creating a place that encouragement doesn't exist. Also, the opposite is often true that in ministry, people seem eager to bring light to a fellow believer's sin and lose focus of being an encourager.
- As discussed, earlier Hebrews 10:24 tells us to "spur one another." Galatians 6:2 tells us to "Carry each other's burdens." In a community vibrant church, these things happen seamlessly. Examples of this taking place are littered throughout the book of Acts. However, in many churches today, these functions of the church are absent because relationships aren't intimate enough to lovingly encourage each other.

A goal of community should be to create a place for encouragement for all believers.