Liberty University

Recognizing and Overcoming the Problem of Individualism in a Local Church

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by

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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

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Abstract

Recognizing and Overcoming the Problem of Individualism in a Local Church
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Individualism, the concept that a person's own thoughts and interests are ethically paramount over any governmental system, can be a problem in a church, especially a small church where changes in numbers can directly affect the church's ability to carry out its vision and mission. This project will look at a rural Illinois church to show how it handles the problem of individualism, specifically in its leaders, by emphasizing the biblical concepts of the body of Christ and the family of God. The project will include an interview with a Bible college president who has researched church leadership to talk about how individualism affects churches as a whole and with the church's pastor to discuss how the church deals with the issue. A poll of the church's leadership small group will be conducted to identify the individualistic tendencies within the group, and then the research will be used to create small group lessons that will address the issues presented by the survey. A study of Scripture will provide a basis for how the early church dealt with individualism to gains insights for the modern church.

Abstract length: 185 words

Dedication

To my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is with by Your inspiration and guidance this project came to be.

To my wife, Elizabeth. Without your love, support, patience, and understanding, I would still be thinking about completing a doctorate degree.

To my children, Cate and Matthew. May you always have the drive to complete the race God has set before you.

To my home church. Your Prayers and support were much needed during times of self-doubt and weariness.

Contents

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All Scriptural references are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The American church is facing a crisis. "Between 6,000 and 10,000 churches are closing their doors each year."[1] Each day more and more churches close. Similarly, "more than 2,000 pastors are leaving the church each month."[2] What is the cause of this problem? Is there a root to the dissatisfaction that pastors are experiencing? The researcher believes that the root of the problem stems from society, in general, becoming more individualistic in nature. And is there a biblical solution to overcoming the problem? The researcher believes that the Bible may hold the key to this problem. The following story demonstrates how individualism can affect a church and the pastor of the church.

A church has just received a generous donation from a member of the congregation. The church leadership decides to use the money to replace the carpet within the sanctuary. So, the leadership does some comparison shopping and finally presents to the congregation the proposal for the purchase of the carpet, which not only includes the price but also the color. Instantly, a problem begins to develop. One person does not like the color, another does not like the texture, still another thinks they can find a similar carpet for less money, and yet another thinks the original carpet is fine and the money should be used somewhere else. To make matters worse, one of those complaining is the person who originally donated the money. It seems the donor's chief argument is that they were not consulted in how the donation would be used and feel left out and unappreciated. As the arguments continue, the church begins to divide, members stop

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[1] Thom S. Rainer, "Hope for Dying Churches," *Facts and Trends*, January 16, 2018, https://factsandtrends.net/2018/01/16/hope-for-dying-churches.

[2] George Ferrar, "Pastors Leaving Ministry—Statistics and Causes," Belize Prayer Network, May 1, 2018, https://belizeprayernetwork.com/?p=5502.

attending, and the offerings the church receives begin to dwindle. Eventually, the church is no longer able to sustain itself because it cannot even meet its basic utility obligations and is forced to close. The pastor of the church, burned-out from dealing with personal problems and infighting has had enough and no longer feels a desire or a passion to serve in the ministry, so the search for a new source of income begins. This feeling of wanting to pursue another income source is also common. A recent survey of pastors found that "fifty percent feel so discouraged that they would leave their ministry if they could but can't find another job."[3] The researcher of this project knows of a church like the one described. And while the church has not closed, it has seen a time where it had to recall a former pastor because the current pastor was feeling burned out and wanted to leave. The pastor's departure caused a rift within the congregation, and as a result, the total membership eventually was reduced by almost two-thirds its size. This church is the focus church of this project.

Ministry Context

The focus church is in a small, rural, mid-western town. Like many churches in the mid-west, it is located at the edge of the town it calls home and is surrounded by farm fields on three sides.   The campus consists of one large building that houses the church's education, administration, and worship facilities. The campus itself is large with room for expansion. It has a current active membership of around 200 congregants. The church defines an active member as a person who attends any church event at least once a month. The church staff consists of married couples, with one couple being the senior pastor and his wife, who are both full-time, salaried staff. The church has recently added a full-time worship pastor who serves alongside his

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[3] Bill Gaultiere, "Pastor Stress Statistics," Soul Shepherding, accessed April 19, 2020, https://www.soulshepherding.org/pastors-under-stress.

spouse. The church's staff is augmented by a full-time executive assistant as well as another part-time associate pastor and his wife. In the course of its history, the church has had two different senior pastors and several other support staff as needed. The current senior pastor is in his second stint as the senior pastor. He was the founding pastor and left for a brief period and had a successful business career. At the time the first pastor left, he and the church secretary were the only full-time staff members. This may have contributed to the rise of a hidden problem within the church and the eventual splits. Having a church with only one pastor can lead to the church centering around the personality of that pastor. As Neil Cole writes, "If we build a church that is based on a charismatic personality, an innovative methodology, or anything else, we have a church that is inferior to that church which Jesus would build."[4] No matter how much the pastor tries to focus on the Bible as the foundation of the church, it is inevitable that people will look to that pastor as their source of faith and validation. When the first pastor left, some in the congregation may have felt betrayed and let down. Some would want the new pastor to reflect the first and would not be able to see the giftings and abilities of the new pastor, preferring the first pastor.

The church's second senior pastor ministered at the focus church for around ten years and then decided to retire due to many factors including health issues, congregational power struggles, and family issues. All these factors are quite common reasons for a pastor to leave the ministry. "Fifteen hundred pastors leave the ministry each month due to moral failure, spiritual burnout, or contention in their churches."[5] As a result, the founding pastor returned and has been

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[4] Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith where Life Happens* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2005), 8.

[5] Richard J. Krejcir, "Statistics on Pastors: What is Going on with Pastors in America?" *Into Thy Word: Teaching People How to Study the Bible,* accessed 4/2/2020, https://www.intothyword.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=36562.

the current senior pastor for over fifteen years.

The church was established in the farmhouse basement of the founding pastor. For a few years of its existence, it rented space from another church in the town. Then it moved into a store-front location within the town's main business area. The church moved to its current location on the edge of the town in the early 1990's. At one time, the church had an attendance of over 500 active members and housed a school. But within the last twenty years, the attendance has dwindled, and the school has closed due to financial mismanagement. The closing of the school occurred shortly after the tenure of the second senior pastor. Again, this change in leadership may have contributed to the split in the church and the reduction of members. Some in the congregation may have felt that the founding pastor had returned and forced the second senior pastor out. The second senior pastor was well-liked and with a returning leader, some members may have felt they would lose their position of influence within the congregation and with the pastor. All these feelings show the underlining problem within the focus church that really led to the split.

The mission statement of the church is, "Take Jesus out and bring people in."[6] The vision of the church is, "A common thread that unites our body is that we all are seeking a greater knowledge of the truth of God, and an ever closer, personal walk with Jesus Christ."[7]   In these statements, the church is demonstrating that it believes in the individual's importance as a member of the body of Christ. The church also makes this statement, "We accept each individual where they are on their spiritual journey, while providing a safe, nurturing environment for each person to learn, grow, and be changed by the Holy Spirit into the amazing individual God

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[6] Living Word Church, "About Us," accessed April 2, 2019. https://www.gotolwc.org/about-us.

[7] Ibid.

intended each of us to be: an individual that reflects the image of Jesus Christ!"[8] In other words,

as Albert Nolan writes, "Every individual is lovable, no matter how hypocritical he might be."[9]

The church emphasizes the importance of the individual on fulfilling the mission of the

church. It recognizes that God has gifted everyone differently, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians:

> To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes (1 Cor 12:7-11).

Therefore, the church in this study places a heavy emphasis on the individuality of the

members to promote unity within the body. However, the focus church, as mentioned

previously, has had its share of problems.

As mentioned earlier, the focus church at one time had an active membership of over 500

and was home to a church school. A problem developed when a group of members began

teaching a doctrine that was not approved by the leadership of the church. When confronted by

the leadership about the issue, the group decided to leave the focus church and to start a new

congregation in a nearby town. The focus church also housed a Christian, private school which

had an enrollment of over 200 students. Unfortunately, the school administration allowed the

school to fall into financial hardship, and the current pastor was forced to close the school.

Many of the focus church's members left when the decision to close the school was made.

The church's location plays into the author's belief because the church is in a rural,

agricultural community. The people value hard work and the idea that one should be able to

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[8] Living Word Church, "About Us."

[9] Albert Nolan, *Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 149.

"pull one's self up by their own bootstraps." The people are highly independent and value individual expression and success stories. "Among the characteristics of modernity, individualism stands out as one of the most fundamental."[10] Although most of the members come from farming families, mixed in are some independent business owners or career businesspeople.

For the most part, the members do not have higher than a high school education, but a portion of the members do have some college credits in their history. Only about five to ten percent of the congregation has higher education beyond college. This contributes to individualism in the church because as Jaak B. Billet writes, "Those with more education were less likely to favor authoritarian ideas, partly because they were less politically powerless and thus, had less need for compensation."[11] While Billet is writing about Flemish Catholics, his observations hold true to the focus church. Those with more education tend to believe they have more options in life and thus do not depend on an authoritarian figure to give them a sense of purpose and importance. Higher educated members of a church do not need their individuality acknowledged by the leader of the congregation.

This study will focus on one small group within the church. This small group is called the "leadership group." The intent of this group is to bring those who are involved in any aspect of ministerial leadership within the church together for a time of fellowship, prayer, teaching, and vision-casting. The group is made up of adults ranging from age 25 to age 95. The group meets once a month, and it is this group of individuals from which the research and information

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[10] Andreas Buss, "The Individual in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religiones* 40e, no. 91 (June-Sep 1995): 41.

[11] Jaak B. Billet, "Church Involvement, Individualism, and Ethnic Prejudice among Flemish Catholics: New Evidences of a Moderating Effect," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34, no. 2 (June 1995): 229.

regarding individualistic tendencies will be drawn. This group represents the lay leadership of the church. Most, if not all, of the ministry done by congregational members is completed by this group within the church. It is here that many problems that can threaten to cause a new split within the church would arise. It is this groups' thoughts and worldview on how church leaders and staff should act that determines how the rest of the congregation views the pastoral staff and the ministry that is being done. If this group has division in it, the church will be divided.

As a member of this group, the researcher is concerned with helping the group to recognize each member's individual giftings but without people moving to the point where they believe their individual gifting is more important than any other in the church. The church is seeing a turnaround in its attendance as signs of growth are occurring. But it needs to be able to avoid repeating the same mistakes that caused the problems in its history.

This project will address a problem which is how does the focus church continue to grow without allowing a major problem to take root. As previously stated, the people of the area are highly independent individuals, and as such, they have a tendency to rely on themselves to solve problems or complete tasks. As a result, they have cultivated the worldview of individualism. Individualism is a problem that appears in many churches. It is a problem because it elevates the needs, wants, and ideas of an individual over any other idea, including the Bible and God. If it remains unchecked, it can lead to a split within the church, as was witnessed in the focus church of this project.

The researcher has known many ministers who have felt overwhelmed by the needs and demands of their congregants. Many have expressed a sense of betrayal as they have either chosen to leave the ministry or have been removed from a position because of individuals within the church. As Robert G. Ingersoll notes, "Every pulpit is a pillory, in which stands a hired

culprit, defending the justice of his own imprisonment."[12] For many ministers, being a pastor can feel like a prison in that they are constantly surrounded by the bars of others' needs and wants. But individualism can affect more than just a minster; in a small church like the church of the research project, it can lead to the church dividing and eventually closing if it is not recognized and dealt with.

The Bible records a prayer of Jesus the night before his crucifixion, where He prays, "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those who also believe in me through their word; that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me and I in You, that they may be in Us, so that the world may believe that you sent me" (John 17:20-21). In this prayer, Jesus is praying for the unity of believers, not only among those who were with Him, but also for those who in the future who believe in Him because of the testimony of the disciples. Individualism is the antithesis of unity, it calls for the individual to be glorified as a separate unit, instead of being seen as a part of a group.

The Bible also records in Hosea, "My people are ruined for lack of knowledge!" (Hosea 4:6). When church leadership fails to recognize the signs of growing individualism within the church, they are condemning their church to failure. Although this is an issue that is manifested in the local church, this problem can also be seen in the church globally.

The global church, as a whole, has lost its position of influence in the lives of the members and attendees of each service. And like the project church, churches worldwide have fired ministers and have had congregational splits over issues such as the color of paint in the sanctuary to more intense fights over which style of music to play during the worship service. The issue lies not in whether these things are important to the mission of the church but lies more

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[12] Robert G. Ingersoll, "Individuality," In *Individualism: A Reader*, ed. George H Smith and Marylin Moore (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 2015), 185

in the preferences of the people of the congregation. It is the preeminence of the preferences of the people that lie at heart of the issue of individualism.

Individualism within the local church is a direct result of what has become known as "American Values." Rev. John P. McGarry writes, "American values is one that seems . . . to give everyone else the `space` to do his or her own thing without any commitment to any sort of broader societal behavioral norms."[13] Individualism emphasizes the concepts of independent thought and action. The individual is free to leave the group without any consequence and at any time.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is to raise awareness about the problem of individualism and is intended to teach the differences between individuality and individualism. As stated previously, the researcher believes individualism is at the heart of the majority of the challenges that the focus church has faced. Individualism has taken many forms in today's culture. One form it has taken on is the form of individual rights. For the church, this means a person is free to worship God however they choose, whether it is within the context or group of the church or not. Tertullian writes, "It is a basic human right that everyone should be free to worship according to his own convictions. No one is either harmed or helped by another man's religion."[14]

Our society celebrates individuals. From the sports superstar to the most boisterous politician, western culture has embraced the notion and the worldview that individuals are the

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[13] John P. McGarry, *Eucharist and American Culture: Liturgy, Unity, and Individualism* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2009), 21.

[14] Tertullian, "To Scapula 1-2," in *Documents in Early Christian Thought,* ed. Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 227.

ones who define culture and not the other way around. And as Rev. McGarry states, "When society favors personal sovereignty over benefits to society, there are numerous ramifications in family interactions and religious organizations."[15] Individualism emphasizes personal sovereignty. Personal sovereignty is a direct contradiction to the first commandment which states, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex 20:2-3). Personal sovereignty says that the individual is in charge and no authority, including God, is supreme to the individual. In a church setting, this means that each and every person in the congregation is more important than the will of God, the Bible, and the leaders of the church.

As a result, in a local church, factions begin to develop among the people who operate in the church. Usually the faction develops around a popular or charismatic figure, and if the leadership makes a decision that is not liked, or the pastor says something that is found to be offensive, the figure can either leave the church or work against the pastor and leaders to cause problems. Personal sovereignty relies on the individual's intellect and feelings to be the sole authority in the individual's life. This is in contrast to Paul writing in Galatians, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal 2:20). This is a call to give up personal sovereignty to Jesus, and live by faith, not by personal intellect or feeling.

Individualism also goes against what the Bible says about authority, as Paul writes in Romans, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God" (Rom 13:1). The

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[15] McGarry, *Eucharist and American Culture*, 25.

leaders of a church have been placed in those positions by God, and to assert individual authority over those individuals goes against the Bible. When an individual goes against the leadership of the church, problems arise.

As bad as individualism can be, it is the researcher's belief that if the local church teaches the concept of individuality in relation to the individuals being part of the body of Christ then individuality can be celebrated without having people become individualistic. Individuality recognizes that each person has been created with unique gifts and abilities by God. As Colin Morris writes, "The value of the individual and the dignity of man are both written in large in the pages of Scripture."[16] The best way to show this is to quote the words of Paul in his first letter to Corinth, where he writes, "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many" (1 Cor 12:12-14).

This project will show through a survey detailing the individualistic tendencies of the research church's leadership how the local church can strengthen unity by celebrating individuality without crossing over into individualism. This will be accomplished by incorporating the findings of the survey into lessons focusing on the biblical concept of becoming the body of Christ.

Basic Assumptions

The researcher does have some basic assumptions as he begins this project. The first assumption is that those who read the final draft and outcome of this project are likely to have

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[16] Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual: 1050-1200* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 11.

similar characteristics as the author of the project. Those who read this project will be assumed

to have an ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ and a desire to help others within the body of

Christ to follow the call that God has placed on them.

Second, the researcher assumes that those who are reading this project will be active in

the ministry of their church, pursuing a degree from a Bible college, university, or seminary, or

the person will have some theological training beyond their home church.

Another presupposition the researcher has in starting this project is that the church that is

the focus of the project has already had a split caused by the problem of individualism. As

mentioned in the introduction, the congregation at one time had an active membership of over

500 but now has an active membership of only 200. The researcher strongly believes that

individualism is at the heart of the split.

As the researcher is a member of the focus church and part of the leadership ministry, the

presupposition may hinder and affect the researcher's view of the church, its pastors, and its

board; as a result, the researcher has to be very careful in his analysis of the data that will be

produced.

Definitions

For the purposes of this project, the researcher will use various definitions. The first is

the term *individualism*. Webster's dictionary defines individualism as "a doctrine that the

interests of the individual are or ought to be ethically paramount."[17]   Stated in another way,

individualism is the belief that individuals set their own ethical and moral beliefs. The individual

is paramount, and the beliefs the individual develops in regard to social, governmental, and even

religious affiliations or doctrines are paramount to any other source. And while this is a good,

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[17] Merriam-Webster Dictionary.com, s.v. "Individualism," accessed November 7, 2018, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/individualism.

base definition of what individualism is, this definition leaves a little to be desired when discussing the ramifications of individualism. Peter Callero writes, "Individualism is a belief system that privileges the individual over the group, private life over public life, and personal expression over social experience; it is a worldview where autonomy, independence, and self-reliance are highly valued, where free actors are assumed to make choices that have direct consequences to their own destiny."[18]

When discussing individualism, though, it is important to distinguish this term from another term which is the term *individuality*. Individuality is defined as, "total character peculiar to and distinguishing an individual from others."[19]   Individuality, in a simpler definition, is a characteristic or trait that separates an individual from another individual, the thing that makes each person unique. Individuality is how we are able to distinguish one person from another in society and within a group. As Callero also writes, "Our very identity is a social creation that is constantly sustained by social relationships both large and small."[20]

So, then, what is an individual? For the purposes of this project an individual is, "a single human being as contrasted with a social group or institution."[21] When speaking of an individual, this project will be speaking of a single person. A single person, acting in accordance with individualism, can radically affect the vision and mission of a church and cause major problems. When speaking of individualism, the issue of egoism will also arise.

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[18] Peter L. Callero, *The Myth of Individualism: How Social Forces Shape our Lives*, 2nd ed. (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013), 15.

[19] Merriam-Webster Dictionary.com, s.v. "Individuality," accessed November 7, 2018, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/individuality.

[20] Callero, *The Myth of Individualism*, 3.

[21] Merriam-Webster Dictionary.com, s.v. "Individual," accessed November 7, 2018, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/individual.

Egoism is defined as, "a doctrine that individual self-interest is the valid end of all actions."[22]   Egoism is the direct result of individualism and really becomes a danger when the leader of the church falls victim to this doctrine. When a church leader begins to see himself or herself as the main reason for the success of a ministry or the ministries existence then that person is falling into egoism or its cousin narcissism.

Narcissism is what happens is the leader begins to think, feel, and act like the ministry would fail or that tasks would not get accomplished if the leader is not there or is not tightly overseeing the task. Narcissism is detrimental, as Gary L. McIntosh and Samuel D. Rima, Sr. state, "Narcissistic leaders have an overinflated sense of their importance to the organization and an exhibitionistic need for constant attention and admiration from others, especially those they lead and any person or group to whom they report."[23] This, too, can lead to a split in the local body of Christ as a cult following my arise around the leader as the leader gathers those around that depend on the leader to do everything for them.

The term *body of Christ* will be used interchangeably to refer not only to the local church where the research is being conducted, but also to the Christian church universal, meaning every church or individual who claims Jesus Christ as Lord. Each local congregational body can be identified as the body of Christ as well as being part of the body of Christ. Each church has a role or is part of the whole body. This concept is written about by Paul in his first letter to Corinth, where he writes, "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ" (1 Cor 12:12).

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[22] Merriam-Webster Dictionary.com, s.v. "Egoism," accessed November 7, 2018, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/egoism.

[23] Gary L. McIntosh and Samuel D. Rima, Sr., Overcoming the Darkside of Leadership: The Paradox of Personal Dysfunction (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 98.

In addition, the term, *five-fold ministry* will appear. Five-fold ministry is a term used to describe the spiritual offices or callings listed by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4, "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:11-13).

While some view these offices as being a set of spiritual gifts that Christ has given the church, the researcher sees these offices or particular positions that are assigned to individuals within the body of Christ to help other individuals in the body achieve the goal stated by the apostle Paul. As Klyne Snodgrass writes, "The gifts God gives to the church are people to promote serving and building up. This text teaches both about gifts and about institutional order."[24]

In addition to five-fold ministry, the terms *servant-leader* and *servant-leadership* will be used. The term servant leadership can be defined as a leadership philosophy in which the main goal of the leader is to serve. And a servant-leader is a leader who practices servant-leadership. As Robert K. Greenleaf states, "The servant-leader is servant first. . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first."[25] The best way to define it is to look at the words of Jesus: "Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:35). Leaders in the body of Christ are called to serve, both Christ and those He has put under the leader's charge. Individualism and its

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[24] Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 202.

[25] Robert K. Greenleaf*, Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1977), 4.

counterpart egoism put an individual above the group, and if a leader falls into these doctrines, the leader will have a difficult time serving.

Limitations and Delimitations

In evaluating and measuring the process by which churches handle the problem of individualism within their own congregations, the researcher cannot address every aspect of the issue or every aspect of the process by which the issue is addressed. Therefore, in this project there are key limitations. The first limitation is the fallibility of the researcher. The researcher is human and is creating a step-by-step process to help combat individualism within the researcher's own church. However, each person or church leader can use the research results to become aware of the problem of individualism within the context of the ministry in which they are serving.

A second limitation to this project is that the project is not designed to become a subject of denominational debate. The research is taken from a focused, case-studied church and a cross-section of writings on individuality and individualism from many different academic disciplines. Yet, the system that will be proposed can be used by the church universally as it will be based solely upon Scripture.

A third limitation on the project is the geography of the researcher. Living in a rural area limits the researcher's access to a huge number of potential interviewees in a confined area.

Fourthly, the process presented will not just produce disciples on its own, it must have leaders who are passionately willing to see their church grow and to see more people within their church step up to serve and follow Jesus as Lord.

Another delimitation is that the researcher is going to create and administer a survey dealing with the individualistic thoughts and tendencies of the leadership group at the focus

church. The survey can be used by other leaders to identify individualistic tendencies within

their church. The leadership group was chosen because it is an already separated group of

individuals from the whole congregation. This group is voluntary, so participation in the survey

is also completely voluntary and will have no effect on an individual's standing within the

leadership group or the focus church at large.

Thesis Statement

This project will show that the negative effects of individualism can be overcome by the

local church through biblical teaching on the concept of unity in the body of Christ and by

celebrating the individuality of its members, while at the same time reminding its leaders to

focus on being the servants of Christ. Now that a foundation has been laid for the research

project, it is time to move on to the research itself.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

Literature Review

In the course of completing this project, the researcher consulted numerous literary works to assist in understanding what individualism was and how it affects the church. These works include books, journals, commentaries, websites, and the Bible. The focus of the research was individualism, theology, and church leadership. The following is a review of the literature that was sourced for this project.

Books

The first two books that the researcher consulted for this project were written by the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In *Life Together,* Bonhoeffer writes about Christian community. He writes, "It is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly in this world to share God's Word and sacrament."[26] Written during his tenure as the president of an illegal seminary in Finkenwalde, Germany, during the rule of Adolf Hilter, this book addresses the importance of Christians living together in unity. This book will be used in this project to counter other authors who put the individual above everything else.

Similarly, the second book by Bonhoeffer sourced in this project is his classic work, *The Cost of Discipleship.* In this book, he writes, "Through the call of Jesus men become individuals."[27] Bonhoeffer is stating here that it is through the call of Christ and His impartation of gifts that people become individuals. This is a thought that will be discussed further when looking at the theological basis for teaching individuality versus individualism.

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[26] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper Brothers, 1954), 18.

[27] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1959), 94.

The earliest book the researcher found that directly addressed the issue of individualism was published in 1975. Entitled *Documents in Early Christian Thought* and edited by Maurice Wiles and Mark Santer, this book contains the quote used earlier from Tertullian, "Nevertheless, it is a basic human right that everyone should be free to worship according to his own convictions. No more either harmed or helps by another man's religion."[28] The emphasis in this quote is on the individual over the institution or the group. Tertullian is basically saying that every individual is free to worship however the individual chooses and the choice made has no bearing on anyone else either for the good or bad. However, the researcher feels that if the church is truly the body of Christ, then how each part of it, or each individual, chooses to worship or not worship has a direct affect upon another and ultimately the whole body of Christ.

A more recent book that contains many articles on individualism is *Communitarianism and Individualism*, edited by Shlomo Avineri and Aver De-Shalit. This book contains numerous articles that will be referenced in this project. In the introduction, the editors write, "We must consider people's aims and values if we want to understand who they are."[29] They basically are saying that in order to understand and individual, we must understand what motivates them. An individualist, or a person who has the worldview of individualism, is driven by the value that only their decisions matter and those decisions do not impact anyone else.

As the topic of individualism became more prevalent, more books have been written on the subject. In *Overcoming the Darkside of Leadership: The Paradox of Personal Dysfunction*, Gary L. McIntosh and Samuel D. Rima Sr. discuss some of the issues that develop within the lives of church leaders that help to bring down or hurt ministries. About narcissism they write,

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[28] Tertullian, "To Scapula," 227.

[29] Shlomo Avineri and Aver De-Shalit, "Introduction," in *Communitarianism and Individualism,* ed. Shlomo Avineri and Aver De-Shalit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3.

"Christian leaders often use those that they lead to enhance their own image and to improve the way they feel about themselves."[30] This one sentence speaks not only to narcissism but also individualism because an individualist will seek to enhance their position in any organization they are in. If a member of a church's congregation focuses on their individualism at the same time a church leader is doing the same thing, a rift in congregational unity will occur.

Speaking of church leadership, Os Guinness wrote on the subject in his book *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life.* In this book, Guinness writes, "In Western society, at a more suburban level, 'identity' has become our most important private project."[31] This speaks to individualism and individuality in that we seem to define ourselves by our own set of identifiers. We try to do this privately, but in reality, we cannot do this without society having an input.

Another book that echoes this sentiment is *Hard to Believe: The High Cost and Infinite Value of Following Jesus.* In this book, John MacArthur writes, "Spiritual defectors seek no personal relationship."[32] MacArthur is stating here that those who seek individual fulfillment and individual identity outside of Christ have no need of personal relationships.

Later, MacArthur contrasts the individualistic worldview with a Christian worldview in the introduction to *Think Biblically: Recovering a Christian Worldview.* He writes, "A truly Christian worldview, simply put, is one in which the Word of God, rightly understood, is firmly

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[30] McIntosh and Rima, *Overcoming the Darkside of Leadership*, 99.

[31] Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 22.

[32] John MacArthur, *Hard to Believe: The High Cost and Infinite Value of Following Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 173.

established as both the foundation and final authority for everything we hold true."[33] While an individualist seeks their identity from their own viewpoint, a Christian seeks their identity from the Word of God.

The next book sourced for this project is *Servants of the Servant: A Biblical Theology of Leadership.* Written by Don N. Howell, this book deals with the mentality of leaders from a biblical perspective. Howell writes, "Paul was not afraid to confront individuals or groups of individuals who seek to undermine the apostolic foundation on the churches."[34] Essentially, Howell is implying that leaders should not be afraid to confront those who seek to undermine not only the authority of leaders but also the unity of a church. This argument will be explored more in the theological review of this project.

In order to reflect a change in thinking on how church should be conducted, two books by Neil Cole were sourced. The first book is entitled *Organic Church: Growing Faith where Life Happens.* In this book, he goes against the idea of a single pastor church and the propensity for people to desire the mega-church when he writes, "If we build a church that is based on a charismatic personality, an innovative methodology, or anything else, we have a church that is inferior to that which Jesus would build."[35] Again, this speaks to a pastor or any leader who wants to build a church based on something or some source other than the Bible. An individualistic leader would build a church around their own theology or doctrines instead of biblical doctrines.

Similarly, Cole writes in *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church*, "Our core

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[33] John MacArthur, "Introduction," in *Think Biblically: Recovering a Christian Worldview*, ed. John MacArthur (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003), 21.

[34] Don N. Howell Jr, *Servants of the Servant: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 257.

[35] Cole, *Organic Church*, 8.

belief in the Gospel itself and the consequent sanctification of believers is all about change, so

we should be welcoming to it."[36] Change is good in an individual and organization because it

shows growth and the acquisition of knowledge, but change for the sake of change is not good

because change can be controlled by a single individual and can be lead in a non-biblical

direction.

Another book the researcher sourced was written by Rev. John P. McGarry. It is entitled

Eucharist and American Culture: Liturgy, Unity, and Individualism. Rev. McGarry is a Catholic

priest, so this book helps with the theological foundations of the project but gives a different

viewpoint than that of an evangelical Protestant. He writes, "Although the followers of Jesus are

diverse in their numerous talents and God-given gifts, this diversity can be seen as a sign of their

one-ness."[37] This quote speaks to the thesis of this project in that a church and the people in it

can celebrate each other's individuality while at the same time defend against individualism by

teaching that all gifts and talents are God-given and have a role in the body of Christ.

Another book sourced for this research project is from the *Bible Study Textbook Series*

and is entitled *A Chain of Jewels from James and Jude*, written by Donald Fream. In it, he speaks

to individualism when he writes, "Either directly or indirectly, a man will boost his own ego in

order to rationalize his action to the point of complete ignorance of God's will."[38]

A final book for literary review is entitled *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes:

Removing Cultural Blindness to Better Understand the Bible.* Written by E. Randolph Richards

and Brandon J. O'Brien, this book address the issue of looking at the Bible with our own cultural

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[36] Neil Cole, *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 16.

[37] McGarry, *Eucharist and American Culture*, 7.

[38] Donald Fream, *A Chain of Jewels from James and Jude,* Bible Study Textbook Series (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1965), 53.

beliefs and ideals. This includes reading the Bible through the lens of individualism and interpreting what is written to fit that worldview. The purpose of the book is to change people's understanding of biblical interpretation. The authors write, "One of our goals in this book is to remind (or convince!) you of the cross-cultural nature of biblical interpretation."[39]

<center>Commentaries</center>

To form the theological foundation of the project, the researcher sourced several commentaries. The first commentary the researcher sourced comes from a series of commentaries known as The NIV Application Commentary. In particular, the first commentary sourced was written by Craig Blomberg and focused on 1 Corinthians. He writes, "The New Testament recognizes no individual or 'lone-ranger' Christians who are not attached to some local Christian fellowship."[40] This speaks to the idea that a person who is an individualist seeks no affiliation within an organization, but as the project will show, a church can celebrate individual giftings and talents without drifting into individualism. The research also sourced this series commentaries on the biblical books of Philippians and Ephesians.

Another commentary sourced for this project is the *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, Volume 2: New Testament. Edited by Kenneth L. Baker and John R Kohlenberger III, this commentary also seeks to add practical application to the Scripture. They write, "It is God who has organized the human body in the way he wants it, and it is the same way with the church; according to his will, its many parts should function as one body—the body of Christ."[41] Again

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[39] E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2012), 12.

[40] Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 252.

[41] W. Harold Mare, "1 Corinthians," in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, *New Testament,* ed. Kenneth L Baker and John R. Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 642.

this citation shows the theological foundations of the project in that the body of Christ should be one, even though it is made up of a variety of different parts or individuals.

In continuing to look at themes of unity of individualism in the Bible, the researcher also sourced commentaries that focus on Paul's letters to the Philippians. The first commentary is from theologian Karl Barth. In his commentary, *The Epistle to the Philippians,* Barth has this to say about chapter 2, "To believe in grace means concretely; to set the other above oneself."[42] Again this speaks to Paul's call for unity and not individualism. For an individualist, their primary focus is self and the feeling that they are superior to all else.

Another commentary sourced for the theological foundations of this project is William Barclay's commentary on 1 Timothy. In speaking of church leaders and the role of the man who is given the term *bishop* or *overseer,* he writes, "The more organized the Church became, the more such a figure would be necessary and would be bound to arise. The elder who stood out as a leader came to be called the *episkopos*, the superintendent of the Church."[43] Here it is the qualities of the leader that makes him stand out, not his insistence on being the leader or that his way is right. While a single leader may be necessary, it is in his displayed leadership qualities that sets him apart.

While also sourcing the concept of the body of Christ in Scripture, the researcher sourced F.F. Bruce's commentary on Romans, from the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. In referring to Paul's use of the body as an image of the church, he writes: "In them there is no possibility of an ordinary member of the church being compared to the head, or to be a part of

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[42] Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM Publishers, 1962), 56.

[43] William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 83.

the head (as is done in 1 Cor. 12: 16-17, 21); in them, too, the body ceases to be used as a mere simile and becomes rather the most effective term which the apostle can find to express the vital bond which unites the life of believers with the risen life of Christ."[44] Here again, we see the importance of each part of the body as Bruce states that it is the best way to describe the church and the bond between its members.

<div align="center">Journals</div>

In order to see recent studies and information on the topic of individualism, the following journal articles were sourced:

First is Jaak B. Billet's article entitled, "Church Involvement, Individualism, and Ethnic Prejudice among Flemish Roman Catholics: New Evidence of a Moderating Effect." In this article published in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,* Billet comments on the effect of education on individualism by writing, "The degree of education tempered feelings of political powerlessness, utilitarian individualism, authoritarianism, and the attitude toward foreigners."[45] While this article focuses on one particular ethnicity and belief system, it has a lot to say about ways to moderate the effects of individualism. In this case, it is speaking on the role education has in moderating the effect of individualism. However, while the more secular education one has seems to help moderate individualistic tendencies, it is the researcher's belief that more the concept of the body of Christ is taught, more reduction will happen to the effect of individualism.

Additionally, the article entitled "The Individual in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition" was sourced for this research project. In the article, Andreas Buss writes, "In early Christianity, the

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[44] F.F Bruce, *Romans*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris. rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 215.

[45] Billet, "Church Involvement, Individualism, and Ethnic Prejudice," 229.

individual as a value was conceived as apart from the given social and political organization, outside and beyond it, an outwardly individual, as opposed to the inwardly individual in modern society."[46] Here we see that for the early church, individuality was an outward manifestation of the person and was not considered a part of who the person really was. This shows that everyone was a part of an organization, whether religious or otherwise.

Another article that was sourced for this research project is entitled "The Move Toward American Modernity: Empowerment and Individualism in the Black Mega-Church." In this article, the authors write, "The building of community within the church is intentional and purposeful and involves mutual confession, vulnerability, and sharing of resources including money, talent, and time."[47] This article is showing that in order for mega-churches to be effective within their communities, they have to build a church community which depends upon each other. This shows that like a human body needs each part to work together in order to function properly, the body of Christ needs each part to work together in order to function properly.

An article that speaks to the trend towards individualism in the modern church and was sourced for this project is "Individualism and Empowerment in Pentecostal Sermons: New Evidence from Nairobi, Kenya." This article, written by Gwyneth H. McClendon and Rachel Beatty Riedl, focuses on the Pentecostal movement in Kenya and how the church leaders there are moving their congregants towards individualism. They write, "The sermons messages and social service activities of the churches were remarkably consistent across congregation and that

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[46] Buss, "The Individual in Eastern Orthodox Tradition," 41.

[47] Amanda Speakes-Lewis, LeRoi L. Gill, and Crystal George Moses, "The Move Toward American Modernity: Empowerment and Individualism in the Black Mega Church," *Journal of African American Studies* 15, no. 2 (June 2012): 241.

the main commonality was an individualistic theme: a focus on individual autonomy, empowerment, and self-affirmation and breaking with traditional collective ties."[48] This is a trend that is also apparent in sermons in western churches and is believed to be the cause for disunity within the church because each individual is encouraged to focus upon themselves in terms of growth and not rely on biblical principles and teaching.

Theological Foundations

In establishing the theological foundations of this research project, the researcher feels that the first thing that is needed is to revisit the proposed definition of individualism. Once again, this project defines individualism as, "a doctrine that the interests of the individual are or ought to be ethically paramount."[49] In this, the individual makes a god of their individuality and personal choices. However, this doctrine is in contrast to the first commandment found in the book of Exodus. In Exodus, we read, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex 20:2-3). Concerning verse three, Walter C. Kaiser Jr. writes, "It is perhaps beast translated, 'You should not prefer other gods to me.' The result, however, is the same: The Lord is the only true God."[50] We see these words repeated in Deuteronomy, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me" (Deut 5:6-7). Gary Hall writes, "There was only one God who had done what the Lord had done for

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[48] Gwyneth H. McClendon and Rachel Beatty Riedl, "Individualism and Empowerment in Pentecostal Sermons: New Evidence from Nairobi, Kenya," *African Affairs* 115, no. 458 (January 2016): 121.

[49] Merriam-Webster Dictionary.com, s.v. "Individualism."

[50] Walter C. Kaiser, "Exodus," in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, *Old Testament*, ed. Kenneth L Baker and John R. Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 1994), 99.

Israel, therefore there was no possibility that some other deity could be a different, but similar god.[51]

Individualism puts the onus of every life decision and outcome upon the individual, including salvation. In his own notes, Gary Hall writes, "In the New Testament, God is defined by Jesus Christ, who call himself the 'I am.' Therefore, he is the only way to God for no one has ever done what he did."[52] A true individualist would look to personal deeds or beliefs for salvation. As stated previously, individualists have allowed their personal preferences, interests, and choices to become the god of their lives.

As a result, they fail to see the necessity of a group of people who believe in the same thing in order to have a relationship with God. As Avineri and De-Shalit write, "Individualists fail to see that this community is not necessarily a voluntary one, and that social attachments which determine the self are not necessarily chosen ones."[53] It is the researcher's belief and this project's intention to show that the body of Christ is necessary. When an individual descends into individualism, the need or even desire to be part of a group fades, and as a result, a part of the body of Christ is weakened or removed from its intended purpose.

Here again, the researcher believes we need to explore a definition because individualism cannot occur if no individual exists. So, then what is an individual, or what makes someone different from another. As stated before, Merriam-Webster defines an individual as, "a single human being as contrasted with a social group or institution."[54] And while this is a good, basic

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[51] Gary Hall, *Deuteronomy*, The College Press NIV Commentary, ed. Anthony L. Ash and Jack Cottrell (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2000), 117.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Avineri and De-Shalit, "Introduction," 3.

[54] Merriam-Webster Dictionary.com, s.v. "Individual."

definition of what an individual is, the question as to how the Bible defines an individual still needs to be answered. In the book of Psalms, David writes, "For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb" (Ps 139:13). So by this, a biblical definition of an individual is a person created by God. Willem VanGemeren writes, "All of God's 'works' are 'wonderful,' but the believer senses more than any other part of God's creation that he personally is 'fearfully and wonderfully made.' He lives with a personal awareness of God's gracious purpose."[55] By this, VanGermeren is stating that a biblical definition of an individual is someone who understands that God has a unique purpose for them. Os Guinness writes, "Humanness is a response to God's calling."[56] If following God's calling is a condition of being human, and hence an individual, then can an individual exist outside the calling of God?

In order to be human or an individual, the pursuit of God's will should be the preeminent determination of who is an individual or not. Elisha William writes, "Everyone is under an indispensable obligation to search the Scripture himself (which contains the whole of it) and to make the best of it he can for his own information in the will of God, the natures and duties of Christianity."[57] We are under this obligation because we are all a part of the body of Christ. We are to search out our callings and roles within the body to help it function correctly.

Now that it has been shown that according to the Bible, an individual is someone who is seeking God's calling and purpose for their life, the question that needs to be asked is, "How does Scripture address individuality?" First, a glance at the words of Jesus concerning calling is needed. In the gospel of Luke, the following words are recorded, "And He was saying to them

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[55] Willem A. VanGeremen, "Psalms," in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, *Old Testament*, ed. Kenneth L Baker and John R. Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 928.

[56] Guinness, *The Call*, 24.

[57] Elisha Williams, "The Essential Rights and Liberties of Protestants," in *Individualism: A Reader*, ed. George H. Smith and Marylin Moore (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 2015), 175.

all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me'" (Luke 9:23). Here Jesus is talking about individual responsibility within the church. Walter L. Liefeld writes, "Those who want to be Jesus' disciples can only truly be said to 'follow' him when they have implemented a radical decision to 'deny' themselves."[58] The apostle Paul echoes these sentiments when he writes, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal 2:20). Once we begin a journey and a relationship with Christ, we no longer live for ourselves but for Him. We live to carry out his mission and desire upon the earth. Boice writes, "It is not Paul who is living at all, but rather Christ who lives in him."[59] Yet, even if a follower, or disciple of Christ, no longer lives for themselves but as a part of the body, each one has a unique role or place in the body. Dietrich Bonhoeffer described our relationship to Christ this way: "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."[60]

In teaching the body of Christ, we must look at the metaphor in the way the apostle Paul described it. He starts out teaching about spiritual gifts and in the process speaks of individuality. "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to *each one* is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12:4-7).[61]

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[58] William L. Liefeld, "Luke," in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, *New Testament,* ed. Kenneth L Baker and John R. Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 243.

[59] James Montgomery Boice, "Galatians," in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, *New Testament*, ed. Kenneth L Baker and John R. Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 720.

[60] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 94.

[61] Emphasis is the researcher's.

Blomberg comments, "Verse 7 employs yet a fourth term, 'manifestations,' and stresses that all the Corinthian Christians have at least one such gift, which is to be used for mutual edification."[62] Here it is shown that each person has a unique gift to be used within the body of Christ to help others grow in their faith. But Paul later speaks about not letting oneself get caught up in thinking their gift is more important than another's. He writes, "But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members but one body" (1 Cor 12:18-19). Blomberg writes, "Without the diversity that comes from specialization of function one no longer has an organism, merely one giant organ, unable to do anything."[63] The body of Christ must have each part of it working together in order to function correctly. Without this cooperation, the body would be just a part and worthless. Mare agree with this when he writes, "The whole body cannot be a single part, or it would be a functioning body. So it is with the church."[64]

Paul echoes this sentiment when he writes to the church in Rome: "For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Rom 12:3-5).

Everett Harrison writes, "To offset the danger of individualistic thinking with its resulting

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[62] Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 243.

[63] Ibid., 246.

[64] Mare, "1 Corinthians," 642.

danger of pride, Paul refers to the human body—an illustration familiar from his earlier use of it in 1 Corinthians 12."[65] If the apostle thought it necessary to offset individualistic tendencies, and as a result individualism by using the image of a body, the local church should not refrain from using the same metaphor to combat the individualistic tendencies in its members.

So far, this section has focused on the individual members of the body, but how can a church leader prevent individualistic thought from creeping into their personal and ministerial life? The key to this is for church leaders to be reminded that they are also servants of Christ.

First, though, we are reminded by the words of Paul that those who lead within all arenas are placed in their positions by God. He writes in Romans, "For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God" (Rom 13:1b). Harrison reminds us, "Paul makes a sweeping statement when he says, 'There is not authority except that which God has established.' This is true even of Satan; what authority he exercises has been given him by God."[66] Leaders should not think of themselves more important than those they serve. Authority in the church in given by God.

Paul writes about leadership in the church in Ephesians, where he writes, "And he gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers" (Eph 4:11). In some theological traditions, these positions are referred to as the "five-fold ministry." This means that these positions are designed and chosen for specific individuals within the church to accomplish a given task. The task is given by Paul as he continues, "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to

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[65] Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, *New Testament*, ed. Kenneth L Baker and John R. Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 583.

[66] Ibid., 588.

the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:12-13). No matter the

reader's theological feelings on whether these offices are active within the modern church, it is

clear that the purpose of all church leaders is to help others and the church reach maturity in

Christ. Wood writes, "Service is what unites all the members of Christ's body from the apostles

to the most apparently insignificant disciple."[67]

A person who is appointed to one of these positions or gifted with the ability to operate in

leadership should not use their giftedness or position as a tool to demean others. In the Gospels,

we read of a time where the followers of Jesus were arguing over which of them was the most

important when Jesus turned to them and said the following:

> You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and
> their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever
> wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first
> among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to
> serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:42-45).

In remembering it is God who grants authority, the words of Jesus remind us, "The

Gentile rulers loved to be in charge. But this is not the way it should be among true followers of

Jesus, where greatness is achieved by humble service."[68] Prime and Begg write, "God calls men

to shepherd God's flock and to care for its well-being, to show God's people by example and

instruction how they should live lives worthy of God their Savior."[69] The only way a follower of

Christ can be a servant is to learn from a servant. A servant by nature attends to the needs and

wants of the person they are serving. Personal needs and care are put aside to the needs of the

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[67] A. Skevington Wood, "Ephesians," in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, *New Testament*, ed. Kenneth L Baker and John R. Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 769.

[68] Walter W. Wessel, "Mark," in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, in vol. 1, *New Testament*, ed. Kenneth L Baker and John R. Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 177.

[69] Derek J. Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 18.

master. As Don N. Howell Jr. writes, "Those who would lead others, at least in the Scriptural definition of the term, must align their practice of leadership with these most essential priorities on the expressed heart of God."[70] A biblical leader is someone who is serving those he or she is leading in order to teach them how to serve others and God.

Jesus shows us an example of this on the night of his betrayal. The Gospel of John relates to us this story:

> During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. Then He poured water into the basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them dry with the towel which He was girded. So, when He was had washed their feet and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done? You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:2-5, 12-14).

Jesus did the job of a servant. Merrill Tenney comments, "It was a voluntary humiliation that rebukes the pride of the disciples."[71] Later Jesus says about this event, "For I gave to you an example that you also should do as I did to you" (John 12:15). Tenney continues, "Jesus put his emphasis on the inner attitude of humble and voluntary service for others."[72]

In some theological circles, the ministerial gifts listed in Ephesians 4 and referred to earlier in this project are the actual hand of the body of Christ. The hand is supposed to help guide and direct the body into the work of serving the Lord and doing His will. If

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[70] Howell, *Servants of the Servant*, 3.

[71] Merrill C. Tenney, "John," in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, *New Testament*, ed. Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 342.

[72] Ibid.

a part of the hand or the whole hand itself is only doing what the hand wants to do, then

the whole body suffers. It means that someone who leads needs to think and have the

attitude of Jesus, as Paul writes the following:

> Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind and regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude within yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did no regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:4-8).

> Karl Barth writes, "To believe in grace means concretely; to set the other above oneself.

My neighbour is its bearer and representative, and therefore in comparison with me a hyperechon

(a superior)."[73] When we have the attitude of Christ, we see others as more valuable than

ourselves, and consequently we seek to serve their needs. Homer Kent echoes this sentiment

when he writes, "Believers should avoid 'selfish ambition' and consider others above

themselves."[74] Frank Thielman adds, "Just as Jesus expressed his divine character in his

unselfish obedience to God, so we should express our Christian character by placing the interests

of others ahead of our own in obedience to God's Word."[75] For these men, putting oneself first

and self-interest are just not biblical. While individualism seeks to put the self above all else, the

Bible seeks first to keep God in His rightful place and then requires individuals to put the needs

of others first. When a church fails to teach these things, it is inviting trouble. John Stuart Mill

writes, "The liberty of the individual must be thus far limited; he must not make himself a

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[73] Barth, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 56.

[74] Homer A. Kent Jr., "Philippians," in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, *New Testament*, ed. Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 796.

[75] Frank Thielman, *Philippians*, NIV Application Commentary, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 128.

nuisance to other people."[76] If an individual is constantly demanding their needs, desires, and

wants be met, that individual takes away time and resources from the whole body. A way to

think of it is to view the church like a body, which is why the apostle Paul used the imagery.

When the natural body has an injury or an illness, it needs the time to divert resources to deal

with the problem. What happens many times is that a different part of the body sees neglect and

a new problem can arise. Likewise, in a church, when one individual is demanding their own

way, they divert the time of the ministry leaders to deal with their issues, which can lead to

problems developing in other areas.

Again, the solution in this relies on the leaders of the church to constantly teach the body

that they are first servants of God, then servants of each other, working together as the body of

Christ to see God's kingdom upon the earth. The best example of this type of church is found in

Acts. The author of the book of Acts writes the following description of the early church:

> And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they
> began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone
> might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread
> from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of
> heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to
> their number day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2:44-47).

Notice the pattern set by the early church, "All those who believed were together and had

all things in common" (Acts 2:44). In this one statement, any sense of individualism in gone.

Richard Longenecker puts a little more context to this passage when he comments, "While Acts

implies that over persecution of the Christians came somewhat later, in certain instances

economic and social sanctions were undoubtedly imposed on the new believers. Thus, the

communal life described in vv. 44-45 should be understood, at least in part, as a response to

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[76] John Stuart Mill, "Of Individuality, as One of the Elements of Well-being," in *Individualism: A Reader*,
ed. George Smith and Marylin Moore (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 2015), 38.

these pressures."[77] Whether the selling of the possessions was a product of economic and social pressures or a product of the apostle's teaching, the fact remains that believers were willing to put aside their own wants and needs to meet the needs of others. This contrasts with someone who practices individualism where the tendency is to state that everything I have is mine and mine alone. An individualist would not see it necessary to help someone else, especially if it interferes with that individual's own needs and wants. This type of individual is one who wonders why the church keeps asking the congregation for money for another special offering.

In referencing the same passage, F. F. Bruce writes, "The members of the new community, living together thus with a deep sense of their unity in the Messiah, gave up the ides of private property and "had all things in common." Private property is one of the signatures of individualism in that an individualist sees their possessions to satisfy their own desires. However, the researcher at this point wants to make it clear that the researcher is not advocating a communal lifestyle for twenty-first century believers. This makes teaching the importance of individuality as part of the body of Christ paramount.

Now that this project has explored the theological foundations of the research, it is time to understand the theoretical foundations as well.

Theoretical Foundations

Peter Callero writes, "Individualism is a belief system that privileges the individual over the group, private life over public life, and personal expression over social experience; it is a worldview where autonomy, independence, and self-reliance are highly valued and thought to be natural; and it is an ideology based on self-determination, where free actors are assumed to make

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[77] Richard N. Longenecker, "Acts," in *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, *New Testament*, ed. Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 398.

choices that have direct consequences for their own unique destiny."[78] While this is a broad

definition of individualism, it has a lot to offer in terms of defining what individualism actually

is. As you can see, this belief system is one in which the individual is the center of everything,

which is in stark contrast to the teaching of the church being the Body of Christ. The trouble with

this is that individualism then turns to something that devalues any institution and any ideals. As

Michael G. Long writes, "Its resistance to ideological forces that elevate a twisted form of

individualism over the solidarity called forth by our life together."[79]

Again, though, we need a definition of an individual because we cannot have

individualism if we do not have an individual. George Smith writes, "The abstract individual –

otherwise known as 'human nature' – is the foundation of social and political philosophy."[80] But

the term "individualism" is relatively new. Alexis de Tocqueville wrote, "That word

'individualism' . . . was unknown to our ancestors, for the good reason that in their days every

individual necessarily belonged to a group and no one could regard himself as an isolated unit."[81]

This is demonstrated by the passage in Acts discussed in the theological foundations sections.

Private ownership was secondary to the unity of the group. The early believers were willing to

give up their possessions if it served the purpose of the group. Individualism makes the

individual so important that the idea of giving up or selling one's possessions is only feasible if

the act produces a benefit for the individual, if an individual is only as defined by Webster as, "a

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[78] Pet Callero, *The Myth of Individualism*, 15.

[79] Michael G. Long, "Christianity is Resistance," in *Resist: Christian Dissent for the 21st Century*, ed. Michael G. Long (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), xxiv.

[80] George H. Smith and Marylin Moore, "Introduction," in *Individualism: A Reader*, ed. George Smith and Marylin Moore (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 2015), 5.

[81] Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Régime and the French Revolution [1856]*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Anchor Books, 1983), 96.

single human being as contrasted to a social group or institution."[82] George Smith writes, "The abstract individual allows us to move from the particulars of history to the generalizations of theory."[83] An individual is a person who is singular, and individualism makes that singular person the most important being in the universe, impervious to the decisions of others and unmindful of the singular's impact upon others. An individual has the ability to make decisions apart from a group, and as John Stuart Mill writes, "It is the privilege and proper condition of a human being, arrive at the maturity of his faculties, to use and interpret experience in his own way."[84] So an individual is a person who interprets experiences in a unique way separate from a group. This definition can be also expressed in the term *individuality*. Individuality is what make a person an individual, it is the concept and expression of the individual. While individualism focuses solely on the individual and what they feel and experience as an expression unto themselves, individuality allows an individual to use those experiences and interpretations within the group to enhance the group in new ways. As Smith writes, "Individuality . . . signifies a focused attention in the inner self and a positive evaluation of the unique features of one's personality."[85]

Within a church body, a conflict arises when the notion of individualism becomes more prevalent than the notion of individuality. Again, individualism is the idea that one's own thoughts, needs, and beliefs are supreme over any other form of authority. The individual is the ultimate authority, and thus any decision made will be done in a way that enhances the life of the individual regardless of the affect it has on others. As Oscar Wilde writes, "Individualism

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[82] Merriam-Webster Dictionary.com, s.v. "Individual."

[83] Smith and Moore, "Introduction," 5.

[84] Mill, "Of Individuality," 38.

[85] Smith and Moore, "Introduction," 18.

exercises no compulsion over man. On the contrary, it says to man that he should suffer no compulsion to be exercised over him."[86] Individualism is anti-authoritarian. So, in the church environment where an individual has been designated as the authority, or a group of leaders has been given ultimate authority, a person who holds to individualism will automatically reject the authorities rule over the individual's life. This includes any book or belief system that a larger group holds and even the idea of a supreme deity. As Robert G. Ingersoll writes, "Every soul should repel dictation and tyranny, no matter from what source they come from—from earth or heaven, from men or gods."[87] For an individualist, the following statement from Jesus would be utterly rejected: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). In the same way, they would rebel against Paul's writing in Romans on authority when he writes, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God" (Rom 13:1). So, when it comes to the idea of a single ministerial leader of a church, an individualist would fight against the leader unless the leader does, says, or fits what the individual is wanting or believing at any moment. And this is what the focus church in the research project and the church universal must deal with. This is simply because of the influence of western society upon the church. "The cultural ideal of the Western, industrialized world is the self-made, self-sufficient, autonomous individual who stands by himself or herself, not needing *anyone* (except for sex) and not beholden to anyone or anything."[88] Sadly, this worldview has entwined itself within the church. Douglas Strum writes. "Modern religion has transformed faith from an

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[86] Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of a Man under Socialism," in *Individualism: A Reader*, ed. George H. Smith and Marylin Moore (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 2015), 61.

[87] Ingersoll, "Individuality," 185.

[88] Nolan, *Jesus Today*, 15.

objective institutional system, with imposed doctrines and rituals under the control of

ecclesiastical authorities, into a matter of individual spiritual quest and personal decision,

resulting in over time in a fragmented array of denominational possibilities and spiritual

pathways."[89] Many people have taken to saying, "I can worship God where I want and do not

need anyone telling me what to believe about God." But this is opposite of what the Bible

teaches. In Hebrews, the writer of this letter to the church implores, "Let us hold fast the

confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider

how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together,

as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing

near" (Heb 10:23-25). As stated previously, Michael G. Long writes, "Its resistance to

ideological factors that elevate a twisted form of individualism over the solidarity called forth by

our life together."[90] Mr. Long is writing about how Christianity must resist this insistence that an

individual can determine by their own beliefs and experiences how and where to worship God.

Douglas Strum also writes, "We are called, I declare, to resist modern individualism, give its

distortions and basic flaw, and to bend out energies toward the advocacy of solidarity, as a

version of covenantalism."[91] Strum is calling for a return to a system where the emphasis on

being the body of Christ is taught within the church, teaching unity over division and

individualism, while working together for the common good and spiritual growth of all. As

Albert Nolan writes, "A thoroughly individualist spirituality is proving to be counter-

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[89] Douglas Strum, "Resisting Individualism, Advocating Solidarity," in *Resist: Christian Dissent for the 21st Century*, ed. Michael G. Long (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 147.

[90] Long, "Christianity is Resistance," xxiv.

[91] Strum, "Resisting Individualism," 141.

productive."[92] And, "The common good is always in the best interest of the individual too."[93] As churches teach the importance of unity within the body of Christ, people will begin to see that it is okay to have differences in individuality, and those differences serve to help the body of Christ grow, just as individual parts in a human body make working together make the whole body stronger.

The church is fighting the culture of a generation. Josh McDowell writes, "Our young people have into their way of processing and perceiving reality—a way that says, "what works right now is right for now."[94] As a result, they seek instant gratification that may not always come in a group that is working for the betterment of all. But McDowell also writes, "Because He is the God of relationships, He gives us His Spirit and His Word that we might know so intimately that He literally lives in and through our lives. This intimate bonding with God's Word and His Holy Spirit with every believer is the foundation of relationship with Him."[95] In other words, you cannot have a strong, intimate relationship with God without being in contact and in relationship with other believers. The best way to do this is within the local church. Joseph H. Hellerman expresses it this way, "It is a simple but profound biblical reality that we both grow and thrive together, or we do not grow at all."[96] Os Guinness sees the church as the solution to individualism when he writes, "For many people, another challenge of individualism

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[92] Nolan, *Jesus Today*, 16.

[93] Ibid., 17.

[94] Josh McDowell, *The Last Christian Generation* (Holiday FL: Green Key Books, 2006), 53.

[95] Ibid., 74.

[96] Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 1.

is closer and easier to change; commitment to faithful, regular worship."[97]

But what happens when individualistic thought is prominent within the leadership of the church? Gary L. McIntosh and Samuel D. Rima Sr. write, "Christian leaders often use those they lead to enhance their own image and improve the way they feel about themselves." This too, is a product of the individualistic worldview that permeates Western culture. Hellerman writes, "We in America have been socialized to believe that our own dreams, goals, and personal fulfillment ought to take precedence over the well-being of any group—our church or our family for example—to which we belong."[98] It is acknowledged that God uses individuals as leaders. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "Through the call of Jesus men become individuals."[99] And as Os Guinness writes, "God normally calls us along the lines of our giftedness, but the purpose of giftedness is stewardship and service, not selfishness."[100] When a leader is individualist, the leader tends to use people in conjunction with personal goals and objectives no matter the consequence to those who are being led or the church they are leading. A leader needs to remember that they are first called to serve God and then called to serve others. Leaders, too, are a part of the body of Christ, and when they seek individual glory or gratification, then the whole body suffers. So a leader must understand that he or she needs the congregation. E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien write, "Paul's vision of the church life in his letter to Titus includes every member encouraging and instructing the others to embody the gospel in their behavior."[101] This means that even the leaders need the other parts of the body to help them life

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[97] Guinness, *The Call*, 102.

[98] Ibid., 4.

[99] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 94.

[100] Guinness, *The Call*, 46.

[101] Richards and O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture through Western Eyes*, 106.

out the gospel within their lives. As Don N. Howell Jr. writes, "Biblical leadership is taking the

initiative to influence people to grow in holiness and to passionately promote the extension of

God's kingdom in the world."[102] Christian leaders need to put aside their own agendas and look

to the vision and calling God has placed on the church. They must teach against individualism

and teach the gospel in a way that shows unity brings about good for everyone. Howell writes,

"Dependent obedience, humble submission, reverent worship, and wholehearted commitment to

the will and purposes of Another are qualities that, far from destroying human dignity, bring

about its restoration."[103] Christian leaders need to be examples of how serving God is the way to

bring about growth both in emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual health. If the vision and the

mission of the church worldwide and the focus church is to bring others into relationship with

Christ, then this mission is ultimately the mission and calling of each Christian leader. It is the

Christian leader's job to help each individual grow in Christ. As Reggie McNeal writes, "People

will support leaders who help them discover who they are created to be and then empower them

to employ their talents, energies, and passions."[104] This is echoed in the Bible in the previously

quoted passage in Ephesians:

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[102] Howell, *Servants of the Servant*, 3.

[103] Ibid., 11.

[104] Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2000), 83.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love (Eph 4:11-16).

So, to teach the importance of the individual within the body of Christ and to prevent a future split within the focus church, the researcher designed a two-part intervention. The intervention was designed this way as a means to not only gather information on the influence individualism has on the members of the focus church but also to allow the researcher to understand which areas of thought individualism has the most influence among the participants.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Intervention Design

As stated earlier in this thesis, the researcher was concerned about the effect that individualism was having on the thought processes of the leaders of the focus church. The researcher has experienced being forced out of a ministerial position by those who displayed individualistic tendencies. This is not new for the researcher or for others within the ministerial profession. In a survey conducted by the Francis A. Schaffer Institute of Church Leadership Development, they found, "Of the one thousand fifty pastors we surveyed, every one of them has a close associate or seminary buddy who had left the ministry because of burnout, conflict in their church, or from a moral failure."[105] The researcher believes every one of these causes is rooted in the worldview of individualism. Individualism at is worst becomes as Jaak B. Billet wrote, "unrestrained striving for personal interests and success with little account being taken of others."[106] When people have descended into this form of individualism, factions and splits within a church are inevitable. One of the problems about combatting individualism in the church is that as Andreas Buss writes, "Among the characteristics of modernity, individualism stands out as one of the most fundamental."[107] In contrast, the writings of Paul have a different focus. As E. Randolph Richards and Brandon O'Brien write, "Paul's vision of church life in his letter to Titus includes every member encouraging and instructing the others to embody the

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[105] Krejcir, "Statistics on Pastors."

[106] Billet, "Church Involvement, Individualism, and Ethnic Prejudice," 227.

[107] Buss, "The Individual in Eastern Orthodox Tradition," 41.

Gospel in their behavior."[108] The teaching of being a part of the body of Christ is essential to combat the effects of individualism within the church. Another area of individualistic thinking that affects the church is the thought patterns of the individualist. As David Gauthier writes, "First of all, the liberal individual is an active being who finds satisfaction in the seeking and striving that constitute activity as we humans conceive it. Second, the liberal individual has her own independent conception of good."[109] This is in stark contrast to the Bible, as John MacArthur writes, "But Christianity, the genuine gospel of Jesus Christ, is not a matter of opinion. It is a matter of truth. What you want, or what I want, or anybody else wants, makes no difference whatsoever. It is what it is by God's sovereign will."[110] The individualist asserts free will, but the Bible and becoming the body of Christ demand we submit to God's will and meet the needs of others.

In order to help teach the concept of the body of Christ to the leadership group of the focus church and prevent individualistic thought to take root and cause problems within the focus church, the researcher decided to intervene by creating a survey that would allow the researcher to first discover how much individualism affects the thoughts of the survey's participants as a sample of the whole leadership group and then second, the researcher would use those results to design and teach a leadership curriculum that informs the group of the problem of individualism and teaches them how to combat individualism within the church in order to prevent a split.

The researcher began this project by first seeking the approval of both the Rawlings School of Divinity. He did this by drafting a research proposal that was submitted to the School

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[108] Richards and O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture through Western Eyes*, 106.

[109] David Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement,* in *Communitarianism and Individualism,* ed. Shlomo Avineri and Aver De-Shalit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 151.

[110] MacArthur, *Hard to Believe*, 5.

of Divinity in the fall of 2016. The proposal contained the initial research and observations of

the researcher as well at the initial literary review and proposed procedures the researcher would

take to complete the project. This was done to help set parameters for the researcher, as John

Stuart Mill writes, "The liberty of the individual must be thus far limited; he must not make a

nuisance of himself."[111] Once approval was received from the School of Divinity, the researcher

began to gather articles, books, commentaries, and other materials that would form the

theological and theoretical basis for the research project. The first place the researcher looked

for source material was his personal library. The researcher has collected many books on the

ministry as well as commentaries during his years in pastoral ministry and found many books

and commentaries that directly addressed the issue of individualism in the church. Once the

researcher had gleaned enough information from his own resources, he used his local public

library to obtain other resources that were not readily available at the local library. The

researcher discovered within the readings a quote that sums up most of the writers' views about

individualism. Brian K. Morley writes, "There has been a corresponding dimming of the

prospect of finding objective truth and of constructing a comprehensive and coherent

worldview."[112] As the researcher was waiting for materials to arrive from the local library, he

sought out websites and articles on the internet to see if any recent research had been done on

individualism in the church. The researcher discovered three articles that addressed the church

worldwide and the effects of individualism within certain sectors of Christianity. These articles

helped the researcher get a sense of the problem. This process took numerous months and was

ongoing up until the rough draft of the project report was completed. At the same time, the

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[111] Mill, "Of Individuality," 38.

[112] Brian K. Morley, "Understanding our Postmodern World," in *Think Biblically: Recovering a Christian Worldview*, ed. John MacArthur (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003), 150.

researcher had other tasks to complete. These tasks were designed to be repeatable within the focus church and the church worldwide.

The first task the researcher completed was to craft a survey that looked to assess the individualistic thought patterns of the participants in two key areas. The first area to be tested was to see how much individualistic thought influenced the participants' view of the world. The second area to be tested was how much individualism influenced the participants' areas of the church that can cause splits. Each section consists of ten statements, and the participant was to read the statement and respond each on a scale of one to five. For the first section, the responses were: "1 = not like me at all, 2 = rarely like me, 3 = neutral, 4 = like me, and 5 = extremely like me." The second section also consists of a series of ten statements in which the participant responds by circling a number on a scale of one to five. The responses were: "1 = strongly disagree. 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree."[113] The responses show how much individualistic thought influences the participant and how it may affect the church and be a source of contention and an eventual split. The purpose of the survey was to help make the participants aware of their own individualistic thought patterns. It allows for formal self-reflection, and as Gary McIntosh and Samuel Rima Sr. write, "Though opening oneself to formal evaluation is always a risky and frightening experience, it is worth the risk and fear it engenders."[114] None of the questions asked can be answered with a quick thought; they are designed to make each participant think about how they answer each question. The survey was also designed to show each participant that they are unique and have individuality. As George H. Smith writes, "Individuality . . . signifies a focused attention on the inner self and a positive

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[113] See Appendix A.

[114] McIntosh and Rima, *Overcoming the Darkside of Leadership*, 200.

evaluation of the unique features of one's personality."[115]

Once the survey was completed, the researcher sought the permission of both the senior pastor of the focus church and Institutional Review Board of Liberty University to conduct the survey with the leadership group. This process took several months as the researcher had to coordinate meetings with the senior pastor to discuss the content of the survey and the focus of the research project. During this time, the senior pastor of the local church had several familial issues arise which slowed down the process by which the researcher could garner permission for the survey's administration. The Institutional Review Board made sure that the survey was compliant for ethical research and met the standards they established for research projects. Several drafts were submitted for approval, and final permission was received in the spring of 2020 from both parties. The researcher then met with the senior pastor to discuss the best way to administer the survey. The permission letters are included as appendices at the end of this project.

Along with the surveys, the researcher also crafted letters of recruitment to encourage participation in the survey. These letters also had to receive approval from the Institutional Review Board. As mentioned in the limitations and delimitations section of this project, the administration of the survey was tricky as the researcher is a regular weekly attendee of the focus church and a member of the group being surveyed. The problem of anonymity was addressed by how the survey was administered. The survey was designed to exclude any question that would reveal the identity of the participant. The members of the leadership group would be asked to complete the survey and were able to do so in a private area. The surveys would be completed in the adult Sunday school classroom of the focus church were the participants were free from

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[115] Smith and Moore, "Introduction," 18.

distraction and outside influence. Once the surveys were completed, the participants were instructed to place the completed surveys within a plain, manilla envelope. This step was done to assure the researcher did not know which completed survey belonged to which participant. Participation in the survey was completely voluntary and no participant's position within the leadership group is compromised by completion of the survey and the results generated.

Having the surveys completed, the next step for the researcher was to tabulate the scores and to analyze the results. The scores were tabulated by adding the number of points in a section based upon the number circled in response to the question. The results would show that the higher the total of points, the more individualistic the participant's worldview is. The surveys range scale is as follows: a score of 10 to 20 indicates low individualism, a score of 21 to 35 would indicate someone with moderate individualism, and a score of 36 to 50 would show high individualism. Once the overall scores were tabulated, the researcher then looked at the average score for each statement to analyze how the participants views were affected by the worldview of individualism. Each question was designed to address a specific issue within a participant's life or a specific issue within the church. Again, the purpose of calculating the results would show the researcher the level of individualistic thought within the group and allow the researcher to craft the intended leadership training to address specific issues within the leadership group in order to help prevent a future split. The researcher is hoping the results will show a similar trend to what has been observed in Black mega-churches across the country where, "In recent years, the Black church has moved away from being prophetic and embraced a corporate model that promotes pastor as CEO or chairman of a large business enterprise. Consequently, through the use of business principles, numerous mega-churches promote personal prosperity and a theology

of individualism versus collectivism."[116] If the surveys show a high level of individualistic

thought within the leadership group, then an assumption can be made that the teachings of the

focus church have moved into this realm of teaching personal prosperity and individualism

instead of teaching the importance of being an individual part of the body of Christ. The

researcher tabulated the responses and then averaged the scores to get an overall level of

individualistic thought within the leadership of the focus church.

Once the results were tabulated and analyzed, the researcher began to plan the curriculum

for the lessons. The researcher decided that the first lesson had to be on the concept of

worldview and to teach the participants what individualism is. Many people have not really

thought of the concept of worldview and really do not think about how they perceive the world

around them. The purpose of the lesson is to introduce the participants to the idea of having a

Christian worldview. As John MacArthur writes, "A truly Christian worldview, simply put, is

one in which the Word of God, rightly understood, is firmly established as both the foundation

and the final authority for everything we hold true."[117] This is in contrast to an individualistic

worldview, in which as Douglas Strum writes, "the crux of individualism as a worldview, we are

instructed not to kowtow to tradition, not to give unquestioned obedience to presumed

authorities, but to think, and to act, each one of us, for ourselves."[118] This lesson and subsequent

lessons are designed to have participant interaction with questions designed to make the

participants think about worldview and how they perceive the world. The lesson is also designed

to start building a foundation upon Scripture toward a biblical worldview. The lesson's biblical

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[116] Speakes-Lewis, Gill, and Moss, "The Move Toward American Modernity," 242.

[117] John MacArthur, "Embracing the Authority and Sufficiency of Scripture," *Think Biblically: Recovering a Christian Worldview*, ed. John MacArthur (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003), 21.

[118] Strum, "Resisting Individualism," 145.

focus is 1 Corinthians 12:12-14. This lesson introduces the concept of the body of Christ and encourages the participants to begin to look at Christianity as more than just a belief system but as a worldview and a way of life. It shows, as Nolan Albert writes, "My true self is being human with other human beings."[119]

The researcher started by consulting various literature about worldview that has been cited above. Then, the researcher looked at previously published Sunday school material to develop an outline for teaching. Once the outline was established with the major points, the researcher then filled in the outline with information and discussion questions. The researcher chose an interactive, question and answer format to shape the lessons in order to draw the participants into the lesson and to have them interact with the material in the effort to have the participants understand and internalize the information that was being presented.

The second lesson of the curriculum is designed to present the biblical concept of the body of Christ and the importance of the individual within the body. It focuses on the writings of the apostle Paul found in 1 Corinthians 12 with supporting Scripture from Romans 12. The lesson will follow Paul's concept of a body to describe the church and teach how each part of the body is vital for the proper functioning of the church. No one part is more important than the others, yet each part has its own unique function within the body. The lesson is designed to show the participants that, "A thoroughly individualist spirituality is proving to be counter-productive."[120]

The researcher followed the same format for developing this lesson. The main difference is that the researcher relied more on the Bible to make up most of the material and information

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[119] Nolan, *Jesus Today*, 163.

[120] Ibid., 16.

that was being presented in the lesson as opposed to outside sources. The research wanted to establish a biblical framework for the teaching of the concepts of individuality and the body of Christ.

The third lesson is based on the writings of Paul in Ephesians 4. The lesson is designed to present the concept of calling to the body and that everyone in the body has been called to specific roles. The purpose is to help every member become who they are called to be. Because, as Bonhoeffer writes, "Through the call of Jesus men become individuals."[121] The lesson will show how individuality is an important concept, but it is to be used within the body of Christ to promote the growth of the body as a whole.

Following the familiar format of the previous two lessons, the researcher once again relied heavily on the Bible as the main source material for this lesson. The researcher used information from both *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer and *The Call* by Os Guinness to supplement the biblical sources.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

In order to implement the intervention, the researcher scheduled a meeting with the senior pastor of the focus church in January of 2019. This meeting was to discuss the research project, the intervention design, and plan so the senior pastor was informed about what the researcher saw as a potential problem, what steps could help prevent the problem from manifesting, and how the intervention would proceed. Once that meeting was completed, the researcher sought permission from the Institutional Review Board to complete research with human subjects and submitted the application on April 21, 2019. After completing the required revisions for the Institutional Review Board, a meeting was set with the senior pastor to receive permission to

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[121] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 94.

proceed with the survey. This process took several months as many personal issues arose for both the researcher and the senior pastor. The researcher was finally able to get permission to conduct the survey on January 20, 2020. The next step was to set a date for the survey implementation. This also proved to be challenging as the focus church was going through a vision campaign and was beginning to reorganize the leadership group. This group usually met once a month for fellowship, a brief leadership training, and to discuss various areas of ministry. However, during the vision campaign, the group was not meeting. Eventually, the researcher and the senior pastor agreed to having the surveys completed by leadership group members after a Sunday service. The participants were asked to separate to a fellowship area and complete the surveys. Each survey was completed with no other participants and without the researcher present. Once completed, the surveys were placed into a manila envelope which was sealed by the last participant prior to giving it to the researcher. These steps were completed to ensure the privacy and anonymity of the participants as stated in the participant consent letter (see appendix). The surveys again allowed the participants to analyze their thinking. As Brian Morley writes, "As individuals, we can know our inner selves clearly and coherently."[122]

Now that the surveys were completed, the researcher compiled and analyzed the results in order to have a view on how much individualism affects the views and opinions of the participants in relation to the statements in the survey. Each survey was scored first to see how much individualism influences the daily thinking of each participant. Those results then were compiled to determine the average level of individualistic thought within the group of participants. Then each survey was scored individually on the effect of individualism influencing the thoughts of the participant regarding theological issues and issues within the church. Again,

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[122] Morley, "Understanding our Postmodern World," 139.

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once the individual data was collected and scored, an average level of individualistic thought was tabulated for the group.

After all data collection was completed, the researcher began to construct the curriculum that he would use to raise awareness of individualism within the focus church and to help prevent another split from occurring by demonstrating the importance of having leaders teach the concept of the body of Christ to the church as a whole. Each lesson in the curriculum was designed to address a specific issue raised within the surveys according to answers given to statements. The issues that were addressed were determined by the information gleaned during the literary research conducted by the researcher as issues that are most common regarding church splits or pastoral dismissal and combined with the information that was obtained by the surveys.

Once the curriculum was ready, the researcher again met with the senior pastor to discuss the best way to present the material and the findings of the survey, as well as the best way to present the curriculum to the leadership group. It was determined by the senior pastor and researcher that most of the leadership group attended the weekly Sunday school class for adults, so they agreed that the developed curriculum could be taught over three weeks. It was during this time an extraordinary event occurred that was not included in the limitation because it was not foreseen by the researcher. The first class of the Sunday school curriculum was set to be taught on Sunday, March 22, 2020. However, at the beginning of the year, a virus, called COVID-19, was reported in China. This virus was extremely contagious and as a result, it quickly spread across the globe. The global pandemic that ensued caused the United States and Illinois governments to issue stay-at-home orders for the general population in order to slow down the spread of the virus. This order stopped the focus church from having regular meetings

beginning on March 22, 2020, so the researcher needed to find a new way to teach his curriculum and analyze the responses from the participants. The researcher consulted with his advisor and the senior pastor, and it was agreed that the researcher could teach the curriculum via an internet program that allowed the researcher to present the material and receive feedback from the participants. The researcher then amended the procedures to teach the curriculum over three days via the internet and was able to have almost all of the leadership group involved. Each teaching session was scheduled for between 30-45 minutes which would be adjusted according to how much interaction and discussion arose between the participants and the researcher. The researcher analyzed the effect of the teaching by listening to the questions being asked and the non-verbal responses of the participants to the material being presented. The overall results of the intervention are discussed in the next chapter.

The meetings were scheduled to begin in the mornings of each session. The first lesson focused on presenting the concept of worldview and explaining to the participants how worldview affects their daily lives. It is in this lesson that the topic of individualism is first addressed and is given definition to the participants. Each participant is required to evaluate their own worldview and to see how it affects the way they perceive the world. The lesson also shows the participants how worldview even affects how they read the Bible and how they view the way ministry should be accomplished in the church by the congregants and the pastoral staff. Biblically, the lesson focuses on passages from Paul's epistles to show the contrasting worldview of individualism with the concept and worldview of being a part of the body of Christ. The lesson emphasizes the importance of every individual within the body and how they are uniquely gifted to serve as part of the whole.

The second lesson of the curriculum focuses on the concept of individuality and continues the theme from the first lesson that everyone within the body of Christ has a specific role to fulfill within the body. This role helps the whole body function correctly. This lesson again uses the writings of Paul to show how everyone within the body serves a specific role, like the organs of the human body. Each organ must function properly for the whole body to work properly. The lesson shows that God has given everyone a unique set of abilities and gifts to fill a particular role within the body of the focus church, or the local church in order for it to fulfill the mission and vision God has given it.

The third lesson in the curriculum focused on the issue of calling within the body. As Os Guinness writes, "Calling is not only a matter of being and doing what we are but also becoming what we are not yet but are called by God to be."[123] When Christians begin to understand first that everyone has been called by God into a particular part of service within the body of Christ, and in that certain individuals have been called as leaders within the body of Christ, it will begin to recognize some have been given positions of authority with great responsibility. This understanding will combat the notion of individualism in which, "We are not instructed to kowtow to tradition, not to give unquestioning obedience to presumed authorities, but to think, and to act, each one of us, for ourselves."[124]

Once the intervention was designed and implemented. The researcher was left with the task of tabulating and interpreting the results of the intervention in order to better see how much individualism influences the participants and if the lessons had a dampening effect upon how individualism influences the leaders.

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[123] Guinness, *The Call*, 30.
[124] Strum, "Resisting Individualism," 145.

Chapter 4

Results

After gathering and tabulating the results, the researcher was able to make some initial observations that affect ministry within the church. In looking at the overall scores of the survey participants, the median score for the first section is a 35. The following chart shows the scores of all the participants.
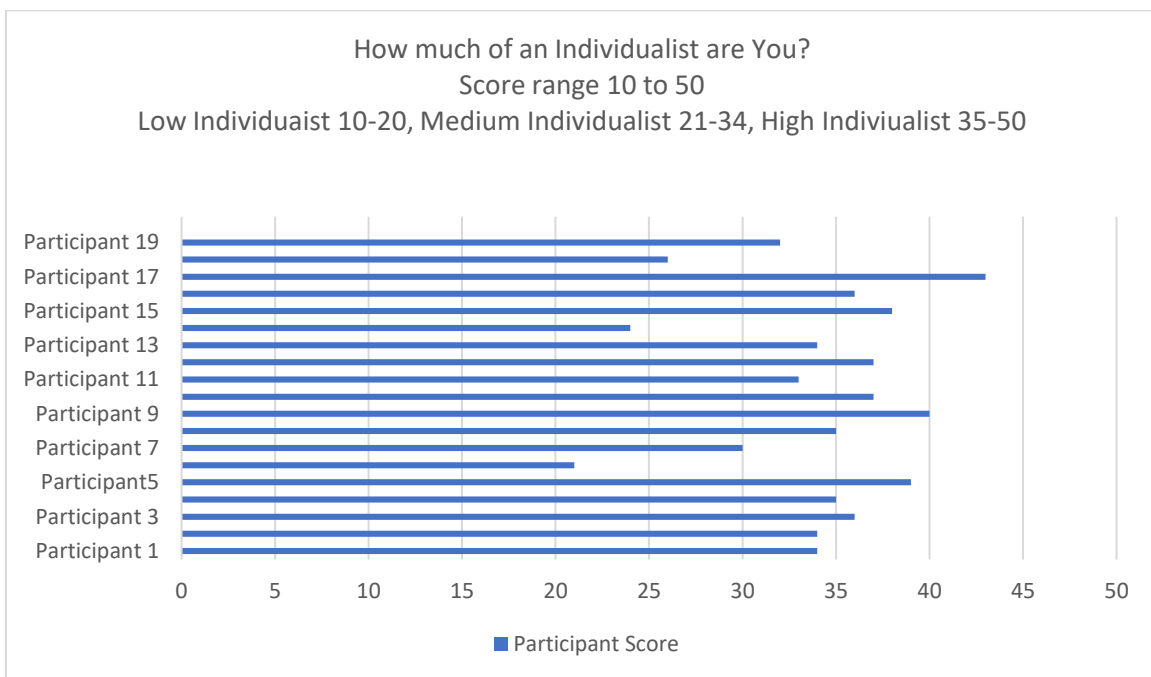

Figure 1. Survey Results: How Much of an Individualist are You?

In placing that score on the individualism scale, it rates as highly individualistic, albeit on the low end of the high scale. What this means is that the leadership group of the church is very individualistic and individualism influence is high. This shows that the group values individualism, but that desire to be truly independent of others is mitigated by other factors. Does this mean that the group is destined to break apart because of competing ideas or desires? Not necessarily? While the group's median score shows a propensity towards individualism, the

fact that it is on the low end shows that the group values togetherness as well. Brian Morley writes, "Postmodernism highlights the limits of the human perspective and difficulties with language; it also questions human intentions."[125] The highest total of the group was a score of 43; this participant scored very high on the individualism scale. This highly individualistic person may become a source of problems within the group. Depending on how the person feels in relations to the group and the necessity of being part of the group to achieve personal goals, this participant can cause issues to arise.

As Robert Ingersoll writes, "Surely it is sublime to think that the brain is a castle, and within its curious bastion and winding halls the soul, in spite of all worlds and beings, is the supreme sovereign of itself."[126] Meaning, in spite of being in the group, this participant holds no real allegiance to nor acknowledges any authority over their life except their own. Ultimately, if an issue arises that will threaten their status, influence, or wants, then the participant has no loyalty to the group. This is in stark contrast to the first commandment which states, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex 20:3). By having a worldview in which the individual's thoughts, needs, and wants are paramount, even the will of God becomes secondary to the desires of the individual, especially if the will of God is in conflict with the individual's will.

When we look deeper at this person's answers, we see what might be perceived as a conflict within the person. For example, when responding to the statement, "It is important to maintain harmony in the group," the person responded with the answer "extremely like me." This means the person believes harmony is of utmost importance. But as Shlomo Avineri and Aver De-Shalit write, "We must consider people's aims and values; if we are to understand who

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[125] Morley, "Understanding our Postmodern World," 149.

[126] Ingersoll, "Individuality," 188.

they are."[127] If the maintaining of harmony is extremely important to this person, then they will do whatever it takes to make sure that harmony is maintained, including leaving the group and taking others with them if they feel that their personal group's harmony is being threatened or if the feel their position within the group is threatened. This is also in contrast to New Testament teachings on the body of Christ, as Larry Seidentop observes, "For Paul, the love of God revealed in the Christ imposes opportunities and obligations on the individual as such, that is, on conscience."[128] The can be seen in Paul's writings in his letter to the Philippians when he writes, "Do not merely look out for you own personal interests, but also the interest of others" (Phil 2:4). Paul's admonition is that we should care about each other and support each other. A highly individualistic person is only concerned about looking out for their own interests. In a leadership group, this individual will strive to maintain harmony because they perceive it is in their best interest to do so.

To counter this thinking and to change the worldview of this individual, the teaching of the concept of individuality within the body of Christ is vital. As Rev. John P. McGarry states, "Although the followers of Jesus are diverse in their numerous talents and God-given giftings, this diversity can be seen as a sign of their oneness."[129] It is the diversity in the body of Christ that shows the unity, as Paul writes in Romans, "So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Rom 12:5).

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[127] Avineri and De-Shalit, "Introduction," 3.

[128] Larry Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual: The Origins of Western Liberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 352.

[129] McGarry, *Eucharist and American Culture*, 7.

Another discovery comes on how the group views themselves as individuals. In the first section, the survey asked the participants to respond to the statement, "I am a unique individual." As the following chart shows, the scores for this statement were extremely high.
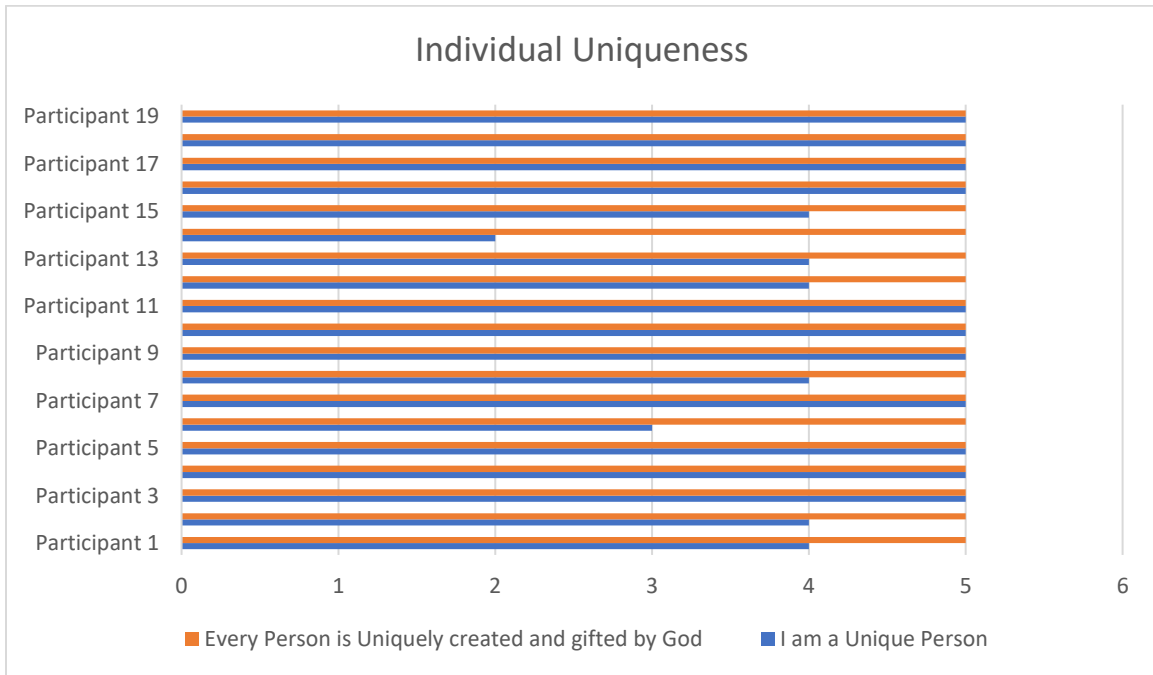

Figure 2. Survey Results: Individual Uniqueness

The average score of the group was 4.47. In the second part of the survey, the participants responded to the statement, "Every person is uniquely created and gifted by God."[130] Every participant answered they strongly agreed with the statement. This result shows how much individualistic thought is in western culture echoing the previous statement by E. Richards Randolph and Brandon J. O'Brien, "In Western individualistic cultures, the decision to become a Christian is a personal and individual decision."[131] Every one of the leaders in the group believes they are uniquely created and gifted by God. What can arise from this is that each person can

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[130] McGarry, *Eucharist and American Culture*, 7.

[131] Richards and O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture through Western Eyes*, 96.

develop a mentality of, "The purpose of the church is to help me grow in my personal relationship with Jesus Christ."[132] Depending on how individualistic the person is this can be a good thing or a bad thing. A good thing in that a person can lean into the mentality that "The common good is always in the best interest of the individual too."[133]

Negatively, as E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J O'Brien write, "If we are not careful, our individualistic assumptions about church can lead us to think of the church as something like a health club."[134] In other words, a truly individualistic person will see the church and leadership group as merely a means to advance their own well-being in all areas of their life and can be discarded when it is no longer perceived as necessary to advance the well-being of that individual.   It also can lead to an individualist feeling that once the church is no longer helping them grow in relationship with Christ, then they are free to leave and find another church that helps them continue in their personal growth. In a larger church, this may not be a problem, but in smaller churches like the focus church, individuals choosing to leave affects more than just the individual; the decision affects what the church can do ministerial wise and can result in a dramatic loss of numbers. This is because, as Os Guinness writes, "However strong our individual callings are, our sense of corporate calling is often very faint."[135] When the church members are not taught that they are an important and necessary part of the body of Christ, the sense of calling to a local church can be diminished. But as Josh McDowell writes, "He wants us to bring his children close to him so we can experience the unfathomable happiness he created us

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[132] Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family*, 15.

[133] Nolan, *Jesus Today*, 19.

[134] Richards and O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture through Western Eyes*, 107.

[135] Guinness, *The Call*, 101.

to enjoy. And he has given us his body, the church, as his instrument of restoration."[136] The only way to help individuals feel important to the body is to teach them they are important to the body. We must give them that sense of calling by teaching the concept of the body of Christ.

As shown by the chart, however, participant 14 answered the statement "I am a unique individual" with the response, "Rarely like me." Which is contrast to their response to the statement, "Every person is uniquely created and gifted by God." This participant's response was, "Strongly agree," meaning they feel person is uniquely created by God. Several possibilities arise from the person's response to the first question. One is that the person has a low self-esteem and does not value their own worth. This is quite common among pastors as "seventy percent of pastors say they have a lower self-esteem now than when they entered the ministry."[137]

Unfortunately, as lay members of a congregation enter the ministry, they too can come to the point where self-esteem lags because of the demands put on them by others. This lack of self-esteem can be contributed to a feeling that those being ministered to do not have compassion for those who are doing the ministering. When this happens, the leader may feel the urge to leave because they are no longer feeling valued by the church. And if this person feels like many, as Joseph H. Hellerman comments, "The purpose of the church is to help me grow in my personal relationship with Christ,"[138] then the urge to leave grows. Consequently, by being among the leadership of the focus church, the person has influence among others and if this lack

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[136] McDowell, *The Last Christian Generation*, 75.

[137] Bill Gaultiere, "Pastor Stress Statistics."

[138] Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family*, 15.

of self-esteem and feelings of unimportance continue, the person can spread those feeling onto others and cause a rift within the church and an eventual split.

Another viewpoint on this answer is the person beliefs in what is written in the Bible in the books of Romans, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). This person may recognize everyone is common in their need for the salvation that Christ offers and that they have a common bond with everyone, which would explain why the participant is confident that everyone is uniquely created and gifted by God. If the participant has this understanding, the participant knows that while everyone has the same condition of sinfulness, each person is responsible for living out their faith according to the calling placed upon them by Christ. As Os Guinness writes, "Somehow we human beings are never happier than when we are experiencing the deepest gifts that are truly us."[139]

Another issue that can arise in looking at the influence of individualism is the importance of harmony within the group. Harmony is another issue that can have many purposes for an individualist. One purpose is that harmony allows the individualist to fulfill his or her own agenda. This can be dangerous when a person's views of individualism have descended into narcissism. "Christian leaders often use those they lead to enhance their own image and improve the way they feel about themselves."[140] The strong individualist will look at the group's harmony as a sign of their position. When challenged, the leader will look to remove the source of disharmony by any means necessary. This includes gathering the group they lead and leaving the church.

When looking at the group's overall response to the statement, "It is important to

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[139] Guinness, *The Call*, 45.

[140] McIntosh and Rima, *Overcoming the Darkside of Leadership*, 99.

maintain harmony in a group," the average response to this statement was 3.89, meaning that the group was relatively neutral when it comes to maintaining harmony. Again, issues can arise within this group. Members can either develop several patterns of thought. One of these patterns being, "I don't want to make waves and cause disharmony, so I won't say anything." This pattern of thought arises if a person does not feel they are important to a group or the person does not feel they have something to contribute to the discussion. This is a sign of individualistic thought in a person. As Albert Nolan writes, "The self-centered individualist loses touch with reality."[141] The reality is that everyone is important to the body of Christ and has something to contribute. To combat this thought pattern, people within the church must be shown that everyone has value as an individual. Os Guinness writes, "Humanness is a response to God's calling."[142] In other words, for us to be human, we must respond to God's calling. A person who is part of the leadership of the church is responding to God's calling on their life, if they do not feel as if they have a part or have something important to contribute, they may begin to feel a loss of humanness that can lead to discontentment. Discontentment can lead to the person looking for ways to feel important by causing issues within the church over minor things and if not resolved can rally a group of people around the area of discontentment and eventually cause a split in the church in order to feel better about themselves and feel as if they have a voice.

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[141] Nolan, *Jesus Today*, 16.

[142] Guinness, *The Call*, 24.

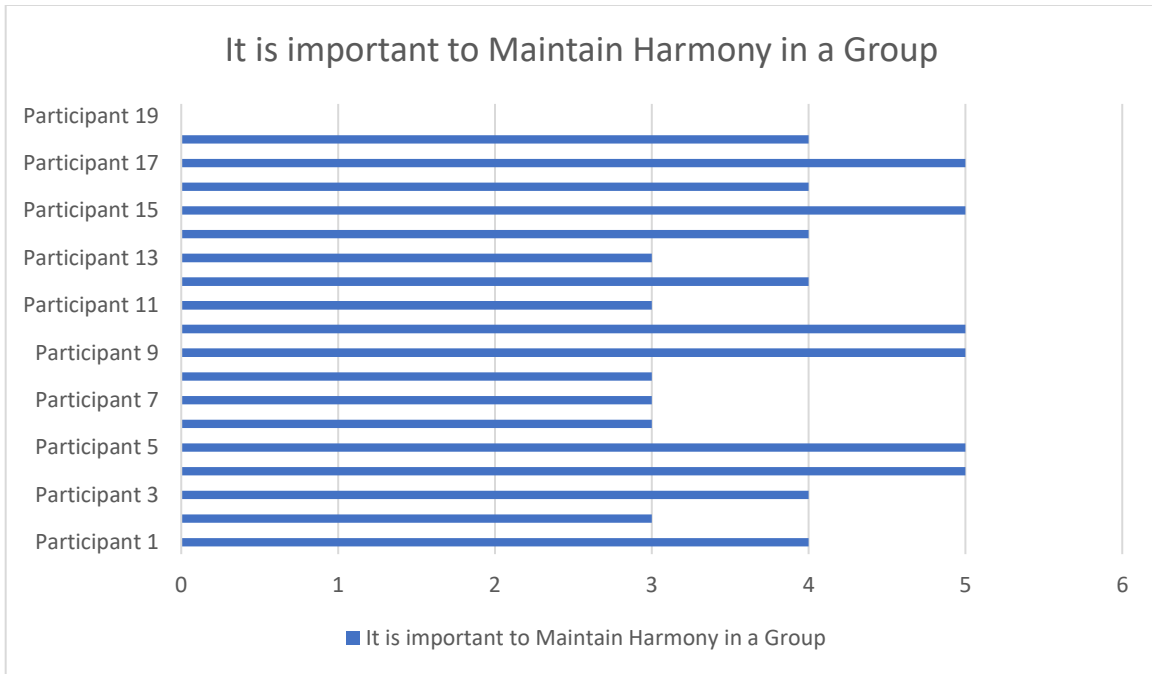**It is important to Maintain Harmony in a Group**

Figure 3. Survey Results: It is Important to Maintain Harmony in a Group

If harmony is not important, then disagreements can also arise over theological issues. Brain K. Morley writes, "The tendency of element of post-modern culture is to base tolerance on the meta-physical assumption that there is no single view that is universally true, but than many views are correct in the same way."[143] This response to the question show that the group believes in the value of different viewpoints; however, if one of the group members feels they are right over an issue and want their issue accepted by others as valid, they may be willing to sacrifice unity in order to force their view's acceptance. If this view is contrary to Scripture, then the view will cause problems within the church between those who want to follow Scripture and those who want to accept the other view. As shown in the following chart, the participants responded to the statement, "Pastors should only use one version of the Bible."

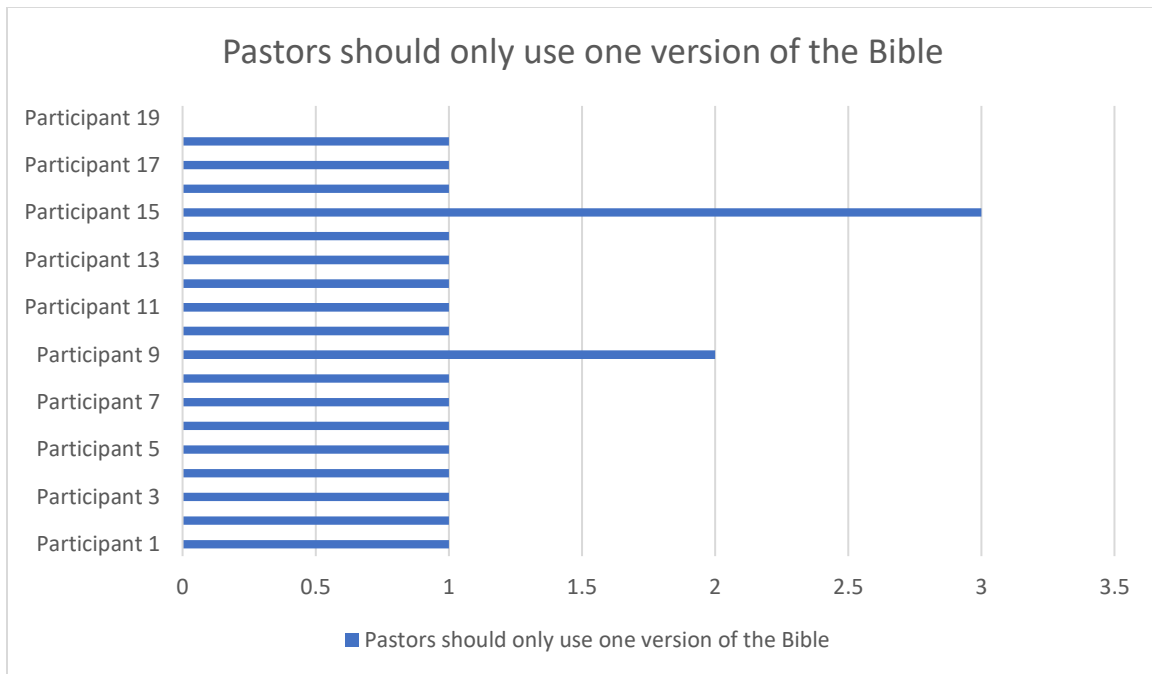[143] Morley, "Understanding our Postmodern World," 150.

Figure 4. Survey Results: Pastors Should Only Use One Version of the Bible

The average response was, 1.21. This means that the group does not feel a single version of the Bible is important for teaching. This reflects a high level of individualistic thought as each participant would choose a version of the Bible that best fits their needs and worldviews. They would seek to find a Bible version that confirms their own values and assumptions, and in turn, the pastor is forced to use the version that is in concert with viewpoints of the majority of the church members in order to keep his job. This result is consistent with a recent survey done by the Pew research center.

In this survey, Tara Burton writes, "among self-described Christians, a full 20 percent believe in a higher power but don't believe in the God described in the Bible."[144] Based on this information, at least one of the participants of the research survey does not believe in the God of

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[144] Tara Isabella Burton, "This Poll Asked Americans if They Believe in God. The Answers were Fascinating," *Vox*, April 26, 2018. https://www.vox.com/2018/4/26/17282284/pew-americans-god-religion-study-faith-identity.

the Bible. In a group of fifty church leaders, that means at least ten of the people within the group do not believe in the God of the Bible. Similarly, Gallup found this information, "Fewer than one in four Americans (24%) now believe the Bible is "the actual word of God, and is to be taken literally, word for word," similar to the 26% who view it as "a book of fables, legends, history and moral precepts recorded by man."[145] Meaning based on this information at least twelve members of the group may not even believe the Bible is the word of God.

When issues of theology arise, disagreements can result that will challenge the viewpoints of the leaders over the reasons for the implementation of certain policies and programs within the church. As a result, if the disagreement becomes strong enough, it could cause almost a quarter of the church to leave. For a megachurch, this may not be an issue, but for a small church, this would cause a serious disruption in the ability of the church to even exist. Therefore, harmony over the validity of the Bible must be maintained and taught to the leadership and the body of the church. As Douglas Strum writes, "the crux of individualism as a worldview . . . we are instructed not to kowtow to tradition, not to give unquestioning obedience to presumed authorities, but to think, and to act, each one of us, for ourselves."[146]

Another key statement in the survey was, "The pastor is an employee of the church." The following chart shows the participants' responses to this statement.

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[145] Lydia Saad, "Record Few Americans Believe Bible is Literal Word of God," Gallup, Social and Policy Issues, May 15, 2017, https://news.gallup.com/poll/210704/record-few-americans-believe-bible-literal-word-god.aspx.

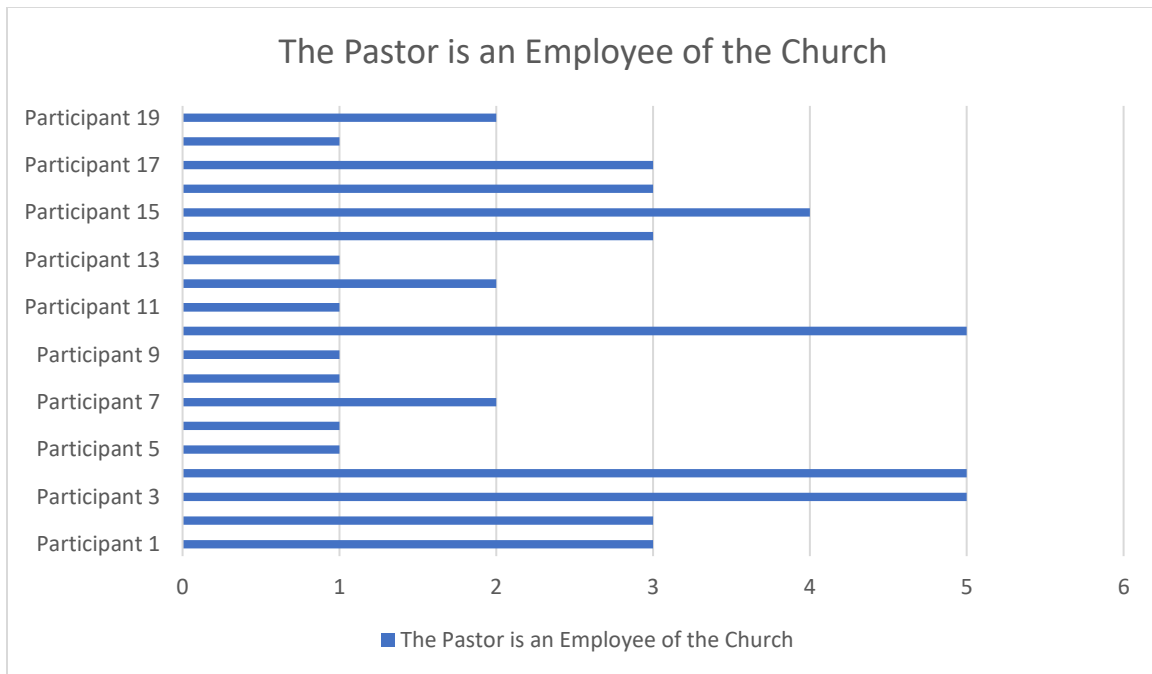[146] Strum, "Resisting Individualism," 145.

Figure 5. Survey Results: The Pastor is an Employee of the Church

The average answer to this question was 2.47. This result shows that a good majority of

the participants do not view the pastor as an employee. However, some of the participants do

have this view. In fact, four of the participants answered they either agreed with the statement or

strongly agreed with the statement. Another five gave neutral responses. This means that over

seventy-three percent of the participants either see the pastor as an employee of the church or

really do not have an opinion about this. And really this can be at the heart of the individualistic

feelings and worldview of the church. As E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien

comment, "The most important entity in an individualistic culture is the individual."[147] When a

church and those who are in leaderships positions view the pastor as an employee, the pastor

may feel pressure to perform in a way that helps him or her not lose their position instead of

following the calling God has placed on their lives. The pastor or church leader begins to

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[147] Richards and O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture through Western Eyes*, 96.

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concern themselves with fulfilling the daily wants, needs, and concerns of the congregation instead of focusing on the calling God has placed on their life. It also causes congregations to put unrealistic expectations upon the pastor. "Eight hundred two (802 or 71%) of pastors stated they were burned out, and they battle depression beyond fatigue on a weekly and even a daily basis."[148] This means the church they are serving uses them in a way that is contrary to their calling or puts demands on them that exceed what they are able to handle. In the same survey, Richard J. Krejcir reports "Nine hundred thirty-five, (935 or 89%) of the pastors we surveyed also considered leaving the ministry at one time. Five hundred ninety, (590 or 57%) said they would leave if they had a better place to go-including secular work."[149] This happens when the pastor is running around trying to fill the individual needs of the whole congregation. This view of the pastor as an employee can also lead to a pastor becoming narcissistic. Gary McIntosh and Samuel Rima Sr. write, "At the heart of narcissistic leaders are self-absorption and uncertainty due to deep feelings of inferiority."[150] Krejcir states, "Seven hundred ninety (790 or 75%) of the pastors we surveyed felt they were unqualified and/or poorly trained by their seminaries to lead and manage the church or to counsel others. This left them disheartened in their ability to pastor."[151]

Within the focus church, the responses show that, in general, the participants do not see the pastor as an employee, the average score shows a more neutral view as the average score was 2.47. Yet it is those who answered at level 4 and 5 that is of concern. An individualist would

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[148] Krejcir, "Statistics on Pastors."

[149] Ibid.

[150] McIntosh and Rima, *Overcoming the Darkside of Leadership*, 101.

[151]Krejcir, "Statistics on Pastors."

hold the viewpoint that since the church pays the salary of the pastor and the individual gives to the church, the pastor also works as an employee of the individual and should meet the demands of every person who gives to the church. In fact, a recent survey showed, "Forty-four percent of pastors do not take a regular day off."[152] Which in turn can lead to the feeling that if the pastor does not meet the individual's needs then the individual is free to leave. It is this thinking that causes many pastors to have to face yearly reviews that help determine if the pastor is retained by the church for another year. The can be tricky because, as stated earlier, McIntosh and Rima write, "Though opening oneself to formal evaluation is always a risky and frightening experience, it is worth the risk and fears it engenders."[153] The risk for the pastor and the congregation is if the pastor is found wanting, he is dismissed upon evaluation. Many pastors are faced with this and in a lot of ways they face tighter scrutiny than those in the secular world who also face such evaluations. As Brian Morley writes, "Postmodernism highlights the limits of the human perspective and difficulties with language; it also questions human intentions."[154] The danger of having a pastor who faces this type of yearly scrutiny is that he begins to craft his ministry to please the members of the congregation instead of following God's calling upon the pastor's life.

This finding agrees with the responses to the statement, "The members should be allowed to vote when a church hires new staff." As the following chart shows, the average response to this statement was 2.11.

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[152] Bill Gaultiere, "Pastor Stress Statistics."

[153] McIntosh and Rima, *Overcoming the Darkside of Leadership*, 200.

[154] Morley, "Understanding our Postmodern World," 149.

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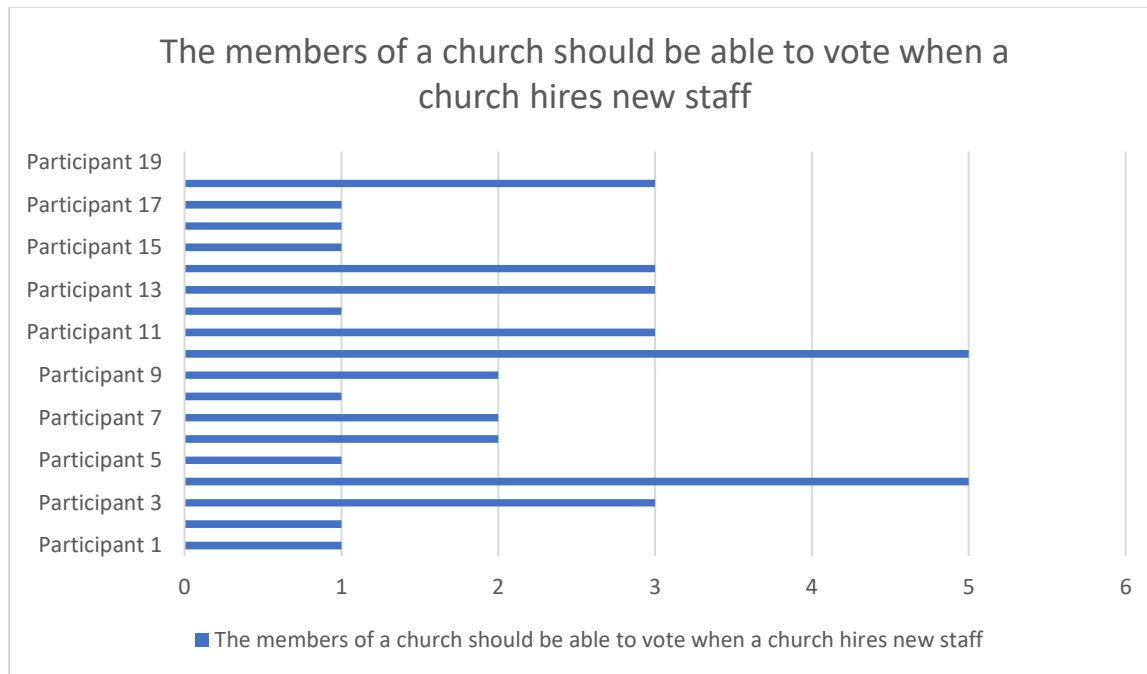The members of a church should be able to vote when a church hires new staff

Figure 6. Survey Results: The Members of a Church Should be Able to vote When a Church Hires New Staff

What this finding shows is that the leadership does not view the church as a democracy where every member has a say on who is chosen to lead. This result seems to be in contrast with the experience of many pastors. Bill Gaultiere writes, "Seventy-five percent of pastors report being 'extremely stressed' or 'highly stressed'."[155] When church members see the pastor as an employee, they tend to look to the pastor to fill needs and accomplish tasks that they are not called to fulfill. Sometimes, the church members place unfillable expectations on the pastor, and his family. "Twenty-four percent of pastor's families resent the church and its effect on their family."[156] That is because the church members see the pastor as someone who is at their disposal at any time of the day or night, seven days a week. Again, this thinking can be changed

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[155] Gaultiere, Bill. "Pastor Stress Statistics."

[156] Pastoral Care Inc., "Statistics in the Ministry: Newly Revised Statistics," accessed 4/03/2020, https://www.pastoralcareinc.com/ statistics.

by teaching about the importance of roles and individuals in the body of Christ. As Paul writes, "And he gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the service" (Eph 4:11-12). According to the Bible, pastors have be assigned a particular task to train equip the saints for the work of the service. The body of Christ, every part, must work in concert together to complete the works of service. It is not just the pastors who are called to service. Yet in the leadership group of the focus church, two out of the nineteen surveyed stated that they strongly agree with this statement, meaning they feel that the members of the congregation should be able to decide on who the church hires. In analyzing the numbers, ten percent of the leadership group believes they should have a say on who is hired by the church. Translate that to the whole of the focus church, then at least twenty members of the church feel that they should have a say in choosing the staff. Those numbers are a significant amount of people in a small church. As E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien comment, "If we are not careful, our individualistic assumptions about church can lead us to think of the church as something like a health club."[157]

Another statement that needs exploring is the statement, "I do not need to attend church on a weekly basis in order to be a Christian." As the following chart shows, the average response to this statement was a 1.89. Meaning the participants of the survey value church attendance as a part of their expression of Christianity.

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[157] Richards and O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture through Western Eyes*, 107.

I do not need to attend Church on a Weekly Basis to be a Christian.

Figure 7. Survey Results: I Do Not Need to Attend Church on a Weekly Basis to be a Christian

However, if we go deeper into the numbers, we can see another potential problem that can develop in the focus church. Of the nineteen participants in the survey three answered that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. This means, of the participants, at least fifteen percent of the group does not feel weekly church attendance is a defining characteristic of a Christian. In addition, another two participants were neutral in thinking church attendance is part of being a Christian. In total, twenty-six percent of the participants do not feel that church attendance is an important part of being a Christian. To relate that to the overall viewpoint of the focus church, if this number holds for the leadership group, thirteen members of the leadership group hold this view, and for the church, thirty-nine members hold this view. This is reflected when Os Guinness writes, "The plain fact is that for most modern people, community is either a

rare experience or a distant, even mocking, ideal."[158] When the church fails to teach the importance of the individual within the body of Christ, the idea of regular attendance wains.

This can also be seen in how modern people in America at large view church. Rev. John McGarry writes, "American values is one that seems . . . to give everyone else the "space" to do his or her own thing without any commitment to any sort of broader societal behavioral norms."[159] This lack of commitment to societal norms includes weekly attendance of church services. This is in contrast to the writings of the author of Hebrews, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Heb 10:23-25). McGarry comments, "He emphasizing the link between becoming Christ's body in the world and active participation in the eucharist meal, and was taking to task those who desired union with Christ but did not accept the demands of union and interaction with fellow Christians."[160]

A part of this is that, "Individualists fail to see that this community is not necessarily a voluntary one, and that the social attachments which determine the self are not necessarily chosen ones."[161] But it may be more complicated than just failing to see the need for association with fellow believers, as John MacArthur writes, "Spiritual defectors seek no personal relationship."[162] If thirty-nine members of the focus church do not feel that personal relationships

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[158] Guinness, *The Call*, 99.

[159] McGarry, *Eucharist and American Culture*, 21.

[160] Ibid., 11.

[161] Aveneri and De-Shait, "Introduction," 3.

[162] MacArthur, *Hard to Believe*, 173.

are important and that weekly church attendance contributes to relationship building, this group

will be more likely to split from the church when a conflict arises. Os Guinness tell us the way to

combat this, "For many people another challenge of individualism is closer and easier to change:

commitment to faithful, regular worship."[163] If the participants of the survey can become

committed to weekly church attendance, then the possibility of a split is diminished. One thing

we can be assured of is that "Associating with Christ but not his church is a distinction Jesus

would never have made."[164]

What the results of the survey really show is that the leadership group of the focus church

has a worldview that is colored by Individualism. Because of this, the researcher created three

Bible lessons that teach on the issue of worldview. The first lesson dealt with the issue of

worldview to make the leadership group aware of their unknown worldview and share the results

of the survey with the group. The purpose of the lesson was to make the group aware that even

though the church is a unified group, problems could arise because of the worldview of

individualism. The lesson started by discussing the definition of worldview given in this project

and uses a question and discussion format to teach the lesson. The result of this lesson was a

greater understanding of individualism and the concept of the body of Christ. As Larry

Siedentop writes, "Jesus' insistence that the "kingdom of God" is within you (as the early church

often proclaimed) was designed to invoke such a response, to create an individual will."[165] The

lesson focuses on the difference between individualism and individuality and how the individual

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[163] Guinness, *The Call*, 102.

[164] Richards and O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture through Western Eyes*, 110.

[165] Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual*, 353.

is important to the body of Christ. As Colin Morris writes, "The value of the individual and the dignity of man are both written large in the pages of the Scriptures."[166]

The true result of the lessons is subjective and can be seen only in the long-term application and acceptance of the lessons' teachings. As John Stuart Mill writes, "The human faculties of perception, judgement, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference, are only exercised in making a choice."[167] The individuals that participate in the lessons are the ones who decide if they accept this new information and allow it to change their worldview.

The goal of the lesson is also to demonstrate a clear difference between the worldviews of individualism and Christianity. An empirical evaluation of the success of the lesson was to have each participant describe the concept of worldview and then orally list differences between individualism and Christianity. When asked, most of the participants were able to correctly define worldview and then listed several differences between Christianity and individualism.

The second lesson the researcher created for this project focused on the concept of individuality and the role of the individual within the body of Christ. Based on the statistics from statement six from part one and statement one of part two in the survey, this lesson seeks to reinforce that God has granted each person individual gifts and abilities to use within the body of Christ. As Paul writes the following in 1 Corinthians,

> But to each one of you is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing, by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues (1 Cor 12:7-10).

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[166] Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200*, 11.

[167] Mill, "Of Individuality," 41.

The lesson also teaches that these giftings are a part of God's calling or purpose for the lives of the participants and everyone in the body of Christ. As Josh McDowell writes, "Because He is the God of relationships; He gives us His Spirit and His Word that we might know so intimately that He literally lives in and through our lives. This intimate bonding with God's Word and His Holy Spirit with every believer is the foundation of relationship with Him."[168] When we understand that we have His Spirit within us and it is that Spirit that not only gifts us individually but also unites us with other believers, then we can truly see how individuality is a part of the body of Christ and how each person fits into the body. The goal of this lesson is to teach the participants that God has created them uniquely and cares about them individually. As Os Guinness writes, "Calling is not only a matter of being and doing what we are but also becoming what we are not yet but are called by God to be.[169] Yet, the lesson also teaches the importance of not letting one gift seem more important in the functioning of the body, thus creating the illusion that the person who has the celebrated gift is more qualified to lead. The danger of this is creating celebrity pastors and leaders. Neil Cole warns, "If we build a church that is based on a charismatic personality, an innovative methodology, or anything else, we have a church that is inferior to that which Jesus would build."[170] As Paul writes the following:

> On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become more presentable, whereas are more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another (1 Cor 12:22-25).

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[168] McDowell, *The Last Christian Generation*, 74.

[169] Guinness, *The Call*, 30.

[170] Cole, *Organic Church*, 8.

The lesson resulted in the participants expressing in a desire to first learn about how they were individually gifted and then to see how they can use those giftings to support and encourage each other in the focus church.

The third lesson that was created because of the survey's findings deals with the role of the individual within the body of Christ for the focus church to function correctly. One of the goals of the lesson was to teach the importance of understanding the purpose of the church and the role each person has within the body to fulfill that purpose. While the previous lesson focused how the participants were individually created by God to work in the body, the third lesson focuses on how the body is to function in the Word. The goal of this lesson is to teach that the focus church itself is part of the body of Christ worldwide and has a specific purpose and function within the whole body of Christ to fulfill. As Os Guinness writes, "We are not summoned to be a bunch of individual believers, rather to be a community of faith."[171] This lesson looks at the Biblical concept of the body of Christ more deeply and how each individual functions within it. The lesson is in response to results of the statement in the survey which said, "I do not need to attend church on a weekly basis to be a Christian." It teaches the importance of regular church attendance in order for a Christian to be a functioning part of the body of Christ in the focus church. The teaching of the body of Christ is important because it changes the believer's reality. As Bonhoeffer writes, "Since the coming of Christ, his followers have no more immediate realities of their own, not in family relationships, nor in ties with their nation no in the relationships formed in the process of living."[172] Our reality as believers should be one that is focused on becoming the body of Christ he desires and our own wills are subjected to his.

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[171] Guinness, *The Call*, 101.

[172] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 96.

The results of this lesson cannot really be measured at this time through statistical evidence as the COVID-19 pandemic prevented the meeting of the focus church on a weekly basis within the church building. It was the intent of the researcher to look at weekly attendance of the leadership group to judge their attendance before the lesson and then the attendance of the group after the lesson. However, the results of the lesson can be measured empirically by listening to the comments and responses to the lesson's questions. Overall, the response of the group was positive, and many in the group expressed an interest in further lessons on the topic. Overall, the effectiveness of this intervention can only be seen in the attendance figures of the focus church once regular services can resume.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Where Should We Go?

In analyzing the results of this research project, it becomes necessary to decide what is next for the focus church. The first thing that is needed is a further evaluation of the effectiveness of the interventions. With the circumstances in which the intervention was conducted, analytical results of the curriculum were unable to be completed. Due to a worldwide pandemic, restrictions on the size of public meetings were implemented in the state due to where the project was conducted throughout the intervention period. However, future research can be conducted once the restrictions are lifted. The first way to do this would be to re-administer the survey to those who participated within the lessons to see the immediate effect of the lessons on the thinking of the group. Then a review of the curriculum should be conducted within six months followed by an ongoing look at various ministries in the church to see the level of participation by separate individuals. This analysis of the effect of individualism within the focus church should be reviewed at least every two years, but preferably every year.

The focus church needs to combat a shift in the perception of the church as a voluntary association. As Os Guinness writes, "The rise of voluntary associations shifted the emphasis of moral agency in public life from local churches as institutions to individual Christians acting as individuals in public life—in association."[173] What happens when Christians begin to see their faith expression as purely reliant on their own experiences with God is that they lose sight of the importance of the church. Os Guinness further writes, "Voluntary associations and later "parachurch" organizations reinforced the trend towards individualism and further eclipsed the

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[173] Guinness, *The Call*, 100.

corporate nature of the church in most Christian's minds."[174] This shift from "doing church together" to seeing faith as a purely individual act is what the curriculum is trying to combat. That is also why "twenty-two percent of pastors' spouses reports the ministry places undue expectations on their family."[175].

When the members of a congregation begin to feel that their personal faith expression is solely dependent upon their own interactions with God, then they begin to demand the pastor or pastoral staff meet their expectations and their image of what a pastor and a pastor's family should be, resulting in pastor's and their families being held to a different and often unrealistic standard. Teaching the biblical concept of the body of Christ helps to bring in a sense of belonging to a group and a sense of corporate calling. Guinness writes, "Commitment to our corporate calling means we must resolutely guard against modern proneness to casual individualism."[176] This commitment to a corporate calling will allow pastors and individuals within the research church to fulfill the individual call of God upon their lives as they see that calling as a part of the functioning of the entire body of Christ. When people see themselves as an integral part of a group, then they will invest more time and energy into the functioning of the group.

The research conducted for this project needs to be extended to the church worldwide. The church, and specifically local churches, are losing their place of significance in the lives of not only non-Christians but Christians as well. Individualism at its core states that the only thing of significance in the life of the individual is the individual. No other institution, person, or even

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[174] Guinness, *The Call*, 100.

[175] Pastoral Care Inc., "Statistics in Ministry: Newly Revised Statistics."

[176] Guinness, *The Call*, 102.

deity matters. As a result, any structure that imposes obligations upon an individual is viewed with suspicion and distrust, up to the point of being not needed. This contrasts with the writings of the Bible. As Larry Siedentop states concerning the writings of the apostle Paul, "For Paul, the love of God revealed in the Christ imposes opportunities and obligations on the individual as such, that is, conscience."[177]

Each church within the body of Christ worldwide deals with the problem of individualism. Unfortunately, this can be attributed to some of what is being taught in the pulpit. As Andreas Buss writes, "Among the characteristics of modernity, individualism stands out as one of the most fundamental."[178] Additionally, Gwyneth McClendon and Rachel Beatly Riedl write, "Pentecostal churches were primarily focused on individual empowerment over collective agendas, and this focus was reflected in both sermon topics and in the churches' social service provision (or lack thereof)."[179]

When churches focus on individuals instead of the body of Christ as a whole, they can expect an increase in individualistic thought and a lack of commitment to the local church as a result. McClendon and Reidl were writing about churches in Kenya, and they clarify their statements by writing, "The sermons' dominant focus on individual empowerment was related to adherents' aspirations for well-being and survival."[180] This is in contrast to the early church, "In early Christianity, the individual as value was conceived as apart from the given social and

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[177] Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual*, 352.

[178] Buss, "The Individual in Eastern Orthodox Tradition," 41.

[179] McClendon and Riedl, "Individualism and Empowerment in Pentecostal Sermons," 140.

[180] Ibid., 122.

political organization, outside and beyond it, an outwardly individual, as opposed to the inwardly individual in modern society."[181]

The early church understood that individuality is derived from a person's role and participation within the body of Christ. The modern church's focus on individual faith, and individual experiences plays into the growth of individualistic thought in the church. This is happening without people realizing it is occurring. As the survey of the focus church showed, the average score showed the participants of the survey were highly individualistic when they thought about how they viewed themselves and their place in the world. Individuals in the church need to be taught the history of the church and the doctrine of the body of Christ. As Amanda Speakes-Lewis, LeRoi Gill, and Crystal George Moss write, "The history of the church has been one of active collaboration and an atmosphere of equality, mutuality, and social support."[182]

The church has lost this sense of mutual collaboration. Individualists are only concerned with doing the things that benefit the individual and not necessarily concerned with the things that benefit the church. The individualist is not concerned with the greater good, only their individual good. Individualists see the staff of a church as a tool to meet their needs, wants and goals not as someone who can help them grow in relationship to God and in relationship with others. As a result, "eighty percent of pastors and eighty-four percent of their spouses have felt unqualified and discouraged as role of pastors at least one or more times in their ministry."[183]

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[181] Buss, "The Individual in Eastern Orthodox Tradition," 41.

[182] Speakes-Lewis, Gill, and Moss, "The Move Toward American Modernity," 243.

[183] Pastoral Care Inc., "Statistics in Ministry: Newly Revised Statistics."

Another area that this research could be extended to is the realm of church ministers. Church ministers and pastoral staff can develop a tendency toward individualism as well. If left unchecked, this individualistic thought can lead to the realm of narcissism, where the pastor views himself as the only reason the church is in existence and will do anything to ensure that the pastor stays in the position of power.

This feeling of narcissism comes from a different place than one of egoism, as Gary McIntosh and Samuel Rima Sr. write, "At the heart of narcissist leaders are self-absorption and uncertainty due to deep feelings of inferiority."[184] This is reflected in what the survey by the Schaeffer Institute revealed when they found, "fifty-two percent of pastors feel overworked and cannot meet their church's unrealistic expectations."[185] They also report that, "fifty-seven percent of pastors feel fulfilled but yet discouraged, stressed, and fatigued."[186] The survey authored by the researcher can also help show these trends by showing if the pastor has developed a feeling that they have to go it alone, especially if the pastor answers that they extremely feel that their happiness depends on the happiness of others. This is dangerous because the pastor may feel that they must make sure everyone is happy within the church, and if they are not doing that, then they are failing to do their job or calling. When churches develop a sense of corporate calling, the pastor and ministerial staff will never feel as if they must go it alone.

Comparison to Other Research

This research project is comparable to the research done in similar areas, specifically, in

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[184] McIntosh and Rima, *Overcoming the Darkside of Leadership*, 101.

[185] Pastoral Care Inc., "Statistics in Ministry: Newly Revised Statistics."

[186] Ibid.

three articles the researcher found dealing with the subject of individualism in three specific churches: Flemish Churches, Black Megachurches in American, and Pentecostal Churches in Nairobi, Kenya. And even more specifically, the environment in which the churches conduct ministry directly affect the way and how much individualism permeates and hinders the churches. For example, Jaak Billet writes, "Education level, income level, the generation to which one belongs, and active participation in organizations shape the social environment in which people live"[187] His study showed, "Those with more education were less likely to favor authoritarian ideas, partly because they were less politically powerless and thus, had less need for compensation."[188] Meaning, the more educated the person, the more an individualistic mindset prevailed. More education generally means more opportunity for the individual to succeed without the assistance of another, consequently the idea of having a collaborative relationship even within the church diminishes.

In commenting on Black megachurches in the United States, Amanda Speakes-Lewis and LeRoi Gill write, "The building of community within the church is intentional and purposeful and involves mutual confession, vulnerability, and sharing resources money, talent, and time."[189] This is in contrast to the Pentecostal churches in Nairobi where, as mentioned earlier, "Pentecostal churches were primarily focused on individual empowerment over collective agendas, and this focus was reflected in both sermon texts and in the churches' social service provision (or lack thereof)."[190] McClendon and Riedl also write, "In many post-colonial

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[187] Billet, "Church Involvement, Individualism, and Ethnic Prejudice," 231.

[188] Ibid., 229.

[189] Speakes-Lewis, Gill, and Moss, "The Move Toward American Modernity," 242.

[190] McClendon and Riedl, "Individualism and Empowerment in Pentecostal Sermons," 140.

countries, Pentecostalism has encouraged citizens to turn inward and pursue individual transformation."[191] This is shown in the sermons presented as, "The sermons' dominant focus on individual transformation was related to adherents' aspirations for well-being and survival."[192] When the congregants' focus is on survival and existence, the tendency to have the focus on individualism is strong.

In the Black megachurches, the focus was on building community, while in Africa, the focus is on individual empowerment for survival. So, what the church as a whole needs is a balance between the two. Churches need to teach the importance of individuals within the church, working as a community or as the body of Christ, in order to fulfill the calling, vision, and mission placed on the local church and the church worldwide. Again, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12, "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:12-13). When the church begins to teach the idea the local church is a part of the larger body of Christ with a specific calling and purpose within that body in concert with the fact that the local church in itself is a body of Christ where each individual has a purpose and calling within that body, then the church worldwide can begin to see the fulfillment of Christ's commission to the church.

What Did the Researcher Learn Implementing this Project?

In implementing the project, the researcher was able to learn that individualism as a worldview is something so ingrained within Western culture, people do not even realize that

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[191] Ibid., 127.

[192] Ibid., 122.

individualism affects every decision they make and every aspect of their lives. And while recognizing the uniqueness of individuals is inherent within Scripture, the version of individualism promoted in Western culture is dangerous to the church. A great example of this can be found in the concept of self-sacrifice.

As mentioned before, in the book of Philippians, the apostle Paul writes, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil 2:3-4). Here Paul is talking about looking out for and caring for others, while individualism in Western culture promotes looking out for yourself only. As George Smith writes, "American moralists did not preach the beauty of self-sacrifice; they did not "pretend that one must sacrifice himself for his fellows because it was a fine thing to do." But they did believe in the utility of such virtues, that is, as a concern for the public good furthers each person's self-interest, rightly understood."[193] American moralists saw sacrifice as a means to the ends of promoting self-interest. Any act of self-sacrifice should be taken only if it benefits the person. While Paul is promoting self-sacrifice to imitate Jesus, American moralists see self-sacrifice as an act to promote self-interest. In Western culture, we have been taught to value the individual expression and individualistic thought. Western culture has glorified individualism. As Robert Ingersoll wrote, "It is a blessed thing that in every age, someone has had individuality enough and courage enough to stand by his own convictions-someone who had the grandeur to say his say."[194]

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[193] Smith and Moore, "Introduction," 11.

[194] Ingersoll, "Individuality," 183.

In our history books, we tend to study individuals instead of movements, and we look at great deeds instead of the process by which they are accomplished. Herbert Hoover wrote, "Individualism has been the primary focus of American civilization for three centuries."[195]

In the church, we do the same thing; we look at individuals instead of what their influence brought. We tend to look at the exploits of the apostles and the miracles they were able to do with the help of the Holy Spirit instead of looking at their messages of solidarity and unity within the body of Christ. So, in faith, we tend to go it alone and not seek the assistance of our brothers and sisters in Christ to help us improve our individual relationships with Christ. This is contrary to the teaching of Jesus, as Randolph Richards and Brandon O'Brien write, "For Jesus, family not only designated one's immediate, biological relatives, but included all who are knit together in faith."[196]

This trend to individualism in the church extends to pastors. The researcher has learned that many pastors try to do ministry on their own, and as a result, it affects how they view their role in the body, how they view their job, their stress levels, and even to the point where it is hurting familial and marital relationships. Pastoral Care Inc. reports that "seventy percent of pastors do not have someone they consider to be a close friend."[197] In addition, "twenty-seven percent of pastors report not having anyone to turn to for help in a crisis situation."[198] This is because pastors are perceived as employees of the church. As reported early, the researcher learned that even in the focus church, forty-two percent of those surveyed reported that they were either neutral to or mostly agreed with the statement that pastors are employees of the church. In

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[195] Herbert Hoover, *American Individualism* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1922).

[196] Richards and O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture through Western Eyes*, 105.

[197] Pastoral Care Inc., "Statistics in Ministry: Newly Revised Statistics."

[198] Ibid.

other words, when the pastor is viewed as an employee, those with individualistic tendencies will see the pastor as merely a person paid to meet their spiritual needs and wants, someone to be bossed around and told what to do instead of someone who has been called by God to minister to the local body. An employee is someone who can be dismissed because they do not meet the requirements of the individual, no matter what that requirement is. The researcher learned that until we change the view of the pastor from employee to the shepherd of the local congregation, chosen and called by God, then this trend to individualism in the church will continue.

Application of Results in Other Settings

When it comes to applying the researcher's findings to other ministerial settings, one thing can be made clear. If church leaders can be informed about how much individualism as a worldview influences the lives of their congregants, they can develop a method of teaching that combats individualism with a worldview of the local church and each individual being a part of the body of Christ. As Douglas Strum writes, "the crux of individualism as a worldview . . . we are instructed not to kowtow to tradition, not to give unquestioned obedience to presumed authorities, but to think, and to act, each one of us, for ourselves."[199] It is this reliance on self the church worldwide and locally needs to combat. Albert Nolan has a suggestion, "It will be in the families and in the small sharing groups of one kind or another, in the churches or outside of them, that we today will come to experience something of what it means to be treated as persons and to treat others as persons, and what spontaneous love might mean."[200] When we teach people

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[199] Strum, "Resisting Individualism," 145.

[200] Nolan, *Jesus Today*, 167.

that everyone has value, then they will see it is their individuality and uniqueness that helps form

the body of Christ. As the apostle Paul wrote the following:

> On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker
> are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these
> we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more
> presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so
> composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that
> there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for
> one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is
> honored, all the members rejoice with it (1 Cor 12: 22-26).

And as Josh McDowell writes, "He wants us to bring his children close to him so we can

experience the unfathomable happiness he created us to enjoy. And he has given us his body, the

church, as his instrument of restoration."[201]

Every local church would benefit from teaching their members about being the body of

Christ. And when the body begins to understand its relationship to God and what Christianity

means, we will have a different worldview. As John MacArthur writes, "But Christianity, the

genuine gospel of Jesus Christ, is not a matter of opinion. It is a matter of truth. What you want,

or I want, or anybody else wants makes no difference whatsoever, it is what it is—by God's

sovereign will."[202]

Many churches across the world long for a return to the church described in Acts chapter

two, where miracles were done and new converts joined the church daily. It is a church that is

described as unified:

> Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place
> through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in
> common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them
> with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple,
> and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with

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[201] McDowell, *The Last Christian Generation*, 75.

[202] MacArthur, *Hard to Believe*, 5.

gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2:43-47).

The success of the early church was in their unity. And it was this unity that Paul was trying to convey to the church at Corinth and why he chose to use the image of a body. As Joseph Hellerman writes, "It is hardly accidental that the New Testament writer chose the concept of family as the central social metaphor to describe the kind of interpersonal relationships that were to characterize those early Christian communities."[203] The concept of family is the only thing that can combat individualism. When each local church comes together as a body, then each church will understand the vision and mission it has been given in the world by God. It is then that each local church can work with other churches in their communities to build an ever-growing sense of unity within the body at large. One thing we must understand is, "The people Paul evangelized had been socialized to believe that the group to which they belonged took priority over their individual desires."[204] In our society, we have been socialized to believe, "The supreme value is the sovereignty of the individual."[205] Local churches need to be places where people are taught constantly that the church is essential to their walk with God and everyone in the church plays a role in the growth and health of each other.

Again, to combat the influence of individualism in the church, we must change perceptions of the church. One of the questions in the survey designed by the researcher was, "I do not need to attend church on a weekly basis to be a Christian." This is a question that hints at the trend towards individualism because it essentially is judging if a person feels regular church

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[203] Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family*, 6.

[204] Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family*, 6.

[205] Richards and O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture through Western Eyes*, 96.

attendance is an indicator of a person's level of faith and commitment to Christ over self. In the focus church, only three of those surveyed answered they were either neutral on the statement, agreed with the statement, or strongly agreed with the statement. This shows the focus church emphasizes the importance of church attendance.

This is a concept that needs to be promoted and encouraged throughout the church world. Because as E. Richards Randolph and Brandon O'Brien write, "If we are not careful, our individualistic assumptions about church can lead us to think of the church as something like a health club."[206] Having this health club mentality means people will also view the offerings and ties like dues, and as long as the members see benefit from going, they will go. Once the benefit is no longer there, they will stop attending and move on to the next church that offers them a promise of growth.

However, "Scripture is clear that when we become Christians, we become—permanently and spiritually—a part of the church."[207] There is no separation from a Christian and the church. So, the notion that a person can be a Christian outside the body of Christ is a false one, one that needs to be eradicated from the church. That is why the writer of Hebrews states, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Heb 10:23-25). The members of the body need each other to grow in relationship with Christ and in relationship with each other. As Albert Nolan writes, "My true self is being human with all other human beings."[208] As individuals interact within the local

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[206] Ibid., 107.

[207] Ibid.

church, they display their humanity and learn what it means to be human. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer stated, "Through the call of Jesus men become individuals."[209]

What Merits Future Research

When thinking about issues that arose within the project that merit further research, the main issue that kept coming up is the issue of distinguishing between individualism and individuality. The research project has shown that individualism at its core is worship of self. As George H. Smith writes, "Over time, however, individualism tends to degenerate into pure egoism, because it ignores the civic virtues on which society depends."[210] Even within the focus church, the tendency of the survey participants was to lean toward individualism. The problem is what individualism tells people about obligations or compulsions towards others. As quoted earlier, Oscar Wilde wrote, "Individualism exercises no compulsion over man. On the contrary, it says to man that he should suffer no compulsion to be exercised over him."[211] Individualism states that no person or group has any hold over another, that each individual is an entity unto himself and can decide whether or not to conform to any group or social organization. Wilde later makes the statement, "It is not selfish to think for oneself."[212] This is true in the sense every person has been given individual talents and personalities by God, but false if a person begins to only think about oneself. An individualist thinks only about themselves and not about anyone else.

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[208] Nolan, *Jesus Today*, 163.

[209] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 94.

[210] Smith and Moore, "Introduction," 8.

[211] Wilde, "The Soul of Man under Socialism," 61.

[212] Ibid., 62.

Robert G. Ingersoll writes, "Every soul should repel dictation and tyranny, no matter from what source they come from—from earth or heaven, from men or gods."[213] Ingersoll is speaking here against the tyranny of a governmental body or a religious system, but this holds true as well when it comes to thinking about individualism. True individualists are their own tyrants. They will not entertain any idea that intrudes or disrupts their perception of self as the highest source of validation and truth. When those ideals are challenged, individualists will, at best, remove themselves from the group that challenges them or at worst, seek to destroy the group or other individual that threatens their beliefs. Ingersoll even writes, "It is the duty of each and every one to maintain his individuality."[214] Ingersoll is writing here to encourage people to maintain the things that make them individuals, to maintain their uniqueness at all costs. He is speaking against blanket conformity where an individual stops using the things that make them unique. He is celebrating the individual and the individualist. He later writes, "Surely, it is sublime to think that the brain is a castle, and within its curious bastion and winding halls the soul, in spite of all worlds and all beings, is the supreme sovereign of itself,"[215] meaning, Ingersoll believes the soul is its own god and ruler. Individualists see themselves or their souls as being separate the ultimate source of meaning and truth. This obviously goes against the commandments of God, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex 20:2).

On the other hand, when promoting individuality within the church, the members are free to be who God created them to be without losing the things that make them individuals. As Shlomo Avineri and Aver De-Shalit write, "Individualists fail to see that this community is not

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[213] Ingersoll, "Individuality," 185.

[214] Ibid.," 187.

[215] Ingersoll, "Individuality," 188.

necessarily a voluntary one, and that social attachments which determine self are not necessarily chosen ones,"[216] meaning individualists see all social associations and attachments as voluntary, but it is the social association that really defines who people are as individuals.

So, research needs to be continued on how the church can help everyone find out who they truly are in Christ and in turn who they are as individuals. As stated earlier in the project, one of the duties of those in professional ministry is to help individuals in the church reach their full potential and their identity in Christ. In Ephesians 4, Paul writes the following:

> And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:11-130)

These individuals within the church are called to help the body of Christ reach its full potential in Christ. As Klyne Snodgrass writes, "The church must train people for various levels of ministry."[217] It is the responsibility of the individuals with the appointments listed to make sure the church is trained properly. Every individual in the body of Christ is called to service. "Service is what unites all the members of Christ's body from the apostles to the most apparently insignificant disciple."[218] When each member of the body discovers their role within the body, then the body will function as it should.

Consequently, that means each local church has a group of individuals whose purpose is to prepare others for service, which merits further research to figure out if a correlation exists

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[216] Avineri and De-Shalit, "Introduction," 3.

[217] Snodgrass, "Ephesians," 224.

[218] Wood, "Ephesians," 769.

between how the member of the church view the pastor and the health of the congregation in terms of unity and growth.

Mentioned earlier in the project, a survey was completed in 2006 by the Francis A. Schaffer Institute of Church Leadership. One of the staggering results was that "eight percent of pastors believed their pastoral ministry has negatively affected their families and thirty-three percent said it was an outright hazard."[219] Individualism affects how people view those in authority no matter what organization they are a part of. If an authority figure is viewed as someone who is blocking the individualist from achieving their goals or even their desires, that authority figure is someone who must be removed. This includes Christ Himself, as John MacArthur writes, "They have traded the concept of abandoning our lives to the honor of Christ for Christ honoring us. As such our submission to his will is replaced by his submission to our will."[220] We can never understand who we truly are as individuals if we do not understand who we are in Christ and that means submission to his will in becoming a part of the body of Christ, his church. Reggie McNeal writes, "People will support leaders who help them discover who they are created to be and then empower them to employ their talents, energies, and passions."[221] Does this mean we need to change how we view the role of the ministry? McNeal's statement is in line with what Paul wrote in Ephesians. The positions or gifts that are listed in Ephesians 4 are intended to help everyone in the body and the body itself obtain the full stature that is in Christ Jesus. They are not to be authoritarians who demand strict obedience but those who help individuals discover the giftedness and calling within the body, or in other words, to help them

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[219] Bill Gaultiere, "Pastor Stress Statistics."

[220] MacArthur, *Hard to Believe*, 4.

[221] McNeal, *A Work of Heart*, 83.

discover their individuality within the body of Christ. As Os Guinness states, "In the biblical understanding of giftedness, gifts are never really ours for ourselves."[222]

Even those who have been gifted and appointed to lead the church must realize their giftings and appointments are for service to others. When Bible colleges and seminaries begin to teach their students that they are first servants of God then servants of their congregations who must teach their congregants to serve, then we will see the church become what it was meant to be.

Ultimately what this research project has shown is that ministers and laity within the church have been influenced by the worldview of individualism, and the best way to combat individualism's influence is to begin to teach the idea of individuality within the body of Christ. We do this by showing everyone that they have a specific role within the body of Christ to carry out its mission in the world. The focus church faced periods of disunity when individualism became the dominant thought pattern within the church, but when the church teaches on individuality within the body of Christ, the disunity lessens and the church will begin to see growth. The body of Christ is meant to serve each other in the body and not to look to satisfy individual wants and needs. When the church recaptures the essence of the first century church by becoming unified in the faith, they will begin to draw others to them. As Joseph H. Hellerman writes, "People did not convert to Christianity solely because of what the early Christians believed. They converted because of the way in which early Christians behaved."[223] When the church begins to act as a unified body, then the church will see the growth in influence it has been praying for.

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[222] Guinness, *The Call*, 47.

[223] Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family*, 105.

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Appendix A

How much of an individual are you?

Personality survey created by Michael Jackson

Part 1

Please respond to the following statements on a scale of 1 to 5.

1 = not like me at all, 2 = rarely like me, 3 = neutral, 4 = like me, 5 = extremely like me.

1.	I like to do my own thing.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I care about the well-being of others.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I believe an individual should live independently of others.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I prefer to be direct and forthright in discussions.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	It is important to maintain harmony in a group.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I am a unique individual.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I like sharing things with my neighbors.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I feel good when I cooperate with others.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	When I succeed, it is usually because my abilities.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	My happiness depends on the happiness of others.	1	2	3	4	5

Part 2

The following questions will look at your views on the church.

Please circle respond on a scale of 1 to 5

1 = strongly disagree. 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

1. Every person is uniquely created and gifted by God.   1   2   3   4   5

2. The more you give, the more say you should have.   1   2   3   4   5

3. The pastor should look professional at all times.   1   2   3   4   5

4. I have left a service because type of music.   1   2   3   4   5

5. Members should be able to vote when a church hires new staff.   1   2   3   4   5

6. I serve in the church even without affirmation.   1   2   3   4   5

7. The pastor is an employee of the church.   1   2   3   4   5

8. I do not need to attend church on a weekly basis to be a Christian. 1   2   3   4   5

9. Pastors should only use one version of the Bible.   1   2   3   4   5

10. I find joy in serving others.   1   2   3   4   5

Individualism vs. Collectivism Survey

The survey is divided into two parts. The first part looks to discover personal individualistic tendencies of those who participated in the survey. The second part looks at how individualism affects the viewpoint of the participant when it comes to issues in the church and how they view themselves in the body of Christ.

Overall results: 19 total participants, a truly individualistic person would score a 50

The scoring is based on the following scale for both parts:

8-20: Low Individualism

21-30: Medium Individualism

31-50: High Individualism

Part 1

Questions that show individualistic tendencies: 1,3,4,6,9

Questions that show collectivistic tendencies: 2,5,7,8,10

Average score: 32.8

Highest score: 43/50

Lowest score: 26/50

Average score on each question:

1.   3.15

2.   4.68

3.   1.89

4. 3.68

5. 3.89

6. 4.47

7. 3.52

8. 4.68

9. 2.58

10. 2.53

Part 2

Questions that show individualistic thought regarding the church: 2,4,5,7,8,9

Questions that show collectivistic thought regarding the church: 1,3,6,10

Average score: 28.1

Highest score: 39

Lowest score: 20

Average score on each question:

1. 5.00

2. 1.79

3. 3.21

4. 1.11

5. 2.11

6. 4.26

7. 2.47

8. 1.89

9.	1.21

10.	4.68

Lesson Outlines

Identifying and Overcoming Individualism in the Church

Lesson 1: Understanding Individualism

Introductory Question: What do you think is the biggest factor in churches splitting or closing

in America?

Write answers on a white board, SmartBoard, or on a computer projected on a screen.

Ask: Do you think these reasons have a common thread?

Say: "At the heart of all these reasons is the worldview of individualism."

    I.   Definitions

          a.   Worldview: **Say**: Worldview is defined by Webster's as, "a

                comprehensive conception or apprehension of the world especially from a

                specific standpoint."[224]

Say: "In other words, it is the lens by which we view the world. It affects how we interpret the

world around us. Worldview affects the decisions we make and even the actions we take

in different situations.

Ask the following questions:

How do you decide which political candidate to vote for?

How did you decide what issues to support or reject?

Say: "Every issue you listed and qualification for a candidate has been shaped by your

worldview. With a different worldview, you would probably choose a different

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[224] Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "Worldview," accessed April 14, 2020, merriam-webster.com/dictionary/worldview.

candidate."

   b. Individualism: **Say:** "Individualism is defined by Webster's as, "A doctrine that the interests of the individual are or ought to be ethically paramount."[225]

Say: A person with a worldview of individualism sees the world through the lens of what is important to them is primary, no matter the consequence to anyone or anything else. Peter Callero, a professor of sociology at Western Oregon University, defines individualism as, "a belief system that privileges the individual over the group, private life over public life, and personal expression over social experience; it is a worldview where autonomy, independence, and self-reliance are highly valued, where free actors are assumed to make choices that have direct consequences to their own destiny."[226] In other words, individualism makes the individual supreme over any other force or person in the universe. The individual becomes an entity unto themselves without any concern about the world around them. Every decision is for the benefit of the individual and the individual alone, no matter what the consequence is to the world or the people around them.

Ask: "How can this worldview affect the church?"

Ask: "Is there a way that the church can minister to someone with this worldview and possibly change how they see the world?"

Say: "The best way is to teach them about what the Bible has to say about the individual, individuality, and how the individual fits within the body of Christ. The coming lessons

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[225] Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "Individualism."

[226] Callero, *The Myth of Individualism*, 15.

will demonstrate that God values individuality, 'total character peculiar to and distinguishing an individual from others,' but within the context of being a part of something more important than self, being a part of the Body of Christ."

II. Bible Foundations

Say: "In order to discuss the importance of the individual to the body of Christ, we will first look to the apostle Paul."

Read 1 Corinthians 12: 12-14.

Say: "Every person is part of the body of Christ. Paul uses the image of the human body to describe the church because the body is made up of many different parts that have specific functions, but all work together to make the body."

Example: **Ask**: "How many of you have put together an elaborate toy for your kids for Christmas?" "Did you have any parts left over?" "What happened to the toy with the missing parts, did it work as it was supposed to?"

Ask: "How many of you have broken a bone?" "Have any of you broken a finger or a bone in your dominant arm?" "How difficult was it to learn to do things with your non-dominant arm?" "Has anyone broken a toe?" "How difficult is it to walk with a broken toe?"

Say: "Similarly, if one part of the body of Christ does not act in the way it is supposed to, the rest of the body has to compensate or do things they are not normally supposed to do in order for the body to work right, but the body does not function at its peak level.

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:26.

Say: "Paul writes early in this chapter about the importance of the individual."

Read: 1 Corinthians 12: 4-11.

Say: "Paul is writing here that each person has been given a gift and a task to do within the body for it to function correctly. No one is without a gift, but some have more, and some have less, by the will of the God. God gives every individual in the body a gift to use in service to the body and alongside others within the body. This speaks to the individuality of every member within the body of Christ. In the next lesson, we will look at how celebrating individuality within the body of Christ combats the worldview of individualism."

Lesson 2

Celebrating Individuality

I.   Introduction

Introductory Questions: "What makes someone an individual?" "Are there qualities that exist that distinguish one person from another?" "How can we celebrate differences while maintaining unity within the body of Christ?"

Say: "In his book, *Jesus Today: A Spirituality of Radical Freedom*, Albert Nolan writes, "The cultural ideal of the Western industrialized world is the self-made, self-sufficient, autonomous individual who stands by himself or herself, not needing anyone (except for sex) and not beholden to anyone for anything."[227]

Ask: "Does this quote reflect how Western culture views life?"

Ask: "How do we as a church combat this viewpoint?"

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[227] Nolan, *Jesus Today*, 15.

Say: "In this lesson, we will look some of the things that makes each of us individuals and how we can celebrate and honor those differences while establishing a unified purpose within the body of Christ. First, let us look Webster's definition of individuality."

    I.   Definition: Webster's defines individuality as, "total character peculiar to and distinguishing an individual from others."[228]

Say: "In other words, individuality is the traits, patterns, and behaviors that enable us to tell one person from another. And while we want to avoid getting to the point where those differences are the most important thing in everyone's life, we can use those things that identify individuality to build unity within the body of Christ. While the worldview of individualism takes the idea of individuality and twists it to make the individualist believe that being a separate individual who makes their own decisions and takes responsibility for the consequences of those actions, celebrating individuality allows us to acknowledge the things that make us individuals but also celebrates how each individual is a vital part of the body of Christ"

II.   **Biblical Foundation**

Ask: Peter L. Callero writes, "Our very identity is a social creation that is constantly sustained by social relationships both large and small."[229] Is individuality something that society creates or have we each been given the things that make us separate individuals?"

Say: "Let's take a look at what the Bible has to say about how we achieve individuality."

Read: Psalm 139: 13-14.

Ask: "According to this passage who was the One who formed us?"

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[228] Merriam-Webster Dictionary.com, s.v. "Individuality."

[229] Callero, *The Myth of Individualism*, 3.

Ask: "How were we made?"

Ask: "How does this passage speak to the concept of individuality?"

Read: Jeremiah 1: 5

Ask: "In reading the call of Jeremiah, how does God speak to individuality here?"

Say: "This passage is echoed in the writings of Paul."

Read: Romans 12: 4-7, 1 Corinthians 12: 27-31, Ephesians 4: 11-13

Ask: "What is the common thread that is found in these passages?"

Ask: "Who is the one who does the calling?"

Say: "As we learned in the last lesson, God has given us each a specific gift, individually, that makes us different from everyone else in the body of Christ, but each gift is vital to the proper functioning of the body. Read Romans 12:4-5 again."

Read: Romans 12: 4-5

Say: "The body of Christ needs every part in it to function correctly, and each individual part has its role. As we discussed in the last lesson, no part is more important than the other. Let's read what Paul write about this in 1 Corinthians."

Read: 1 Corinthians 12: 22-26

Say: "Paul writes here that every part of the body is important, even those that we think are less honorable. Every part has a function and a role to play. In the same way, everyone has been given a gift that is vital in the proper functioning of the body of Christ, and we as leaders must help everyone discover what those gifts are and celebrate those gifts within the individual and the body of Christ."

Ask: "So how do we avoid allowing one person's gifting to become more celebrated or seemingly more important than anyone else's gifting? In other words, how do we prevent one person from thinking they are more important than anyone else in a church?"

Say: "In the next lesson we will look at the importance of the individual within the body of Christ and how each individual can function in unity with one another."

Lesson 3

The individual within the body of Christ.

I. **Introduction**

Say: "In his book, *When the Church was a Family*, Joseph Hellerman writes that many people in the Western world see, "The purpose of the church is to help me grow in my personal relationship with Christ."[230]

Ask: "What is the purpose of the church?"

Say: "Earlier in the same book, Hellerman writes, "It is a simple but profound biblical reality that we both grow and thrive together, or we do not grow at all."[231] So, what is it about the body of Christ that encourages us to live and grow together. What is our individual responsibility within the body to help others grow? In this lesson, we will look at the importance of the individual within the body of Christ and how everyone is needed for the body to grow properly. To start with, let's take another look at 1 Corinthians 12."

II. **Biblical Foundation**

Read: 1 Corinthians 12: 17-23

Ask: "According to what was just read, how important is an individual to the body of Christ?"

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[230] Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family*, 15.

[231] Ibid., 1.

Ask: "Can the body function correctly without every part working together?"

Say: "This passage shows us that the body needs every part doing its function for the whole

body to work properly. No one is above each other, even those tasks that may seem less

important are vital for the whole body for function correctly. For example, think about

the pinky toe on your foot, when it works well, we can do all sorts of things. But what

happens if it is broke, everything from walking to running and even just maintaining

balance is affected. But the question is, how do we prevent one part or person in the body

of Christ from believing that it or they are more important to the body than the rest of the

parts. Let's see what the Bible has to say about this. First, we all know we have been

called."

Read: 1 Peter 2:9

Say: "This passage tells us we have been chosen for a purpose; the body of Christ has a calling

upon it to proclaim the gospel. Every individual in the body, no matter what they have

been called or gifted to do has a role in fulfilling this calling. But callings are more than

just for the church, individuals are called and gifted by God to serve different roles."

Read: 1 Corinthians 12: 27-30, Romans 12: 6-8, Ephesians 4: 11

Say: "Each of us has been called to serve in a different role in the church. You have been

gifted and called to serve a role in the church. It is our duty as believers to figure out what

that gifting is, and to use it in the place and way God intended us to use it. Dietrich

Bonhoeffer wrote, "Through the call of Jesus, men become individuals."[232] Our

individuality comes from the calling God has placed on our lives and that calling

distinguishes us from one another. I am not called to do what you are to do in the body,

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[232] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 94.

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and you are not called to do what I am to do in the body. Os Guinness wrote, "All attempts to explain human individuality in general terms can be summed up as varieties of being 'constrained to be'."[233] The calling of God tells us who we are to become and what is our part in the body of Christ. But that does not mean we should think we are better than anyone else."

Read: **Ephesians 4: 1-3, Philippians 2: 3-4**

Ask: "What do these passages have to say about the attitude a believer should have?"

Read: **Mark 9:35**

Ask: "What is Jesus saying here about our attitudes?"

Ask: "How is this contrary to how we typically view and pick leaders in the world, in the body of Christ?"

III. **Conclusion**

Say: "The body of Christ is made up of individuals, and each individual is important to the body. A true leader in the body understands this and acknowledges that their role is no more important than anyone else's. For the body to function properly, each individual must work together using the gifting and following the calling that God has placed on their life in service to each other and in service to God."

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[233] Guinness, *The Call*, 21.