

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

**Reincorporating Senior Adults into the Life of a Local Church**

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

By

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Nashville, Tennessee

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**Thesis Project Approval Sheet**

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## THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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This DMIN research thesis's problem concerns that some senior adults have grown complacent in their walk with God at Judson Baptist. In response to this problem, the researcher desired to implement a trend of encouraging all senior adults to become fully engaged in serving Christ. This senior adult minister wanted to reincorporate inactive members into the life of the church. As the seniors were encouraged to reactivate their status, their prayer life and faith walk may have improved.

The problem was addressed by using a specific plan and understanding its objectives of overcoming apathy and indifference in church life. A sample of three-hundred fifty older adults at Judson Baptist consented to participate in this project. A survey interview collection method was implemented in encouraging seniors to continue growing in Jesus Christ. Prayer and faith may have been rejuvenated in members' lives.

This project study will encourage other senior adult ministers and pastors to reevaluate their age group's significance in extending God's kingdom. Hopefully, the research will ignite a flame of interest as to why seniors think as they do, why they act in their unique ways, how they can be encouraged to be mentors to the next generation, and how they can contribute to the growth of the church. All of these answers will benefit ministry to senior adults. This project will help incorporate older adults into the local church to fully implement the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

## Contents

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Ministry Context</b> .....	1
Judson Church History.....	1
Current Ministry.....	5
<b>Problem Presented</b> .....	7
<b>Purpose Statement</b> .....	9
<b>Basic Assumptions</b> .....	12
<b>Definitions</b> .....	13
<b>Limitations</b> .....	16
<b>Delimitations</b> .....	17
<b>Thesis Statement</b> .....	17
<b>Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework</b> .....	19
<b>Literature Review</b> .....	19
Retirement.....	20
Motivation and Church Life.....	23
Faith .....	27
Prayer .....	32
<b>Theological Foundations</b> .....	35
Older-Adult Ministries.....	35
Gift from God .....	38
Rising Above Self by Pursuing God.....	41

Finishing Well.....	46
<b>Theoretical Foundations</b> .....	48
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology</b> .....	54
<b>Intervention Design</b> .....	57
Plan and Reasoning.....	58
Reaching Out to the Senior Adults .....	62
<b>Implementation of Intervention Design</b> .....	63
Survey Interview.....	66
Explanation and Book Reviews .....	68
Reviewing Local Church Ministry.....	72
<b>Chapter 4: Results</b> .....	74
<b>Key Issues and Themes</b> .....	74
<b>Survey Questions</b> .....	79
<b>Observations and Discoveries</b> .....	83
<b>Responses</b> .....	86
<b>Chapter 5: Conclusion</b> .....	91
<b>Brief Overview</b> .....	91
<b>Results</b> .....	92
<b>Study’s Findings</b> .....	99
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	102
Conclusion .....	105
Bibliography .....	106

Appendix A.....	109
Appendix B.....	110
Appendix C.....	113

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My heartfelt thanks are also extended to Pastor Jeff Mims and the Judson Jewels Executive Committee for their affirmation and support.

Lastly, I want to express gratitude to Brad Bass for typing this paper. Where would I be without him?

## Abbreviations

BYPU	<i>Baptist Young People's Union</i>
DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
IRB	<i>Institutional Review Board</i>
LIFE	<i>Love, Instruction, Fellowship, and Evangelism</i>
NIV	<i>New International Version</i>
WMU	<i>Women's Missionary Union</i>

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

In sharing a thesis project in the field of pastoral counseling, this writer has examined the theme of faithfulness to God concerning one specific stage of life, namely the retirement era. The study has been conducted within the Judson Baptist Church senior adult organization in Nashville, Tennessee. In seeking to promote the improvement of prayer life and walking in faith with Christ, Judson's one hundred and tenth year in ministry has been examined, emphasizing evangelism and missions. The problem of complacency within some older adults has been addressed, as well as the purpose of this study, which has encouraged all senior adults to be actively involved in church life. The chapter has also included the researcher's basic assumptions regarding the research process and the definitions, limitations, and delimitations to the research project. The chapter has concluded with the thesis statement section. The desired outcome has been for all older adults to realize that continued ministry and service can be accomplished by a more active prayer life and renewed faithfulness to the Lord Jesus.

### **Ministry Context**

#### **Judson Church History**

Throughout its one hundred and tenth year of history, the Judson Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, has maintained its spiritual vitality. Even though the church has experienced dormant days, the gospel it first began proclaiming in 1911 remains the same gospel preached in 2021. The church has retained its doctrinal integrity and has never lost its vision for evangelism and missions. It must continue to accept the challenge of becoming even more

intentional in reaching people with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and shaping their lives for God's glory.

That was the intended purpose for Judson Baptist when it was organized in January 1911 during a period of significant growth for Baptists. It was a time when Baptists began penetrating new areas. Judson was the eighteenth Southern Baptist congregation in the city and continues today, after the death or merger of earlier congregations, the eleventh oldest Southern Baptist church in Nashville.<sup>1</sup> The name commemorates one of the most significant persons in mission history, Adoniram Judson, a missionary pioneer to Burma. Adoniram's son, Edward, in June 1911, laid the cornerstone for the new church.

The original property at 8th Avenue South and Prentice Avenue was located approximately three miles south of the city's newly developed Waverly Place area. The property was purchased for \$1,700, and a new building for sanctuary and education space was completed in September 1912 for \$6,600. During those early years, the church implemented many traditional Baptist programs and ministries, including Sunday School, BYPU, weekly Prayer Meetings, Men's Brotherhood, and WMU. Significant growth in membership and giving was recorded during the 1920s.

During the 1930s and 1940s, the church continued to grow physically and numerically. In accommodating the more significant numbers, the church expanded its facilities twice, providing additional sanctuary and educational space. Although the church was conservative in its fiscal policies, it was essential to provide adequate facilities for its growing congregation. Under

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<sup>1</sup> Albert W. Wardin, Jr., *A History of Judson Baptist Church, Nashville, Tennessee, 1911-1986* (Nashville, TN: Judson Baptist Church, 1986), 5.

Herbert Barclay Cross's ministry (1931-1951), the church almost doubled its resident membership from 591 to 1,161.

Upon Pastor Cross's retirement, the church called Hobart B. Ford (1951-1969) as its new pastor in May 1951. During this period, the church continued to enlarge with gains in membership, giving, staff expansion, property acquisition, building programs, and initiatives in establishing new mission churches. Three adjacent parcels of land were acquired, a new education building was completed, and two new mission churches were found (Tusculum Hills Baptist and The Benton Avenue Chapel). While establishing mission fellowships, the church continued to grow numerically.

Several particular instances within the church's history defined the need for this research project. The first episode occurred in the 1960s. It dealt with its original site at 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue South and Prentice Avenue. In this location, the church faced the difficulties of a changing neighborhood, declining membership and attendance, and the critical question of relocation. In July of 1964, the church acquired an 8.5-acre tract of land for \$65,000, 3.5 miles south at 4900 Franklin Road.<sup>2</sup> In August 1968, construction commenced on a new \$550,000 sanctuary and education complex. The first worship service was held in the new facility on May 4, 1969. Although the church had completed its relocation, it experienced substantially higher debt and its pastor's failing health. A decision had to be made concerning the intentionality of the church, "Would it continue reaching and discipling people for the cause of Christ?"

With the coming of H. Raymond Langlois (1971-1991) in September 1971, the church renewed its momentum and began to impact the Crieve Hall/Forrest Hills/Brentwood areas. During the first decade of Langlois's pastorate, the church experienced significant growth in

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<sup>2</sup> Albert W. Wardin, Jr., *A History of Judson Baptist Church, Nashville, Tennessee, 1911-1986* (Nashville, TN: Judson Baptist Church, 1986), 88.

membership, giving, new facilities, adjacent property, staff, and problems comparable to the 1950s. In June 1975, a multi-purpose activity building was completed at the cost of \$375,000. The two-story structure included a gymnasium and needed education space. In February 1973 and August 1976, the church acquired two adjacent residences just south of it at 4904 and 4908 Franklin Road. The 4904 property was used initially for additional education space, while the 4908 property was converted to a missionary residence for furloughing Southern Baptist missionaries. To accommodate the enlarging membership, the need for a new sanctuary was growing. These plans were developed in 1978 and 1979, and the new sanctuary was completed in July 1980 at the cost of \$1.6 million. The church continued to grow during the 1980s, adopting its first million-dollar budget (\$1,029,825) in 1985. With its name as a memorial to a pioneer Baptist missionary, the church renewed its interest in missions by beginning a new mission church in the Hickory Hollow area. After twenty years of bold and dynamic leadership, Dr. Langlois announced his retirement in 1991.

From 1993 through 2005, the church called two pastors, Walter Jackson (1993-2000) and David L. Wilson (2002-2005). Both of these men were godly spirit-filled individuals who introduced new programs and initiatives to regain the growth trends of the 1980s. Under Jackson's leadership, the church embarked on a much-needed million-dollar sanctuary renovation project in 1997. Wilson's short ministry produced sizable increases in Sunday school attendance, giving, and acquiring properties for future growth.

The second instance occurred when the church called its twelfth pastor, Gene Mims, on January 1, 2006. Under Mims' leadership, the church adopted a Master Plan for Ministry in May 2006 to focus Judson towards becoming the Great Commission church it desired to be. A note of intentionality of being a kingdom-focused church and fulfilling its mission strategy to the ends of

the earth was renewed. This time was a defining moment in Judson Church's history. On October 8, 2006, the church moved forward in faith and voted affirmatively to construct new facilities that would replace the chapel building. The new structure houses preschool, children, senior adults, and church offices. On February 8, 2009, the church held an open house to celebrate the completion of the new facilities along with the renovation of the sanctuary, student, and recreation areas. Under Mims' leadership, the church continued to grow and celebrate its one-hundredth anniversary on January 16, 2011. One year later, Mims led the church in establishing a Global Focus Initiative in which funds were allocated for new mission partners. The church continues to be supportive of Southern Baptists' missions entity, "The Cooperative Program."

#### Current Ministry

Gene Mims continued his ministry at Judson Baptist until September 2018, when he became the founding minister of another mission church named The Gathering at 840, south of neighboring Franklin, Tennessee. When Pastor Gene left, the church called his son, Jeff Mims, as its next pastor. Pastor Jeff was partly responsible for this researcher assuming the position of Minister of Pastoral Care and Senior Adults at Judson Baptist on January 15, 2017. Pastor Jeff and this student had served together on a local associational team and knew each other well. This pastor loves his work and has finally found his niche in ministry.

Under Pastor Jeff's leadership, this minister has learned much about Judson Baptist. To begin with, this writer has realized Judson follows "A Kingdom-Focused Church Model and Process." Concerning "lost, unsaved" people, the church implements several biblical principles. First, as a kingdom-focused church, it makes disciples, matures them as transformed followers of

Christ, and then multiplies them as ministers throughout God's kingdom based on Matthew 28:18-20. That means the strategy for completing the above vision continues to be Acts 1:8. In addition to being kingdom-focused, Judson possesses five core values or functions, which include 1. Evangelism – Leading people to faith in Christ; 2. Discipleship – Helping Christians to mature in their walk with Christ; 3. Ministry – Meeting the needs of others in Christ's name; 4. Fellowship – Growing and serving together in external relationship; 5. Worship – Attributing and expressing glory to God for who He is. As far as joining the church fellowship, it accepts new members by profession of faith and baptism, letter of recommendation from another Baptist church, or a statement of faith from another like-minded church.

Next, biblical principles and church practice in the kingdom-focused model leads to kingdom results. They include numerical growth, spiritual transformation, ministry expansion, and kingdom advance. The church structure has been built around the purpose of equipping the saints for ministry (Ephesians 4:11-16). The church has been pastor-led, deacon served, committee administered, and people supported. That has been the fellowship this minister has been called to serve faithfully.

Concerning church practice in relation to a kingdom-focused church model, Judson Baptist highly encourages several things. First, the church asks each member to realize involvement with the local fellowship's five functions personally. Furthermore, the church encourages its members' commitments on the theme of stewardship, namely finances, time, and lifestyle. The church also asks its members to be involved in LIFE Groups, corporate worship, and even ministry teams. LIFE Groups are an essential ministry within the church.

As mentioned earlier, this student's relationship with Judson Baptist has been fulfilling the role of part-time Minister of Pastoral Care and Senior Adults. This job description includes

several things. First, this minister shares with all 350+ older adults, sixty-five years of age and up, within the church membership. That consists of visiting nursing homes, assisted living complexes, hospitals, and even homes. The position also includes being on call for any ministry needs. Secondly, the role consists of leading the Judson Jewels Senior Adult organization, basically for those sixty-five and older, based on the name “Jewels,” found in Malachi 3:16-17 (NKJV). Leading the Jewels has involved guiding a fifteen-member executive committee that coordinates and implements activities and other senior adults’ events. Some of these activities have included a monthly fellowship meal and program, adult choir, exercise class, “fun day” emphasis, providing different trips, retreats, and being involved in numerous mission opportunities. The church family has supported its senior adults in providing an expense account, including mileage and a detailed budget for the Judson Jewels.

The Judson Jewels ministry has met a need within the church family for twenty-nine years. This minister has followed the capable leadership of Brother Johnnie Hall and Dr. Ernest Standerfer. Yes, they have accomplished a great work; however, the day has arrived to involve even more senior adults in a more excellent intentional ministry. Much has been achieved. The time has come to continue counteracting some seniors’ noticed complacency in the work of Judson Baptist and to continue encouraging all seniors to participate in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, especially at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. The time has come to take the next step in serving the Lord Jesus.

### **Problem Presented**

This project has addressed the problem that some senior adults have grown complacent in their walk with God at Judson Baptist. They have decided to accomplish nothing. “Nothing is a

frequent response to the question, ‘What are you going to do when you retire?’ The answer suggests either no interests, no understanding of God’s ongoing call on your life, or the result of intentionally postponing all plans for your future.”<sup>3</sup> It has become an all too typical response.

Several concerns have been addressed since there has been some history of apathy, complacency, and even “nothingness” within the church family. They are all in relation to senior adults becoming more actively involved in the life of the fellowship. These concerns were related to the following themes, including retirement, motivation and church life, faith, and prayer. All were thoroughly researched in this study.

Ever since its inception in 1911, the Judson Baptist Church has endured difficult moments in its history. One occurred in the 1960s when the church found itself surrounded by a changing neighborhood amid declining attendance. Would they relocate? They chose to move three miles away south to better minister to the needs of their church family and the surrounding community. That move, however, led to increased debt along with the untimely illness of its pastor. How did the church respond? They intentionally met the needs of their ailing pastor and also sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Those actions led the church family to overcome their debt and then call a new dynamic young pastor two years later, which led to a new vision being cast.

The second strategic moment of the church happened when it called its twelfth pastor in Gene Mims. Under Mims’ leadership, he led the fellowship to consider its future. Would the church remain status-quo, or would they fulfill their name in going to the ends of the earth in sharing the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ? The decision to move forward was led by a group of

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *Finding Freedom: Understanding the Power of a Future Funded Ministry* (Columbia, SC: Envoy Financial, 2018), 14.

senior adults who realized the church's potential was directly proportional to their prayer life.<sup>4</sup> Their goal of prayer was "to discern what God wants, what God wills."<sup>5</sup> God willed that the church family does what was best for the entire membership. The church decided to follow the maturity and wisdom of their seniors. That decision has prompted Judson Baptist to thrive during the last fifteen years.

The third difficult moment has been the present. Before the pandemic struck in 2019, complacency was happening within the church family, especially the senior adults. They were essentially questioning their role within the church family. "Why were their needs not being met? Why were they not incorporated in the inner life of the church?" Since the pandemic began, life has not been normal; however, a renewed spirit has arisen. Under Pastor Jeff's leadership, a new perspective has prevailed among all church members, including some older adults, which has been an impetus of this study.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry research thesis has been to encourage all senior adults at Judson Baptist Church to become fully engaged in serving Christ. This senior adult minister has shared several aspects of this problem. The first part addressed the concern, while the second part delineated some benefits to resolving the issue. Both were pertinent thoughts to this study.

Why should the problem of all senior adults becoming fully engaged in church life be addressed? Several answers included considering the topics of retirement and motivation and

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Batterson. *Draw the Circle: The 40 Day Prayer Challenge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 196.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

church life. There were some issues which needed to be considered so their lifestyles could be changed. Serving God in later years of life was explored. Several reasons were uncovered for the church not taking more interest in developing senior adults' full potential in relation to church life. Senior adults were not a hindrance to church growth, but their leadership was not being fully developed. All of these issues were addressed.

A second issue highlighted in this study related to its purpose was what benefits seniors could anticipate. One involved renewed faith and prayer. When seniors began living for the future instead of walking in the past, they realized many challenges in life could be overcome. One of those fears was, as one author concluded, "Fear is the tyrant of the imagination. It imposes itself upon us from the shadows, from its lazy mirror of maybe."<sup>6</sup> They realized fear was the opposite of faith, that "obeying God is absolutely essential to pleasing Him."<sup>7</sup> They also understood that one must risk his life or be sidetracked by regret.

In his book concerning regret, Dr. Neal Roese makes a fascinating distinction between two types of regret: regrets of action and regrets of inaction.<sup>8</sup> He defines a regret of action as "wishing you had not done something," while a regret of inaction has been defined as "wishing you had done something."<sup>9</sup> Renewed faith has encouraged seniors to step out in their trust in God and decrease the sins of omission. Some have realized the need to be more proactive in life.

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<sup>6</sup> David Jeremiah. *What Are You Afraid Of? Facing Down Your Fears with Faith* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2013), X.

<sup>7</sup> Charles F. Stanley, *30 Life Principles: A Study for Growing in Knowledge and Understanding of God* (Atlanta, GA: In Touch Ministries, 2008), 9.

<sup>8</sup> Neal Roese, *If Only: How to Turn Regret into Opportunity* (New York, NY: Broadway, 2005), 47-48.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

“Is anyone tired of reactive Christianity that is more known for what it is against than what it is for?”<sup>10</sup> We have become far too defensive; we have become far too passive. We must do more than play it safe. We must be on the lookout for more God-given opportunities.

A second benefit of following Christ has been a more substantial prayer life. People realize there were two ways to live one’s life: survival mode or prayer mode.<sup>11</sup> Survival mode consists of praying only when it is necessary, reacting to the circumstances beyond them. “If prayer is... One of the supreme joys in life, the throbbing heartbeat of our relationship with God, the nearest we will be to God this side of heaven, our compass that helps keep us on the right path... and it is all of the above... why is it so hard?”<sup>12</sup> What is the answer? Because prayer is a battle.<sup>13</sup> It is spiritual warfare; prayer is a fight. Another writer suggests that the secret prayer chamber is a bloody battlefield.<sup>14</sup> Oswald Chambers stated, “Prayer is not preparation for the battle; it is the battle.”<sup>15</sup> The survival mode of prayer is often incorporated because of the fierceness of the opposition of prayer, namely the devil.

In opposition to survival mode, prayer mode takes advantage of all the opportunities God presents.<sup>16</sup> Some seniors realize potential opportunities God seems to be sharing with them. Older adults have also understood how God answers all prayers. Studies have also shown that

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Batterson, *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day: How to Survive and Thrive When Opportunity Roars* (New York, NY: Multnomah, 2006), 19.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>12</sup> Anne Graham Lotz, *The Daniel Prayer: Prayer that Moves Heaven and Changes Nations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 245.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Ole Hallesby, *Magnificent Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 270.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Mark Batterson, *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day*, 140.

prayers extend life, that prayers can offer protection for all senior adults, and that “prayer is less about changing our circumstances and more about changing our perspective.”<sup>17</sup> “We should stop asking God to get us out of difficult circumstances and start asking Him what He wants us to get out of those difficult circumstances.”<sup>18</sup> Faith and prayer’s renewed intent has encouraged seniors to become more involved in serving the local church.

### **Basic Assumptions**

The first and foremost presupposition has been that the desired outcome has been accomplished by a more active prayer life and renewed faithfulness in the Lord Jesus. The time has arrived to counteract the noticed complacency of some senior adults in the work of Judson Baptist and to encourage all older adults to participate in sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. The time has come “to transition my thinking from entitlement to blessing... from focus on self to focus on others... from personal obsession to humility.”<sup>19</sup> A renewal of faith and prayer is what this researcher believes has happened as a result of this study.

A second assumption concerning this study included the Judson Baptist Church’s senior adult organization being considerate and cooperative in working with this minister to delineate the results. They have also been honest but affirming in their responses. In addition, they have accepted a level of anonymity in their participation. Their differing viewpoints have added to the

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<sup>17</sup> Mark Batterson, *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day: How to Survive and Thrive When Opportunity Roars* (New York, NY: Multnomah, 2006), 82.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Bob Vander Plaats, *If 7:14 – An Urgent Call for Revival... It’s Time* (Urbandale, IA: The Family Leader, 2015), 71.

process. All of the team members were encouraging participants during the latter part of the study.

The third assumption concerning this study involved senior adults reframing the problem of complacency among their peers. They now view it from a different perspective. They are realizing “internal attitudes are far more important than (their) external circumstances. Joy is mind over matter.”<sup>20</sup> As a result of this study, senior adults possess more empathy toward their age group.

### **Definitions**

In this research document, several key terms have been defined to give more clarity to the project. The first term was “Rethinking Retirement.” In his 2009 booklet, John Piper shared how giving all honor and praise to God has been resisting the American dream of retirement, which often occurs at the age of sixty-five.<sup>21</sup> The term referred to being so satisfied with Christ that believers lost interest in the things of this world. Bruce Bruinsma offered a somewhat different approach by sharing how growing old to the glory of God meant using whatever health and strength people possess in later life to treasure Christ and find joy in truly serving others. That was by bringing people into an everlasting enjoyment of serving Christ.

A second term that needed to be delineated was “Retirement Reformation.” As Bruce Bruinsma’s volume subtitled, “Finding Freedom with Faith... A Better Way to Experience the Final (and Best) Decades of Your Life” indicated that the title was a means of encouraging the

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<sup>20</sup> Mark Batterson, *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day: How to Survive and Thrive When Opportunity Roars* (New York, NY: Multnomah, 2006), 72.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *The Retirement Reformation: Finding Freedom with Faith... A Better Way to Experience the Final (and Best) Decades of Your Life* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2019), 12.

current and next generation of senior adults to understand retirement from God’s perspective.<sup>22</sup> The writer essentially says money is important, but it isn’t everything. Many people have more than enough financial assets to support them throughout retirement but lack any sense of deeper meaning or purpose in life.<sup>23</sup> Bruinsma joined with others as a retirement reformation champion dedicated to reforming how Christians viewed and lived out the last decades of life, with or without money.

A term related to retirement which must be considered concerns the “Phases of Retirement.” What are they? They include Active Phase (Go-Goes), Passive Phase (Slow-Goes), and Final Phase (No-Goes).<sup>24</sup> Go-Goes are actively pursuing a variety of interests; Slow-Goes are beginning to slow down, while No-Goes’ end-of-life concerns take on a new and different urgency.<sup>25</sup>

Another term that needed defining was “Successful Aging,” which, according to Jacqueline Liffiton, was a different retirement approach.<sup>26</sup> For those sixty-five years of age, it involved assisting seniors in maintaining their health, physical, and cognitive functioning for the rest of their lives. It dealt with a more holistic approach to life. A second author, Daniela S. Jopp, shared a difference with Liffiton’s process. She said successful aging is determined by

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<sup>22</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *The Retirement Reformation: Finding Freedom with Faith... A Better Way to Experience the Final (and Best) Decades of Your Life* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2019), 17.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>24</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 47.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-48.

<sup>26</sup> Jacqueline A Liffiton, et al., “Successful aging: how does physical activity influence engagement with life?” *European Review of Aging and Physical Activity*, (2012): 103.

examining role models in achieving longevity in life.<sup>27</sup> A third author, Jennifer Reichstadt, says successful aging combines the first two approaches previously mentioned, namely wisdom. It is a combination of self-acceptance and self-contentedness on one hand and engagement with life and self-growth in later life on the other.<sup>28</sup> All three methods were similar but different.

A fourth term that needed defining was “Ageism.” Ageism was defined as stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination toward people based on age.<sup>29</sup> Older adults are often viewed as dull, weak, and unproductive. Ageist thinking leads older adults to believe that they should “step aside” at church.<sup>30</sup> Ageist attitudes exist in every aspect of society, which remains detrimental to the welfare of senior adults. “The Western world of today generally credits youth with wisdom and sees old age as corrupt, myopic, or behind the times.”<sup>31</sup>

The last term which needed further clarification was “The Circle Maker.” The name was Mark Batterson’s book, subtitled “Praying Circles Around Your Biggest Dreams and Greatest Fears.”<sup>32</sup> The volume began with the story of Honi, The Circle Maker, a first-century B.C. sage who was bold enough to draw a circle in the sand and not budge from inside it until God

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<sup>27</sup> Daniela S. Jopp, et al., “Who Is Your Successful Aging Role Model?,” *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 72, no. 2 (March 1, 2017): 238, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbw138> .

<sup>28</sup> Jennifer Reichstadt, “Older Adults’ Perspectives on Successful Aging: Qualitative Interviews,” *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* 18, no. 7 (July 2010): 567-575, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3593659/> .

<sup>29</sup> Alana Officer, “A Global Campaign to Combat Ageism,” *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 96, no. 4 (2018): 295., <http://dx.doi.org/10.2471/BLT.17.202424>.

<sup>30</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 30.

<sup>31</sup> Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 127.

<sup>32</sup> Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker: Praying Circles Around Your Biggest Dreams and Greatest Fears* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 11.

answered his impossible prayer for his people. According to Batterson, “Drawing prayer circles around your dreams is not just a mechanism whereby we accomplish great things for God. It is a mechanism whereby God accomplishes great things in us.”<sup>33</sup>

### **Limitations**

Several limitations have been evident in encouraging a select group of older adults at Judson Baptist to participate in a senior adult survey. In conducting a sample with some other individuals, some seniors were reluctant to share with the researcher for various reasons. The first concern was the COVID-19 pandemic. Some members were hesitant in taking the risk of meeting for fear of being exposed to the virus. They were not comfortable in meeting with the researcher. A second reason may have been a lack of time or taking time to participate. This lack of time may have been due to uncomfortableness in addressing issues that directly related to them. A third reason some participants were hesitant in sharing their feelings concerning implementing intentional ministry for all senior adults may have been their acceptance of the status quo. They wanted no part in exploring the possibility of a retirement reformation.

Methodologies included reviewing several volumes that would delineate the value of prayer and faith in intentionally meeting senior adults’ needs. Those books included works by Bob Sorge, Richard Gentzler, and Mark Batterson. A brief summary of these three books will be incorporated into the consultation with the Jewels’ leadership. After the researcher had conducted his study and tabulated the results, the Judson Jewels Executive Committee would then be encouraged to determine a renewed vision in ministering to all senior adults.

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<sup>33</sup> Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker: Praying Circles Around Your Biggest Dreams and Greatest Fears* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 45.

## **Delimitations**

Several delimitations were imposed upon this research. The first delimitation was limited to the church family, senior adults, ages sixty-five years and up. No other group was consulted. The second delimitation was that this researcher had been the only one to meet with the older adults. The Judson Jewels Executive Committee was only consulted after the study had been completed and the results tabulated. The third delimitation was that there had been no distinctions in meeting with Judson seniors, no matter their gender, vocation, or current ministries. The only criteria were for each participant to possess an open heart and mind when considering the researcher's proposal.

## **Thesis Statement**

If senior adults continue to serve the Lord faithfully, their prayer life and faith walk have improved. That means they realized the Judson Church and the Judson Jewels desire a genuine relationship with them. The interest shown toward older people has increased their faith in God and encouraged their communication with the risen Lord. Just as the church has become more intentional in meeting seniors' needs, older people have realized they must refocus on serving the risen Lord.

In addition, continuing to serve the Lord faithfully means they have heard and then accepted several truths. First, God has already shown Himself strong by working through many peoples since He created the heavens, earth, and everything in it. He has answered their prayers by their trusting Him and believing His Word. Besides, the issue of cognitive gravity, which shifts from the imaginative right brain to the logical left brain as we age, has been addressed with senior adults. Instead of creating the future, we start repeating the past. Instead of living by faith,

we live by logic. Next, seniors were encouraged to believe God can work through any circumstance in life for His glory and praise. Nothing was impossible with God. Lastly, senior adults have answered the question, “Can life be finished well?” The only way for that scenario to happen was for God’s children to keep believing in Him. A renewal of faith and prayer occurred due to this study, along with more participation of seniors in God’s church. To God be the glory, great things He has done.

## Chapter 2

### Conceptual Framework

The problem of complacency among senior adults in a local church setting needs to be addressed. Why? Because it has vast ramifications upon the extension of God's kingdom around the world. In examining the concern of apathy and indifference with older people, four themes are considered. They include retirement, motivation and church life, faith, and prayer. Then, theological and theoretical foundations are shared, which provide a biblical and practical basis for conducting the research project. This chapter should provide ample justification for addressing the problem.

### Literature Review

Faithfulness to God in life has always been a struggle. Whether it be during biblical times or serving the Lord in present-day society, difficulties have arisen. Those trials have sometimes taken precedence over life. One of those stages in life, which has created much discussion, is the retirement era, the finishing well stage.<sup>34</sup> In this literature review, the writer will examine the four themes of retirement, motivation and church life, faith, and prayer concerning some senior adults' complacency within the local church. Each topic will offer ways for older people to pursue their relationship with the Lord.

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<sup>34</sup> Jimmy Draper, *Don't Quit Before You Finish* (Franklin, TN: Clovercroft, 2015), 292.

## Retirement

People are living longer than ever before. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, people are living eight years longer in the last fifty years.<sup>35</sup> That eight-year increase is true for both genders.<sup>36</sup> A study in England and Wales between 1981 and 2002 revealed similar results. During those years, life expectancy increased by 8.2 years for men and 6.0 years for women.<sup>37</sup> Most people live into their eighties, and even some approach the century mark and live longer. One writer says by the year 2050, there will be one million American centenarians.<sup>38</sup>

Since people are living longer than ever before, that longevity in life presents many challenges. Paul Tournier shared one of those challenges; he states how retirement depends on how people have already lived their lives.<sup>39</sup> How do folks change their routines in life to serve the Lord? Howard Hendricks then further notes how retirement has always been a challenge to one's faith and how it is a chance to do nothing.<sup>40</sup>

What do older people mean when they say “nothing” in response to the question, “What happens after retirement?” They usually mean three things. Their answers typically suggest they have no interests or hobbies, no understanding of God's word on their lives, or the result of

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<sup>35</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *Finding Freedom: Understanding the Power of a Future Funded Ministry* (Columbia, SC: Envoy Financial, 2018), 19.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> James E. Bennett et al., “The future of life expectancy and life expectancy inequalities in England and Wales,” *The Lancet*, 386 (April 30, 2015): 163-170, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(15\)60296-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(15)60296-3).

<sup>38</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *Finding Freedom*, 20.

<sup>39</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *The Retirement Reformation: Finding Freedom with Faith... A Better Way to Experience the Final (and Best) Decades of Your Life* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2019), XI.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

deliberately postponing plans for their futures.<sup>41</sup> The nothing reply is the all too typical response. This senior adult pastor has heard that comment too many times.

In light of considering the “nothingness” of retirement, different authors have addressed this issue. In the New International Version of the Bible, the Scripture only mentions the word “retirement” twice. The first reference is found in Numbers 8:25-26, when the Levites were asked to retire at age fifty. The second reference is located in Joshua 13:1 when the Scripture says, “Joshua was old and well advanced in years, the Lord said to him, ‘You are very old...’” (NIV). Yes, “Joshua was getting old – he was between 85 and 100 years of age at that time,<sup>42</sup> God still had work for Joshua to accomplish. American culture often glorifies the young and sets aside those who are older; however, senior adults are encouraged not to retire from God’s service. Then centuries later, Paul Tournier highlighted the case in the 1970s by writing his book entitled *Learning to Grow Old*.<sup>43</sup> Bob Buford next raised the issues brought about by key life transitions.<sup>44</sup> He stressed the challenges of going from success to significance in the 90s.

In 2009, John Piper, noted pastor and author, began addressing the issue of retirement in culture. Unlike one secular physician who said, “When asked the recipe for a good old age, I often give a list: good genes, good luck, enough money, and one good kid, usually a daughter.”<sup>45</sup> Piper shares a more spiritual approach. He essentially connects God’s plan and heart with the

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<sup>41</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *Finding Freedom: Understanding the Power of a Future Funded Ministry* (Columbia, SC: Envoy Financial, 2018), 14.

<sup>42</sup> *The Life Application Bible, New International Version* (Wheaton, IL and Grand Rapids, MI: Tyndale House Publishers and Zondervan, 1991), 354.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Tournier, *Learn to Grow Old* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1972).

<sup>44</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *The Retirement Reformation: Finding Freedom with Faith... A Better Way to Experience the Final (and Best) Decades of Your Life* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2019), 11.

<sup>45</sup> Louise Aronson, *Elderhood: Redefining Aging, Transforming Medicine, Reimagining Life* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 155.

issues of longevity and a lonely culture's needs.<sup>46</sup> In his booklet *Rethinking Retirement*, "Finishing Life for the Glory of Christ," Piper shares how giving glory to God is resisting the American dream of retirement. It means being so satisfied with Christ that believers lose interest in the things of this world, which creates so much emptiness and uselessness in retirement.<sup>47</sup>

Bruinsma takes his thought a step further when he shares how growing old to the glory of God means using whatever health and strength people have in life and genuinely treasuring Christ, and finding joy in serving others.<sup>48</sup> C.S. Lewis says concerning others, "True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less."<sup>49</sup> Bruinsma then states how believers must keep fighting the good fight of faith by keeping their eyes focused on Christ. Bruinsma refers to Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who once said, "God kisses away our dilemma of aging with promises from his Word."<sup>50</sup> Such promises include I Corinthians 1:8-9, Jude 1:24, and Romans 8:30-31. Next, Bruinsma shares how he and others have begun a movement entitled Retirement Reformation to encourage the next generation to understand retirement from God's perspective.<sup>51</sup> It essentially says, do not throw away your life on the American dreams of retirement.<sup>52</sup>

Several authors take different approaches to retirement by defining the term "Successful Aging." Liffiton shares how with the number of individuals over sixty-five years increasing

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<sup>46</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *The Retirement Reformation: Finding Freedom with Faith... A Better Way to Experience the Final (and Best) Decades of Your Life* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2019), 11.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Bob Vander Plaats, *If 7:14 – An Urgent Call for Revival... It's Time* (Urbandale, IA: The Family Leader, 2015), 66.

<sup>50</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *The Retirement Reformation*, 13.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

worldwide, it is critical to assist seniors in maintaining their health, physical, and cognitive functioning for the rest of their lives.<sup>53</sup> Jopp mentions how successful aging can be determined by examining the role models of aging in folks.<sup>54</sup> Reichstadt shares how “successful aging is a combination of the first two approaches with an emphasis on wisdom.”<sup>55</sup> All three approaches are somewhat different from the retirement reformation movement. This author concurs with the reformation approach.

### Motivation and Church Life

God calls Christians to avoid any discrepancies between what they sincerely believe and what they say. Many believers are not actively involved in a local fellowship of Christians. Jeremiah shares how many Christians seem to regard regular participation in a local church as optional.<sup>56</sup> They do not view it as an essential priority in life. The Bible speaks in Hebrews 10:24-25 of Christians gathering together to share their faith and to strengthen other believers in the Lord.<sup>57</sup> “No Christian has ever been called to ‘go it alone’ in his or her walk of faith.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Jacqueline A Liffiton, et al., “Successful aging: how does physical activity influence engagement with life?” *European Review of Aging and Physical Activity*, (2012): 103-108.

<sup>54</sup> Daniela S. Jopp, et al., “Who Is Your Successful Aging Role Model?,” *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 72, no. 2 (March 1, 2017): 238, <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbw138> .

<sup>55</sup> Jennifer Reichstadt, “Older Adults’ Perspectives on Successful Aging: Qualitative Interviews,” *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* 18, no. 7 (July 2010): 567-575, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3593659/> .

<sup>56</sup> David Jeremiah, *The Jeremiah Study Bible* (Franklin, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2013), 1757.

<sup>57</sup> *The Life Application Bible, New International Version* (Wheaton, IL and Grand Rapids, MI: Tyndale House Publishers and Zondervan, 1991), 2235.

<sup>58</sup> Charles F. Stanley, *30 Life Principles: A Study for Growing in Knowledge and Understanding of God* (Atlanta, GA: In Touch Ministries, 2008), 142.

Jeremiah discusses several reasons why every Christian should be an active member of a local church. First, every believer is an active member of the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13).<sup>59</sup> Part of becoming a Christian is being united with other believers into one body, namely the universal church. That reason pales with the excuses of not attending because they have had challenging experiences with “religious people;” people think they have too many responsibilities in life to participate adequately, and they are fearful of being rejected.<sup>60</sup> The point is – God desires for all of His children to be involved in His church.

A second reason why every Christian should be an active member of a local church is maturity.<sup>61</sup> “In Ephesians 4, Paul writes that Christians should live, minister, and work together in community so they can experience the fullness of Christ (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 4:13).”<sup>62</sup> The body becomes more robust when all of its members work for the common good. Some people deny that truth because they feel it is not feasible to be active church members.<sup>63</sup>

The third reason for every Christian becoming actively involved with the church includes spiritual gifts.<sup>64</sup> God has given Christian grace in the form of spiritual gifts (Romans 12:3, 6; I Corinthians 12:18; Ephesians 4:7).<sup>65</sup> These gifts have been given to edify the body of Christ.

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<sup>59</sup> David Jeremiah, *The Jeremiah Study Bible* (Franklin, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2013), 1757.

<sup>60</sup> Charles F. Stanley, *30 Life Principles: A Study for Growing in Knowledge and Understanding of God* (Atlanta, GA: In Touch Ministries, 2008), 142.

<sup>61</sup> David Jeremiah, *The Jeremiah Study Bible*, 1757.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Charles F. Stanley, *30 Life Principles*, 142.

<sup>64</sup> David Jeremiah, *The Jeremiah Study Bible*, 1757.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

Some Christians refuse to implement their spiritual gifts because of inadequacy, time, or even age.<sup>66</sup>

A final reason why every Christian should become involved in a local church is peer pressure.<sup>67</sup> “Scripture tells us that a healthy form of peer pressure can change us when we participate in something larger than ourselves.”<sup>68</sup> That is when the fear factor enters believers’ lives. They essentially possess low self-esteem.<sup>69</sup>

What is the answer? Stanley shares several thoughts. First, Christians must meet regularly with other believers to help safeguard them against drifting from the faith.<sup>70</sup> Jeremiah concurs by referring to Hebrews 3:13, in which he writes, “Believers should encourage other Christians daily, bolstering them against the inevitable trials and temptations of life.”<sup>71</sup> Believers must stay in fellowship with one another, talking daily about their mutual faith and being aware of the attractiveness of sin. Stanley mentions a second point, which involves the word “encouragement.” Disciples have a responsibility to use our gifts in encouraging other believers (I Peter 4:10).<sup>72</sup> The question then arises, “How can older adults be motivated for service within

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<sup>66</sup> Charles F. Stanley, *30 Life Principles: A Study for Growing in Knowledge and Understanding of God* (Atlanta, GA: In Touch Ministries, 2008), 142.

<sup>67</sup> David Jeremiah, *The Jeremiah Study Bible* (Franklin, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2013), 1757.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Charles F. Stanley, *30 Life Principles*, 142.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>71</sup> David Jeremiah, *The Jeremiah Study Bible*, 1748.

<sup>72</sup> Charles F. Stanley, *30 Life Principles*, 146.

the local church?” Why do some seniors continue serving while others never begin?<sup>73</sup> Many older adults find ways of serving others. Some say it is time for others to take their positions.<sup>74</sup>

What is the solution? As Gentzler mentions in two different sources, the church needs to respond.<sup>75</sup> The church’s attention and commitment to older adults should always be evident in a congregation’s life.<sup>76</sup> New formats and methods must be developed in helping older adults grow in faith.

In the second source, Gentzler shares how churches should specifically respond. They can hold seminars on the myths and realities of aging.<sup>77</sup> Churches can also conduct workshops on the positive and negative aspects of aging, and they must be careful in the use of language so that older adults feel included, not left out.<sup>78</sup> Churches can accomplish different things.

Once the church has responded, motivation then seems to be a key factor.<sup>79</sup> How can senior adults be encouraged to continue serving the Lord? Richard Gentzler shares several ways. “First, we must recognize that older adults are already motivated to do what they are already doing.”<sup>80</sup> They do activities every day they desire to accomplish, such as: watching television, playing eighteen holes of golf three times a week, or raising grandchildren while their children

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<sup>73</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *The Graying of the Church: A Leader’s Guide for Older-Adult Ministry in the United Methodist Church* (Montgomery, AL: Discipleship Resources, 2004), 45.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 34.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *The Graying of the Church*, 47.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 45-46.

work. Secondly, it is possible that older adults do not know what to do or what they can do.<sup>81</sup> Often, churches do not ask senior adults to be involved in ministry because church members believe seniors are too old to participate, already have the information, or are not interested in participating. “Third, it is important that we accept the fact that older adults may be called to a different ministry.”<sup>82</sup> These seniors may need to capture a newer vision for ministry. Older adults can be motivated to do the Lord’s work.

If ministry leaders are to organize change in motivating senior adults to serve, several things must happen. They consist of 1) the change must meet a need; 2) those involved in the change must understand the consequences for themselves and others; 3) believe change can be accomplished; 4) change must be perceived as a better situation than what they already have; 5) seniors must be involved in the process.<sup>83</sup> Change must occur gradually. There must be prayerful thought and consideration given to it.

## Faith

In addressing the aspects of faith, Jeremiah shares three elements of it. The first is perception (the mind).<sup>84</sup> The object of their faith must be worthy of their belief.<sup>85</sup> People must

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<sup>81</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *The Graying of the Church: A Leader’s Guide for Older-Adult Ministry in the United Methodist Church* (Montgomery, AL: Discipleship Resources, 2004), 46.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> David P. Gallagher, “Ministering To Senior Adults,” October 6, 2016, accessed July 17, 2020, <https://www.careleader.org/care-well-senior-adults/>, 18-19.

<sup>84</sup> David Jeremiah, *The Jeremiah Study Bible* (Franklin, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2013), 1759.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

accept the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as a fact and then understand the ramifications of Jesus' life upon their lives.

“Trusting God means looking beyond what we can see to what God sees.”<sup>86</sup> Yes, circumstances and obstacles may appear overwhelming, but God's resources are more powerful than one could imagine.<sup>87</sup> God sees tomorrow and will prepare His children for whatever may occur. That is why believers must place their faith in God and do whatever He says.

The mind must perceive God as more significant than all the circumstances of life. It is beyond “Seeing is believing. Why do I need faith? Faith is for weak people.”<sup>88</sup> God has chosen foolish things to confound the worldly-wise (I Corinthians 1:27, KJV).<sup>89</sup> People need to humble themselves under the reality of Jesus.

The second element of faith is persuasion (the emotions).<sup>90</sup> “Although people may be under persuasion at the same time that they receive knowledge, many know the gospel but do not accept the gospel.”<sup>91</sup> They know Christ but do not know all about him. Believers trust in Christ, but they do not fully follow Him. Sometimes, their emotions betray them, while, at other times, their emotions do not betray them.

“In the largest and best-designed study of their day, William J. Strawbridge, Ph.D., and other California researchers examined the relationship between religious service attendance

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<sup>86</sup> Charles F. Stanley, *30 Life Principles: A Study for Growing in Knowledge and Understanding of God* (Atlanta, GA: In Touch Ministries, 2008), 43.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ray Comfort, *Faith Is for Weak People: Responding to the 20 Top Questions to the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 76.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> David Jeremiah, *The Jeremiah Study Bible* (Franklin, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2013), 1759.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

patterns and mortality of 5,286 people aged twenty-one to sixty-five in Alameda County between 1969 and 1994.”<sup>92</sup> This research was so landmarking, and it was published in the *American Journal of Public Health* in June 1997. The main goal of the project was to analyze any long-term connection between faith and longevity in life.<sup>93</sup> Their results were astounding. During the years of the study, the hazard of dying of frequent religious service attendees was 36 percent less than for people who attended services less than once a week.<sup>94</sup> As Ducharme has observed, “a number of studies have shown associations between attending religious services and living a long time.”<sup>95</sup> Active followers of Christ seem to live longer in life than inactive believers.

The third element of concern includes the volition (the will).<sup>96</sup> “In this aspect, a person’s will responds with a personal commitment to and complete acceptance of Christ as the only hope for salvation.”<sup>97</sup> Thus, saving faith involves someone believing in Christ with all of one’s heart. It includes making a conscious decision to follow Christ completely. Willits and Crider have discovered current church attendance and sound religious beliefs are positively related to overall life satisfaction.<sup>98</sup> Saving faith involves embracing all of Christ with their whole being.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Harold G. Koenig, M.D., *The Healing Power of Faith: How Belief and Prayer Can Help You Triumph Over Disease* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1999), 165.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Jamie Ducharme, “You Asked: Do Religious People Live Longer?” *Time Magazine*, February 26, 2018.

<sup>96</sup> David Jeremiah, *The Jeremiah Study Bible* (Franklin, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2013), 1759.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Fern K. Willits and Donald M. Crider, “Religion and Well Being: Men and Women in the Middle Years” *Review of Religious Research* 29, no. 3 (March 1988), 285.

<sup>99</sup> David Jeremiah, *The Jeremiah Study Bible*, 1759.

How does a senior adult remain faithful and young all of their life? One pastor shares how our attitude is what makes the difference.<sup>100</sup> This elderly minister suggests two things. First, we need to keep learning so we can remain productive and keep contributing to the world.<sup>101</sup> Secondly, we must keep laboring and continue looking for service opportunities through the church and other ministries.<sup>102</sup> Fulfilling those two tasks will hold a senior faithful and young as long as they live.

Batterson suggests that neuroimaging has shown as people mature in life, the center of cognitive gravity tends to go from an imaginative right brain to a logical left brain.<sup>103</sup> This tendency presents a grave danger. Humans cease living out of imagination at some point in life and begin living out of their past.<sup>104</sup> That is where people, in general, especially senior adults, must make a conscious choice to follow Christ all the days of their lives. Instead of living by logic, they must walk by faith, embracing Christ with their whole beings. As Morgan writes, “If (we) need strength for the journey, (we) have to stretch out the wings of faith and catch the updrafts of the promises of God.”<sup>105</sup> As Isaiah 40:31b tells us, “They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint” (NIV).

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<sup>100</sup> Charles F. Stanley, “Staying Young All Your Life,” In Touch (January 2021): 38, In Touch Ministries.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker: Praying Circles Around Your Biggest Dreams and Greatest Fears* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 43.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Robert J. Morgan, *The Strength You Need: The 12 Great Strength Passages of The Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2016), 97.

As Jeremiah notes, “real faith does not bypass the mind and the emotions. In a similar view, intellectual understanding or warm feelings do not qualify as biblical faith if they do not lead to trust and action.”<sup>106</sup> Faith involves action; it is doing, not pretending. Faith works.

Today as people live longer and often retire earlier, they may experience a new spiritual awakening.<sup>107</sup> People have often viewed aging with senility and death, but now, a glimpse of human potential has opened up numerous possibilities.<sup>108</sup> New opportunities may avail themselves. Senior adults may even learn how to “age faithfully.”<sup>109</sup>

What is “aging faithfully?” It means several things. It refers to seeing all of life as a gift from God; trusting in the promises of God; standing against the cultural prejudices of growing old; developing a new understanding of self-worth; being part of a church where spiritual growth is encouraged for older adults; and practicing the spiritual disciplines.<sup>110</sup> As disciples age faithfully, believers are invited to hear and respond to the words of Micah; “With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:6a, 8).”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> David Jeremiah, *The Jeremiah Study Bible* (Franklin, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2013), 1759.

<sup>107</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 69.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 70-73.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 73.

## Prayer

“Is not it incredible that the awesome God of the universe has invited us to a breathing, growing relationship with Him?”<sup>112</sup> When believers pray boldly, God answers their bold prayers. He is not offended by their boldness; however, He is offended by anything less.<sup>113</sup> God loves keeping promises, answering prayers, and performing miracles. One of the greatest moments in life is when human impotence and divine omnipotence intersect, and God intervenes and performs miraculous moments.<sup>114</sup>

“Miracles are the byproducts of prayer that have been prayed by you and for you.”<sup>115</sup> That should be all the motivation anyone needs to pray. The greatest tragedy in life is the prayers that go unanswered because they have never been spoken.<sup>116</sup> As one physician writes, repetitive prayer provides emotional protection for patients.<sup>117</sup> People find comfort in prayer. They cherish it during difficult times in life. While awaiting major surgery, one elderly lady remarked, “The Bible just brings me comfort.”<sup>118</sup> Patients should feel comfortable bringing up spiritual or religious issues with their physicians, especially if they feel uncomfortable praying with their minister or chaplain.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Bob Sorge, *Secrets of the Secret Place: Igniting Your Personal Time with God* (Kansas City, MO: Oasis House, 2001), 1.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker: Praying Circles Around Your Biggest Dreams and Greatest Fears* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 18.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>117</sup> Harold G. Koenig, *The Healing Power of Faith: How Belief and Prayer Can Help You Triumph Over Disease* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1999), 31.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 298.

In her dissertation, Saudi refers to several studies that have found prayer as a direct-action coping strategy. They have discovered prayer as a commonly used coping technique in healthy adults, emergency room settings, psychiatric patients, patients with chronic low back pain, and coronary care settings.<sup>120</sup> In other words, prayer works. Communicating with God is an excellent means of coping with pain and even stress. Yancy goes on to share, “A 2003 survey reported five hundred clinical studies documenting correlations between religious practices, including prayer... Eight in ten Americans believe that miracles can happen today, and more than half of all doctors report observing miracles in their patients that defy medical explanation.”<sup>121</sup> On the other hand, Ducharme states how “Some studies have found that prayer can improve disease outcomes and prolong survival, while others have been less conclusive. One 2006 study published in the *American Heart Journal* even found that people who know they were being prayed for before undergoing heart surgery were more likely to experience complications than people who did not know whether they were in others’ prayers.”<sup>122</sup>

In another study, prayer has been identified as a helpful coping mechanism.<sup>123</sup> It is a powerful tool. Prayer can assist one in knowing the “Master’s business.”<sup>124</sup> Prayer “triggers the relaxation response, a state of mind-body rest that has been shown to decrease stress, heart rate, and blood pressure; alleviate chronic disease symptoms, and even change “gene expression.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Theresa L. Saudi, “Health Locus of Control and Healthiness of Prayer in Preoperative Cardiac Surgery Patients” (PhD diss., The University of Alabama at Birmingham, 1989), 8.

<sup>121</sup> Philip Yancy, *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 2006), 251.

<sup>122</sup> Jamie Ducharme, “You Asked: Do Religious People Live Longer?” *Time Magazine*, February 26, 2018.

<sup>123</sup> Theresa L. Saudi, “Health Locus of Control...”, 8.

<sup>124</sup> Greg Pruitt, *Extreme Prayer: The Impossible Prayers God Promises to Answer* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 97.

<sup>125</sup> Jamie Ducharme, “You Asked: Do Religious People Live Longer?” *Time Magazine*, February 26, 2018.

This state has been linked to communication with God. Various forms of prayer have been identified as one of the most valuable resources available for the patient.<sup>126</sup>

A wonderful Scripture in praying, meditating for God's protection in life, in general, is Psalm 91. While often referred to as "The Soldier's Psalm," this chapter will help overcome temptation and encourage Christians to refrain from repetitive sin.<sup>127</sup> It will also ease the pain of grief. One author delineates "5 Good Things Hidden in Grief" from Psalm 91.<sup>128</sup>

"Prayer is life's greatest time saver."<sup>129</sup> It assists in making the most of every moment in life. Believers may incorporate the power of prayer into their everyday lives. Prayer will lead God's children to remain calm, gentle, and joyful in life (Philippians 4:4-7).<sup>130</sup>

In Psalm 71:18, the writer shared, "Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come" (NIV). A person is never too old to pray, much less serve.<sup>131</sup> They must never weary in sharing God's love for others. They are living in an age of opportunity.<sup>132</sup> They must eliminate their idiosyncrasies and stereotypes and develop new solutions and directions for older adults' ministry.

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<sup>126</sup> Theresa L. Saudi, "Health Locus of Control and Healthiness of Prayer in Preoperative Cardiac Surgery Patients" (PhD diss., The University of Alabama at Birmingham, 1989), 8.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>128</sup> David P. Gallagher, "Ministering To Senior Adults," October 6, 2016, accessed July 17, 2020, <https://www.careleader.org/care-well-senior-adults/>, 116-122.

<sup>129</sup> Charles F. Stanley, *30 Life Principles: A Study for Growing in Knowledge and Understanding of God* (Atlanta, GA: In Touch Ministries, 2008), 137.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>131</sup> *The Life Application Bible, New International Version* (Wheaton, IL and Grand Rapids, MI: Tyndale House Publishers and Zondervan, 1991), 1248.

<sup>132</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 18.

## Theological Foundations

### Older-Adult Ministries

Why is older adult ministry essential to the life of the church? Why is it important for the local church to provide for its seniors, those sixty-five years of age and up? Why must their needs be met? The Bible and society, in general, share several reasons.

The first reason concerns what senior adults have to offer the church. They have much maturity and wisdom. Leviticus 19:32 says, “Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord” (NIV). People often dismiss the opinions of the elderly and refuse to spend time with them; however, God instructed otherwise. He commanded the Israelites to honor the elderly, thus demonstrating how seriously people should take the responsibility of respecting the aged.<sup>133</sup> Their wisdom gained from experience can alleviate many pitfalls in people’s lives.

Older adults can offer other things to the church. First, older adults can be receptive.<sup>134</sup> Because of the difficulties in later life, some people will more likely consider participation in the church’s ministry. Secondly, older adults offer care for others.<sup>135</sup> Senior adults will more likely volunteer in churches than any other religious organization. Next, older adults can offer more available time.<sup>136</sup> Leaders searching for assistance within the church find that older adults have

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<sup>133</sup> *The Life Application Bible, New International Version* (Wheaton, IL and Grand Rapids, MI: Tyndale House Publishers and Zondervan, 1991), 197.

<sup>134</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *The Graying of the Church: A Leader’s Guide for Older-Adult Ministry in the United Methodist Church* (Montgomery, AL: Discipleship Resources, 2004), 25.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

more time to serve than another age group. Lastly, older adults still desire to be valued and believe they can contribute to church after retirement.<sup>137</sup> They are looking for ways to feel needed and wanted by the church family.

The second reason for older-adult ministries is because God cares for all people, including the elderly. Galatians 3:28 speaks to this fact when it says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, for you are one in Christ Jesus” (NIV). Because all believers are one in Christ, no one is more privileged than or superior to anyone else.<sup>138</sup> No age is more special than another to the Lord. God desires for all of His children to be blessed.

In the creation story, Genesis 1:31 tells that God blessed all that He had made.<sup>139</sup> That means when a person reaches sixty-five, God does not take away His blessing. Instead, He often gives them a purpose and mission for life. For example, Abraham was seventy-five years old when God commanded him to leave his homeland (Genesis 12:1-4). Moses was eighty years old when God allowed him to speak to Pharaoh after seeing the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-12; 7:1-7).<sup>140</sup> Caleb was eighty-five years old when Moses gave him Hebron, a portion of the Promised Land (Joshua 14:6-15). Age is not a factor in serving the Lord.

While society and many churches focus solely on reaching youth and young families, that action causes older adults to forget God loves them. They sometimes think God has no time for them. That statement is far from the truth. Psalm 100:5 says, “For the Lord is good, and His love

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<sup>137</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *The Graying of the Church: A Leader's Guide for Older-Adult Ministry in the United Methodist Church* (Montgomery, AL: Discipleship Resources, 2004), 26.

<sup>138</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 25-26.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 36.

endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations” (NIV). The church must help older adults realize that God always loves them no matter the problems they may be experiencing, whether they be physical or cognitive.<sup>141</sup>

God’s love for all people is creative and unconditional. “People have dignity and worth, not because they have achieved some measure of success or experience or the esteem of their family or friends.”<sup>142</sup> People are worthy in God’s eyes because they have been made in His image. That means God loves older people too.<sup>143</sup> All of God’s children are worthy in His sight because He made them and then blessed them. God cares for all of His people.

The third reason for senior adult ministries is because “there are more adults in the United States population.”<sup>144</sup> As a result of medical advances, scientific discoveries, job safety, lifestyle choices, and other factors, more people live longer than before. “Almost one-quarter of the average American’s life will be spent in retirement.”<sup>145</sup> Projections indicate that the older population will continue to grow tremendously in the future. “In 1900, there were 3.1 million people in the United States age sixty-five and older. Today, there are more than 47.8 million, and by 2060, there will be 98 million people in the U.S. who are sixty-five years of age and older.”<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 35.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *The Graying of the Church: A Leader’s Guide for Older-Adult Ministry in the United Methodist Church* (Montgomery, AL: Discipleship Resources, 2004), 25.

<sup>144</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity*, 24.

<sup>145</sup> David P. Gallagher, *Senior Adult Ministry in the 21st Century: Step-By-Step Strategies for Reaching People Over 50* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2002), 9.

<sup>146</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity*, 25.

Our world is aging. Resources are limited in investigating this new phenomenon. According to one source, “Life expectancy in 1900 was forty-seven years. By 2015, life expectancy in the United States had increased to nearly seventy-nine years, more than thirty years longer than in 1900.”<sup>147</sup> For the first time in the nation’s history, America is becoming a country of older people.<sup>148</sup> The church must not overlook the vast mission field of older adults all around its facility.

The final reason why older adult ministries are essential to the church is that they comprise a significant percentage of many churches’ membership.<sup>149</sup> As a result of an aging population, many churches are witnessing increasing numbers of older members. This fact seems to be true in both urban and rural areas. “With fewer children and youth, and with more people living to old age, older adults may make up a significant percentage of a congregation’s membership.”<sup>150</sup> Older adults tend to be more religious than any other age group, and they make up a large proportion of the people sitting in the church pews.<sup>151</sup> The church must not overlook the rising age of its population. Yes, older adult ministry is essential to the life of any church.

### Gift from God

God has much to say in Scripture about aging, which is a gift from God. It is a reward for faithfulness. “In Job, the question is asked, ‘Is wisdom with the aged, and understanding in

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<sup>147</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 21.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 27.

length of days?’ (12:12). An answer is given in Proverbs, ‘Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life’ (16:31).”<sup>152</sup>

“The Bible is realistic in conveying the hardships of aging and old age, but it also proclaims the blessings associated with growing old.”<sup>153</sup> 1) The Bible is full of many different perspectives on age and aging. Psalm 71:9 says, “Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone” (NIV). The Bible says God will never leave or forsake us. 2) “Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old” (Proverbs 23:22, NIV). Continue to care for one’s family. 3) Isaiah 46:4 says, “Even to your old age and gray hairs, I am He, I am He who will sustain you. I have made you, and I will carry you; I will sustain you, and I will rescue you” (NIV). “His love is so enduring that He will care for us throughout our lifetime and even through death.”<sup>154</sup>

According to Proverbs 16:31, “The Hebrews believe that a long life was a sign of God’s blessing; therefore, gray hair and old age were good.”<sup>155</sup> While young people glory in their strength, older folks can delight in their motivation and wisdom. Gray hair is not a sign of disgrace to be covered, but it is a crown of splendor.<sup>156</sup> The Bible encourages respect for the elderly.

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<sup>152</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 36-37.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>154</sup> *The Life Application Bible, New International Version* (Wheaton, IL and Grand Rapids, MI: Tyndale House Publishers and Zondervan, 1991), 1248.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 1102.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

Jesus was confronted with issues that involved aging.<sup>157</sup> When Nicodemus came to him and said, “How can a man be born when he is old?... Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born” (John 3:4, NIV). Christ was essentially saying people do not enter the kingdom by better living but by being spiritually reborn.<sup>158</sup> Another time, Jesus shared the kind of death Peter would experience when he grew old; “Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish” (John 21:18, NKJV). Peter indeed would follow his Lord to death. “The Bible does not record how Peter died, but Eusebius wrote, ‘Peter preached... and having come to Rome, he was crucified, head downward, so he himself had to suffer.’”<sup>159</sup>

As a church, we recognize all believers’ priesthood, not the superiority of any particular leadership role or age group.<sup>160</sup> One Scripture connects the blessings of aging and old age. Psalm 37:25 tells us, “I was young, and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread” (NIV). “David is observing God’s provision over a lifetime. Though there are unfortunate exceptions to this general principle, God provides for His own people.”<sup>161</sup> Wherever He leads, God provides, which is another gift from Him.

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<sup>157</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 37.

<sup>158</sup> *The Life Application Bible, New International Version* (Wheaton, IL and Grand Rapids, MI: Tyndale House Publishers and Zondervan, 1991), 1876.

<sup>159</sup> David Jeremiah, *The Jeremiah Study Bible* (Franklin, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2013), 1480.

<sup>160</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity*, 38.

<sup>161</sup> *The Life Application Bible*, 943.

“Although the Judeo-Christian tradition rejects what some religious cultures called ancestor worship, the Bible does place great importance on children honoring their parents.”<sup>162</sup> Two Scriptures illustrate this point. One is Exodus 20:12, when God said to Moses, “Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God has given you” (NKJV). “The fifth commandment means to treat one’s father and... mother with dignity and respect... Paul notes that this commandment is the first one with a promise (Ephesians 6:2), ‘that your days may be long upon the land.’”<sup>163</sup>

The second Scripture is found in I Timothy 5:1,2, which says, “Do not rebuke an older man but exhort him as a father, older women as mothers” (NKJV). Paul was referring to relationships within the church. This thought reflects the idea of the early church believing an assembly was God’s household. For that reason, Timothy was being encouraged to avoid stern rebuke when dealing with the congregation members.<sup>164</sup> Instead, he was asked to exhort, which implies encouragement as well as correction.<sup>165</sup> The point is obvious: God rewards those who are faithful to Him with old age.

### Rising Above Self by Pursuing God

In praying for revival and spiritual awakening within the United States of America, this writer focused on II Chronicles 7:14. It states, “If my people, who are called by my name, will humbles themselves and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I

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<sup>162</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 38.

<sup>163</sup> David Jeremiah, *The Jeremiah Study Bible* (Franklin, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2013), 101.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 1709.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (NIV). The first condition for revival is “humb(ling) ourselves by admitting to our sins.”<sup>166</sup> In other words, God’s people must focus on Him instead of themselves. As one writer suggests, “Stop the perpetual madness of attempting to please your flesh with the things of this world that will never satisfy, and instead pursue God and His righteousness.”<sup>167</sup>

Jesus spoke to this issue of pursuing His Father when he said in Matthew 6:33, “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all of these things will be given to you as well” (NIV). What did Christ mean when he urged his followers “to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness?” It means “to turn to God first for help, to fill your thoughts with His desires, to take His character for your pattern, and to serve and obey Him in everything.”<sup>168</sup> What are “all of these things?” One author suggests they are earthly pursuits such as fulfillment, purpose, and satisfaction.<sup>169</sup> Any of these desires can bump God out of first place within people’s lives. Jesus desires for His children to refocus and place our priorities in order, God’s kingdom, and His righteousness.

Tom Brokaw labeled the World War II generation as “The Greatest Generation.” Why did he coin that phrase? He named it because that group of people knew how to place others before themselves. They knew what it meant to sacrifice their lives for the sake of freedom.

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<sup>166</sup> *The Life Application Bible, New International Version* (Wheaton, IL and Grand Rapids, MI: Tyndale House Publishers and Zondervan, 1991), 724.

<sup>167</sup> Bob Vander Plaats, *If 7:14 – An Urgent Call for Revival... It’s Time* (Urbandale, IA: The Family Leader, 2015), 70.

<sup>168</sup> *The Life Application Bible*, 1659.

<sup>169</sup> Bob Vander Plaats, *If 7:14 – An Urgent Call for Revival... It’s Time*, 70

“What made them great was the ability to put ‘the cause above themselves.’ This... sums up leadership at any level, ‘cause above self.’”<sup>170</sup>

God is calling all people, especially senior adults, to take the focus off of themselves and to place it on Him, His kingdom, and His righteousness. He is encouraging us to set our sights with an eternal versus an earthly focus.<sup>171</sup> Therefore, Christians must not ask themselves, “What will one gain from serving the Lord,” but instead, “How can God be glorified in ministering on His behalf?” This is encompassing the first condition of revival, namely humility instead of selfishness.

When God’s people diligently seek Him and His righteousness, the Lord responds more favorably. “We see this in the way he handled the twelve. Peter, James, and John were invited into some of Jesus’ most intimate and awesome moments, while the other disciples were not included.”<sup>172</sup> What was the difference? One author suggests some disciples held back toward the Lord, while Peter, James, and John intimately pursued Jesus.<sup>173</sup>

What is the point? Christians must run after Him. They, including older adults, must seek Him with all of their hearts. Believers must realize when they draw closer to the Lord, He will draw closer to them. As James 4:10 shares, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift

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<sup>170</sup> Bob Vander Plaats, *If 7:14 – An Urgent Call for Revival... It’s Time* (Urbandale, IA: The Family Leader, 2015), 138.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>172</sup> Bob Sorge, *Secrets of the Secret Place: Igniting Your Personal Time with God* (Kansas City, MO: Oasis House, 2001), 43.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

you up” (NIV). “Although we do not deserve God’s favor, He reaches out in love and gives us worth and dignity, despite our human shortcomings.”<sup>174</sup>

Christians must continue running the race of living for Christ. They must not allow anything to daunt their pursuit of a high calling of God (Philippians 3:13). The following is an excerpt from John Wesley’s diary. It says,

“Sunday morning, May 5. Preached in St. Ann’s. Was not asked to come back anymore. Sunday p.m., May 5. Preached at St. John’s. Deacon says, ‘Get out and stay out.’ Sunday a.m., May 12. Preached at St. Jude’s. Can’t go back there either. Sunday p.m., May 12. Preached at St. George’s. Kicked out again. Sunday a.m., May 19. Preached at somebody else’s. Deacons called and said I couldn’t return. Sunday p.m., May 19. Preached on the street. Kicked off the street. Sunday a.m., May 26. Preached in meadow, chased out of meadow as bull was turned loose during the service. Sunday a.m., June 2. Preached at the edge of town. Kicked off the highway. Sunday p.m., June 2, afternoon service. Preached in a pasture, 10,000 people came to hear me.”<sup>175</sup>

Believers must continue praising God no matter their hardships and disappointments.

The story is told of a Chinese prisoner who fasted for 76 days from both food and water. During this time, he prayed for the salvation of his fellow prisoners who had abused him for the entire ordeal. Then, something amazing happened. “At the end of the 76 days, he arose in

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<sup>174</sup> *The Life Application Bible, New International Version* (Wheaton, IL and Grand Rapids, MI: Tyndale House Publishers and Zondervan, 1991), 2250.

<sup>175</sup> Bob Sorge, *Secrets of the Secret Place: Igniting Your Personal Time with God* (Kansas City, MO: Oasis House, 2001), 45.

supernatural strength and authority, preached to his cellmates, and all fifteen of them repented on the spot.”<sup>176</sup> We must obey God and leave all the consequences to Him.<sup>177</sup>

J. Oswald Sanders has faithfully served the Lord. While fervently serving God, he has written many noteworthy books, especially those on spiritual leadership. While speaking at the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School chapel, at the age of eighty-nine, Sanders shared how he had written a book a year for Christ since he was seventy.<sup>178</sup> What a great testimony of pursuing God in the latter years of one’s life.

All Christians, including senior adults, must pursue running the race of continually serving the Lord. As Hebrews 12:1 states, “Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (NIV). According to one source, “the Greek word translated ‘witnesses’ – the origin of the English ‘martyr’ – means ‘testifiers.’ These individuals testify to the power of faith and God’s faithfulness.”<sup>179</sup> Choirs of saints are cheering believers from the banisters of heaven by saying, “We finished the course of God’s grace; you can too.”<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Bob Sorge, *Secrets of the Secret Place: Igniting Your Personal Time with God* (Kansas City, MO: Oasis House, 2001), 44.

<sup>177</sup> Charles F. Stanley, *30 Life Principles: A Study for Growing in Knowledge and Understanding of God* (Atlanta, GA: In Touch Ministries, 2008), 8.

<sup>178</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *The Retirement Reformation: Finding Freedom with Faith... A Better Way to Experience the Final (and Best) Decades of Your Life* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2019), 16.

<sup>179</sup> *The NIV Archaeology Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 2005), 1996.

<sup>180</sup> Bob Sorge, *Secrets of the Secret Place*, 45

## Finishing Well

No matter how many times senior adults have tried and failed to continue pursuing the Lord, they must continue rediscovering the path of holiness and righteousness.<sup>181</sup> As Proverbs 24:16 says, “No matter how many times you trip them up, God-loyal people don’t stay down long” (The Message). God can recalibrate His plans for senior adults, recalculate their plans, and assists them in a new beginning. He can turn their trials into trails, master their lives before it is too late.<sup>182</sup>

Today, older adults are dealing with many crises. “According to geriatric specialists with Johns Hopkins Medicine, many elderly people seem to be experiencing something called a ‘Later-Life Crisis.’”<sup>183</sup> People used to refer to it as a midlife crisis. It can be diagnosed when one spends too much time looking into the rearview mirror of life.<sup>184</sup> Regretting missed opportunities can be debilitating. That is why the same Johns Hopkins article suggests, “Reframe what it means to get older. Instead of lamenting what you never did, or what you have lost, (think) about this time as a chance to take on new challenges and embrace life in a new way.”<sup>185</sup> Instead, “Don’t quit before you finish... keep your eyes on the goal...”<sup>186</sup> Picture life as a race found in Hebrews 12:1-3.

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<sup>181</sup> Robert Morgan, *Mastering Life Before It’s Too Late: 10 Biblical Strategies for a Lifetime of Purpose*. (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 265.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>183</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *The Retirement Reformation: Finding Freedom with Faith... A Better Way to Experience the Final (and Best) Decades of Your Life* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2019), 142.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> Jimmy Draper, *Don’t Quit Before You Finish* (Franklin, TN: Clovercroft, 2015), 292.

In Hebrews 11:1 (NIV), two words describe faith: “sure” and “certain.” Both qualities need a beginning and an ending point. The beginning point of faith is sure in God’s character, while the ending point is certain of His promises.<sup>187</sup> When people believe that God will fulfill his promises even though they do not see them, they exhibit true faith. They trust God as Thomas witnessed the risen Lord for the first time (John 20:24-31).

While senior adults continue aging in life, they must keep believing. White refers to Ray Pritchard’s book entitled *Keep Believing*, which encourages others to come to faith in Jesus Christ and help them find the courage, hope, and perseverance to keep on believing, no matter the circumstances.<sup>188</sup> That is the central message of Pritchard’s life in ministry.<sup>189</sup> It is also the same reason he began Keep Believing Ministries in 2006. Pritchard had no idea his salvation prayer at the age of fifteen would lead to such an adventurous life in Christ.

The prayer that saved a generation has been recognized as one of the most significant prayers in Israel’s history.<sup>190</sup> It involved Honi, the circle maker who lived in the second half of the first century B.C. After claiming Psalm 126:1, he drew a circle around himself and prayed for rain. His prayers were answered in that rain came for the drought-stricken nation.<sup>191</sup> The story of Honi, the circle maker, stands forever as a testimony of how God honored a single prayer that changed history.<sup>192</sup> God is thrilled when believers pray in faith.

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<sup>187</sup> *The Life Application Bible, New International Version* (Wheaton, IL and Grand Rapids, MI: Tyndale House Publishers and Zondervan, 1991), 2239.

<sup>188</sup> Matthew White, “In a world of chaos, Keep Believing.” *afaJournal* (August 2020): 14-15.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker: Praying Circles Around Your Biggest Dreams and Greatest Fears* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 13.

<sup>191</sup> Sefer Ha-Aggadah, *The Book of Legends: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1992), 202.

<sup>192</sup> Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker*, 13.

## **Theoretical Foundations**

In addressing the theological foundations of senior adults realizing life is a gift from God, it must be finished well; the Lord must continue to be pursued in life above self. All older adults desire to be valued, and proven biblical theories will be implemented. One will deal with the researcher meeting in ministering to individual senior adults. This was a proven means of Christ's ministry answering questions and sharing other information such as His dialogue with the religious leader, Nicodemus (John 3:1-15, NIV). After the surveys have been taken and results have been recorded, the Judson Jewels Executive Committee will consider the findings concerning more pertinent ministry. This second strategy was implemented by the Lord Jesus when He prayed and next called twelve new followers to become His disciples (Luke 6:12-16, NIV). For three years, Christ shared with these men. Neither of these approaches is new to the Judson Church.

How will the problem of complacency among senior adults among Judson Baptist be addressed? It will be tackled in several ways. First, the minister will address his concern by consulting various books, articles, and other writings to know the matter's extent. Once the need has been discussed and a survey has been prepared, the researcher will then schedule home visits so senior adults can share their feelings concerning their involvement or lack of it within the church. After the surveys' results have been tabulated, the Judson Jewels Executive Committee will be consulted to briefly review several books on prayer and faith and then determine how to better minister to all older adults. The conversations with the participants and the executive committee will hopefully improve all senior adults' prayer life and faith walk.

Why should the issues of apathy and indifference be addressed within the Judson church family? Several problems need explaining. The first reason is some senior adults possess

different ideas of retirement. People long for stressless days.<sup>193</sup> Some dream of living their days alone and in quiet solitude, while others cannot imagine a day without work. As one minister said, “I will just die in the pulpit.”<sup>194</sup> There are still others who do not even think of retirement. The financial realities of life do not allow them even to entertain a future different from their past. Their future looks much like their past.<sup>195</sup>

That thought leads to a second reason why some seniors have not planned for retirement. More than two thousand years ago, Honi, an eccentric sage who lived in the second half of the first century B.C., was mesmerized by one phrase in a verse of Scripture, Psalm 126:1.<sup>196</sup> “When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed” (NIV). That statement, “we were like those who dreamed,” raised a question that Honi dealt with his entire life.<sup>197</sup> Is it even possible for a man to dose and dream continuously for seventy years?<sup>198</sup> Is there purpose and meaning in later life?

“Nothing honors God more than a big dream that is way beyond one’s ability to accomplish.”<sup>199</sup> Why? Because there is no way one can take credit. “Nothing is better for our spiritual development than a big dream because it keeps us on our knees in raw dependence.”<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *Finding Freedom: Understanding the Power of a Future Funded Ministry* (Columbia, SC: Envoy Financial, 2018), 10.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>196</sup> Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker: Praying Circles Around Your Biggest Dreams and Greatest Fears* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 43.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Sefer Ha-Aggadah, *The Book of Legends: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1992), 203.

<sup>199</sup> Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker*, 45.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

“We stand tallest and strongest on our knees.”<sup>201</sup> Prayer is the most powerful thing we can do. Dreaming dreams essentially clears people’s consciences, giving them the freedom to fulfill God’s will for their lives (Romans 14:1-4, 10-12).<sup>202</sup> Seniors need not be guilt-ridden at the end of their days on earth.

Can older adults experience longevity in life? Yes, they can pray for meaning and purpose in life, which can be accomplished by dreaming dreams. “May imagination overtake memory. May you die young at a ripe old age.”<sup>203</sup>

A third reason for addressing complacency within senior adults is gaining a new perspective on aging. Two contrasting views of aging define the problem. One is pessimistic. “Some see the retirement years as a long, dehumanizing, and depressing downhill slog through various ailments of body and mind, ending in death.”<sup>204</sup> The other view is more hopeful. Yes, aging leads to challenges and ultimately leads to death; however, “the last 30 years of one’s life can truly be the best, most productive, and most fulfilling years of a person’s life.”<sup>205</sup> While folks cannot choose how rapidly their bodies and minds deteriorate, they can decide how they respond to those deficiencies.

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<sup>201</sup> Charles F. Stanley, *30 Life Principles: A Study for Growing in Knowledge and Understanding of God* (Atlanta, GA: In Touch Ministries, 2008), 83.

<sup>202</sup> Erwin W. Lutzer, *The Power of a Clear Conscience: Let God Free You from Your Past* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2016), 10.

<sup>203</sup> Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker: Praying Circles Around Your Biggest Dreams and Greatest Fears* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 45.

<sup>204</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *The Retirement Reformation: Finding Freedom with Faith... A Better Way to Experience the Final (and Best) Decades of Your Life* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2019), 65.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

Today, people who live beyond sixty-five and older are generally healthier, wealthier, and even more active than previous generations of senior adults.<sup>206</sup> That thought illustrates how aging is changing. The stereotypes of aging as decline, disease, dependency, and dementia, must be replaced with encouraging views of aging, such as independence, activity, well-being, and service.<sup>207</sup> A new perspective must be adopted concerning senior adult ministries, especially one within the church.

A fourth reason apathy and indifference must be addressed is that old stereotypes must be addressed within the church, especially society. While churches place much energy in reaching the younger generations for the future's sake, they often overlook the spiritual development and full potential of equipping senior adults.<sup>208</sup> Not supporting the full development of this age range limits older people's full potential and the entire church.<sup>209</sup> Unfortunately, often older adults say, "I have done my part," or "It is time to get others (younger people) involved," or "I'm too old."<sup>210</sup> While it is good to encourage all leaders of all ages, it is important to desire the faith and wisdom of older adults who do not need to be underutilized. As Paul wrote in Galatians 3:26, 28, "For in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith... there is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (NRSV).

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<sup>206</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 27.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *The Graying of the Church: A Leader's Guide for Older-Adult Ministry in the United Methodist Church* (Montgomery, AL: Discipleship Resources, 2004), 44.

Most people do not view sixty-five as being old. “Age is no longer synonymous with death.”<sup>211</sup> Churches that recognize that fact will be more likely to incorporate God’s purposes in their seniors’ lives. This same author views this open-mindedness as an age of opportunity.<sup>212</sup> He writes, “The church is uniquely positioned to help older adults respond to the challenges of aging: to see the tremendous potentialities in lives of older adults for making the church and community better; and to assist older people as they experience new meaning and purpose in their later lives.”<sup>213</sup> Yes, the church has a vital role in optimizing lives.

Compare those thoughts to ageism, which is prevalent in society as well as in churches. Older adults are often viewed as dull, weak, and unproductive.<sup>214</sup> Ageism can be defined as systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people because of their age.<sup>215</sup> Ageist attitudes also exist in every aspect of culture. They perpetuate the myth that aging is the problem; however, the real problem is ageism in society.<sup>216</sup>

Another stereotype that must be addressed concerns an older congregation’s image of being perceived as outdated and closed-minded. Unfortunately, ageism is not only widespread in society, but it is also prevalent in churches. A church’s image, when perceived this way, hinders church growth.<sup>217</sup> Many younger trained seminary pastors have no background serving with

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<sup>211</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 18.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

senior adults. There are very few, if any, specific seminary classes offered in ministering to the elderly.<sup>218</sup> Besides, younger pastors often view older members as resistant to change or holding them back in church.<sup>219</sup> Old stereotypes lead many older adults to think less of themselves, causing them to believe they should “step aside” at church.

What is the practical response to overcoming issues of complacency within senior adults? The real issue is making disciples of all followers of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19, 20, NIV).<sup>220</sup> It is including older adults in the life of the church. These issues need to be addressed because they will encourage all older adults to maintain a sense of self-worth and dignity, involving them in service opportunities vital to their well-being.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> David P. Gallagher, *Senior Adult Ministry in the 21st Century: Step-By-Step Strategies for Reaching People Over 50* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2002).

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *The Graying of the Church: A Leader's Guide for Older-Adult Ministry in the United Methodist Church* (Montgomery, AL: Discipleship Resources, 2004), 44.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

The problem of complacency among senior adults in a local church was addressed in several ways. The first means was to identify project participants at the Judson Baptist Church. That list was compiled by determining the number of members who were sixty-five and above. The number was substantial, with three hundred fifty members. Then, recognizable church personnel were consulted, who, in turn, intentionally determined the inactive folks from the active ones. For this study, an inactive senior adult member attended worship and LIFE Groups less than twice a month, did not tithe, and did not participate in some ministry-related activity.

Once the number of inactive members was determined, a letter was mailed to each potential participant concerning their possible involvement in this pastor's school project. Sixty-six names were identified and sent a note concerning their possible participation. This letter is included in Appendix A. After two weeks of consideration, seven of that sixty-six chose to be involved in the study. They decided to participate in this project basically because of their love for the Lord, His church, and doctrinal students.

After the researcher had called other names from the senior adult inactive roll and some declined because of various reasons: being exposed to the COVID-19 virus, being short of time, and showing no interest in expressing their sentiments, a new strategy was implemented. Direction was sought by the Lord in prayer. God immediately gave this pastor a list of other inactive to active seniors who considered participating in this study because of their interaction with this minister and his love for older adults. These folks were then contacted, and several consented to the researcher's request to participate in the survey interview.

One source was extremely helpful in creating the survey instrument. It was discovered in reading Richard H. Gentzler's volume subtitled *Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults*. In Appendix C, Gentzler identified two types of surveys, namely Questionnaire and Interview. He defined the two types as: "1) Questionnaire – usually 'paper and pencil' instruments or online that the respondent completes; 2) Interview – usually completed by the interviewer based on what the respondent says."<sup>222</sup> Both types of surveys were utilized in gathering data, information, and opinions for this particular project. Gentzler's explanation of raising different questions such as Who, What, When, How, and Where were also helpful to the researcher in organizing his thoughts related to the survey.<sup>223</sup>

Several survey instruments in Gentzler's book were considered, but only one was used. It was Appendix F, "Sample-Older-Adult Survey 3."<sup>224</sup> Concerning using this survey, several suggestions were implemented. They include: "1) Contact the older person to be interviewed and establish a mutually agreed-upon day and time for the interview... 2) Upon arriving for the interview, identify yourself and briefly state the nature of your visit. 3) Give the person being interviewed a copy of (the) survey form, read each question aloud, and record the information on (the) form."<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 193.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 193-194.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

In Gentzler's book entitled *An Age of Opportunity*, he offered some helpful points in Appendix G – “Conducting an Older-Adult- Survey Interview.”<sup>226</sup> He encouraged researchers to design a survey form that gathered information concerning the needs and wants of senior adults at one's church.<sup>227</sup> Gentzler next offered some tips in conducting the survey interview. They consisted of: being prompt in visiting the survey participant, staying only forty-five minutes to an hour for the survey interview, and thanking the senior adult for their participation.<sup>228</sup> One more step was considered. A personal thank you letter was written to each participant.<sup>229</sup>

Once the survey interview process began, several issues were addressed. One involved the responses of the participants. What were they actually saying? Were their needs being met? Were prayer and faith an integral part of their relationship with Christ? Was there any inclination in returning to active discipleship?

In the preliminary responses to the survey interview process, similar answers were given. They all desired to be involved in the study; the ladies welcomed the opportunity to share their love for the Lord and His church. In addition, the initial group freely shared different aspects of their lives. The most popular part of their lives was their marriages or lack of one. One of the ladies interviewed had been single all of her life, while another individual had been divorced twice. All of the ladies chose as their current demographic, independent alone in their own home. Furthermore, all chose their status as either pursuing various interests or beginning to slow down in life. The group shared some exciting stories.

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<sup>226</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 207.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 209.

As far as a baseline for change within the senior adults, their responses to the attitude section, specifically the question, “What could your church offer to make your life better?” was the key. In all of the survey interviews conducted, the participants were appreciative of the many ways Judson Baptist had ministered to their needs. All shared appreciation for what the church had meant to them, but only two persons showed any inclination to become involved again in different church life aspects. The others either lived too far away from the church, experienced failing health, or suffered from lingering, hurtful memories from the past in the church. Prayer and faith were still integral ingredients of all the initial interviews; however, it was most evident in those who again desired to reconnect with the church. This fact was confirmed in the different conversations.

The researcher collected the data during the research process. The pastor met most senior adults in their respective homes, while some suggested the survey occur at church. During all of the interviews, the material was gathered in a one-on-one interview with a tape recorder. After the discussion ended, this minister listened to the tape recordings and wrote observations concerning every conversation. It was a rewarding experience.

### **Intervention Design**

While serving as the part-time Minister of Pastoral Care and Senior Adults at the Judson Baptist Church, this pastor began noticing a reluctance on behalf of some older adults in participating in the church’s ministry. Even some members of the Jewels Executive Committee witnessed that same trend too. That was when a team member suggested a possible evaluation of all Judson Jewel policies and procedures. All of these actions transpired before the onset of the

COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, the crisis has diminished to some extent, but obstacles remain in incorporating the membership, especially some of the older adults, into the church's life.

### Plan and Reasoning

The intervention design process was taken from Tim Sensing's volume subtitled *A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*. In this particular approach, Sensing used the analogy of a recipe. Items included in this plan consisted of:

- “The purpose and objectives of the project's intervention
- The tasks to be done
- The steps to be taken for each task
- The people involved...
- The places where activities will occur
- The timelines and durations of activities
- The ethical issues related to informed consent and confidentiality
- The resources required – Handouts...
- The types of data that will be collected
- The tools for gathering information needed – Recording equipment...
- Protocols for using tools (precise recipes)
- The analysis/evaluation procedures and methods required (e.g., coding of data).”<sup>230</sup>

All of these ingredients were discussed.

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<sup>230</sup> Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 66-67.

The intervention design addressed the problem that some senior adults had grown complacent in their walk with God at Judson Baptist. Some had decided to “retire” peacefully and accomplish nothing, which meant some older members had not planned for this retirement aspect. That is the impetus for this research project. The specific purpose of this DMIN research thesis intervention was to encourage all senior adults to become fully engaged in serving Christ. Once the project design had been implemented, the senior adults were encouraged to be faithful to the Lord Jesus. Their prayer life and faith walk may have been strengthened.

What are the tasks to be addressed related to the problem of complacency among senior adults? They include different actions. This researcher addressed the initial task by reviewing different books, articles, and other writings to know the extent of the concern. This research and the composition of two chapters plus the summary of a third one had been accomplished before the beginning of the DMIN 885 class, which began January 18, 2021. Specifically, chapters on introducing the study and examining the project’s conceptual framework had been written. In chapter one, entitled “Introduction,” the student’s ministry context had been researched. A thorough history of the Judson Baptist Church had been presented, along with a detailed explanation of the researcher’s current ministry at Judson had been shared. Other prominent aspects, including the problem presented, purpose statement, basic assumptions, definitions, limitations, delimitations, and thesis statement, has been delineated. Concerning the second chapter entitled “Conceptual Framework,” a literature review on the themes of retirement, motivation and church life, faith, and prayer has been researched. In contrast, theological foundations such as older-adult ministries, gift from God, rising above self by pursuing God, and finishing well, have been established. In addition, theoretical foundations, including researcher

meeting with individuals and a larger group of members, have been accomplished. This research occurred over a four-to-five-month period during the latter part of the year 2020.

What material was shared in these respective chapters? Chapter one answered the question of “What problem was being addressed?;” and then chapter two dealt with the question of “Why was this task being addressed?” The responses to these two questions led to chapter three, entitled “Methodology,” being composed. It answered the question of “How was this problem (of complacency among senior adults at Judson Baptist) being addressed?”

After these three questions have been answered, a consent form and a survey form were prepared. Sensing’s “Sample Consent Form for Interviews” helped compose this document.<sup>231</sup> The consent and survey forms were presented to the Institutional Review Board for certification. Instead of approving it as a research project, it was labeled as an educational project. This action was granted on Monday, January 18, 2021. See Appendix A for IRB approval. Three days later, on January 21, a formal letter was sent to the prospective senior adult candidates so they may be encouraged to activate their involvement in the church's life. Once the invitations were sent to sixty-six persons, two weeks were extended for the seniors’ participation. This action occurred between January 28 and February 11.

During the weeks of January 25-February 21, the researcher continued implementing the project. When participation was lacking, a courtesy telephone call was made to encourage their involvement. During that initial calling period, individuals were contacted to arrange home visits or share at the church. More interviews were scheduled. Several were conducted in respective homes of those survey interviews, while a few happened at the church facility. During each of these interviews, surveys were conducted while gathering other pertinent information.

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<sup>231</sup> Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 235-236.

Results have been analyzed. The survey's key question that serves as a baseline for change concerned the fourth question related to section four, entitled "Attitudes." It asked, "What would your church offer to make your life better?" The answer to this question determined the interviewee's satisfaction or dissatisfaction toward their church, their prayer life, and even their faith walk. Suppose the participants began intentionally sharing excuses or unintentionally giving signals of their lack of involvement. In that case, those senior adults lacked the motivation to engage in the church's life fully. Another indicator of their prayer life and faith walk having been strengthened during the interview process was a gesture of sincere appreciation shared with the researcher, such as a telephone call or an email related to the interview. This response was evidence of the interview encouraging the senior adult's walk with Christ.

From February 22-March 28, the researcher continued implementing the research process and sharing results. This student completed writing chapter three of the study entitled "Methodology." Several tasks ended, including calling the senior adults for their involvement and conducting the survey interviews. The tape recorder was used during the actual survey process. Once chapter three was rewritten, the minister began incorporating a report into chapter four entitled "Results." This action occurred the week of March 8-14. That report was then shared with the fifteen members of the Judson Jewels Executive Committee on Wednesdays, March 17 and 24, at the church. The sessions occurred in a large LIFE Group class for no more than one-and-a-half-hour sessions.

The first session answered the question as to why the Judson Jewels Executive Committee was involved. It began with the question, "Why are we here?" The leadership team was present so the researcher and the church family could meet its senior adults' needs. In light

of that objective, the pastor shared two goals. The initial goal was to energize the leadership team's commitment to prayer and faith during the two sessions. They would, once again, realize the importance of becoming more like Christ. The second goal was that these sessions would stimulate the Jewels leadership group's hearts and minds in discovering how to better minister to older people. It would renew their interest in meeting the needs of others. During the second session, the researcher shared a detailed report with the committee and asked them how the council wanted to proceed with the information. Did the leadership team need to implement any changes in ministry? While completing the paper's results section, the minister began writing the "Conclusion" for chapter five. The candidate then submitted chapter five after reexamining and resubmitting chapter four.

From March 29-April 30, the researcher completed several assignments. The student compiled the thesis project, bibliography, and appendices, which, in turn, were submitted. Once chapter five was written and returned to the candidate, the researcher incorporated feedback into that chapter and then resubmitted it. When all the mentor corrections were included, the faculty advisor sent the draft thesis to a professional for grammar and style editing. After several weeks, the candidate received the thesis project back from the editor and made the recommended changes. Once the thesis project was presented to the mentor for further consideration by Friday, April 30, the faculty supervisor evaluated whether the study was ready to defend. That knowledge was known by Sunday, May 9.

### Reaching Out to the Senior Adults

When potential candidates were granted permission for the research study, each participant was then contacted about the day and time for the conversation. Once an agreed time

was set, the researcher prepared for his visit. Upon arriving for the survey, the minister identified himself and the nature of his visit. Also, the consent form was thoroughly shared before permission was granted to continue the discussion. This action freed the researcher from any legal repercussions. Once permission had been granted to proceed, each senior adult was then given a copy of the consent form. This was when the tape recorder was turned on because it was when the actual interview survey began. As the researcher read the survey, notes were taken for each category. The following sections comprised the survey. They included: 1) Contact Information, 2) Life Story, 3) Current Demographics, and 4) Attitudes.<sup>232</sup> Once the survey interview had been completed, then the tape recorder was turned off. Confidentiality was stressed during the entire visit. At the end of each interview, a word of gratitude was expressed to every participant.

After the home or church visit, several things occurred. The student listened to the tape recording for accuracy in taking notes and making other observations. The interview was kept confidential and was used in coding a participant's answer. The recording remained safely secured in the pastor's church office. Next, a note of appreciation was written to each participant. It consisted of gratitude and thankfulness for involvement in the project. Lastly, a prayer time was offered to the Lord Jesus for His involvement in this ministry process. A moment of thanksgiving was expressed.

### **Implementation of the Intervention Design**

Once the surveys were completed, the researcher continued analyzing the results. This pastor evaluated all four sections of the survey forms, with particular attention given to section 4:

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<sup>232</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 203-206.

Attitudes. When trends were revealed, chapter four of the research study entitled “Results” was written. Once the initial compilation occurred, a report was shared with the Judson Jewels Executive Committee. That leadership team began meeting for two weeks on Wednesdays, March 17 and 24. The first session included a brief vignette from Bob Sorge’s *Secrets of the Secret Place: Keys to Igniting Your Personal Time with God* concerning the theme of walking daily with God taken from the life of Enoch in Genesis 5:21-24.<sup>233</sup> The initial meeting also consisted of answering the question “Why are we here?” concerning this researcher better meeting the senior adults' needs.

A brief description of three books by Bob Sorge, Richard Gentzler, and Mark Batterson on faith and prayer was shared. At the close of that initial meeting, the researcher’s general report was given to the core team for their evaluation. Questions were raised during the second session, and items were discussed concerning the information. At the end of this discussion, further changes to ministry were considered.

What were some of those possible changes? One concerned more congregational care ministry.<sup>234</sup> James 1:27 says, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and thoughtless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (NIV). “By caring for these powerless people, the church puts God’s word into practice. When we give with no hope of receiving in return, we show what it means to serve others.”<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Bob Sorge, *Secrets of the Secret Place: Igniting Your Personal Time with God* (Kansas City, MO: Oasis House, 2001), 194-196.

<sup>234</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 139.

<sup>235</sup> *The Life Application Bible, New International Version* (Wheaton, IL and Grand Rapids, MI: Tyndale House Publishers and Zondervan, 1991), 2246.

Three specific congregational care ministry areas can be implemented: Congregational Care Giver Support Group Ministry, Adult Day-Care Ministry, and Elder Abuse Awareness and Response Ministry.<sup>236</sup> Congregational Care Giver Support Group Ministry helps primary caregivers provide loving care for frail and dependent older adults. Adult Day-Care Ministry assists caregivers in a community, while Elder Abuse Awareness and Response Ministry leads churches to prevent elder abuse. These possible changes to seniors' ministry could alleviate much strife and hardship in their homes.

Additional ideas for intentional ministry were also considered. They consisted of 1) using older adults in the planning process; 2) continuing to study the needs of senior adults; 3) remembering older adults are all different; 4) surveying to detect seniors' interests; 5) doing some networking; 6) developing programs that meet the needs of various older adults; 7) coordinating, planning, and carrying out different activities; 8) obtaining basic health information, including diet restrictions, medication, physicians' and family members' phone numbers, and any activity constraints; 9) meeting regularly to access needs; and 10) staying informed about issues related to older adults.<sup>237</sup> The thought was that all seniors are different, and one ministry plan does not meet all needs. That was why needs have to be identified and ministry planned accordingly. A few "best practices" for creating intentional ministry by, with, and for older adults include: 1) Book Club; 2) C.O.A.P. – Children of Aging Parents; 3) Companion Services; 4) Fraud and Scam Awareness; 5) Grand Friends; 6) Intergenerational

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<sup>236</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 140-153.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-161.

Retreat; 7) Senior Crisis Teams; 8) Senior Technology Training Minister; 9) Service Provider Referral List; and 10) Transportation Ministry.<sup>238</sup> All of these ministries were viable options.

### Survey Interview

Two sources were consulted concerning the survey interview process. One was Richard Gentzler's book subtitled *Intentional By, With, and For Older Adults*. The second one was Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom's volume entitled *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry*. Both assisted in composing the survey and in organizing the interview. Both contributed significantly to the researcher's study project.

The survey consisted of four sections: contact information, life story, current demographics, and attitude.<sup>239</sup> The contact information was essential to the survey to substantiate the identity of the interviewee. Age was one question that could have created difficulty. Gender and race were also indicated. Section two dealt with a person's life story. The member was invited to share any aspect of their life. In all of the interviews, marriage (or lack of one), children, family, occupations, hobbies, and even interests were discussed. Section three concerned current demographics. What was their present living arrangement, and how would they describe their current mobility status and share why? All of the participants were forthright in sharing their true feelings. The fourth section dealt with attitudes. What could the Judson Baptist Church do to make a senior's life better? Was the church family missing a need? This section and post-interview comments and observations were critical to determining any baseline changes related to complacency among some senior adults at the church.

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<sup>238</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 161-175.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 203-206.

The interview protocol consisted of Whitney and Trosten-Bloom's comprehensive guide, which includes six parts. They consist of:

1. "An introduction that sets the stage for the interview and includes an overview of the inquiry process, significance of the interview, and details about confidentiality and how the data will be utilized in the future.
2. Stage-setting questions that build rapport.
3. Topic questions that explore in-depth the subject at hand.
4. Concluding questions that wrap up the interview. For example, 'Anything you want to add?' 'What should I have asked you that I did not think to ask?'
5. Summary sheets that allow you to collect the interview data. They serve two purposes. First, they function as a repository for the best stories, quotes, and ideas. Second, they provide space for reflection, where initial interpretations are recorded.
6. Quick action sheets to collect items that require immediate action or attention. For example, changes that need to be made in the interview protocol, future questions to ask, or items needing attention before the next section."<sup>240</sup>

"Various forms of question are elaborated as:

Backward questions generally come first. They invite us to remember high point experiences – times when we have experienced the Affirmative Topic to be most alive and most present... inward questions generally follow backward questions. They refer back to the high point experiences, and to extrapolate learnings about their root causes of success... Forward

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<sup>240</sup> Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom, *The Power of Appreciative Inquire: A Practical Guide to Positive Change* (San Francisco: Barrett-Koehler, 2003), 156-157.

questions generally come last. At their best, they solicit our hopes, dreams, and inspirations. They encourage us to imagine futures in which the Affirmative Topic is the best it can possibly be... Transition questions are often embedded within the forward questions. They are retrospective reflections from the imagined future state – an opportunity for the interviewee to consider first steps and transitions from the current reality to the imagined future.”<sup>241</sup> All of this material was advantageous in the survey interview process.

### Explanation and Book Reviews

When the researcher met with the Judson Jewels Executive Committee, a thorough explanation of the research project was addressed. It started with a brief vignette from Bob Sorge’s *Secrets of the Secret Place: Keys to Igniting Your Personal Time with God* taken from the life of Enoch in Genesis 5:21-24.<sup>242</sup> No, Enoch was not the first man to call upon the name of the Lord (Genesis 4:26). “(He) was the first man to uncover the true delight of walking with God... He pressed into God until he learned how to commune with God through every facet of life.”<sup>243</sup> Enoch, along with Noah, Abraham, Moses, Daniel, and even the Lord Jesus, all relied totally upon their God.

The explanation continued with Bruce Bruinsma’s thought of moving beyond one’s self.<sup>244</sup> One of the best ways to discover renewed purpose and meaning in life was to move

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<sup>241</sup> Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom, *The Power of Appreciative Inquire: A Practical Guide to Positive Change* (San Francisco: Barrett-Koehler, 2003), 152-153.

<sup>242</sup> Bob Sorge, *Secrets of the Secret Place: Igniting Your Personal Time with God* (Kansas City, MO: Oasis House, 2001), 195-197.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>244</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *The Retirement Reformation: Finding Freedom with Faith... A Better Way to Experience the Final (and Best) Decades of Your Life* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2019), 143.

beyond one's destiny and discover others. "Instead of thinking about retirement, solely in terms of 'me' or 'us,' start considering one's phase of life as an opportunity to give more attention to 'them' and 'these.'"<sup>245</sup> That mindset encouraged seniors to look beyond themselves and become more intentional in serving the Lord Jesus Christ. That reasoning was the sole purpose for conducting this research project.

Once a thorough explanation and reasoning for the study had been given, brief excerpts from three different volumes were shared. The first book was by Bob Sorge on the theme of prayer. This was a small volume the Judson fellowship read as a church family during a spiritual emphasis in February 2020. The book was read as a means to invoke a consistent prayer life in believers' lives. *20 Ways to a Consistent Prayer Life* dealt with several key phrases. They included: "Desire: Jesus is motivating believers with a strong desire to pray; Decide: Say 'Yes' to Jesus' call, to pray twenty minutes a day, for the next twenty days; Reach: Refuse to allow any past failure to derail a person; Fight: Demonize every distraction to prayer. This is war!; Place: Withdraw to the same place every day for prayer; Clock: Keep to the time of day when you're at your best; Repent: Repent as needed; Cleanse: Be washed with Christ's blood and enter with confidence into your Father's arms; Thanks: Make thanksgiving and praise your opener; #PrayRead: Pray the scriptures as you read them; Psalms: Find vocabulary for prayer in the Psalms; Listen: Yes, talk; but even better, listen; Journal: Record and review everything noteworthy that comes to mind; Obey: Resolve to obey every word He speaks through Scripture; Love: Tell Him, over and over, that you're doing it all for love; Fast: Fast occasionally; List: Use a prayer request list for a year to see if it helps you; Routine: Arrange the elements of your

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<sup>245</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *The Retirement Reformation: Finding Freedom with Faith... A Better Way to Experience the Final (and Best) Decades of Your Life* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2019), 143.

prayer routine into a set order and follow that format daily; Endure: Always keep sowing to the secret place, even when not inspired, knowing you'll eventually reap a harvest; and Grow: Receive grace to keep growing in prayer all your days. There's more!"<sup>246</sup>

The second volume that was addressed was Richard Gentzler's book on opportunity in senior adult ministry. Specifically, the question of "what does 'aging faithfully' mean?"<sup>247</sup> was mentioned. According to the author, it alluded to several things. It meant: "To see and know that all of life – at every age and stage – is a gift from a loving, creator God."<sup>248</sup> Isaiah 46:4 says, "Even to your old age and gray hairs I am He, I am He who will sustain you. I have made you, and I will carry you; I will sustain you, and I will rescue you" (NIV). "To age faithfully is to trust the promises of God."<sup>249</sup> God's gift of long life is an opportunity to perfect one's relationship with Him. "To age faithfully is to stand against the cultural prejudice of growing old."<sup>250</sup> Aging faithfully discounts the presupposition that young is beautiful and old is ugly. "To age faithfully means that we develop a new understanding of self-worth."<sup>251</sup> Worth is not determined by productivity but by value in being loved by God. "To age faithfully is to be a part of a congregation that knows that spiritual growth is possible and relevant for older adults."<sup>252</sup> Psalm 92:12, 14 says, "The righteous will flourish like a palm tree; they will grow like a cedar of

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<sup>246</sup> Bob Sorge, *Secrets of the Secret Place: Igniting Your Personal Time with God* (Kansas City, MO: Oasis House, 2001), 89-90.

<sup>247</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 70.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

Lebanon; ...They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green” (NIV). “Finally, to age faithfully means to practice the spiritual disciplines.”<sup>253</sup> It refers to praying, reading the scriptures, participating in the ordinances, sharing one’s testimony, and meeting others' needs. All of these points were discussed.

The third volume was briefly shared, and that was Mark Batterson’s *Praying Circles Around Your Biggest Dreams and Greatest Fears*. The thought of drawing prayer circles around oneself began with discerning what God desires and what He wills.<sup>254</sup> It is not getting what people want. That is not the goal of praying circles. “The goal is glorifying God by drawing circles around the promises, miracles, and dreams He wants for you.”<sup>255</sup>

Batterson perfectly illustrated this theme in *The Circle Maker* Epilogue. He recalled the story of an evangelist named Rodney “Gypsy” Smith crisscrossing the Atlantic Ocean forty-five times, preaching the gospel to millions.<sup>256</sup> What was his secret? It was a private prayer. In revealing his secret to a delegation of revival seekers, Gypsy said, “Kneel down in the middle of the floor (in your room at home) and with a piece of chalk draw a circle around yourself. There, on your knees, pray fervently and brokenly that God would start a revival within that chalk circle.”<sup>257</sup> That kind of prayer glorifies God.

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<sup>253</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 73.

<sup>254</sup> Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker: Praying Circles Around Your Biggest Dreams and Greatest Fears* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 205.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

Once the study’s explanation was shared, and excerpts from key volumes were mentioned, the executive committee then possessed a better understanding of the research project. The group hopefully acquired more empathy for all of their peers. The team also understood the researcher’s heart in desiring to incorporate all senior adults into the church’s ministry. This explanation and brief review occurred in one setting in a large room at the church.

### Reviewing Local Church Ministry

Once an explanation of the research project was given, books on prayer and faith were reviewed, and the general report was shown to the Judson Jewels Executive Committee, then a time of evaluation and reviewing local church ministry occurred. The following questions assisted the core team in evaluating the overall ministry by, with, and for older adults.<sup>258</sup> They included such thoughts as: Is it intentional?<sup>259</sup> Does the ministry meet its constituents’ needs? “Does it empower older adults for life in ministry?”<sup>260</sup> If they were equipped, they would grow to understand what it means to live a Christian life. “Is the church free of barriers for all participants?”<sup>261</sup> Have all physical, psychological, social, and economic barriers been removed? “Does the church reach out to senior adults?”<sup>262</sup> Are other people incorporated into the fellowship? “Does the ministry provide opportunities for continuous and personal growth?”<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 118.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 120.

Are classes, seminars, workshops, and support groups available to cope with life transitions and enhance learning skills? “Are many of the church’s programs intergenerational?”<sup>264</sup> Do they have opportunities of sharing their faith with all ages? Intentional ministry by, with, and for older adults in a local church is a challenging and rewarding undertaking.

Once these issues were addressed, the Jewels core team hopefully understood highlighting prayer and faith played a significant role in incorporating non-active senior adults into active and more involved older adults. It took an action-oriented approach to Scripture. Peter Marshall, the former chaplain of the United States Senate, once prayed:

“I wonder what would happen if we all agreed to read one of the Gospels until we come to a place that told us to do something, then went out to do it, and only after we had done it... began reading again?

There are aspects of the Gospel that are puzzling and difficult to understand. But our problems are not centered around the things we don’t understand, but rather in the things we do understand, the things we could not possibly misunderstand.

This, after all, is but an illustration of the fact that our problems are not so much that we don’t know what we should do.

We know perfectly well... but we don’t want to do it.”<sup>265</sup>

Senior adults must continue reaching out to their own peer group so God’s church can be renewed and strengthened.

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<sup>264</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 121.

<sup>265</sup> Peter Marshall, *Mr. Jones, Meets the Master: Sermons and Prayers of Peter Marshall* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1988), 143-144.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

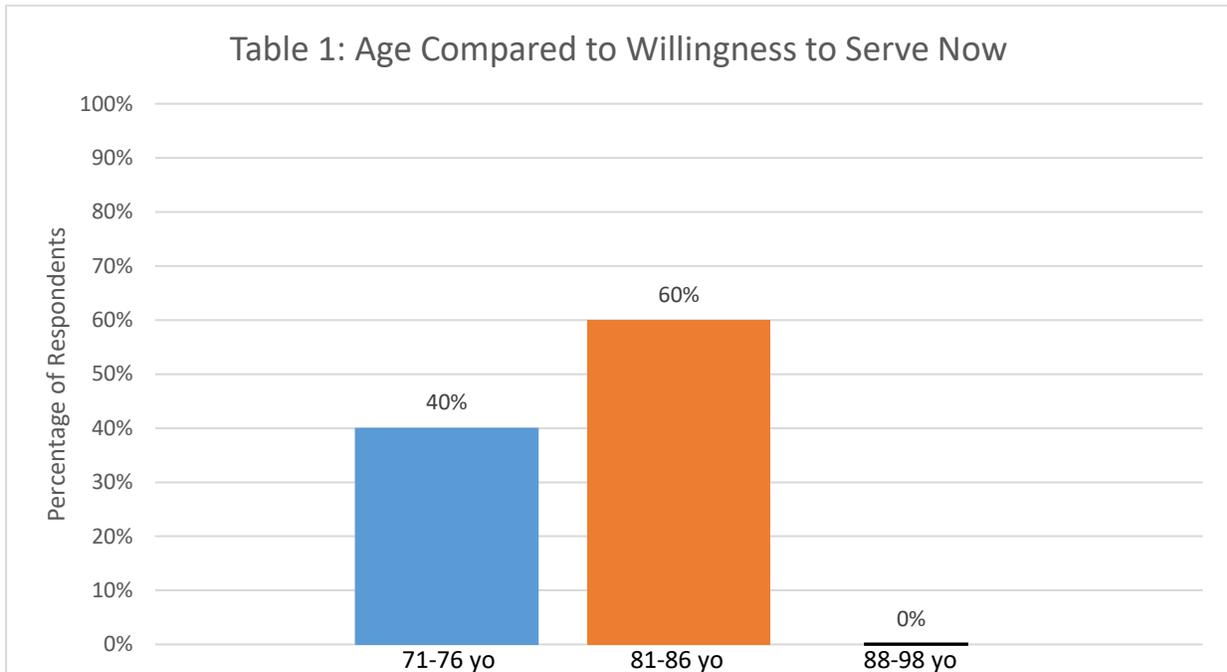
The results of the intervention plan were similar to what the researcher had anticipated. Two different approaches for analyzing the data were implemented. One was an analysis of key issues and themes, while the second approach dealt with questions and how participants responded to different aspects of life. Next, observations and discoveries were offered concerning the results; and then material responses were shared related to meetings with the Judson Jewels Executive Committee.

### **Key Issues and Themes**

Once the survey interview process had ended and results had been tabulated, one issue from the participants' response had to be addressed. It involved the response of the participants. 1) What were they actually saying? Did their words match their motives? 2) Were their needs being met? Was the church genuinely caring for them? 3) Was prayer and faith an integral part of their relationship with Christ? Were they reliant upon the Lord? 4) Was there an inclination to return to active discipleship? Were there any indicators of their willingness to reconnect with the Judson Church? All of these questions were addressed.

In conducting the survey interviews with fifteen members, several issues and themes were discovered about overcoming senior adults' complacency. They included: age compared to the willingness to serve now; willing to serve versus no criticism; and willingness to serve compared to life status. The first theme compared the participants' age in comparison to their willingness to serve within Judson Church now. In Table 1, three different age ranges: 71-76, 81-

86, and 88-98, with five other individuals in each category, were graphed. They were measured with their willingness to serve in ministry concerning their age compared to their willingness to serve at church now.



In the 71-76 category, two of the five participants indicated a willingness to serve now, while the other said that they could not minister at this particular time for different reasons. The two who would serve now included one who was already in ministry, with the second one getting married and being available for service soon. The other three in this section who said they could not serve in ministry were either taking care of their ailing husbands or beginning to suffer from a significant disease. Only forty percent of the first category (ages 71-76) were in a position to serve now.

In the 81-86 grouping, three of the five interviewees indicated a desire to serve now, while the other two stated an unwillingness to minister at this point in life. The three who could serve now commented on not accomplishing what they used to do; however, they desired to continue fulfilling God’s purpose for their lives within their church family. The two who

indicated they could not serve now lived too far from church or cared for family. That meant sixty percent of this second category (ages 81-86) could begin serving now.

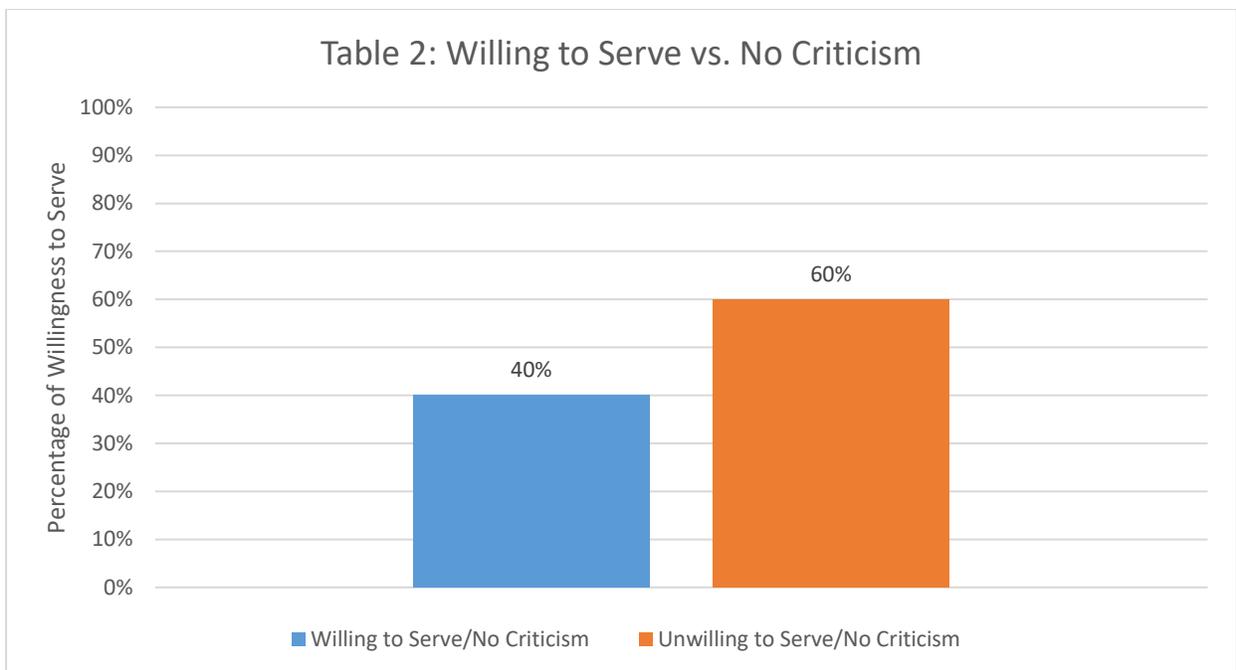
In the 88-98 age range, none of the five interviewees possessed a desire now to serve within the Judson Baptist Church. Various reasons were offered. One included living too far from the church, while a second one was not physically able. The other three shared a willingness to remain active in life, a healthy desire to continue living life to the fullest, but just not at the church. In summary, fifteen of these members still love the Lord and want to serve Him, but only thirty-three percent of them possessed the physical or mental ability to minister at the Judson Church.

A side note related to seniors' willingness to serve now was how all the older adults had endured hardships during the last several years of life. They all indicated enduring traumatic events during recent days. Would any of the fifteen interviewees be returning to church after enduring many grievances in life? Of those who had suffered from difficult circumstances years earlier and even now, five shared a willingness to return to church.

The researcher thoroughly enjoyed listening to the Lord's leadership in these five people's lives. In one person's pilgrimage, she related how God had led her through two divorces and much mental anguish. This lady expressed her newfound closeness to the Lord and how she was eager to return to Judson and assist in different ways. The following two interviewees expressed a healthy desire to return to church after COVID-19 restrictions had been lifted and once they were married. Both expressed gladness over returning to church after being a widow for twelve years and a widower for eighteen years. The fourth participant shared a loving story of her husband dying after sixty-three years of marriage. The lady mentioned how much the church had accomplished for her; so, she desired to continue serving the Lord through His fellowship.

The fifth person had endured many hardships, including her husband's death, confusion within her immediate family, and even personal health issues. These concerns did not keep her from desiring to begin assisting in the seniors' ministry-related projects benefitting all ages. These five individuals will continue ministering at the Judson Church as long as the Lord desires.

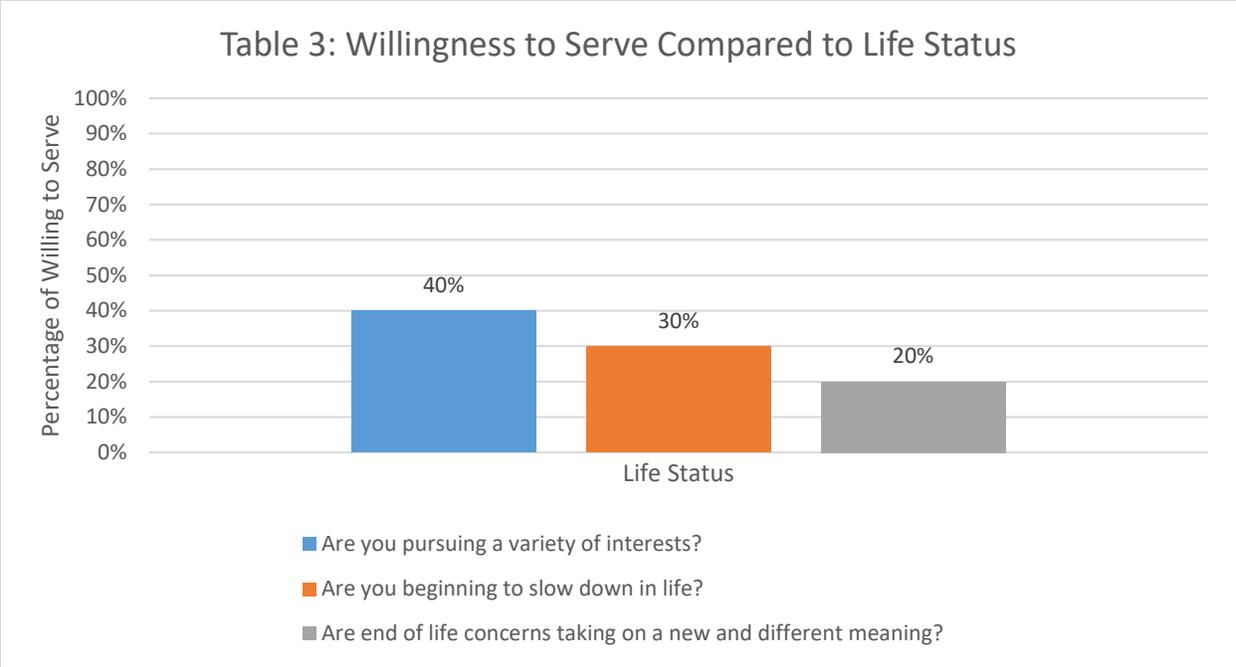
The second theme expressed in the survey interview was the seniors' willingness to serve at the church versus no criticisms shared by them related to the fellowship. Of the fifteen interviewees, ten shared no negative comments toward the church, while the other five shared criticisms toward the fellowship. In Table 2, the ten participants willing to serve with no disdain for the church are listed in one of two columns. The first column indicated older adults with a willingness to serve with no criticism; the second column included senior adults with an unwillingness to serve with no criticism. Of the ten interviewees who shared no criticism of the church, only four (40%) of them expressed a desire to serve at church.



Of these ten participants, four seniors were in the colored column entitled "Willing to Serve/No Criticism." In contrast, six senior adults were included in the colored column named

“Unwilling to Serve/No Criticism.” The first person in the willing to serve category was excited to minister in any area of the church. She was complimentary of Judson Baptist. The second individual raised the question, “What is the church not doing now?” He was grateful for everything the church family had meant to him and how he would continue serving the Lord through his body for the rest of his life. The third person shared a moving testimony about how much the church, specifically one minister, had meant to her. She noted how she is growing weaker every day; however, the lady desires to continue extending God’s kingdom through the church family. The fourth individual was thankful for her fellowship in ministering to her needs. This lady related how she sensed she still possessed ten more years of life, and she desired to use every moment of it for God’s glory. In summary, four (40%) of those ten participants were “Willing to Serve/No Criticism” as opposed to six (60%) of those ten interviewees who were “Unwilling to Serve/No Criticism.”

The third theme expressed in this survey interview was the seniors’ willingness to serve compared to their life status. In Appendix A, a survey interview form was included. Under section three, entitled “Current Demographics,” three questions were asked concerning their current status. They included: “Are you pursuing a variety of interests?;” “Are you beginning to slow down?;” and “Are end of life concerns taking on a new and different urgency?” Each one of these questions was listed in one of three columns on the graph. The participants were asked to check all of the three responses that applied to their individual lives. The total responses were then compared with the five seniors who were willing to serve. Percentages were close for each one of the categories.



Of the five interviewees who desire to keep serving the Lord at Judson Baptist, forty percent of them chose column one, referring to pursuing various interests within or outside the church. One of those four only selected the first category, while two others chose the first category along with either the second thirty percent or third column twenty percent. A fourth person chose only the second question, “Are you beginning to slow down in life?” A fifth individual chose all three of the statements.

Life status seems to make a difference in seniors continuing to serve the Lord. Why? Because 80% of the five willing to serve chose to share they were pursuing various interests. Life interests seemed to correlate to active ministry within the church.

**Survey Questions**

The actual survey interviews consisted of four sections. They included: “Section 1: Contact Information; Section 2: Life Story; Section 3: Current Demographics; and Section 4:

Attitudes.”<sup>266</sup> All four sections are carefully explained and then analyzed. Each of the categories shared some interesting thoughts.

Concerning Section 1: Contact Information, fifteen senior adults, sixty-five years of age and up, and fifteen members of Judson Baptist Church were interviewed. Seven of the fifteen participants possessed active email addresses. The age range of the group varied from seventy-one to ninety-eight years of age. One married couple comprised the process while two other persons were soon married.

Concerning Section 2: Life Story, a variety of information was shared. They pertained to different themes such as marriage, singleness, family, occupation, careers, church involvement, and life goals. All but one of the fifteen participants had been married, were married, or were pursuing marriage. One participant had been married many years before her husband died. Only one person declared herself as single. She was proud of her lifestyle. Of those interviewed, two never had any children, while most shared about their grandchildren and even their great-grandchildren. Several careers were involved, which included: homemakers, clerks, associate managers, teachers, directors, beautician, bricklayer, and a physician. All were Christians and had been involved in serving within a local church. Some were inactive in the church for different reasons, while others were waiting for the church family to resume its regular schedule because of the recent pandemic. Most of the participants possessed future goals; others seemed to be waiting for the Lord to call them home to heaven. They had made none or very few retirement plans. The researcher encouraged all the interviewees to realize God still had a plan, a purpose for their lives, or he would have already called them home to heaven.

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<sup>266</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 203-206.

Section 3: Current Demographics – 5. Living Arrangement, the group was split into several categories. The most popular choice was “Independent Alone in Own Home.” Most of these ladies had been cared for by their husbands or their families, and they lived comfortable lives. All of them expressed a great support system. The second choice was a tie between “Living with Another Person in the Home” and “Other.” Two ladies lived with other persons in their respective homes (one was a special arrangement), while one married couple lived in their own home with their grandson. The fourth choice was “Independent with Spouse/Partner in Own Home.” A married lady was taking care of her ailing husband. The demographics were similar for all the participants.

Under Section 3: Current Demographics – 6. Status, all three categories were checked. Concerning the initial question, “Are you pursuing a variety of interests?” only one person solely checked that category. Even though she had experienced many problems in her life, she was excited about her future. Nine other members checked that first question about one or both of the second and third questions, which asked, “Are you beginning to slow down in life?” and “Are end of life concerns taking on a new and different urgency?” Only one person who chose questions one and two said, “End of life does not concern her.” She realized her future was bright. Only one person solely chose the second question of slowing down in life. Her husband’s death had taken a physical toll on her. Five of the fifteen respondents checked question three concerning end-of-life concerns related to one of the other two questions. Most of them shared how their failing health had already begun to diminish their lives. None of the participants were hesitant to share about their current status in life.

Concerning Section 4: Attitudes, all of the interviewees were honest in sharing their convictions. All but three of the participants were overly complimentary of how the church had

made their lives better and anticipated the same response in the future. One lady said, “Keep doing what you are doing.” Another person shared how the church had done so much for her. She mentioned one personal experience which thrilled this researcher’s heart. A third person shared candidly how “the church cares about individuals. If you need something, call the church office. They will help you.” Another individual raised the question, “What is the church not doing now?” Even though this person was frustrated concerning the lack of church activities during recent days, he was still complimentary of its ministry.

Next, the married couple openly conveyed their unwavering support for the church. They appreciated the ministry of Judson Baptist. Both affirmed they were “blessed to be a part of a healthy, thriving church family.” They kept saying they were “so blessed” to be a part of a caring, loving group of people.

The couple also related a story as to how they first came to Judson Baptist. The wife described when residing in a neighboring city of asking a minister to recommend a solid, strong Southern Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee. The pastor gave several choices to this couple; however, the minister made only one recommendation, and it happened to be Judson Baptist Church, 4900 Franklin Pike, Nashville. When the couple first met the soon-to-be pastor, a love relationship developed, and they continue to be close friends even today.

Another lady shared an interesting story related to the church’s ministry. She was very complimentary of how the church had met her needs. She dearly loves her church family, and yet she seemed despondent of the fact she “couldn’t do the things she used to do.” She did not know how she could ever serve again at church.

Another person indicated a positive attitude toward the church while she lived in its vicinity. She loved the people and was very complimentary of the church’s ministry. When she

moved to another part of town, the church's ministry almost ceased because of her desire to find another fellowship closer to her new home. Then the pandemic struck, and she has been isolated from the church. That is where a few people from Judson have reached out to this lady and continued to minister to this dear one's needs.

A third person was complementary of the church's history and its present ministry. This lady related how her young daughter was ill and almost died, and the pastor and church family diligently ministered to their needs. She also expressed much love for several previous ministers; however, the older adult shared some disdain for the church's support when it failed to minister to her family when her husband died. The lady was not complimentary of the church's ministry then, but she remains content with it now.

### **Observations and Discoveries**

In summarizing these interviewees, several observations can be made. The Judson Baptist Church has accomplished a noteworthy record in ministering to the needs of its senior adults. Lives have been touched; needs have been met; however, mistakes have been made. Some attitudes, stereotypes possibly exist which need to be addressed. One of them is ageism, which implies there is no longer a place of service for older adults at church. Also, LIFE Group follow-through must be administered to all members. By LIFE Group follow-through, the researcher means every class must care for its entire role of members, whether active or inactive. All members must be contacted at least once every two to three weeks to meet their needs. Furthermore, forgiveness must be offered to all of the church family regardless of circumstances.

A second observation was made concerning the survey interview process. All fifteen participants shared positive things related to the church family, especially the older adults

between the ages of 88-98. While no church is perfect, Judson Baptist should be considered healthy. It is not only beneficial as it relates to senior adult ministry but also for other reasons. This church also strives to minister to all age groups and show personal interest to its members. It is also a healthy fellowship because it seeks to reach and disciple people for Christ and to lead individuals to worship God with all of their hearts and minds. Some of the older people are transitioning from a somewhat complacent group to a more active group of disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ.

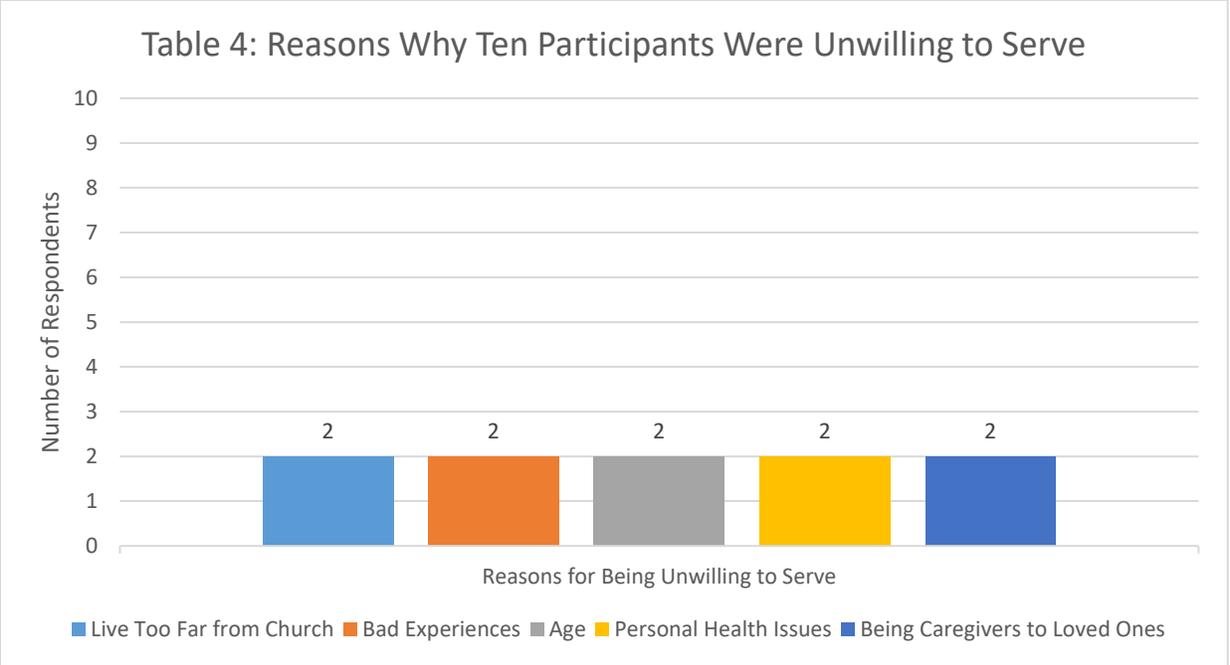
A third observation was that when the researcher showed compassion during the survey interviews, that scenario translated into their sharing heartfelt prayer concerns. Seven of the participants expressed definite prayer needs. They mentioned problems about love being demonstrated to them. All ages seemed to recognize the researcher's passion and concern for them.

Church members were not interested in how much their ministers knew but how much they cared. Older adults are much like children and teenagers who spell the word "love" "t-i-m-e" (time). They desire time with someone who genuinely cares for them, which often reconnects them to the church family. As a result of this reconnection, their prayer lives and faith walk seem to be strengthened.

All of their testimonies were moving. The first person shared her turbulent past and how the Lord led her through all those difficult moments. Even though the lady is still a member of Judson Baptist Church, she is presently feeling led to start a new Couple's Class at a neighboring fellowship. The second person shared a deep concern for a family member. She asked for prayer for her loved one's physical needs. The third individual shared a revelation of a relative's problem with law enforcement. The lady almost wept about sharing the struggle. The fourth

person mentioned another family problem. It involved some folks close to her. The fifth and sixth individuals shared a joint need concerning the husband's deteriorating health. The researcher urged them to take a day at a time and to continue their walk with God. The seventh interviewee addressed the concern of having to rely upon family for transportation. She knew why her car had been taken away; however, she still regretted the decision. The researcher often thinks of these special prayer requests.

Several discoveries have arisen from this research study project. All of the participants have fully invested in the church's life and will continue to do so. Although not all are active, they find other ways of fulfilling their gifts and talents for God's glory. All were encouraged to continue their prayer lives and faith walk with God. They are striving to focus their attention on the Lord. Another observation is that, of these participants, ten are unlikely to come back to the church at present. It is not because of their lack of faith or prayer walk; all of them genuinely love the Lord and anticipate the joys of heaven. It is due to extenuating circumstances such as living too far from Judson Baptist, bad experiences, age, personal health issues, and being caregivers to loved ones. The ten who indicated an unwillingness to serve had five different reasons for this decision. These responses were evenly split between the five reasons (two each).



Five respondents were not shown on the graph because they have indicated an interest in resuming active discipleship at church. Their interest has been demonstrated by their refusal to offer any excuses for not attending church. During the interview process, all five signaled an interest in returning to Judson Baptist. That is the criteria whereby this researcher has recognized prayer life and faith walk have been strengthened.

**Responses**

When the pastor met with the Judson Jewels Executive Committee, a thorough explanation of the research project was addressed. It began with offering a brief vignette from Bob Sorge’s *Secrets of the Secret Place* concerning the theme of walking daily with God taken from the life of Enoch in Genesis 5:21-24. As Bob Sorge wrote, “Enoch was the first man to uncover the true delight of walking with God. He found something even Adam didn’t

experience.”<sup>267</sup> Yes, Adam and Eve had a relationship with God that found them “walking in the garden of the cool of the day” (Genesis 3:8, NIV). Unlike Adam, Enoch “pressed into God until he learned how to commune with God through every facet of life.”<sup>268</sup> Prayer was then offered, asking the Lord's guidance in sharing the presentation of “Reincorporating Senior Adults into the Life of a Local Church.” After leading a corporate prayer, the researcher began sharing key concepts, such as 1) The Statement of the Problem of how “The (concern) is that some senior adults have grown complacent in their walk with God at Judson Baptist;” 2) the Purpose Statement of how “The purpose of this DMIN research thesis is to encourage all senior adults to become fully engaged in serving Christ;” and 3) the Thesis Statement of how “If senior adults continue to serve the Lord faithfully, then their prayer life and faith walk may improve.” These key concepts were discussed concerning Bruce Bruinsma’s thought of moving beyond oneself.<sup>269</sup> One of the best ways to encourage senior adults to discover renewed purpose and meaning in life was by sharing how they moved beyond their destinies to discover others. Instead of thinking of retirement in terms of “me” or “us,” the leadership team was challenged to give more attention to “them” and “these.”

Once a thorough explanation and reasoning for the study were offered, brief excerpts from three different volumes were shared. The first book was by Bob Sorge on the theme of prayer entitled *Reset: 20 Ways to a Consistent Prayer Life*. The Jewels Executive Committee members had previously been assigned to read it before the first session began. All twenty

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<sup>267</sup> Bob Sorge, *Secrets of the Secret Place: Igniting Your Personal Time with God* (Kansas City, MO: Oasis House, 2001), 195.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *The Retirement Reformation: Finding Freedom with Faith... A Better Way to Experience the Final (and Best) Decades of Your Life* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2019), 213.

chapters were discussed with an emphasis on section eight, entitled “Cleanse.” The theme of that chapter was how Christians must “Be washed with Christ’s blood and enter with confidence into your Father’s arms.”<sup>270</sup> Scriptures such as Revelation 21:10-11, Psalm 51:7, and Exodus 12:22 were referred to as possessing great boldness in drawing near to God every day.

The second volume addressed with the Executive Committee was Richard Gentzler’s book *An Age of Opportunity* in encouraging all aspects of senior adult ministry. Specifically, the question of “What does ‘aging faithfully’ mean?” was addressed.<sup>271</sup> Several answers were discussed. They included: “1) To age faithfully is to see and know that all of life – at every age and stage – is a gift from a loving, creator God; 2) To age faithfully is to trust the promises of God; 3) To age faithfully is to stand against the cultural prejudices about growing old; 4) To age faithfully means that we develop a new understanding of self-worth; 5) To age faithfully is to be part of a congregation that knows that spiritual growth is possible and relevant for older adults; and 6) To age faithfully means to practice the spiritual disciplines.”<sup>272</sup> As the author concluded, “Perhaps the purpose of long life is to show that life has value in itself and to share faith, knowledge, wisdom, and love with succeeding generations. Church leaders play a vital role in helping older adults realize this spiritual journey.”<sup>273</sup> The leadership team agreed with that assessment.

The third volume briefly shared was Mark Batterson’s *The Circle Maker: Praying Circles Around Your Biggest Dreams and Greatest Fears*. The story of Honi, the Circle Maker,

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<sup>270</sup> Bob Sorge, *Reset: 20 Ways to a Consistent Prayer Life* (Grandview, MO: Oasis House, 2018), 89.

<sup>271</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 70.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-73.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

drawing his circle in the sand in the first century B.C. was shared. It became known as “one of the most significant prayers in the history of Israel... the legend of Honi, the Circle Maker, stands forever as a testament of the power of a single prayer to change the course of history.”<sup>274</sup> The goal of drawing prayer circles is not getting what one wants but glorifying God around the promises, miracles, and dreams he desires for His people.<sup>275</sup> There must be a priority of prayer. As Charles Stanley points out, “The goal of prayer is not to get God to do what you want but to align your desires and requests with His will.”<sup>276</sup>

Once the study’s explanation was shared, the Executive Committed seemed to understand the research project better. They voiced more empathy for all of their peers. In addition, they better understood the researcher’s motives and rationale for undertaking this study. The committee seemed to be thankful for the timeliness of the project.

When an explanation of the project was given, the importance of prayer and faith was emphasized. A general report was extended to the Judson Jewels Executive Committee, then the second session of evaluating and reviewing local church ministry occurred. The following questions were presented to begin a discussion concerning the current senior adult ministry. They included: “Is it intentional?” “Does it empower all older adults for a life in ministry?” “Is the church free of barriers for all participants?” “Does the church reach out to older adults?” “Does the ministry provide opportunities for continuous spiritual growth?” “Are opportunities provided

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<sup>274</sup> Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker: Praying Circles Around Your Biggest Dreams and Greatest Fears* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 13.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>276</sup> Charles F. Stanley, “The Priority of Prayer,” *In Touch* (March 2021): 26, *In Touch Ministries*.

for companionship and socialization?” “Are any of the church’s programs intergenerational?”<sup>277</sup>  
All of these questions were raised.

After questions were raised concerning senior adult ministry, the Judson Jewels Executive Committee offered suggestions for future ministry. One included providing transportation for seniors desiring to attend church. Providing transportation for older adults who have no rides to doctors’ appointments, groceries, and other places, was also discussed. A second thought was more emphasis was needed in communicating to all senior adults through LIFE Groups. All three hundred fifty Judson senior adults, ages sixty-five years of age and up, needed to be incorporated into an older LIFE Group or placed into an inactive list where another group of members could minister to them. A third suggestion centered around the theme of technology. The group agreed all seniors needed to have access to a computer, if they so desire, and know how to operate it. Concerning those seniors who are home-bound, a Zoom LIFE Group class was suggested to meet their needs. This action would fully incorporate those older adults into the life of the church. A final thought was providing intergenerational activities between high school-age students and older adults. A senior adult could be coupled with a teenager in grasping the meaning of life. All of these suggestions were well-received by the researcher and were seriously considered as possible ministry opportunities.

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<sup>277</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 118-124.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry research thesis has been to encourage all senior adults at Judson Baptist to become fully engaged in serving Christ. Several aspects of the problem were addressed. One concern was why the problem was being examined, while the second concern delineated two benefits to resolving the issue. Both issues related to prayer and faith were thoroughly discussed.

### **Brief Overview**

In sharing a thesis project in the field of pastoral counseling, this researcher has examined the theme of faithfulness to God concerning one specific stage of life, namely the retirement era. The study has been conducted within the Judson Baptist Church senior adult organization in Nashville, Tennessee. Its focus has been to encourage all older adults to be actively involved in church life. The first chapter has included the researcher's basic assumptions regarding the research process and the definitions, limitations, and delimitations related to the project. It concluded with the thesis statement section.

Chapter two deals with the conceptual framework of why complacency among senior adults in a local church setting needed to be addressed. Because the ramifications are far-reaching upon the extension of God's kingdom worldwide, people's lives and happiness are at stake. In examining the concern of apathy and indifference among older people, four themes were considered. They included: retirement, motivation and church life, faith and prayer. Then,

theological and theoretical foundations were shared, which provided a biblical and practical basis for conducting the research project.

The third chapter dealt with methodology. How has this problem been addressed? It has been highlighted by conducting a survey interview with fifteen senior adult members, ages sixty-five and up. Once the interviews were conducted, results were tabulated, and the Judson Jewels Executive Committee was consulted.

The fourth chapter dealt with the question, “What were the results of addressing the problem?” Several issues and themes were discovered about senior adults’ complacency. They included: age compared to the willingness to serve now, willing to serve versus no criticism, and willingness to serve compared to life status. Next, the actual survey interviews consisted of four sections. They included: “Section 1. Contact Information; Section 2. Life Story; Section 3. Current Demographics; and Section 4. Attitudes.”<sup>278</sup> Then, observations and discoveries were offered concerning the results; material responses were shared in meetings with the Judson Jewels Executive Committee. When senior adults continued to serve their Lord, their prayer life and faith walk played a continual role in serving Christ.

## **Results**

Faithfulness to God in life has always been a struggle. Whether it be during biblical times or serving the Lord in present-day society, difficulties have always arisen. Those trials have often taken precedent over life. One of those stages in life, which has created much discussion in the retirement era, is the finishing well stage.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 203-206.

<sup>279</sup> Jimmy Draper, *Don't Quit Before You Finish* (Franklin, TN: Clovercroft, 2015), 292.

Several results were gleaned from the research project concerning complacency among senior adults for not serving within the local church. The first result was that there seemed to be a correlation between a willingness to serve and age. Of the fifteen participants in the project, no one eighty-eight years of age and older were willing to serve during the present time. The five who indicated a willingness to minister were eighty-two years of age and younger. Of the three interviews who were younger than the five willing to minister, all of them faced hardships such as being caregivers to loved ones or overcoming illness. In other words, the eight youngest participants in the survey could minister later or be willing to serve now. In this research project, that result indicated a correlation between willingness to serve and age.

In better understanding this thought of willingness to serve and age, there must be a distinction between one being willing to minister and one possessing the ability to serve. Those seniors who are willing to serve may not have the ability, skill to minister in a particular area; however, they are willing to do whatever they can for God's glory. That scenario refers to a willingness to serve, while others who possess the ability, talent may be for different reasons unwilling to exhibit that spiritual gift for God's glory. This is the researcher's rationale for sharing how some seniors seem complacent with their walk with God.

The first result indicating a correlation between willingness to serve and age was addressed in the literature review under the theme of retirement. This issue involved how people live longer and what seniors said when asked, "What happens after retirement?" Of the fifteen participants interviewed, ranging in age from seventy-one to ninety-eight, the average age was eighty-three. Concerning this statistic, Bruce Bruinsma writes, "It's a fact that people are living longer than ever before. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, since 1970, there is about an

eight-year increase in longevity.”<sup>280</sup> Yes, people are living longer, even those who comprise the Judson Baptist Church.

What do older people mean when they say “nothing” in response to the question, “What happens after retirement?” They usually meant three things. Their answers typically suggest no interests or hobbies, no understanding of God’s Word on their lives, or the result of deliberately postponing plans for their futures.<sup>281</sup> In recently interviewing fifteen senior adults, the researcher found these responses to be authentic. There was not much thought given to planning for retirement.

Interestingly, the correlation between willingness to serve and age seems to have been much hardship within seniors’ lives at Judson Baptist. Complicated circumstances have been prevalent in all people’s lives. Whether one was seventy-one or ninety-eight years of age, trials and tribulations exist. All fifteen members have been or were amid a hardship. That is when the theme of faith has been applied.

How have the participants responded to difficult circumstances? Five of them have responded positively. How have they remained faithful and active all of their lives? They have possessed a positive attitude; they have risen above all their concerns and kept their focus on Christ. As one minister has observed, they have kept learning to remain productive in life and have kept laboring in the church.<sup>282</sup> Fulfilling those two tasks has kept five of the interviewees faithful and young at heart.

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<sup>280</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *The Retirement Reformation: Finding Freedom with Faith... A Better Way to Experience the Final (and Best) Decades of Your Life* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2019), 19.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>282</sup> Charles F. Stanley, “Staying Young All Your Life,” *In Touch* (January 2021): 38, *In Touch Ministries*.

In relating the hardships of life, the five who have responded “positively” in life have some differences. Three of the five seniors have transitioned from an imaginative right brain to a logical left brain. They have ceased to live out of their imaginations at some point in life and began living out of the past.<sup>283</sup> The other two of the five have made a conscious choice to follow Christ every day of their lives. Their actions of creating a new couple’s Sunday School class and walking with God for the next ten years of their life were indicators of walking by faith in Christ instead of living by logic. As Batterson stated, all of God’s children need to dream dreams.

The second discovery of this research project seemed to be the seniors’ willingness and unwillingness to serve at the church versus no criticism. Of the ten participants who expressed no disdain for the church, four (40%) were willing to serve. In contrast, the other six (60%) were unwilling to serve. That finding simply indicates two things. First, criticism does play a role in serving or not serving among senior adults within the church. Also, criticism is not the determining factor in seniors failing to minister within their church. Other reasons seem to exist.

The willingness to serve seemed directly related to motivation and church life shared in the literature review. God calls Christians to avoid any discrepancies between what they sincerely believe and what they say. Many believers, including senior adults, are not actively involved in a local fellowship of Christians. They seem to regard regular participation in a local church as optional.<sup>284</sup> They choose to “go it alone” in their walk of faith.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker: Praying Circles Around Your Biggest Dreams and Greatest Fears* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 43.

<sup>284</sup> David Jeremiah, *The Jeremiah Study Bible* (Franklin, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2013), 1757.

<sup>285</sup> Charles F. Stanley, *30 Life Principles: A Study for Growing in Knowledge and Understanding of God* (Atlanta, GA: In Touch Ministries, 2008), 142.

Those who have chosen not to continue being active members possess several reasons for inactivity. First, they have had challenging experiences with “religious people.”<sup>286</sup> Two of the interviewees indicated bad encounters with church members. A second reason for inactivity within the church was people think they will be rejected. One of the participants expressed this sentiment during her interview. Yes, there seems to be a definite difference in service to the church between those who are not critical instead of those who are critical of the fellowship.

The third discovery of this survey interview included those who pursue interests in life who seemed to be more likely to continue being involved in the church. In Appendix A, a survey interview form was included. Under Section 3, entitled “Current Demographics,” three questions were asked concerning their current status. They included: “Are you pursuing a variety of interests?;” “Are you beginning to slow down?;” and “Are end of life concerns taking on a new and different urgency?”

The fifteen participants were then asked to check any three responses that applied to their individual lives. The total responses were twenty-six, with section one being checked ten times, section two eleven times, and section five only five times. Then the total responses were compared with the five seniors who were willing to serve. The percentages were similar; however, the first two questions were overwhelmingly chosen.

What do these statistics convey? According to the interviews, they mean that prayer can lead seniors to pursue other interests in life. Many of the interviewees commented on how they pray before they pursue other interests. As one study has ascertained, prayer has been identified

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<sup>286</sup> Charles F. Stanley, *30 Life Principles: A Study for Growing in Knowledge and Understanding of God* (Atlanta, GA: In Touch Ministries, 2008), 142.

as a helpful coping mechanism.<sup>287</sup> It can teach older adults to know God’s direction for their lives. Prayer can also assist one in understanding the “Master’s business.”<sup>288</sup> Communication with God can lead to a plan of becoming more involved with others as with the church. Motivation and prayer are vital areas in becoming more engaged in the local church family.

The fourth discovery of the survey interview was extenuating circumstances that cause senior adults to refrain from becoming involved in serving at Judson Baptist. In meeting with all fifteen older adults, the fact became clear that all of them love the Lord and desire to find ways of fulfilling their gifts and talents for God’s glory. Their lack of participation is not because of their lack of faith and prayer walk; all of them genuinely love the Lord and anticipate the joys of heaven. All of them were aging faithfully. It is due to extenuating circumstances such as living too far from Judson Baptist, bad experiences, age, personal health issues, and being caregivers to loved ones. Of the ten who shared excuses in Table 4, there was an even distribution of the reasons in the five circumstances given (two in each of the five reasons).

What does it mean to age faithfully? According to Richard Gentzler, it means several things. It means to view life as a gift from God; to trust in the promises of God; to stand against the cultural prejudices of growing older; to develop a new understanding of self-worth; to be a part of a church where spiritual growth is encouraged for older adults; and to practice the spiritual disciplines.<sup>289</sup> All fifteen of the interviewees exhibited a trust in God; however, the five

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<sup>287</sup> Theresa L. Saudi, “Health Locus of Control and Healthiness of Prayer in Preoperative Cardiac Surgery Patients” (PhD diss., The University of Alabama at Birmingham, 1989), 8.

<sup>288</sup> Greg Pruitt, *Extreme Prayer: The Impossible Prayers God Promises to Answer* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 97.

<sup>289</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 70-73.

who offered no excuses for ministering in the church displayed more faithfulness in God. Their trust in the Lord played an integral role in resuming active ministry within the church.

The researcher learned several things during this research project. First, this minister has realized a less judgmental attitude toward those senior adults who have chosen, for whatever reason, not to serve would be more appropriate. This pastor must be less critical toward older adults who possess extenuating circumstances causing them not to serve at church. After sharing with fifteen older adults, this researcher has gained better insight into why seniors often react the way they do.

In addition, the researcher gleaned several other truths from the study interviews. One was a correlation between serving related to age in senior adults. The older a person becomes, the less likely they will minister at church. That is not always the case; however, it appears to be a strong likelihood. The second truth gleaned from this study is those who pursued other interests in life were more likely to be involved in church events. Church engagement was a means of staying active in life.

The final thought revealed in this study was a reaffirmation of how faith and prayer play an integral role in all seniors' lives. In every interview, this researcher witnessed a love for the Lord and a concern for the church. Some were more passionate than others, while a few tended to be overly critical. In every circumstance, there was a testimony as to the goodness of God. Even though they are not serving at church, the researcher senses all are praying and possessing a love for the Lord.

How might the results apply in other settings? All of the results can apply within life in general, especially hardships and difficulties. All people, especially those who have been blessed

by long life, deserve care and concern. They must know the Lord and especially must see how the church possesses a genuine interest in them.

The results of this research can also apply in other settings. How about those under sixty-five years of age within the church? Besides being less judgmental toward apathy within the fellowship, the researcher must accept different attitudes and opinions. The results may also apply to family and friends. Do faith and prayer play a role in their lives? In all of these settings, the effects of the research project can be beneficial.

What emerged during this study that deserves further research? This minister would feel comfortable researching complacency concerns among senior adults within the church on a much larger scale. Maybe, this action would be feasible in an academic setting. Seminaries might consider offering elective courses in the pastoral counseling field on serving senior adults within the local church. Perhaps, the various stereotypes of aging require more attention. This research would give this pastor an even better understanding of all the obstacles senior adults face in life.

### **Study's Findings**

Several points are noteworthy to share in reviewing the study's findings in light of the theological and theoretical framework. The first is related to the theological construct. In this category, four themes are discussed. They include older adult ministries, gift from God, rising above self by pursuing God and finishing well.

Concerning older adult ministries, the question is raised, "What do senior adults have to offer the church?" According to Richard Gentzler, they have much to offer the fellowship. To begin with, they have maturity and wisdom. Leviticus 19:32 tells us, "Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord" (NIV). Other age groups

need to be gleaned wisdom from mature adults. Secondly, older adults offer care for others.<sup>290</sup> They are more likely to volunteer in churches than any other religious organization. Seniors are willing servants. Next, there are more adults in the United States population.<sup>291</sup> Projections indicate that the older population will continue to grow, which means more people to reach for Christ. Today, there are more than 47.8 million (senior adults), and by 2060, there will be 98 million in the U.S. who are sixty-five years of age and older.<sup>292</sup> Lastly, older adults are essential to a church's ministry because they comprise a significant percentage of many church's memberships.<sup>293</sup> Because of an aging population, many churches are experiencing more significant numbers of senior adults. They are making up a greater percentage of a congregation's membership.<sup>294</sup>

A second theological statement involving growing older concerns aging being a gift from God. It is a reward for faithfulness. "In Job, the question is raised, 'Is wisdom with the aged, and understanding in length of days?' (12:12). An answer is given in Proverbs, 'Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life' (16:31)."<sup>295</sup>

A third theological statement concerns growing older concerning rising above oneself by pursuing God. The thought is the Lord is calling all people, even senior adults, to take the focus off of themselves and putting it on Christ, His kingdom, and His righteousness. He is

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<sup>290</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *The Graying of the Church: A Leader's Guide for Older-Adult Ministry in the United Methodist Church* (Montgomery, AL: Discipleship Resources, 2004), 25.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>293</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 148.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

encouraging them to set their sights on Him with an eternal versus an earthly focus.<sup>296</sup> In other words, Christians must ask, “How can God be glorified in ministering on His behalf?”

A final theological statement concerns growing older in relation to finishing well. While senior adults continue aging in life, they must keep believing. One author defines that term by encouraging others to come to faith in Jesus Christ and help them find the courage, hope, and perseverance to keep on believing, no matter the circumstances.<sup>297</sup> As one author declares, “Don’t quit before you finish... Keep your eyes on the goal...”<sup>298</sup> Picture life as a race found in Hebrews 12:1-3. Those were some theological constructs found in this researcher’s study related to senior adults.

Concerning theoretical constructs, several problems related to apathy and indifference have been considered within the local church. The first reason concerns how senior adults have different ideas of retirement. Some long for stressless days.<sup>299</sup> Others desire isolation and even quiet solitude. Still, others have not given much thought to retirement. That attitude has led to a future much like their past.

Why have seniors not planned for their retirements? Because they have failed to dream dreams.<sup>300</sup> They have been unable to understand God still has purpose and meaning for their lives. They have failed to pray, seeking God’s direction for their lives.

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<sup>296</sup> Bob Vander Plaats, *If 7:14 – An Urgent Call for Revival... It’s Time* (Urbandale, IA: The Family Leader, 2015), 139.

<sup>297</sup> Matthew White, “In a world of chaos, Keep Believing.” *afaJournal* (August 2020): 14-15.

<sup>298</sup> Jimmy Draper, *Don’t Quit Before You Finish* (Franklin, TN: Clovercroft, 2015), 292.

<sup>299</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *Finding Freedom: Understanding the Power of a Future Funded Ministry* (Columbia, SC: Envoy Financial, 2018), 10.

<sup>300</sup> Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker: Praying Circles Around Your Biggest Dreams and Greatest Fears* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 43.

A third reason for addressing complacency among senior adults is gaining a new perspective on aging. Two contrasting views define the problem. One is pessimistic, while the other is hopeful. There is no doubt about the challenges of aging; however, “the last 30 years of one’s life can truly be the best, most productive, and most fulfilling years of a person’s life.”<sup>301</sup>

A fourth reason why apathy and indifference must be addressed in senior adults is that old stereotypes must be examined within the church. While churches place much energy in reaching the younger generations for the future’s sake, they often overlook the spiritual development and full potential for equipping senior adults.<sup>302</sup> In doing so, they limit older people’s full potential and the entire church.<sup>303</sup> The point is older adults do not need to be underutilized. As Paul wrote in Galatians 3:26, 28, “For in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith... There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (NRSV).

### **Recommendations**

In concluding this research project, several recommendations concerning stakeholders such as the Judson Jewels Executive Committee and ministry leaders, pastors, and even seminaries can apply. Concerning the Judson Jewels, they must understand several things. First, they must work with LIFE Group leaders in contacting and encouraging all senior adults, ages sixty-five and up, at the Judson Church. That list presently includes three hundred and fifty names. All must know the church family truly loves and cares about them.

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<sup>301</sup> Bruce Bruinsma, *The Retirement Reformation: Finding Freedom with Faith... A Better Way to Experience the Final (and Best) Decades of Your Life* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2019), 65.

<sup>302</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 17.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

The Judson Jewels must investigate congregational care ministry. That includes evaluating current ministries which meet short-term needs related to brief periods of illness at home, hospitalization, death, or social needs such as food, clothing, transportation, financial assistance, and more. It also involves examining ministries that respond in varying ways to longer-term challenges, such as the visitation of homebound members and nursing home residents. Most churches would benefit from a more comprehensive support ministry. This action would provide and engage senior adults in ministry.

In addition, the Judson Jewels must examine other specific areas of congregational care ministry for meeting the needs of older adults and their families. They include congregational caregiver support group ministry. “Less than five percent of the older adult population reside in long-term care facilities and nursing homes, and most older people are never institutionalized permanently.”<sup>304</sup> Then, there is adult day-care ministry. “Caregivers need support and routine breaks from caregiving.”<sup>305</sup> The third area of congregational care ministry concerns elder abuse awareness and response ministry. As one pastor shares, “As the older adult population has grown steadily in numbers over the years, the instances of elder abuse perpetrated against them have also grown.”<sup>306</sup> All of these areas of the congregational care ministry must be examined.

After working with ministry leaders in contacting and encouraging all senior adults, whether active or inactive, the Judson Jewels would be wise in sharing a comprehensive study concerning knowing one’s spiritual gifts. That action would determine who is doing what and why. It would also give the leadership team a more accurate picture of what is being

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<sup>304</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 140.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

accomplished within the senior adult organization. Determining spiritual gifts would help incorporate more older folks into the Judson Church's life. It would add more teachers, prayers, encouragers, givers, and ministers to church life.

After offering a spiritual gifts study, a survey could be taken among all older adults related to additional ideas for intentional ministry. They could include starting a book club; providing support, networking opportunities for children of aging parents; beginning companion services; mobilizing a Grand Friends ministry (promoting friendship among different age groups); organizing an intergenerational retreat; forming a senior crisis team in responding to various personal needs; providing senior technology training; transporting senior adults to church and other activities; and offering ventures in learning classes.<sup>307</sup> Besides offering current ministries such as Helping Hands, home maintenance and minor home repair teams, monthly luncheon and meeting programs, older adult choir, and field trips, Judson Baptist could meet many more needs within its population. It could become a refuge, a "safe place" for additional seniors within the community. Retirement counseling could become a viable option.

Recommendations for pastors and staff leaders include several thoughts. First, they must never take senior adults for granted. Staff must always care for and love older adults. This reasoning is not because senior adults often control the "purse strings." This fact is not true at Judson Baptist; however, ministers must demonstrate care and concern for senior adults because they are also God's children. In addition, pastors and staff members must always be informed of new and different stereotypes such as ageism; and how they can thwart a Christian's ministry to the Lord. When ministers demonstrate their love to seniors, they show how much they care for them. That concern often translates into ministry for the Lord.

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<sup>307</sup> Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., *An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2018), 161-175.

A final recommendation concerns Christian seminaries. They should consider offering elective courses within the pastoral counseling field that delineate the value of ministers serving with senior adults. Why? Because older adults have so much to offer. Churches could become even more effective in ministering to their communities' needs if they cared more for the older generations. Younger generations can learn much from older-mature adults.

### **Conclusion**

Since this researcher's formative years, this minister has been enriched by visiting, sharing, and encouraging the older generations. This document was an effort to know more about seniors' trials and tribulations, but it was also an attempt to better minister to them through prayer and faith. The desire to serve them comes from a genuine effort to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), whereby all people become believers and growing disciples of the Lord Jesus. This paper was an effort to encourage all senior adults of the Judson Baptist Church, ages sixty-five and up, to reach their full potential for Christ.

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Appendix A

January 20, 2021

Judson Church Member  
4900 Franklin Pike  
Nashville, TN 37220

Dear Member:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree in Pastoral Counseling. The purpose of my research is to encourage all senior adults to become fully engaged in serving Christ, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be sixty-five (65) years of age or older and a member of Judson Baptist Church. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey. The survey will be conducted verbally at the time of the home visit. It should take approximately forty-five minutes to one hour to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at \_\_\_\_\_@\_\_\_\_\_.com (email), or call/text me at (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_ to schedule your home visit.

A consent document will be provided to you at the time of the home visit. The consent document contains additional information about my research. You will be asked to review and sign the consent form prior to the start of the survey.

Sincerely,

Joe Evans  
Minister of Pastoral Care and Senior Adults  
Judson Baptist Church  
(\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_

Appendix B

- Contact the senior adult to be interviewed and establish a mutually agreed upon day/time for the interview.
- Upon arriving for the interview, identify yourself, and briefly state the nature of your visit.
- Give the person being interviewed a copy of this survey form, read each question aloud, and record the information on your form.

**Section 1: Contact Information**

\_\_\_\_\_ Name

\_\_\_\_\_ Address

(\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone

\_\_\_\_\_ E-mail Address

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gender: M / F (*circle one*)
3. Race: \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 2: Life Story**

4. Invite the member to share aspects of his/her life: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Section 3: Current Demographics**

5. Living Arrangement (*please check one*):

- \_\_\_\_\_ Independent with spouse/partner in own home
- \_\_\_\_\_ Independent alone in own home
- \_\_\_\_\_ Living with another person in the home
- \_\_\_\_\_ Living in a co-housing setting
- \_\_\_\_\_ Living in an assisted-living facility
- \_\_\_\_\_ Living in a nursing home or continuing care retirement center
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Status (*please check all that apply*):

- \_\_\_\_\_ Are you pursuing a variety of interests?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are you beginning to slow down in life?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are end of life concerns taking on a new and different urgency?

Please explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Section 4: Attitudes**

7. What could your church offer to make your life better? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix C

Date: 3-20-2021

IRB #: IRB-FY20-21-383  
Title: Senior Adult Survey  
Creation Date: 11-20-2020  
End Date:  
Status: **Approved**  
Principal Investigator: Joe Evans  
Review Board: Research Ethics Office  
Sponsor:

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### Study History

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Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	<b>No Human Subjects Research</b>
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### Key Study Contacts

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Member	Joe Evans	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	jlevans1@liberty.edu
Member	Joe Evans	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	jlevans1@liberty.edu
Member	Ron Hughes	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	rehughes@liberty.edu

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