

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Discipleship Mentoring Program for Emerging Adults That Have Abandoned Church

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

By

Acquenetta Thompson

Lynchburg, Virginia

December 2021

Copyright © 2021 Acquenetta Thompson
All Rights Reserved

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Thesis Project Approval Sheet

Dr. Ramon Carrillo-Moran
Mentor

Dr. Phil Stevens
Faculty Reader

THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Acquenetta Thompson

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, 12/3/2021

Mentor: Dr. Ramon Moran

Abstract: There has been and continues to be a mass exodus of emerging adults that have stopped attending church services after they graduate high school. Many emerging adults have abandoned church and other religious institutions, abandoned their affiliation with the title of Christianity or religion, their religious beliefs that they once held, or have participated in other worldview religions or atheism. The purpose of this research study focuses on the similarities and differences between the current generation of emerging adults and earlier generation of young adults, other reasons why emerging adults have abandoned church, and how effective discipleship mentoring can be to resolve this problem. The research conducted resulted in five major reasons why emerging adults have abandoned church and how the discipleship mentoring program used these reasons to disciple emerging adults to grow in their relationship with God and implement spiritual formation into their lives with the guidance to hopefully return to back to church.

Keywords: Emerging Adults, Generation X, Generation Y, Generation Z, Millennials, Discipleship, Mentoring, Intergenerational Relationships

Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction.....	1
History of Generations.....	2
The Silent Generation	3
Baby Boomer Generation	3
Generation X.....	5
Generation Y and Generation Z.....	7
Emerging Adults	9
Major Historical and Cultural Shifts That Affected Various Generations	10
Problem Presented	14
Possible Reasons Emerging Adults Leave Church.....	16
Significance of This Problem.....	19
Purpose Statement	20
Basic Assumptions.....	22
Definitions....	23
Limitations... ..	27
Delimitations_.....	27
Thesis Statement	28
Chapter 2 Literature Review	30
Emerging Adult Dropout Problem.....	31
Nones.....	33
Other Types of Dropouts	36
Why Emerging Adult Dropout is Important	38
Reasons Emerging Adult's Leave Religious Institutions	38
Church.....	38
Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.....	42
Cultural Shifts	43

Parents.....	45
Developmental Stages of Emerging Adults.....	46
What Motivates and Influences Emerging Adults.....	48
Solving The Dropout Problem.....	49
Attractional Church.....	50
Discipleship.....	51
Discipleship Mentoring.....	53
Review of Literature Conclusion	55
Theological Foundation	56
Parents and The Church Community’s Responsibility.....	58
Moralistic Therapeutic Deism and Other Religious Beliefs.....	61
Discipleship.....	62
Theoretical Foundation	66
Discipleship.....	69
Adoptive Church.....	70
Discipleship Through Mentoring and Small Groups.....	71
An Integrative Model for Discipleship	72
Jude 3 Project.....	74
Evaluating Discipleship Plans.....	75
Theological and Theoretical Foundation Conclusion.....	75
Chapter 3 Methodology	77
Research Intervention Design.....	77
Research Participant Groups.....	78
Group A Senior and Youth Pastors.....	78
Group A’s Research Study Recruitment Process.....	79
Group A’s Focus Group Questions.....	80
Group B Parents of Emerging Adult Children.....	81
Group B’s Research Study Recruitment Process.....	82

Group B’s Individual Interview Questions	83
Group C Emerging Adult.....	84
Group C’s Research Study Recruitment Process.....	85
Group C’s Individual Interview Questions	86
Online Discipleship Mentoring Program Implementation Design	86
Adult Mentor Recruitment Email	87
Adult Mentor Follow-Up Email.....	88
Mentor Ethical Consent Covenant Form	88
Online Discipleship Mentor Orientation and Training Class	89
5 Stages of Discipleship.....	89
Mentoring.....	91
Final Portion of Orientation and Training Class.....	91
Emerging Adult Recruitment Process.....	92
Emerging Adult Follow-Up Email.....	93
Emerging Adult Orientation Class Syllabus.....	94
Measuring Success.....	95
Conclusion.....	96
Chapter 4 Results.....	98
Coding Data	98
Ethical Considerations	99
Confidentiality	99
Senior Pastor Group Results	99
Q1 Discipleship.....	100
Q2 Young Adult Ministries	102
Q3 Similarities and Differences of Earlier Generations	102
Q4 Participation in Discipleship Mentoring Program	104
Parents of Emerging Adult Interview Results	104
Q1 Their Parent’s Church Practices.....	105

Q2 Their Parent’s Family Structure	106
Q3 Current Church Status	106
Q4 Their Child’s Current Church Status	107
Q5 Participation in Discipleship Mentoring Program	109
Emerging Adult Interview Results.....	110
Q1 Their Parent’s Church Practices.....	110
Q2 Current Church Status.....	112
Q3 Participation in Discipleship Mentoring Program	113
Emergent Themes	114
Parental Influence	114
Absentee Fathers	115
Cultural Events of This Generation	116
COVID-19.....	116
Social Injustices	118
Social Media	119
Intergenerational Relationships	120
Church Flaws	121
Discipleship Mentoring Assessment.....	122
Mentor Joe and Mentee Moe’s Evaluation Results	124
Mentor Leonard and Mentee Jarron’s Evaluation Results.....	125
Mentor Marie and Mentee Destiny’s Evaluation Results	126
Mentor Tasha and Mentee Markita’s Evaluation Results.....	127
Online Discipleship Mentoring Conclusion.....	127
Chapter 5 Conclusion	129
Research Methods and Implementation Results	131
Themes Analyzed.....	132
Parental Influence	132
Absentee Fathers	134

Cultural Events.....	135
Global Pandemic	136
Internet and Social Media	137
Intergenerational Relationships	138
Church Flaws	140
Traditional.....	142
Exclusivity	143
Judgmental	143
Relevant Teaching	144
A Concern for Social Justice.....	144
Summary.....	146
Further Research	147
IRB Approval	148
Bibliography.....	149
Appendix A.....	155
Appendix B.....	158
Appendix C.....	161
Appendix D.....	164
Appendix E.....	165
Appendix F.....	166
Appendix G.....	168
Appendix H.....	169
Appendix I.....	170
Appendix J	171
Appendix K.....	172
Appendix L	173
Appendix M	174
Appendix N.....	176

Tables

1	Differences in Generations	13
2	Senior Pastor and Youth Pastor Demographics	100
3	Parent Demographics	104
4	Emerging Adult Demographics	110
5	Mentor and Mentee Discipleship Mentor Pairings	123

Abbreviations

DMIN *Doctor of Ministry*

LUSOD *Liberty University School of Divinity*

Chapter 1

Introduction

Every morning at 6 a.m. eastern standard time for an hour, over one thousand church members, pastors, and church leaders would join the international prayer telephone and internet call. The prayer call would usually begin with a greeting from two pastors or church administrators. The format of the prayer call was the administrators would introduce a guest speaker that would provide a brief sermon on a topic. Afterward, one of the administrators would read the testimonials and prayer lists of a few people that emailed the church. Lastly, the guest pastor and administrators would say a brief prayer to end the call so that the people on the international prayer call could begin their day with praise, worship, and thanksgiving to God.

One morning on the international prayer call in 2019, a guest pastor from a church in Alabama spoke on the issue of young adults abandoning church after graduating high school. A second pastor confirmed that he also had seen that at least three-quarters of young adults in his congregation had stopped attending services. As the prayer line administrator added, many of his colleagues and peers had also expressed concern that young adults had been leaving churches for several years in many churches all across the nation. Even more concerning is that young adults are not returning to church.

Another pastor chimed in on the conversation and shared that young adults leaving the church after graduation is typical throughout many generations based on his observations. However, he noted that the current generation of young adults are different than prior generations of young adults. As the pastor said, young people are not only abandoning the church, but dissociating themselves from religion or Christianity. Based on this pastor's comment, the administrator said that prayer that day was vital as churches need strategies to

retain the emerging adults that are still currently attending churches and re-engage the emerging adults that have abandoned churches.

A number of books, articles, blogs, and dissertations have been written on the subject of emerging adults abandoning churches and religious institutions. There have also been many statistics and studies done on church retention and re-engaging young adults. Many churches are still trying to devise new strategies and continue to use older methods in order to combat the retention of emerging adults that are still present as well as those that have already left.

This research study was designed to highlight some similarities and differences between the earlier generations of young adults and the current generation of emerging adults, to identify other reasons why emerging adults are not returning to church, and to determine if discipleship mentoring would be a useful strategy to encourage young adults to return to churches.

The term *generation* is used to describe a group of individuals that live within the same time period. There are six generations that are mentioned within this research study: Silent, Baby Boomer, Generation X, Y, Z, and emerging adults. The following sections will provide a highlight into each of the six generations including their culture, mindsets, habits, lifestyles, and beliefs to highlight the similarities and differences of various generations.

History of Generations

A generation is a group of people that were born around the same time have experienced similar behaviors, mindsets, and world cultural events. Generational labels are generally used more for marketing and research for companies to better understand their consumers. The generation labels are useful for this research study because it aids in understanding a particular

group's behaviors, lifestyles, habits, and motivations.¹ Although it is difficult to obtain accurate information on the actual years of each generation because they can differ based on who is presenting the information, the fact is that the history of generations helps to describe the behaviors, lifestyles, habits, and motivations coupled with some significant world cultural shifts and trends to explain similarities and differences among young adults in each generation. A brief summary of the history of generations begins with the Silent Generation and ends with emerging adulthood.

The Silent Generation

The Silent generation is also known as veterans, traditional, the matures, and the greatest generation. The Silent generation includes individuals that were born before 1946 and some published data say the individuals were born before 1945. The Silent generation is described as a generation that prefers tradition and makes decisions based on what has worked in the past. The individuals of the Silent generation are private, love formality, pay their dues, and are dedicated to teamwork and collaboration. Their characteristics are consistency, stability, harmony, and respect. The Silent generation worked hard on their jobs and worked hard with saving and conserving.²

Baby Boomer Generation

There were approximately 79 million baby boomers born between 1946 and 1964, during this time baby boomers were the largest population during this period. In 2020, baby boomers were between 56 to 74 years old. Boomers are the biggest consumers of traditional media, such

¹ "Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z, and Gen A explained", *The Kasasa Exchange*, July 06, 2021, accessed on December 2, 2021, <https://www.kasasa.com/exchange/articles/generations/gen-x-gen-y-gen-z>.

² Anick Tolbize, "Generational Differences in the Workplace", Research and Training Center on Community Living (Ph.D., University of Minnesota, August 16, 2008): 2.

as radio, magazines, newspapers, and television. Boomers adopted technology to stay in touch with their family and friends, and most Boomers have a Facebook account. Boomers have experienced the highest numbers in student loan debts, and they are most concerned with helping their children with student loan debt and learning how to generate wealth for retirement as opposed to using social security and pensions since they are declining.³ The baby boomer generation's parents were more religious and attended church more often than the baby boomer's generation did. Church attendance was at an all-time high from 1955 through 1958 with 49 percent of Americans reported to have attended church within the past week based on the Gallup polls church attendance statistics. In fact, studies showed that 95 percent of children that were born during the post-World War II years had participated in or were affiliated with some form of religious activities and services. Due to the expansion of suburban life the construction and growth of churches were expansive.⁴

Although at one point there was a rise in church attendance with baby boomers, there was a decline in church attendance during the early to mid-1960's. After the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the baby boomer generation experienced many cultural shifts with civil rights movements in the South, shifting views of the role of women.⁵ Other reasons for the decline in church attendance for baby boomers was their health and lifestyles. The report stated that the baby boom generation were excessive drinkers, smokers, and many were overweight,

³ "Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z, and Gen A explained".

⁴ Jean-Anne Sutherland, Margaret M. Paloma, and Brian F. Pendleton, "Religion, Spirituality, and Alternative Health Practices: The Baby Boomer and Cold War Cohorts", *Journal of Religion and Health* Vol. 42, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 319.

⁵ Ibid., 319.

which caused the decline in religious attendance.⁶ The baby boomer's generation "having grown up under the conservatism of post-World War II values, carved out new meanings for religion in America."⁷ During this time approximately 58 percent of baby boomers had declined in attending church and religious services and the many of them began to reject the traditional religious practices of their parents. Baby boomers sought out individualistic spiritual practices and beliefs that combined some elements of eastern religion and meditation.⁸

Generation X

Generation X are the children of the Baby Boomers. Other labels given to this generation are "Busters", "Latchkey", MTV generation.⁹ Generation Xers are individuals that were born from 1965 to 1976. In 2020, the Generation Xer would have been between the ages of 44 to 55 years old. The Generation X population was larger than the Baby Boomer population. The name Generation X was said to be given by Douglas Coupland who entitled his first book *Generation X*. Coupland's third book called *Life After God* was an autobiography of his life in search for meaning. Coupland was the first of his generation during the Generation X period that was not raised affiliated with any religion. It was near the end of his book that Coupland was able to see that his search led him to needing God in his life. The book was an example of the journey of the Generation Xer who was not raised with religion.¹⁰

⁶ Anyuan Shen, "Religious Attendance, Healthy Lifestyles, and Perceived Health: A Comparison of Baby Boomers with the Silent Generation", *Journal of Religion and Health* 58, no 4 (August 2019): 1235-1236

⁷ Sutherland, "Religion, Spirituality, and Alternative Health Practices": 319.

⁸ Ibid., 320.

⁹ "Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z, and Gen A explained".

¹⁰ Stanley J. Menking, "Generation X: The First Post-Christendom Generation", *Quarterly Review* 19, no 2 (Summer 1999): 153-154.

A study conducted in 1993 reported that 67 percent of the baby boomer generation had left the church or religious institutions, with only 47 percent returning to church or religious institutions.¹¹ However, research shows that Generation X have left churches, abandoned institutionalized religion, and declined their faith in greater numbers than their parents did. Generation Xers love to church hop. They do not stay with one denomination or one church for long. Their need for various Christianity teachings may lead to spiritual immaturity and not learning the truth of the Christian teachings and faith..¹²

Many Generation Xers believed in secular humanism that human reasoning and ethics superseded religious dogma. Many Generation Xers no longer trusted religious institutions, and they rejected the belief that God is absolute and there were many ways to get to heaven.¹³

Many Generation Xers are in the group "nones," a major group of individuals who indicate that they are not affiliated with any particular religion. In fact, some Generation Xers consider themselves to be atheists and agnostics. Some might say that Generation Xers developed their view of theology from their peers and their human reasoning and beliefs.¹⁴ Generation Xers believed that God was diverse, and they no longer believed in excluding diversity in religion, sex, or ethics in their worldviews.¹⁵

¹¹ "Baby Boomers Rediscover Church", Christianity Today 34, no 15 (Oct 22, 1990): 58.

¹² Kit Carlson, "Equipping the Next Generation to Speak Their Faith Aloud", Anglican Theological Review 98, no 4 (Fall 2016):704.

¹³ Menking, "Generation X", 155.

¹⁴ Carlson, "Equipping the Next Generation to Speak Their Faith Aloud", 704.

¹⁵ Menking, "Generation X", 157.

Generation X is savvy with technology and many Xers spend many hours on Facebook.¹⁶ During the Generation X period, they have had to endure the rise of AIDS and HIV, instability with family and jobs.¹⁷ Many Generation Xers were raised in broken families and homes. Generation Xers have seen their parents' divorce, remarry, and separate. Many Generation Xers have experienced abandonment from their parents due to work and other situations. Many fathers were no longer in the homes, and there was a massive surge of single-parent households during this period. Therefore, this has left many Xers' having to rely on themselves and not having the ability to trust in relationships and have a fear of commitment.¹⁸

Generation Y and Generation Z

The later generational labels are Generation Y, and Generation Z. Here again is where the data on the age range of both Generation Y and Z can differ. Some data shows that individuals born during the Generation Y era were born between 1977-1995, some say 1977-1997. In 2020, Generation Y would have been between the ages of 23-43 years old. Other labels for Generation Y are Millennials, Gen Me, Gen We, and Echo Boomers. As reported in 2020, there were approximately 71 million Generation Y individuals or Millennials. Some data stated that Generation Z individuals were born after 1996, and some state 1997, and others state 1998. In 2020 there were approximately 23 million Generation Z individuals and constantly growing. Other labels for Generation Z are the siblings of Millennials, Centennials, iGeneration, Post-Millennials, and Homeland Generation.¹⁹

¹⁶ "Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z, and Gen A explained".

¹⁷ Menking, "Generation X", 160.

¹⁸ Menking, "Generation X", 159.

¹⁹ "Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z, and Gen A explained".

Generation Y and Generation Z were raised with technology. Many individuals of Generation Y still watch television, but instead of using ordinary cable boxes many of them subscribe to streaming networks such as Netflix and Hulu. Although Generation Y is comfortable with smartphones, many of them still use computers to shop. Many Generation Y'ers have a variety of social media accounts and on the average, they have a high daily consumption of social media. Generation Y are not very loyal to brands, but they will put their trust in brands that have superior product history and continues to stay updated such as Apple, Samsung, and Google. Generation Y is a population that has high student loan debts and financial instability that has led many to delay getting married and starting families. The biggest historical and cultural events that has shaped their lives are the Great Recession, 9/11, and the explosion of technology of social media and internet.²⁰

Much like Generation Y, Generation Z received their first cellular phone under the age of 12 years old. Generation Z grew up connected with the smartphone and may spend an average of several hours on their phones. Many older Generation Z use debit cards as their preferred way of banking. Generation Z are more concerned with financial literacy because of the struggle they have seen with many Millennials. In fact, many Generation Z'ers are opening checking and savings accounts at much younger ages than previous generations did. The historical and cultural events that have shaped Generation Z are explosion of smartphones, social media, and seeing the financial struggles of their Generation X, their parents.²¹

²⁰ "Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z, and Gen A explained".

²¹ Ibid.

Emerging Adults

Emerging adulthood is a newer label that was provided for Millennials of the 21st Century because they are no longer teenagers, but are not ready to be called full adults. Emerging adulthood is a combination of Millennials and Generation Y. As of 2020, emerging adults would be between the ages of 18-29, born between 1991 to 2002. Emerging adulthood is the period of a young person's life where they become more independent and self-sufficient. The Silent Generation and the baby boomer parents taught their children obedience, respect, and holiness. However, parent's teaching may have changed from Generation X's period to teaching their children more independence. The independence is not just in one area but also independent thinking in religion.²² Generation Xers cradled their children more. Another term for this is "helicopter parent." They were more involved in various activities in their lives and overparenting. This overparenting may have led emerging adults to become self-entitled, self-reliant, and more reliant to not make decisions on their own but to seek outside approval and acceptance.²³

Emerging adulthood has a longer period of exploration and development. Now exploration and identity development does take place in young adults in every generational period, however, the emerging adulthood exploration period tends to be lengthier. As they become more independent, young adults want to discover their own identities apart from their parents or the people who raised them. Young adults also want to find their purpose, calling,

²² Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, "A Congregation of One: Individualized Religious Beliefs Among Emerging Adults", *Journal of Adolescent Research* (September 2002): 453.

²³ LaVonne Neff, "How to Raise An Adult: Break Free Of The Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kid For Success", *The Christian Century* 132, no 23 (Nov 11, 2015): 36.

gifts, or assignment in their lives. Young adults want to find out who they are and why they were created.²⁴

Major Historical and Cultural Shifts That Affected Various Generations

There have been many major historical and cultural shifts and trends that have impacted and shaped the lives and worldviews of many individuals from one generation to the next. Some of the major historical and cultural shifts that have taken place are the rise of immigrants in the United States, world wars, civil rights movement, and more have made significant impacts on many generations. Some of these shifts and trends have not only impacted individuals but have made significant impacts on religious institutions.

One major cultural shift is the number of immigrants that have moved to the United States, which has led the United States to become more diversified. Many immigrants come to the United States because they believe this is a land of freedom and opportunity. According to the American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, more than 10 percent of immigrants migrated to America during the 19th and 20th century were Europeans. Other ethnicities that have migrated to America in increasing numbers are Latinos and Asians. At one time in the 1960s, immigrants and their children made up 20 percent of the population. In thirty years, the assumption is that immigrants and their children would have made up close to 40 percent of the people in America.²⁵

The Silent Generation lived through the Korean War and the Cold War. The Silent generation lived through the Great Depression that began in 1929 and did not end until 1933. It

²⁴ Arnett, "A Congregation of One", 452.

²⁵ Paul Taylor, "The Well-Being of Young Adults in the "Next America", *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* no 5 (Suppl): S5.

was not until the late twentieth century that severe unemployment, the monetary crisis, and deflation had ended. However, another financial crisis took place between 2007-2008 that caused the housing and sub-prime mortgages to collapse. During this time there was financial and economic devastation that was worse than the recession that occurred in the 1930s. Between 2007-2008 several major financial institutions filed for bankruptcy, the financial condition of Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae who held half the outstanding mortgages in the United States were taken over by the federal government.²⁶

From slavery to segregation, the racism and inequality of Black people has been a struggle among Black people in this country. Jim Crow laws have left Black people dealing with systemic racism and inhumane treatment by whites for a long time. The movement from 1954 to 1965 was a demand of basic equality of Black people. The Civil Rights Movement began with the outcry of Black people following the lynching of 14-year-old Emmett Till from Chicago who was visiting his relatives in Mississippi in 1955. Emmett Till's mother Mamie Till Mobley worked closely with the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) by speaking against systemic racism and inhumane treatments of Black people due to her son's murder. In 1963 Dr. Martin Luther King announced a civil rights initiative in Birmingham, Alabama. Dr. King, a southern Baptist preacher and activist, continually spoke out against police brutality, racism, inhumane treatment of Black people by promoting nonviolent campaigns. Other economic movements that took place between the 1960s and 1970s were the feminist movement, antiwar, and gay rights.²⁷

²⁶ Nicholas Crafts and Peter Fearon, "Lessons from the 1930s Great Depression", *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, Volume 26, Number 3 (2010): 285-286.

²⁷ Dewey M. Clayton, "Black Lives Matter and the Civil Rights Movement: A Comparative Analysis of Two Social Movements in the United States", *Journal of Black Studies* Volume 49, no 5 (2018): 449-450, 452.

Interracial marriages and families have played a significant difference in the changing demographic in America. In the 1960s, interracial marriages and relationships were completely forbidden. During that era, interracial and interethnic marriages and relationships were taboo and illegal in many states. The Pew Research Center analysis of census data has shown that now close to 20 percent of marriages in America are interracial and interethnic.²⁸

Aging is another demographic shift that has changed drastically in America. Demographers typically use the shape of a pyramid to describe the age of a population. The youngest are babies from ranging in age from newborn to four years old, and they are at the bottom. The older adults, of course, are at the top. Today the life expectancy of older adults has increased, and birth rates have decreased. Baby Boomers are the largest generation, and after World War II, many of the soldiers returned home to start families. During that period, the birthrate was 50 percent higher after the war than before the war. However, in the middle of the 1960s, the birth rate began to decrease due to the invention of the birth control pill.²⁹

The American family is another major shift that has taken place in the United States. Families during the earlier centuries consisted of a mother and father, a two-parent household. Now young adults or emerging adults are the least likely to marry young, have families, and affiliate with significant religions. Although there has been a decline in marriage by many emerging adults, there has been a substantial increase in single-parent households.³⁰ Today, there are more single-parent households and same-sex marriage households than ever before. The U.S. Census Bureau reported in a 2019 report that there were an estimated 543,000 same-sex married

²⁸ Taylor, "The Well-Being of Young Adults in the Next America", S6.

²⁹ Ibid., S7-S8.

³⁰ Ibid., S9-S10.

couple's households and 469,000 same-sex unmarried households.³¹ These staggering numbers show that there was a significant shift in American families. Table 1 highlights the differences in generations, from attitudes, lifestyles, cultural shifts and trends, and core values.

Table 1. Differences in Generations³²

	Silent Generation	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Millennials
Other Names	Moral Authority, Radio Babies, The Forgotten Generation	“Me” Generation, Moral Authority	The Doer, 13 th Generation	Gen Y, Generation Next, Echo Boomers, 24/7's
Core Values	Follow rules, sacrifice, law and order, respect for authority	Anti-war, equal rights, anything is possible, want to be effective	Balance, diversity, entrepreneurial, independent, seek life balance	Avid consumers, extreme fun, high morals, competitive, Now!
Education	A dream	A birthright	A way to get there	An incredible expense
Entitlement	Seniority	Experience	Merit	Contribution
Communication	Rotary phones, one-on-one	Touch-tone phones	Cell phones	Internet, picture phones, email
Motivations	Being respected	Being valued	Freedom and no rules	Collaborating with other bright people
Thinks of Money	Livelihood	Status Symbol	Means to an End	Today's Payoff
Mentoring	Investment in long-term commitment, respect their experience, let them define the outcome that you both want	Balance between work, life, and family, need to know they are valued, despises being micro-managed	Casual work environment, more hands-off approach, present information but do not like to be bossed, use peers as testimonials	Flexible, challenge them, respect them, offer peer-level examples, be impressed with their decisions

³¹ “U.S. Census Bureau Releases CPS Estimates of Same-Sex Households”, United States Census Bureau (November 19, 2019), accessed on April 29, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2019/same-sex-households.html>.

³² “Generational Differences Chart”, University of South Florida, accessed on January 26, 2021, <https://www.usf.edu/hr-training/documents/lunch-bytes/generationaldifferenceschart.pdf>.

Problem Presented

The problem is that emerging adults are abandoning institutionalized religion and their religious beliefs after graduating high school and are not returning to churches as earlier generations have done. Although the decline in attending church and associating themselves with a particular religious institution may have started with the baby boomer generation, with 67 percent of the boomers leaving churches, individuals of the Generation X era also had a significant number of young adults abandon institutionalized religion.³³ Emerging adults have now taken the lead in the number of young adults that have abandoned institutionalized religion and some their religious beliefs. "Young Americans are dropping out of religion at an increasingly alarming rate: about 5-6 times the historic rate".³⁴ In 2011 David Kinnaman wrote that 59 percent of emerging adults have dropped out of church after graduating high school or reaching the age of independence. He mentioned that some of those young adults had returned to the church when they got older, but many still have not. In 2019 Kinnaman published a book that revealed that the emerging adult dropout was still a huge problem. The number of emerging adults that have dropped out of churches had increased by 5 percent.³⁵

According to Barna Research, when emerging adults were teenagers, more than half attended church weekly. Approximately 42 percent of emerging adults who participated in church when they were teenagers have stopped attending weekly, and 58 percent have stopped attending weekly church in the 18-29 age range. Therefore, Barna Research believed that about

³³ "Baby Boomers Rediscover Church", 58.

³⁴ Armand J. Boehme, "The Church and The Culture of The Millennials: The Best Or Worst Of Times?", *Missio Apostolica* 21, no 1 (May 2013): 97.

³⁵ "Church Dropouts Have Risen To 64 Percent, But What About Those Who Stay?", *Research Release in Faith & Christianity* (September 4, 2019), accessed on April 25, 2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/resilient-disciples/>.

8,000,000 emerging adults in America that were once attending church when they were teenagers have stopped attending church after they graduated high school.³⁶

For many young adults, their early twenties is an age of exploration and independence. Many young adults that were a part of the earlier generations got married and started families, and many attended colleges during their young adult years. Many young adults leave home after they graduate high school, which means they are no longer under the influence of their parents about church attendance and faith. The earlier generation of young adults would stop attending church for several reasons such as work, starting families, and attending college, but would return later in their lives.³⁷ Therefore, it is not uncommon for young adults to drop out of church or attend less frequently than when they were younger. Some young adults drop out of church after graduation because they are no longer interested in the faith and beliefs that they were taught when they were younger. However, the key is that many young adults in earlier generations returned to church or religious institutions after they settled down and had families. Emerging adults have wandered away, and some have refused to return to religious institutions or organized religion. Some emerging adults that have left the church have even abandoned their faith. Graduating high school seems to be the turning point with emerging adult's participation in institutionalized religion.³⁸

³⁶ "Twentysomethings Struggle to Find Their Place In Christian Churches", *Research Release In Millennials & Generations* (September 24, 2003), accessed on 4/24/2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/twentysomethings-struggle-to-find-their-place-in-christian-churches/>.

³⁷ Arnett, "A Congregation of One", 451.

³⁸ Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 17.

Possible Reasons Emerging Adults Leave Church

Many reasons have been identified that would explain why emerging adults have left the church after graduating high school. Some of these reasons that emerging adults have left the church after graduating high school are the same reasons that earlier generation of young adults have used. For instance, emerging adults face many life decisions such as education, where to live, finances, family and relationships, identity, and purpose.³⁹ Attending college or university in a different state than their church is one reason that many emerging adults have left the church after graduating high school. Some colleges and universities have more diversity than the local high school for emerging adults. With the more diversified colleges and universities, many emerging adults may be influenced by various religious cultures and can include a variety of different religious worldviews. Other worldviews can influence some emerging adults who do not have a foundation in Christian theology.

Anthony Campolo, a world-renowned Christian teacher and apologist spent many years traveling the world with his son Bart Campolo spreading the gospel message. However, Bart came home one day from college to have the dreadful conversation with his deeply religious parents that he no longer believed in the Christian beliefs and faith that he grew up believing. Bart told his parents that he questioned the existence of God when he was a teenager attending church. During college, Bart attended a meeting where a professor discussed the topic of secular humanism. It was then that Bart decided that he would be a secular humanist. Secular humanist is a religious worldview where people believe that there is no absolute truth. Still, that science gives more of a truthful meaning to the creation of the universe and humankind. Secular

³⁹ “Twentysomethings Struggle to Find Their Place in Christian Church”.

humanists are also called humanists and atheists. Atheists are individuals that do not believe in the existence of God.⁴⁰

“Out of students who were actively engaged in youth programs when they graduated high school, research shows that only about 40 to 50 percent stick with their faith through college.⁴¹ Some colleges have philosophy departments that teach courses that argue against the existence of God. Some of these professors are advocates for science and that science and religion do not mix. They believe that science explains fact and the creation of the world and oppose a Sovereign deity that created the world and humankind.⁴²

Some emerging adults attend local colleges or have dropped out of high school. There is still a concern for these emerging adults because this population is often overlooked. There are many religious-based universities and secular universities that offer campus ministries and outreach. There are not as many local colleges that provide campus ministries or outreach. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that there were 4 million students that graduated high school in the United States in 2011, and close to 68 percent of these graduates enrolled in college by that year in October. Of the 68 percent of graduates that enrolled into local colleges that are less likely to have campus ministries and outreach programs. Christian Smith, a sociologist in Notre Dame, stated that emerging adults that do not attend college or university are less religious than their friends.⁴³

⁴⁰ Anthony Campolo and Bart Campolo, *Why I Left, Why I Stayed: Conversations on Christianity Between an Evangelical Father and His Humanist Son* (New York: HarperOne), 2.

⁴¹ Mark DeVries and Scott Pontier, *Sustainable Young Adult Ministry: Making it Work, Making it Last* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 50.

⁴² John B. Cobb, Jr., “God and Universities”, *Journal for the Study of Religion* 31, no 1 (2018): 261.

⁴³ Catherine Newhouse, “The Forgotten Millennials” More Noncollege-bound Young Adults Seek Direction, and More Ministries are Poised to Help”, *Christianity Today* 57, no 5 (Jun 2013): 16.

Another reason that emerging adults leave the church after graduating high school is that they start working. These emerging adults may have busy or hectic work schedules and may choose to rest on their days off. Another plausible reason is that some emerging adults may work on the days that observe religious services. Many companies do not have traditional Monday thru Friday workdays. However, Barna Research stated that the study shows that many of today's emerging adults do not prioritize church attendance because they have entered the workforce.⁴⁴ Emerging adults have led many of the economic, social, and political changes in America this century. Same-sex marriage was at one time taboo and restricted. Still, because emerging adults have been so vocal on these issues, other generations accept the problems or become more supportive of the issues. Emerging adults have also helped bring significant shifts and trends with interracial marriages, the legalization of marijuana, immigration, and matters dealing with diversity exclusion. Some churches are not opened to accepting and supporting same-sex relationships and marriage, openly gay or transgender people.⁴⁵

Lack of church discipleship can also be why many emerging adults have left the church after graduating high school. Kinnaman stated that emerging adults are skeptical and cynical of their church experiences with discipleship, leadership, music, relationships, teamwork, and learning style. Some other church experiences that Kinnaman believes emerging adults are skeptical and cynical with are authenticity and transparency, truthfulness, lack of technology, and lack of purpose, fulfillment, and consistency in community service and ministries involving community service.⁴⁶ The problem with emerging adults being unaffiliated with many churches,

⁴⁴ "Twentysomethings Struggle to Find Their Place In Christian Churches".

⁴⁵ Taylor, "The Well-Being of Young Adults in the Next America", S12.

⁴⁶ "Twentysomethings Struggle to Find Their Place In Christian Churches".

faith, and denominations today may not be solved by adding new church programs. However, the problem can be solved by teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ and allowing faith and the Bible to integrate with emerging adults to cause a transformation. During the past centuries, the youth have been receiving a watered-down version of the Gospel. The youth have been attending activities and events with the church. Still, none of the events and activities have been integrated into young people's lives and hearts for transformation. The level that emerging adults have disconnected and abandoned their faith may stem from the lack of spiritual formation and discipleship in youth ministry.⁴⁷ Further research will help to uncover many other reasons that emerging adults have left the church after graduating high school and are not returning and why some emerging adults may have abandoned their religious beliefs and values.

Significance Of The Problem

Suppose emerging adults continue to leave the church after they graduate and do not return, and some continue to abandon the religious beliefs that they learned growing up. In that case, it is possible that the churches will not grow and will not produce spiritually mature Christians in the world. Churches are declining, and many of them are closing. The church has been struggling to survive. The decline of churches is not explicitly from emerging adults that have left. The church decline started with Generation X. Emerging adults have added significantly to the decline in church attendance, and they are not showing signs of returning to the church. The purpose of the church is to be a community of believers that gather to fellowship, teach, train, encourage, guide, and challenge each other to go into the world to make disciples. The church is not the building; the church is the people. So, the Christian community that fosters teachings and guidance through relationships is dying. The church should not

⁴⁷ Skip Masback, "Twin Calamities: Declining Churches, Struggling Youth", (2015), accessed on April 24, 2021, https://www.twin_calamities_reflections.pdf.

continue to allow emerging adults to isolate themselves from the faith community and relationships that foster teachings of salvation and how to integrate the gospel into every area of their lives. As the church continues to allow emerging adults to leave and do not have plans to reconnect with emerging adults, the church or community of faith suffers.

Another reason that brings significance to this problem is that some emerging adults are developing other religious worldviews. They have adopted a spiritual ideology and theology that is not in line with true biblical theology. Emerging adults no longer learn values, love, self-esteem, or how to live out their purpose from church or the Bible; they now know these things from the internet. Emerging adults have post-Christian, postmodern views. When someone questions their beliefs, they say that it works for them, and they do not want anyone else forcing their antiquated values on them. Emerging adults have adopted the ideology that everyone, every viewpoint, and every lifestyle is valid. Some no longer believe in the traditional sense of sin or right from wrong.⁴⁸ Where does this leave the church if Millennials or Emerging Adults are no longer involved or affiliated with religious institutions and are instead practicing their faith and religion at home with their peers or developing their theology separate from what was written in the Bible and taught in churches.⁴⁹ The church is significant in teaching biblical Christian values and beliefs to mature spiritually and become more Christ-like. This cannot happen if the church continues to be complacent in reconnect, impacting, and influencing the lives of emerging adults.

Purpose Statement

The problem is that emerging adults are abandoning institutionalized religion and their religious beliefs after they graduate high school and are not returning to the church as earlier

⁴⁸ Les Blank and J. Mark Ballard, "Revival of Hope: A Critical Generation for The Church", *Christian Education Journal* 6, no 2 (Fall 2002): 13.

⁴⁹ Carlson, "Equipping the Next Generations to Speak Their Faith Aloud", 709.

generations have done. The purpose of this Doctoral Ministry research was to highlight the similarities and differences among earlier generations of young adults and the current generation of emerging adults, to provide reasons why emerging adults are not returning to churches, and if a discipleship mentoring program will help guide emerging adults to back to church.

Although some reasons why emerging adults have left the church after they graduate high school have already been discovered by many researchers, it was still important to discover other reasons emerging adults have left the church and why they are not returning. Researchers that study generations say that young adults going to the church during the age of independence and exploration is natural and happens in every generation. However, there are some key differences between emerging adults and the earlier generation of young adults that have left churches and other religious institutions. A new study conducted by Barna Research Group showed that millions of emerging adults who once were a part of a church when they were younger no longer see that church as a priority.⁵⁰ Millions of emerging adults that have left the church and are continuing to do so mean that the church needs to rethink ways to reconnect and impact emerging adults, especially if each generation has left the church based on the changing culture and their personal experiences and beliefs. Emerging adults were raised in an era where the changing culture has conflicted with traditional religious values. Emerging adults are more secular today, but many have embraced other religious worldviews, become atheist, agnostic, or have developed a secular spirituality called pluralism.⁵¹

Secondly, it was essential to this research to learn the various discipleship plans, ministries, and programs that other churches and ministries have created and implemented to

⁵⁰ “Twentysomethings Struggle to Find Their Place in Christian Churches”.

⁵¹ Boehme, “The Church and The Culture of The Millennials – The Best or Worst of Times?”, 96.

reconnect with and impact emerging adults. “The bottom line is that the church should be making disciples; it should witness new birth (conversion) and spiritual growth (discipleship) in the people under its ministry. A church that does not reach lost people is not following the mission of the Master.”⁵² The discipleship plan should help emerging adults to stay connected with the faith community to support, challenge, teach and guide them into spiritual maturity in every area of their lives. Therefore, it was essential to learn and evaluate what discipleship plans and programs have been impactful for emerging adults and determine where there may be areas of improvement to create an online discipleship plan that will follow the mandate of the Great Commission with emerging adults.

Basic Assumptions

An assumptions that derived from the research of emerging adults leaving church and not returning is how choosing a discipleship strategy is the best solution to re-engage emerging adults. There have been many techniques and strategies that other church leaders, researchers, and authors have used to re-engage emerging adults. Some churches have revitalized their church environment by changing the type of music, worship, preaching style, and dress code. Some churches have added attractions such as coffee shops, bookstores, dance halls, bowling alleys, and more to engage and re-engage emerging adults. Other techniques used to re-engage emerging adults have been various ways of evangelism and different discipleship strategies. Evangelism and discipleship are not the same. They can go together, but one should not take the place of the other. Some evangelistic methods that churches have used are pamphlets or tracts, talking to emerging adults in the street, talking to emerging adults at their college campuses, inviting emerging adults to recreational activities, and more. Discipleship strategies include

⁵² K.M. Brosius, “Culture and the Church’s Discipleship Strategy”, *Journal of Ministry & Theology* (2017): 130.

conducting formal training classes where church leaders show their congregants what a disciple is and what discipleship means. Another discipleship strategy is when the church breaks into smaller groups, and they have small group Bible studies with each other. However, this discipleship strategy will re-engage emerging adults by combining the many other methods used.

Another presupposition is that if the church does not create a discipleship strategy to re-engage emerging adults and do-nothing emerging adults will continue to leave the church community. Many churches and pastors do not believe that the studies are accurate and do not believe that they are declining, but just in a season of struggling. Many pastors still believe their evangelizing and discipling efforts are helping them to survive. However, true discipleship is not happening in these churches and is clear by the staggering numbers of people, including emerging adults, who have declined to attend church. Without true evangelism and discipleship, the church will continue to decline and eventually lead to their demise.⁵³ Some of these emerging adults that leave the church community may become influenced by the culture around them and lose sight of their religious beliefs or no longer see the value of going to church and having a relationship with Christ. The church cannot afford to do anything. As stated earlier, not everyone believes that the church or youth ministry is in a state of emergency with declining church attendance. Not everyone thinks that the Nones' rising statistics or the increase in other worldviews is as critical as research studies have made it to be.

Definitions

Adolescents. Young kids in their teenage years, between 15 to 18 years old.⁵⁴

⁵³ Brosius, "Culture and The Church's Discipleship Strategy", 129.

⁵⁴ Powell, *Growing Young*, 29.

Agnostics. People that believe it is not possible to know if God or a supreme being exists.⁵⁵

Atheists. People that completely reject the idea of the existence of God or any supreme being.⁵⁶

Cell group. A small group that meets to grow in their relationship with Christ, be a witness among each other, and where members may not be afraid to share because it is a smaller group of people.

Conservatives. People that believe in their traditional faith or religion.⁵⁷

Covid-19. A flu-like virus that globally impacted the world towards the end of 2019 and caused the deaths of millions of people.

Deists. People that are uncertain about whether God exists, but they do believe that there is some type of spiritual force.⁵⁸

Discipleship. This term is not said specifically in the Bible, but Jesus did mandate in Matthew 28:18-20 that all believers should make disciples of others by teaching them to live and follow the teachings of Christ. It is the process that Jesus Christ gave to every Believer to mentor, teach, and train other Believers through relationships to continue this process to discover their God-given purpose and identity and to influence and impact the world.

Emerging adult. Emerging adults is a combination of two generations, Millennials and Generation Y. Emerging adulthood represents young adults between the ages of 18 to 29.

⁵⁵ Jeffrey Jensen Arnett. *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015): 213..

⁵⁶ Ibid., 213.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 213.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 213.

Emerging Adulthood is the name that was given to represent young people who have passed the age of adolescence but have not reached young adulthood.⁵⁹

Epidemic. An epidemic is a disease or anything that affects the minds and bodies of many individuals in a variety of populations at the same time.⁶⁰

Exiles. The name given to those who are still active in their faith but have mixed feelings between their traditional faith and widespread belief.⁶¹

Generation X. The generation that was born typically between 1965 to 1976.⁶²

Generation Y. The generation that was typically born between 1975 to 1997..⁶³

Generation Z. A term that describes individuals that were born after 1997.⁶⁴ This generation comes after the Millennials. Another name to describe Generation Z is by calling them Generation Next.

Intergenerational relationships. Mentoring relationships that are created between older and younger generations, or bridging the communication and relationship gap between older and younger generations.

LGBTQ. The acronym for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transvestite, and queer individuals.

⁵⁹ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, viii.

⁶⁰ Ken Ham, Britt Beemer and Todd Hillard, *Already Gone: Why Your Kids Will Quit Church and What You Can Do to Stop It* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2010), 20.

⁶¹ David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church...and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011): 25.

⁶² Paul O. Wendland, "Postmodernism and the Millennial Worldview", *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 113, no. 3 (Sum. 2016): 210.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁶⁴ Impact Lab. "On The Cusp of Adulthood and Facing An Uncertain Future".

Liberals. People that believe in multiple worldviews or that only believe in some forms of their inherited religion but mix that belief with popular beliefs.⁶⁵

Millennial. A term used to describe individuals that were born between 1977 and 1997.⁶⁶

Another name to describe this group is Generation Y.

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD). The belief that teaches a person to be good and do good, that God wants a people to feel good about themselves, and that God only intervenes in people's lives when they need him.

Nomads. The name given to those who are Christian but do not actively participate in religious institutions.⁶⁷

Nones. This group is comprised of individuals that identify themselves as not associated with a religion. This group is not just emerging adults but any group that does not identify a connection with organized or institutionalized religion.

Prodigals. The name given to those who no longer consider themselves Christians or believers in faith.⁶⁸

Secular Humanism. A religious worldview where people believe that there is no absolute truth. Still, that science gives more of a truthful meaning to the creation of the universe and humankind.

Seeker-sensitive or attractional church. An unconventional style of church, which may include a fresh style of music, different preaching style, different interpretation of the gospel message, and various activities that would attract or engage the younger generation.

⁶⁵ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 213.

⁶⁶ Impact Lab. "On The Cusp of Adulthood and Facing An Uncertain Future".

⁶⁷ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 25.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 25.

Limitations

The external circumstances and factors that presented challenges during the course of this research study were the restrictions from the pandemic and the lack of time and resources for participants. The first external circumstance that presented a challenge for this research study was Covid-19, the global pandemic that appeared near the end of 2019. The information that was received from this research study was provided through personal interviews and a focus discussion group. However, because of Covid-19 churches, businesses, schools, and most companies had to close their doors for several months. People were instructed by government officials to remain in their homes for several months, and when they were allowed to exit they were instructed to distance themselves six feet apart from the next person. These restrictions presented a challenge to where the researcher would not be able to conduct face-to-face interviews, but instead conduct internet interviews.

There are many constraints with conducting interviews and focus groups such as time, lack of resources, and lack of knowledge of how to use resources. Time was a factor because some participants had challenging schedules and the researcher must organize the interviews around the participant's schedules. Some participants may not have the technical resources to be a part of the study. Such as, they may not have access to the internet to have a virtual meeting or may not have compatible devices to have a virtual meeting. These were just a few of the limitations that presented themselves during the course of this research study.

Delimitations

Some parameters presented in the methodology of the research study were the participant group's size. There were five individuals interviewed from three different participant groups. The participants were narrowed to male and female individuals between the ages of 18 to 25 years

old. Lastly, the participants selected to participate in this study were selected from one social media website.

Another parameter presented in this study was interviewing pastors, parents of emerging adult children, and emerging adults that were once a part of a church congregation or ministry and left the community of faith after graduating high school. This sample of participants provided data on the reasons why emerging adults have left churches and have abandoned their faith.

The final parameter, the discipleship strategy itself, is a parameter. Creating a discipleship strategy may be the best effort at resolving the problem of emerging adults leaving the faith community and some abandoning their faith. However, there may be other strategies that other churches and ministries may have implemented that worked for their churches, such as evangelism, outreach, missional, attractional, and many more. However, the discipleship mentoring strategy is the method that was studied and used.

Thesis Statement

The problem is that emerging adults have left the church after graduating high school and are not returning, and some have abandoned their faith and spiritual beliefs. If an online discipleship mentoring program can be implemented that will connect emerging adults with spiritually mature Christian adults, then maybe emerging adults will return to the church. This Doctoral Ministry research was conducted to highlight the similarities and differences among earlier generations of young adults and the current generation of emerging adults, to provide reasons why emerging adults are not returning to churches, and if a discipleship mentoring program will help guide emerging adults to return to church.

This research will also view various outside-of-the-box discipleship programs that some churches and ministries developed to reconnect emerging adults to the community of faith inside and outside of the church walls. The online discipleship mentoring program is also an outside-of-the-box program that will focus on building long-term intergenerational relationships and helping emerging adults with spiritual formation, growing in every aspect of their lives and being changed from the spirit and soul. In building long-term intergenerational relationships, the adult mentors will impart godly wisdom, spiritual truths, place importance on God's word and the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of emerging adults. The adult mentors will exemplify sincerity, honesty, and love in their relationships with emerging adults. The adults will spend quality time online or by phone with their mentees and teach the true gospel of Jesus.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The problem is that emerging adults have left the church after high school and have not returned, and some have abandoned their faith and spiritual beliefs. Emerging adults leaving the church after they graduate high school or reaching the age of independence is not new information. The religious and spiritual decline of emerging adults, according to researchers, seems to have possibly started with the baby boomers.¹ What makes this generation of emerging adults different than earlier generations is that many of them are not returning. Many of them had left their faith, values, and beliefs that they learned when they were younger.

The church is a community of believers that authentically teaches and demonstrates God's grace, love, and mercy to all. The church is a community that teaches the truth about life through proper hermeneutics of the Bible and how the Bible relates to life. Still, emerging adults leave the church community, and some are not returning. This is why parents, and the church community should take the time to understand why emerging adults are leaving the church and are not returning and knowing why this is happening before developing solutions.² It is crucial to discover why this problem exists and any other steps applied to resolve the issue so that an effective and impactful discipleship plan that will fix the problem can.

This section contains a literature review that presents previous research that has been written about emerging adults and reasons why emerging adults have left the church from researchers and theologians who wanted to highlight the existence of this problem. This section

¹ Les Blank and J. Mark Ballard, "Revival of Hope: A Critical Generation for The Church", *Christian Education Journal* 6, no 2 (Fall 2002): 9.

² Ibid., 16.

also includes a theological foundation that presents a biblical stance about the issue and dealing with the situation. Finally, this section consists of a theoretical foundation that will highlight discipleship methods that other churches and ministries have implemented to reconnect with emerging adults. The discipleship methods will be examined to determine if these methods worked with reconnecting emerging adults and impacting their faith.

Emerging Adults' Drop-out Problem

Many emerging adults have left churches that they once grew up in and have not returned. Many emerging adults no longer believe or trust religious institutions, and some emerging adults have abandoned the faith and values they were once taught in church as children. Emerging adult is the name used to describe young adults between the ages of 18 to 29.³ Emerging adults is a combination of millennials that were born between 1991 to 2002.⁴ Some other names used to describe emerging adults are Generation Y, Millennials, and young adults.⁵

In May 2009, political scientists Putnam and Campbell of the Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life released a study that young adults were leaving the church up to five to six times faster than earlier generations. Putnam and Campbell pointed out that 30 to 40 percent of emerging adults no longer identify with a religion, versus 5 to 10 percent of young adults from previous generations that no longer identified with a religion.⁶ Kinnaman, the president of Barna

³ Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 29.

⁴ Alex McFarland and Jason Jimenez, *Abandoned Faith: Why Millennials Are Walking Away and How You Can Lead Them Home* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2017), 11.

⁵ Jonathan "JP" Pokluda and Luke Frieson, *Welcoming the Future Church: How to Reach, Teach, and Engage Young Adults* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020), 11.

⁶ Drew Dyck, "The Leavers: More Than in Previous Generations, 20 – and 30- Somethings are Abandoning the Faith: Why?", *Christianity Today* 54, no 11 (Nov 2010):40.

Group, reported in 2011 that 59 percent of young people with Christian backgrounds had dropped out of attending the church after going regularly. A majority of 57 percent say they are less active in the church today than when they were age fifteen. Nearly 38 percent say they had gone through a period when they significantly doubted their faith. Another 32 percent describe a period when they wanted to reject their parent's faith.⁷ Ham states that from the Barna Group's data derived from interviews with 2,000 teenagers and 22,000 adults in twenty-five separate surveys, the emerging adult church drop-out problem should be considered an epidemic. Ham adds that out of the 50 percent of teenagers in the United States attend church regularly, 75 percent of the teenagers discuss their faith with their friends. Approximately 33 percent of those teenagers attend church activities frequently, and 33 percent of Christian teenagers participate in Christian clubs at their schools.⁸ Newhouse stated that approximately 80 million emerging adults were disconnected and disengaged from the church or religious institutions and beyond the reach of many traditional churches that have used non-contemporary or traditional evangelism to re-engage with emerging adults. This is more so because emerging adults are considered the least religiously affiliated generation throughout the United States.⁹

The *National Catholic Reporter* confirms that 96.5 million catholic teenagers who were baptized in their adolescent years have graduated high school and left their religious institutions

⁷ David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church...and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 19.

⁸ Jeffrey Jensen Arnett. *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 22-23.

⁹ Catherine Newhouse, "The Forgotten Millennials" More Noncollege-bound Young Adults Seek Direction, and More Ministries are Poised to Help", *Christianity Today* 57, no 5 (Jun 2013): 16.

as well.¹⁰ Kinnaman expresses that millions of emerging adults had left the religious institutions that they were once active in when they were younger. Some emerging adults return after staying away for some time, but many have not.¹¹ Powell agrees that some emerging adults have maintained their faith throughout their young adult years and have returned to their religious institutions after their families. Pokluda and Frieson state that millennials stay disconnected for a long time, and some permanently.¹² Therefore, the concern is that there are still many young adults who have not returned to their religious institutions.¹³

The Nones

The *Nones* are identified as a group of individuals that has either dropped out of church or never attended church. Still, when asked if they are affiliated with the church, they say they are not affiliated with any religion or religious institution. Many people have varying definitions of the Nones. Stack defines the Nones as a group of people who, when asked to take a poll and identify any religions they were affiliated with, indicated that they were not affiliated with any religion. Stack says that the Nones have been developing and rising over the past twenty to thirty years. Stack also states that many of the Nones are young adults that did not grow up committed to a religion and did not express a need to want to explore any beliefs.¹⁴

¹⁰ David Gouger, "To Evangelize Youths Who Have Drifted from Church, Go 'Where They Are'", *National Catholic Reporter* 49, no 12 (March 29- April 11, 2013): 7.

¹¹ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 19.

¹² Pokluda, *Welcoming the Future Church*, 13.

¹³ Powell, *Growing Young*, 18.

¹⁴ Judith Stack, "The New Testament's Gentiles and Jeremiah's Good Figs: Biblical Paradigms for God's Presence among the 'Nones' and 'Dones'", *Word and World* 39, no 4 (Fall 2019): 329.

White's definition of Nones is that they are a secular group of individuals that has become one of the largest groups in America of millennials who have gone from believing in orthodox religion to thinking of becoming unsure of what they believe.¹⁵ McFarland agrees partially with White and defines *Nones* as the group that usually indicates *none* regarding being affiliated with religious institutions. McFarland further expresses that None is the fastest rising nation of people. Nones want to know the truth or what is true of spiritual matters.¹⁶ The Nones that are mentioned in this study is the ones that are emerging adults, although Nones can be of any age.

In the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), the total of Nones almost doubled from 1990 to 2008, from 8 percent to 15 percent. These numbers make this group of emerging adults one of the largest religiously unaffiliated groups in the United States.¹⁷ While the ARIS survey presented the above results, the Pew Research Center concluded similar findings:

The state of adults in the US who identify as Christians fell from 78 percent to 71 percent between 2007 and 2014. The corresponding increase in those who identify as 'religiously unaffiliated' (meaning atheist, agnostic, or 'noting in particular') jumped by almost seven points, from just over 16 percent to 23 percent. This well-publicized 'Rise of the Nones', varies by denomination. Mainline Protestantism, including the United States Methodist Church, the American Baptist Churches USA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the Episcopal Church, has experienced the greatest numbers. From 2007 to 2014, mainline Protestant adults slid from 41 million to 36 million, a decline of approximately 5 million.¹⁸

¹⁵ James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post Christian World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 21.

¹⁶ McFarland, *Abandoned Faith*, 13.

¹⁷ James Emery White, *The Rise of the None: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books), 14.

¹⁸ Powell, *Growing Young*, 15.

White believed that although the *Nones* are religiously unaffiliated, he disagrees that Nones are agnostic or atheist. White thinks that the *Nones* are spiritual, meaning that they often believe in and pray to God.¹⁹ White also states that the Nones accept God but deny Christian dogma. This may also mean that they reject the authenticity and accuracy of the Bible.²⁰

Kinnaman expresses that the None's lack of religious affiliation with any religious institution is an opportunity for the church to wake-up.²¹ On the other hand, Richardson believes that the steady increase of Nones and emerging adults leaving the church at an alarming rate is a myth. Richardson implies that the data provided that the rise of Nones are misinterpreted. The problem with the statistics that show that there are massive religious shifts of emerging adults from 2007 to 2014 is that the information does not show the difference between committed Christians and those that do not attend church regularly. Also, when looking at this data, the results are not as bad as researchers have stated.²²

While fewer people identify as Christian, those identifying as religiously unaffiliated or “nones” has grown from 16 to 23 percent. This is a massive growth for only seven years, with millennials (ages eighteen to thirty-three in 2014) accounting for a significant portion of this shift (25 to 35 percent). Looking only at the unchurched, those who identified as nones has risen to just over one-third (34 percent), again with millennials accounting for a significant share of this growth (43 percent of unchurched millennials identify as nones). More critically, the percent of unchurched millennials who identify as nones equals the percent of unchurched millennials that identify as Christians. We have reached a tipping point.²³

¹⁹ White, *The Rise of the None*, 22.

²⁰ White, *Meet Generation Z*, 61

²¹ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 11.

²² Rick Richardson, *You Found Me: New Research on How Unchurched Nones, Millennials, and Irreligious Are Surprisingly Open to Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 34.

²³ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

Richardson also believes that not all Nones are atheists or agnostics, but most of them consider themselves to be spiritual. Some consider them irreligious because the Nones are not affiliated with organized religion and because the definition of spiritual is loosely defined.²⁴ The 2012 Pew Forum study states that there are more than 13 million atheists and agnostics and more than 33 million non-affiliated individuals. Boehme states that Nones prefer to be non-affiliated with organized religion because of the hypocrisy of religions. Boehme continues that hypocrisy is just one factor, but that most Nones consider organized religion judgmental, homophobic, and too political.”²⁵

Other Types of Dropouts

Kinnaman defines other types of emerging adult dropouts as Nomads, Prodigals, and Exiles. The Nomads are considered the most common type of Christian drop out. The Nomads commonly experience disinterest, frustration, up-and-down faith in their teenage years. They are considered spiritual drifters and wanderers who distance themselves from the church community upon reaching emerging adulthood. The Nomads have a mixture of positive and negative emotions about their traditional faith.²⁶ The Nomads deem themselves Christians or that they are ‘spiritual’ just as deists do. Arnett states that deists are emerging adults who have a general belief in God or a higher authority, but reject organized or religious institutions. Deists believe that no one religion holds the absolute truth and that they can learn from many faiths.²⁷ Arnett states that fifteen percent of emerging adults are Deists.²⁸

²⁴ Richardson, *You Found Me*, 39.

²⁵ Boehme, “The Church and the Culture of the Millennials”, 97.

²⁶ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 62-63.

²⁷ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 214.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 213.

Kinnaman describes Prodigals as emerging adult's that typically leave their traditional or inherited faith entirely. Prodigals have feelings about Christianity are usually dependent on whether they had positive or negative experiences with the church. Prodigals typically state that they are no longer Christians or have faith or will change religions.²⁹ Arnett adds that Atheists and Agnostics have similarities with Prodigals. Atheists entirely reject any belief in God and Agnostics do not believe it is possible to know if God exists. Some Agnostics believe that science and religion do not mix. Agnostics accept other religious worldviews versus Christianity because of their uncertainties that God or the afterlife can be proven. Arnett states that 40 percent of emerging adults are either Atheists or Agnostics.³⁰

The last group of dropouts that Kinnaman describes are the Exiles. The Exiles grew up in the church but felt lost and disconnected from the church. The Exiles think that their faith and what they learned in the church was not enough to sustain them. The Exiles are skeptical about religious institutions, but they are still committed to living spiritual lives. Exiles are similar to liberals in that they are frustrated and concerned about religious institutions and how shallow religious practices are.³¹ Arnett stated that liberals take parts that they believe from their faith and ignore the rest. Liberals are also skeptical about religious institutions and organized religion. They do not think that they have to express their faith or love for God by attending a church or an institution. Liberals believe that the church is not as essential as having faith and belief in God.³²

²⁹ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 65.

³⁰ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 213.

³¹ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 77-78.

³² Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 215.

Why Emerging Adult's Drop Out is important

Growth consultant Arn believes that emerging adults who have left the church are not a problem, and there is no need for the church to be concerned. Arn believes that emerging adults will return to the church just as previous generations have done.³³ Kinnaman disagrees with Arn that the emerging adult dropout is a problem, and millions more emerging adults will continue to leave the church.³⁴ DeVries states that ignoring the emerging adult dropout means that the church is missing out on evangelizing and discipling the largest generation in history.³⁵ McFarland points out that young adults leaving the faith and religious institutions is a problem because that means that they are making life choices and decisions on their own without godly intervention.³⁶ Morgan adds that churches think that they are resolving the issue, but instead, the Pew Research Center's report in 2015 showed that emerging adults leaving the church have increased and have become a trend. Emerging adults have closed their Bibles and turned away from organized religion.³⁷

Reasons Emerging Adults Leave Religious Institutions

The Church

Kinnaman reports that emerging adults expressed that religious institutions did not provide a safe environment to express doubts and concerns. The emerging adults that were interviewed further revealed that whenever they expressed concerns or asked questions in

³³ Richardson, *You Found Me*, 17.

³⁴ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 31.

³⁵ DeVries, *Sustainable Young Adult Ministry*, 6.

³⁶ McFarland, *Abandoned Faith*, 16.

³⁷ Tony Morgan and the Unstuck Group, *Reaching and Leading Millennials: Practical Conversations to Get You Unstuck* (The Unstuck Group, 2015), 4.

church, they received "slick or half-baked answers to their thorny, honest questions."³⁸ The emerging adults said that church people were hypocritical, judgmental, mean and that the church does not keep up with major cultural shifts that have taken place in the world with this generation of young adults.³⁹ Dean agrees with this observation and adds that emerging adults have left the church because church people have had a reputation of being mean, unwelcome, rejecting new people and ideas, and are rude and argumentative.⁴⁰ Wendland confirms that the church provided emerging adult's beliefs, culture, and questions with negative feedback.⁴¹ Ham reports that America's Research Group conducted a study of 20,000 emerging adults to find many reasons emerging adults leave the church. The top ten reasons through research from America's Research Group on why emerging adults leave the church are: boring, legalism, hypocrisy of leaders, too political, self-righteous, distance, not relevant, do not believe in hell, do not believe in the relevancy or practicality of the Bible, and their preferred church or faith is not local.⁴²

Setran expresses that the church does not believe that emerging adults leaving religious institutions is a big problem because they do not see young adults as contributors to their churches as their parents. Setran states that some churches believe that young adults do not contribute financially, volunteer, or even serve in ministries. Therefore, these churches believe

³⁸ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 11.

³⁹ Ibid., 20

⁴⁰ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), 35.

⁴¹ Wendland, "Postmodernism", 231.

⁴² Ham, *Gone Already*, 28.

that they should not make deep investments with emerging adults or focus on reconnection.⁴³ Ji disagrees with Setran and states that regardless of whether many churches see emerging adults as contributors, they must still search for ways to minimize the decline in church attendance for young adults. Ji also states that most churches have prioritized re-engaging these young adults in their ministries.⁴⁴

Wendland indicates that emerging adults leave the church or religious institutions because Christians have a reputation for being mean, arrogant, prideful, or have an exclusive attitude towards anyone who does not think, look, or act like them.⁴⁵ McFarland adds that some churches and pastors are hypocritical, judgmental, inauthentic, self-righteous, arrogant and that most pastors and churches are not experiencing a community relationship with their brothers and sisters in Christ.⁴⁶ Pokluda also agrees that emerging adults leave the church because of the inauthenticity of the people that attend and pastor. Pokluda says that emerging adults can tell when people wear masks at church, hiding their issues and problems and pretend to have it all together and go back home no different than they left the church with no real change in their lives.⁴⁷

⁴³ David P. Setran and Chris A. Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 92.

⁴⁴ Chang-Ho C. Ji and Tevita Tameifuna, "Youth Pastor, Youth Ministry and Youth Attitude Toward the Church", *Review of Religious Research* 52, no. 3 (Mar. 2011): 306.

⁴⁵ Wendland, "Postmodernism", 231.

⁴⁶ McFarland, *Abandoned Faith*, 208.

⁴⁷ Pokluda, *Welcoming the Future Church*, 16.

Dean believes that churches are doing a wonderful job of teaching youth that church and faith is not a priority, that God does not require much from Christians, and that church is more of a social gathering than a place to learn how to live in the world rather than living of the world.⁴⁸ Pokluda states that some churches have placed more of a focus on re-engaging emerging adults because they recognize that emerging adults are worth the investment as being future leaders in the world.⁴⁹ Maiden confirms that the church's teachings caused the decline in church attendance among millennials. The church should teach that God has a plan for their lives and that identity and vocation are a part of God's plan. Since the church does not teach millennials that their identity and vocation are part of a bigger plan, millennials do not see the church or religious institutions as relevant.⁵⁰ Mueller believes that the law of separation of church and state has become a problem because it has become less involved in the community. Churches are less vocal about social issues in the community and the church, such as social injustices. Mueller adds that the church does not preach relevant messages about the truth found in the Bible in ways that would make sense in their daily living in the communities they live, work, and play in.⁵¹ Some emerging adults feel that the church condemns their lifestyle choices such as drinking, premarital sex, and being a part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual (LGBT) community.⁵² The church should listen to the hurtful experiences and to the needs of the emerging adults that

⁴⁸ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 188.

⁴⁹ Pokluda, *Welcoming the Future Church*, 12.

⁵⁰ Michael Maiden, *Turn the World Upside Down: Discipling the Nations with the Seven Mountain Strategy* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 2011), 87.

⁵¹ Paul Mueller, "Some Thoughts About the Attractional, Sending, and Engaged Church", *Missio Apostolica* 19, (Nov. 2011): 124-125.

⁵² Setran, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 88.

have left. There is a substantial number of emerging adults that have left church and religion because they lost faith in organized religion.⁵³

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

Another likely reason emerging adults have left the church and are not returning comes from what they were taught when they younger attending church. Some emerging adults have learned religious traditions, rule and regulations more than they have learned about the importance of having a transformative relationship with Christ. Some youth ministries and churches have taught a watered-down version of the gospels and the Bible, and it has left emerging adults to grow up believing that God is just a landlord that watches over the universe and does not have any personal involvement in the people's lives.⁵⁴

“The National Study of Youth and Religion reveals a theological fault line running underneath American churches: an adherence to a do-good, feel-good spirituality that has little to do with the Triune God of Christian tradition and even less to do with loving Jesus Christ enough to follow Christ into the world.”⁵⁵ This faulty teaching has caused emerging adults to see that the Gospel does not pertain to their life and culture, that God is not accessible to them, that what they have learned were myth and fiction, and that teachings were watered-down. This type of erroneous teaching is called Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Powell described Moralistic

Therapeutic Deism as:

Moralistic, meaning that religious young people equate faith with being a good, moral person (generally, being nice). It is therapeutic, so faith becomes a means of feeling better about themselves. And it is deistic, meaning God exists, but this God is not involved in human affairs with any regularity...While a more passionate faith would

⁵³ Boehme, “The Church and The Culture of The Millennials”, 103.

⁵⁴ Setran, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 24.

⁵⁵ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 4.

provide young people with the anchor, they need to ground their identity in Christ, this halfhearted religious worldview leaves teenagers and emerging adults adrift in a ho-hum sea of bland religious niceness.⁵⁶

Dean describes Moralistic Therapeutic Deism as unholy not missional.⁵⁷ Moralistic Therapeutic Deism Christianity can also be described as a religion where God is seen as a genie and God only intervenes with humanity to give blessings or to solve problems. These individuals pray to God when there is a problem; so, instead of seeing God as their Creator, he is seen as their genie. The mindset with this teaching is to live as good people, do good things, and help others to have a good life on earth and to get into heaven.⁵⁸

Cultural Shifts

America has experienced some significant demographic changes since the early 21st century. There have been significant cultural shifts that have led to changes in America today versus America in the 1960s. Taylor states that corporations have noticed the difference and have created marketing ads that reflect the significant demographic shifts that have taken place over the years. Major corporations such as Coca-Cola presented an advertisement during the Super Bowl in 2014 of the song “America the Beautiful” that was sung in seven different languages. In that same Super Bowl advertisement, Cheerios, another major corporation, showed an advertisement of an interracial couple. Chevrolet created an advertisement in that Super Bowl that highlighted families, and one of the families was a gay couple. Therefore, significant corporations are aware that the culture in America has changed significantly. It seems like the

⁵⁶ Powell, *Growing Young*, 130.

⁵⁷ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 130.

⁵⁸ Setran, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 21.

big corporations are becoming aware that if they want to continue to grow these powerful corporations and continue to make money, they will need to shift with the times.⁵⁹

Kinnaman adds that there have been many major cultural shifts that have taken place over the last few decades, such as technology, media, advertising, sexuality, politics, and free markets. Millennials are living in a technologically driven society, where everything they do, and think is technology. Millennials have access to everything from various worldviews, various sermons, pressure about sexuality and identity, and more.⁶⁰ Baby Boomers grew up during the era of the expansion of television, radio, eight tracks to listen to music. Generation X grew up during the evolution of the computer, pagers, car cellular phones, records, and tapes. Millennials grew up during the internet revolution, mp3 players, iPods, and more advanced cellular phones. During the teen years for Millennials, they experienced social media sites, Wi-Fi, and on-demand television instead of just having regular cable for entertainment. Generation Z, on the other hand, was utterly raised in a more technologically advanced world. Generation Z children were born with smartphones, video gaming, and social media. Researchers are now studying the positive and negative effects of continuous technology use with Millennials and Generation Z.⁶¹

Blank adds that emerging adults today are called the Digital Generation or iGeneration because they were raised in a technologically advanced world. Emerging adults and Generation Zers place priority and critical focus on social media and the internet. This generation and the next generation of young adults do not speak the same language, understand the same language,

⁵⁹ Taylor, "The Well-Being of Young Adults in the 'Next America'", S4.

⁶⁰ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 38-39.

⁶¹ Michael Dimock, "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins", *Pew Research Center*, March 17, 2019, accessed on April 26, 2021, <https://www.tony-silva.com/eslefl/miscstudent/downloadpagearticles/defgenerations-pew.pdf>.

have the exact needs, or go to the same places as young adults of previous generations. Many of the millennial and Generation Z boys and young men are addicted to video games. Many millennial and Generation Z girls and young ladies are addicted to learning their identity and self-worth from social media and the internet.⁶²

Boehme agrees with Blank and adds that Emerging adults have grown up in the digital age with Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok videos. Many have many tattoos, piercings, video gamers, and love brand-name materials.⁶³ Emerging adults are the generation that seeks and rely on outside attention and approval, so social media and the internet are how emerging adults and teenagers engage in sexual relationships, peer relationships, and identity.⁶⁴ The answers to questions are at the fingertips of emerging adults on the global internet. At one point, pastors, teachers, and parents were the gatekeepers for information, and now millennials can find all their answers with Google and Siri.⁶⁵

Parents

Parents are another reason that some emerging adults leave the church and do not return. The dynamics of many households have changed. There are fewer traditional households and more emerging adults are growing up blended, single, and same-sex households than ever before. The absence of fathers and men role models or mentors has played a significant role in the lives

⁶² Blank, “Revival of Hope”, 9.

⁶³ Boehme, “The Church and The Culture of The Millennials”, 95.

⁶⁴ Powell, *Growing Young*, 105-106.

⁶⁵ Mark Kiessling and Julianna Shults, “The Search for Young People: 2017 Research of Millennials and the LCMS”, *Concordia Journal* 44 no 4 (Fall 2018): 27.

of teenagers and many emerging adults. The increase of the divorce rate among Christian households has also played a significant factor in the lives of teenagers and emerging adults.⁶⁶

Kinnaman believes that although the family structure and dynamics have changed, the relationship between emerging adults and their parents improves when they reach this developmental stage.⁶⁷ Setran, on the other hand, disagrees with this revelation and states that the relationship between emerging adults and their parents are most difficult in this stage of development. Once the emerging adult reaches the age of independence, they search for their identity and purpose separate from their parents.⁶⁸ McFarland agrees with Kinnaman that emerging adults take on the beliefs and values that they saw their parents portray. McFarland adds that the continuance of faith or religious beliefs in emerging adults may result from how faith and religion were portrayed in their homes as children. Suppose the parent(s) demonstrated a positive, healthy, and strong faith in the household. In that case, the emerging adult would continue that faith after leaving their parent(s). McFarland also states that if the parent(s) faith was not a priority and if other activities were placed above religion and other spiritual formation disciplines, then the emerging adult would not have a positive view on faith when they become independent.⁶⁹

Developmental Stages of Emerging Adults

Dunn stated that emerging adults is the name that describes the new phase of adulthood for the current generation of millennials because their process of development in becoming

⁶⁶ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 45.

⁶⁷ Richard R. Dunn and Jana L. Sundene, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults: Life-Giving Rhythms for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 70.

⁶⁸ Setran, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 89.

⁶⁹ McFarland, *Abandoned Faith*, 14.

independent and fully functioning adults takes a lot longer than earlier generations. Emerging adults stay in college longer, live with their parents longer, and avoid starting families sooner than previous generations.⁷⁰ Arnett said emerging adults have a longer road to adulthood than the last generation of young adults.⁷¹ White also confirmed that this generation of emerging adult development from adolescence into adulthood is lengthier than previous generations.⁷²

There are five main phases of development for emerging adults. The first phase is exploring identity. Emerging adults ask the question, "who am I." This question can be about the essence of who they are in life, work, and relationship. Identity is also about beliefs and values. The second phase is instability. This phase is where emerging adults habituate changing what they do not like, such as jobs, where they want to live, and even changing academic majors or unsure of what academics major they may wish to pursue. The third phase is the self. Self is the phase where emerging adults focus on themselves, their wants, needs, desires, and thoughts. This phase allows emerging adults to feel as though they are independent of their parent's wants, needs, and desires for their lives, and instead, they are focused on their own lives. The fourth phase is the middle. This phase is where emerging adults feel as though they are no longer adolescents, but they do not want the full responsibilities of being adults yet. The emerging adult is in the middle or in-between stage of life. The last phase is limitless possibilities. This is the phase where emerging adults are overly optimistic and believe that they have many opportunities and options that they can and may want to explore.⁷³

⁷⁰ Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*, 17.

⁷¹ Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*, 1.

⁷² White, *The Rise of the*, 14.

⁷³ Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*, 17.

DeVries states that the developmental process for emerging adults is not the same for previous generations. In previous generations, the young adult would grow up, go to college, start careers, start a family, and then retire to live on pensions provided by the next generation of young adults that grow up and start careers and then continue the pattern. However, with this generation of emerging adults, the pattern is entirely off. Emerging adults are unstable with where to live, going to school, traveling, working internships, or temporary positions. They are competing for unpaid jobs to stall progressing into adulthood.⁷⁴

What Motivates and Influences Emerging Adults

What motivates emerging adults is different from the motivations of previous generation young adults. Researchers and business executives have tried to understand what influences emerging adults. Researchers and business executives have concluded that emerging adults are motivated and controlled by the need to feel as though they are contributing to the world and doing something that they believe in, such as helping others, according to Morgan.⁷⁵

Devries states that emerging adults are constantly looking for ways to make the environment and the world better. Emerging adults eat foods that are better for the environment. Emerging adults strive to make the world a better place.⁷⁶ Wendland agrees and adds that “others have characterized them as a hopeful generation – one that is eager to serve and change things for the better. It is true to say that their sense of life’s fragility lends urgency to their quest for change. It causes them to want to keep their focus on what really in life rather than simply living a humdrum existence of working, eating, and sleeping.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ DeVries, *Sustainable Adult Ministry*, 27.

⁷⁵ Morgan, *Reaching and Leading Millennials*, 12.

⁷⁶ DeVries, *Sustainable Young Adult Ministry*, 12.

⁷⁷ Wendland, *Postmodernism and the Millennial Worldview*, 223.

Morgan points out that emerging adults care about their communities, they want to see justice prevail, and they are not seeking the traditional Sunday morning church experience. Emerging adults want to be a part of a church that puts action into community service. Emerging adults are so community-driven that, according to Morgan, if a church is seeking to draw a crowd, they become very frustrated.⁷⁸ DeVries stated that a poll that included young adults between the ages of eighteen to thirty-five were asked what would prevent them from leaving the church or get them to return. Emerging adults said community, social justice, depth, and mentorship are significant to them.⁷⁹

Solving the Dropout Problem

The church has to decide on whether or not they want to develop ways to reconnect and re-engage with the eighty million young adults that have left the church, or if the church wants to continue to watch from the sidelines as these young adults remove God from every mountain of influence and continue to live in a world where God either does not exist or only exists when it is beneficial for young adults.⁸⁰ According to Powell, the church should want to change the way young adults view the church, faith, and the world.⁸¹ Young adults want to be included in something that matters. They want to make a difference in the world. They want to be a part of an environment that will allow them to show their creativity. Young adults also want to be a part of a family that cares about them enough to work alongside them and be honest and

⁷⁸ Morgan, *Reaching and Leading Millennials*, 13.

⁷⁹ DeVries, *Sustainable Young Adult Ministry*, 58.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 61.

⁸¹ Powell, *Growing Young*, 28.

sincere.⁸² Masback stated that “ It is magical thinking to believe we can throw a few crumbs from the church budget table, underpay a revolving-door cast of rookie youth ministers, and trust that a few mumbled prayers would convert pizza, games, and mission trips into a body of Christ.”⁸³ Therefore, Dunn stated that the church should change its thinking on how to reconnect and re-engage with these young adults who want to be a part of something greater than themselves, making a difference in the world.⁸⁴

Attractional Church

According to White, the conversation of the seeker for evangelical churches began in the late seventies and continued until the mid-nineties. Churches have then embraced “seeker church”, “seeker-sensitive”, “seeker-driven”, and more. Seeker was supposed to refer to those who were unchurched but who desired spirituality and religion.⁸⁵ DeVries claims that now seeker is seen more as the attractional church, a strategy that the church has used to make the church service more appealing to those who are unchurched. The music is more contemporary and louder, coffee shops, bakeries, fellowship hall, online giving, and pastors who wear skinny jeans and t-shirts, is what some have thought would draw emerging adults back into the church.⁸⁶ However, White believes that the attractional style church or environment is not the way to draw millennials back to the church. Starbucks, mailings, music, and other attractions will not draw millennials back to the church when they are anti-church in the first place.⁸⁷ McFarland points

⁸² Powell, *Growing Young*, 41.

⁸³ Masback, “Twin Calamities”, 27-28.

⁸⁴ Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*, 46.

⁸⁵ White, *The Rise of the Nones*, 26.

⁸⁶ DeVries, *Sustainable Young Adult Ministry*, 40.

⁸⁷ White, *The Rise of the Nones*, 89.

out that attractional church or seeker-sensitive church has become a place where everyone is right, and no one is wrong. It is a place where Bible does not dictate right and wrong, but the emotions and being politically correct are more the indicators of right and wrong. Therefore, McFarland believes that this strategy is not a way to reconnect or re-engage young adults.⁸⁸

Discipleship

A disciple is a person who spreads the message of Jesus Christ according to Drissi. Discipleship is the process where disciples learn and mature in the teachings of the gospel of Jesus Christ, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit helps to teach, guide, and transform the life of the disciple to become more Christ-like in their lives and then to share their transformative experience and the teachings that they learned with others so that they too can be transformed into the image of Christ.⁸⁹ George Barna proposes that discipleship is a transformation of growing in Christ. He continues to suggest that emerging adults have left churches because the traditional church is ineffective in showing them how to experience God's purpose in this modern world, but instead emerging adults want to experience a purposeful spiritual formation in outside the traditional church.⁹⁰

Brosius adds that salvation is one part of the development and maturation of a Christian. Salvation is the beginning; however, some people and churches are stuck at the salvation stage. Being a disciple is more than just being saved, but it is also learning and growing from the message of the gospel and seeing how this message can transform the life of the individual.

⁸⁸ McFarland, *Abandoned Faith*, 13.

⁸⁹ Ani Ghazaryan Drissi, "What Is Transforming Discipleship?", *The Ecumenical Review* 71, no 1-2 (Jan – Apr 2019): 217.

⁹⁰ Chris Shirley, "It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple: An Integrative Model of Discipleship for the Local Church", *Southwestern Journal of Theology* Volume 50, No 2 (Spring 2008): 207.

Discipleship classes, studies, events, and programs are not what transforms the lives of the individual. The transformation comes from the Holy Spirit. The discipleship strategy or plan is the course of action, but spiritual maturity happens when the person being disciplined is placed in an environment or relationship where they can change and grow.⁹¹

Kinnaman states that the dropout problem with emerging adults is a result of a lack of discipleship in many churches. Young adults leave the church after graduating high school because they were not taught that Christ and their faith in Christ is foundational. Learning that faith and Christ is the foundation in their lives means that they were not disciplined and were not taught to make disciples.⁹² DeVries agreed with Kinnaman that many churches have not been strong in their discipleship strategy and making disciples of young adults. Discipleship strengthens the faith of young adults and all of those who are involved in the discipleship process, such as pastors, mentors, and youth leaders.⁹³ Dunn believes that discipleship should be a priority in every church to teach young adults the truth of God's word, how it applies to their lives, how they can journey through life with God, and give them hope.

Discipleship is a way for young adults to see themselves and their lives in the larger scope of God's picture. The identity and purpose of emerging adults is among God's big picture, just as it was with various people in the Bible.⁹⁴ Powell believes that young adults face many obstacles in their lives that hinder their pursuit of Jesus, his sacrifice, how he set free, healed, and restored wholeness to those who desired Jesus and more in their lives. Discipleship is a way to

⁹¹ Brosius, "Culture and the Church's Discipleship Strategy", 137.

⁹² Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 21.

⁹³ DeVries, *Sustainable Young Adult Ministry*, 134.

⁹⁴ Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults* 40.

show these young adults sacrifice, wholeness, and truth to live their lives.⁹⁵ This truth teaching through Jesus' life and the life experiences of emerging adults, some authors agree is a way to counter the teachings of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Dean further adds that it is through discipleship that young adults will not learn that being nice, selfish, or self-giving, or personal fulfillment and the truth of sacrificing and following Jesus is transformative, contradicting the teachings Moralistic Therapeutic Deism that they may have received when they were younger and attended church.⁹⁶ Instead of the church making disciples for Christ, they have been making disciples of moralistic therapeutic deism. Of course, that has not been the intent of the church.⁹⁷

Barna Research Group conducted a study in 2017 where they visited the congregations of pastors who said that they have Bible-based teachings and that they have biblical worldviews. Barna Research Group concluded after asking the congregation basic questions about salvation, heaven and hell, and Jesus that less than one in seven had an actual understanding of the most basic principles of the Bible. Approximately 85 percent of kids that attended church when they were younger do not have a biblical worldview and leave the church during the period of emerging adulthood. Approximately 20 percent of emerging adults that claim to be Christians have a basic understanding of basic biblical beliefs.⁹⁸

Discipleship Mentoring

Intergenerational relationships are relationships between younger and older individuals that cross from generation to generation. The mentor should be someone that selflessly invests

⁹⁵ Powell, *Growing Young* 128-129.

⁹⁶ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 64.

⁹⁷ Chad Lakies, "Candy Machine God, Or, Going to Church Without Going to Church: Millennials and The Future of The Christian Faith", *Missio Apostolica* 21, no 1 (May 2013): 24.

⁹⁸ Brosius, "Culture and The Church's Discipleship Strategy", 127-128.

their time, commitment, talent, and gifts into an emerging adult.⁹⁹ According to Kiessling, it is easy for emerging adults to disconnect and there are many reasons why they have disconnected, but without discipleship and mentors who want to help emerging adults, they may not reconnect or return to the church.¹⁰⁰ Lakies points out that intergenerational discipleship relationships are absolutely necessary because it allows the older adult to teach, train, coach, and guide the emerging adult through the journey of life so that when the emerging adult gets older they can pass on that same knowledge to the next generation. Intergenerational discipleship is also a way to develop and maintain a healthy Christian lifestyle of faith and spiritual formation for the future in a world that has shifted to the decline of true Christian faith, values, and principles to live by.¹⁰¹

Mentors should have an active prayer life, devotion, and study time to be able to teach and guide emerging adults. Mentors should demonstrate a passion for wanting to train, guide, confront, and challenge emerging adults. Mentors must be authentic and transparent. Mentors must be able to tell emerging adults the truth out of love for them and not “sugar coat” the truth for fear of not being “politically correct” with them. Emerging adults can handle the truth in love, and they want to be told the truth. Mentors should be able to help emerging adults to see their place in God’s redemptive story and how this is relevant to their lives.¹⁰² It is important to create and develop intergenerational relationships.

⁹⁹ Lakies, “Candy Machine God”, 26.

¹⁰⁰ Kiessling, “The Search for Young People”, 29.

¹⁰¹ Lakies, “Candy Machine God”, 26.

¹⁰² Russell L. Lackey, “High Hopes in a Grim World: Why Emerging Adults Need the Church”, *Word & World* 40, no 1 (Wint 2020): 74.

Review of Literature Conclusion

The Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life, Barna Research Group, and The National Catholic Reporter magazine reported that there many young adults that leave religious institutions after graduating high school. Although research has shown that leaving religious institutions after graduating high school is commonplace for emerging adults as they gain a bit of independence from their parents; however, many emerging adults are not returning to churches. In fact, there are many emerging adults that abandon their faith altogether. There are different names for emerging adult's that have dropped out of the church, such as: Nones, Atheists, Agnostics, Exiles, and Liberals. Although, the fastest rising group of emerging adults are the Nones, those that claim that they are not affiliated with any religion or religious institution.

The literature reviewed has shown that there are several reasons why the decline in church and faith with emerging adults is significant. Emerging adults do not see church and religion as a priority in their lives. Some emerging adults no longer believe the teachings that they were taught when they attended church. Some emerging adults believe that the church environment and church people are hypocritical, judgmental, mean, and will not change with the cultural shifts. Therefore, church leaders must rethink and reimagine church so emerging adults will reconnect. Discipleship is the strategy that will help church leaders and parents reconnect with emerging adults. The discipleship strategy should focus on creating long-term intergenerational relationships with emerging adults. These relationships should focus on mentoring, training, teaching, and helping emerging adults to reconnect with the church community and faith. Discipleship is the strategy that will help emerging adults to learn to become disciples, disciple makers, and fulfill the discipleship mandate in Matthew 28:18-20.

Theological Foundations

The theological and biblical content of this research study is to show that creating a discipleship strategy to re-engage and re-ignite emerging adults is the responsibility of parents and everyone in the church community and is rooted in Scripture. The problem is that many emerging adults leave the church community after graduating high school, some abandon their faith, and some abandon institutionalized religion. Even though emerging adults gain their independence after graduating high school and then some leave the church, it is common for some people to get lost in life. It is common for emerging adults to stray away from the church; however, God does not want his people to be separated from him. Luke 15 instructs the believers on what Jesus says about people being lost or separated from God:

So Jesus told them this story: “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep’ (Luke 15:3-7).¹⁰³

It is in this Scripture that Jesus teaches the importance of how God is a loving father, and he knows that people will get lost in life’s journey or lose their way, but it is important for those who understand how detrimental it is to be lost or separated from God to help the lost to find their way back home. This Scripture is where Jesus was teaching the concept of the kingdom of God to both the sinners and the religious leaders. Jesus was also teaching the need for salvation and showing the religious leaders that they cannot be so prideful that they do not see that those who are lost need God.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible references are to the New Living Translation (NLT) (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishing, 2007).

¹⁰⁴ Trent C. Butler, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Luke* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), Luke 15:3.

The word “lost” can be defined as missing something, confused, or even demolished. Using the terms such as missing something, confused, and even demolished or destroyed will paint a different picture about emerging adults leaving the church community.¹⁰⁵ The Bible has many Scriptures about the importance of going after the lost. “For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost” (Luke 19:10). This is the reason that God sent Jesus into the world, and that was to seek and save those that were lost. As emerging adults leave the church community to find their identities in the world, it is possible that they are losing themselves in the world. You cannot find yourself by losing or abandoning your relationship with Christ or the kingdom of God. Therefore, just as Jesus seeks after those who are lost the church community must do the same for emerging adults. It is vitally crucial that the church community not lose emerging adults to the world, because the next generation are the future, and what would the future hold for those who no longer prioritize or accept Jesus Christ?

Also, it is important that emerging adults hear the truth of the gospel of Christ, the kingdom of God, salvation that comes by no other way except through Christ, and that every Believer’s life should mirror that of Christ. Any other teaching is false, and there are many other teachings that are in the world today that emerging adults began to believe when they do not hear the truth.

Preach the word of God Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching. For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths” (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

That time of hearing false teachings, false prophets, and erroneous teachings is now. Right before this Scripture is a Scripture that says “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful

¹⁰⁵ David Earley and David Wheeler, *Everyday Series: Evangelism* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2016), 36.

to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). This Scripture does not make any implications, but it emphatically states that all truth comes from God’s word, and that is what churches should teach and preach. Leaders should not teach from intellect, emotions, opinions, or tradition, but from God’s word. It is his word alone that will cause transformation in a person’s life. Paul was instructing his spiritual son Timothy to preach, to exhort them and to declare what God says about them. Paul was stating that people are lost but when God’s word is preached from the Scriptures that his word will counsel, rebuke, and encourage. Other teachings will appease the flesh but displease the spirit and the Lord.¹⁰⁶

Parents and the Church Community’s Responsibility

“But you must remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you. You have been taught the holy Scriptures from childhood, and they have given you the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:14-15). Children oftentimes follow the example of what their parents taught, or what was taught to them by those who had authority over them. If the parents were taught to follow God, have a relationship with God, and was authentic and transparent in their lives, sometimes children will follow that example.

Another example of following the teachings and example of parents for emerging adults is how Paul described Timothy’s faith. “I remember your genuine faith, for you share the faith that first filled your grandmother Lois and your mother, Eunice. And I know that same faith continues strong in you (2 Timothy 1:5-6). In both 1 and 2 Timothy, Paul had many

¹⁰⁶ Tony Evans, *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary: Advancing God’s Kingdom Agenda* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019), 1297.

conversations with Timothy about the difference between false teachings and the Scriptures. Paul was describing the importance of godly heritage and how the family is the God's first institution to learn about God and faith. This Scriptures also shows the importance of the roles of parents and grandparents and how they model their faith. Lastly, this Scripture shows the importance and powerfulness of women in the lives of a young man when the father is absent physically or spiritually.¹⁰⁷

The relationship with Solomon and David is an example of this. "Observe the requirements of the Lord your God and follow all his ways. Keep the decrees, commands, regulations, and laws written in the Law of Moses so that you will be successful in all you do and wherever you go. If you do this, then the Lord will keep the promise he made to me" (1 Kings 2:3-4). In this Scripture David taught his son to obey the Lord as he has done in his life to have a successful life. In the next chapter Solomon was made king and had a dream where he asked the Lord for wisdom to govern his people. God granted Solomon with wisdom, understanding, and riches that no one else had ever had. God also told Solomon "And if you follow me and obey my decrees and my commands as your father, David, did, I will give you a long life" (1 Kings 3:10-14). When Solomon was given his position, he was an emerging adult around the age of nineteen or twenty. Solomon was about to take on the arduous task of becoming king over a tumultuous nation, with jealous brothers who worked in opposition to him. Solomon knew that he would have profound influence over this nation, and so Solomon followed in the example of his father David by obeying God.¹⁰⁸ It was because of Solomon's obedience and following his father's example that he received long life, wisdom, understanding, and wealth. It is the responsibility of

¹⁰⁷ *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary*, 1292

¹⁰⁸ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes on the Old Testament* (Wordsearch Corp. 2010), 1 Kings.

parents and caregivers to instruct children and emerging adults to follow their example of obeying God. Throughout the books of 1 and 2 Kings are examples of kings that did and did not follow in the examples of their parents. There were more dishonest, murderous, blasphemous kings than there were kings that followed the wisdom and counsel of God. The main point is that the Bible records that many of the kings followed in the example that they were taught by their parents. For example, Abijah ruled in Judah and the Bible stated that he committed the same sins as his father (2 Kings 14). King Amaziah followed his father Joash and they both ruled in a way that pleased God. Joash did not follow the bad example of his father, who did not rule in a way that pleased God. All the kings were measured against their ancestors king David, and even though some of the kings did please God even if their father did not, they still did not follow their godly heritage with King David.¹⁰⁹ Again, the first foundational unit that God created was the family. It is the family that is supposed to teach about faith and pleasing God. The Scripture that follows shows what God says about this matter:

And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders (Deuteronomy 6:6-8).

Proverbs, the book of wisdom, is another Scripture that can lay the foundation for parents of young children and parents of emerging adults. “Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it” (Proverbs 22:6). Some people believe that this Scripture is controversial and means that if you raise your children in church, they will continue when they are grown. This Scripture has much more meaning than church and religion. This

¹⁰⁹ *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary*, 388-389.

Scripture says that when parents are actual examples for their children and that parents live the way they teach, then as children grow up, they continue to keep those principles and values with them. Parents have a responsibility to teach and model wisdom for their children and emerging adults and to help them to decipher between wisdom and foolishness. This is just one principle that allows the child and emerging adult to determine the difference and make better decisions in their lives. Unfortunately, parents fail their children when parents fail to teach their children discipline, obedience, surrender, wisdom, humility, and love. This failure is part of why society has the problems they have and why emerging adults no longer trust any institution.¹¹⁰

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism and Other Religious Beliefs

There are no research studies that prove specifically that the reason that emerging adults become atheists, agnostics, liberal believers, or that they had only a watered-down view of the gospels is because they were forced to regularly attend church services when they were younger. If emerging adults have a faulty belief about church, God, or even the gospel, this will negatively affect their attitude and behavior towards the Christian worldview.¹¹¹ It is possible that emerging adults have never experienced the transformative work of the Holy Spirit. “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”, he asked them. ‘No’, they replied, ‘we haven’t even heard that there is a Holy Spirit’ (Acts 19:2). As Paul was traveling through Ephesus, he had a conversation with some believers on the way. Paul discovered that the believers were not aware of the power and transformative work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Emerging adults need to know the power of the Holy Spirits in their lives. “For the Holy Spirit will teach you at the time what needs to be said” (Luke 12:12). The Holy Spirit is the spirit, power, and glory of God. When

¹¹⁰ *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary*, 603.

¹¹¹ Earley, *Everyday Series*, 29.

God's Spirit takes over a person's life, the Holy Spirit will guide, teach, change, and strengthen the believer.

“But I will send you the Advocate – the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me. And you must also testify about me because you have been with me from the beginning of my ministry” (John 15:26-27). Every believer is a witness for Jesus Christ, and it is the Holy Spirit that aids them and others to see the truth about Christ. The Jewish people viewed the Holy Spirit as a spirit of prophesy, to be used by God to speak God's words. It is the same for the church to be witnesses of Christ, to be used by the Holy Spirit to speak God's message of salvation and redemption to those who are lost. In this case, to emerging adults that have left the faith community. The Holy Spirit fills the believer with the truth and the Holy Spirit is an advocate. Here are some other Scriptures of the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer. “So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves” (Galatians 5:16). “Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit” (Romans 8:5). “We prove ourselves by our purity, our understanding, our patience, our kindness, by the Holy Spirit within us, and by our sincere love” (2 Corinthians 6:6). These Scriptures shows how the Holy Spirit does a transformative work in the believer and teaches the believer the truth about Christ and godly living.

Discipleship

The purpose of this research study is to create a discipleship strategy that will re-engage the emerging adults that have left the church community. “Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you” (Matthew 28:19-20). It is in this

passage of Scripture that Jesus laid the foundation for a successful ministry. Jesus was stating that the heartbeat of every ministry is to reproduce followers of Christ. As the disciples teach and train new believers to be like Christ, they in turn would want to share their newfound faith and power with others. Jesus was also equipping the disciples that the first step is to go unto every nation, the second step is to baptize, but the rest of the process is to teach and train these disciples to be a part of God's family and kingdom. "This is a good summary of the evangelistic task of the church. It is bringing those who identify with the world into a new identification. It is seeing themselves anew as citizens of God's kingdom, as children of God, as brother and sisters of the Messiah, and as brothers and sisters with the rest of the family of believers."¹¹²

"All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity – all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved" (Acts 2: 42,44, 46-47). As the believers were in relationship with each other, eating and praying together, and enjoying themselves in the Lord, they church community grew. This is what discipleship is all about, and Jesus did these very same thing with his disciples. The disciples followed Jesus, slept with Jesus, ate with Jesus, and spent a lot of time with Jesus. Then Jesus taught them, as seen in the above Scriptures, how to have compassion for the lost and hurting, and how to become disciple-makers.

¹¹² Stuart K. Weber, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Matthew*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), Matthew 28.

“The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields” (Matthew 9:37). Jesus was in the process of training his disciples to become disciple-makers. Jesus saw how lost the people were and how much they needed him, and this was something he wanted his disciples to be able to discern. Jesus wanted the disciples to have compassion for hurting and lost people so he asked his disciples to pray for those who were hurting and lost and to pray that there would be people who would be compassionate enough to help those who were lost and hurting recognize their need for Jesus.¹¹³

Another picture of discipleship is Matthew 4:19-20. “Jesus called out to them, ‘Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people’! And they left their nets at once and followed him. This Scripture shows the disciple what they are to do and that is to follow Jesus. In verses 18-22, Jesus gave an invitation to follow him to the first disciples Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Since each of them were fishermen by trade, Jesus made a reference of evangelism and discipleship by using their trade for understanding of the work that they were going to do. However, the work began by Jesus saying to them that they must follow him. Evans states “If you’re not fishing, you’re not following”.¹¹⁴ Jesus places importance on evangelism and discipleship, because it is the duty of a Christian. Some people think that evangelism and discipleship is something that just happens in church and that pastors or leaders are the ones that should be accomplishing this task. However, Jesus made it clear that everyone should be *fishers of men*. Also, Jesus said that he will provide the rest of the way or provide guidance and instruction on what to do next, but the very first step is to follow Jesus.

¹¹³ Weber, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Matthew*, Matthew, 9.

¹¹⁴ *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary*, 870.

Another important discipleship Scripture is when Jesus said, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24, Luke 9:23). In the above verses in the book of Matthew, Jesus is talking to his disciples, but in Luke, Jesus is talking to the crowd. This Scripture is another one that is not just for the pastor, the church, or someone that walks in the vocation or office of one of the five ministry leaders. This Scripture is for everyone that is a disciple of Jesus Christ. This Scripture is saying that as a disciple you must surrender and be obedient to Jesus. Jesus did not tell his disciples or the crowd to do something that he himself was not getting ready to do. Jesus gave up his will, which means he was completely surrendered to God’s plan for his life. In Luke 22:42 Jesus cries out to God, “Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine”. Jesus is completely surrendered to God, even to the point of death. Jesus is saying that if you want to be a disciple then you will have to be completely surrendered unto his Christ, his Lordship, if you want to advance in the kingdom of God. This also leads to another Scripture that also explains this concept further. “So Jesus explained, ‘I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing’” (John 5:19). Therefore, true disciples must submit themselves to God and surrender daily. Disciples must submit or surrender daily because there are many temptations in the world, and the flesh can easily be tempted by any given situation. It is important for disciples and those they are discipling to understand that being a disciple is a daily assignment, and one that should not be taken lightly.¹¹⁵ Being a disciple means that submission, obedience, and humility are necessary traits to not only resist temptation but to also be a disciple and to receive all the benefits that

¹¹⁵ *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary*, 979.

Christ has for every disciple. “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you” (James 4:7-8, NIV).

As research studies have shown there are many emerging adults that are leaving the church community after high school graduation for one reason or another. There are many emerging adults that decide not to return to institutionalized religion or decide to abandon their religious beliefs for one reason or another. That means that there is plenty of harvest, but it will take parents and the church community working in unity to help emerging adults see the purposes and benefits of living life in relationship with Christ. It will take the parents and church community working in unity to help emerging adults to also see the detriment of living life apart from Christ. The effort to re-engage emerging adults is the responsibility of parents and the church community through the mandate of discipleship that Jesus commanded of every believer.

Theoretical Foundations

Emerging adults leaving the church community after graduating high school is common. As previously stated, earlier generations have done the same thing. However, with emerging adults many do not return to the church, and some abandon the religious beliefs that they were once taught. There are many books and websites about the state of this generation of emerging adults not returning to religious institutions, and about them abandoning their religious beliefs. Many authors, researchers, and church leaders have created multiple strategies that they believe would re-engage emerging adults, from changing or rethinking church and ministries to various evangelism and discipleship strategies. Some church leaders believe that changing the church environment, style of worship, style of preaching dramatically is what will re-engage emerging adults. The belief is that doing the same thing that has been done for many years is no longer

working when there is a culture around the church and the world that is constantly changing.¹¹⁶ Therefore, the church and ministries should adapt to the changing culture. In the past few decades, the name “seeker” was created as a strategy to attract emerging adults.

There are many churches now that consider themselves “seeker-driven ministries”, or “seeker sensitive” churches.¹¹⁷ Seeker-driven churches are unconventional and less conservative. Some of these churches have adopted various attractions such as unconventional style of preaching. Andy Stanley is the pastor of North Point Community church in Georgia, and he believes that the traditional church should make changes in their approach and language in order to reach the next generation. Stanley’s services and sermons are geared towards those who are unchurched. Stanley believes that his messages should be more practical so that those who hear his messages will be inclined to remember them.¹¹⁸ Stanley also has stated that he gives people permission to omit or restrict Jesus in some of the messages because he sees himself as more of a motivational speaker than a preacher. Stanley says that he also does this because some of his church attendees are Jewish and of other various religious backgrounds and he does not want to create a hostile church environment.¹¹⁹

This “user-friendly” approach to reaching the unchurched next generation may gain the attention of some emerging adults, but removing Jesus from messages and sermons may do more harm than good. It is possible that Stanley’s approach may create more of a moralistic therapeutic deism mindset in those that attend because they are not gaining the understanding

¹¹⁶ McFarland, *Abandoned Faith*, 74.

¹¹⁷ White, *The Rise of the Nones*, 26.

¹¹⁸ Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 114.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

that salvation is through Jesus, and therefore Jesus cannot be removed from sermons in order to transform the lives of the individuals that are hearing the messages. This is just one seeker-sensitive church's way to re-engage with emerging adults and to attract their unchurched friends. H. Edwin Young is the pastor of Second Baptist Church and he found ways to make the church more appealing or attractive to others by adding a bowling alley, basketball courts, jogging track, and fitness rooms to his church.¹²⁰

Since emerging adults have a growing concern for social justice, equality, diversity, and making an impact on the world, then some church leaders have created ways to re-engage them by teaching children and young adults deep justice.¹²¹ Deep justice is about helping kids understand service by equipping them to make changes that last in their communities. This is revitalizing ministries to help kids understand, be aware of, and act against social injustices that happen in the world around them. It is the teaching of thinking and living in the kingdom of God on earth.¹²² In the kingdom of God, the people are servants working in unity to spread the gospel and how doing so also brings social reform. For instance, one church leader invited Rodney King, a Black man that was beaten in Los Angeles by the police, to speak about racial barriers, tension, and police brutality to his youth ministry. The purpose was to teach the kids how to live with love of all people of all races and ethnicities and how to deal with the hatred by having difficult conversations about race.¹²³ This was another way that churches and ministries used to

¹²⁰ Kimon Howland Sargeant, *Seeker Churches: Promoting a Traditional Religion in a Nontraditional Way* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 13-14.

¹²¹ Chap Clark and Kara E. Powell, *Deep Justice in A Broken World: Helping Your Kids Serve Others and Right the Wrongs Around Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 16.

¹²² Ibid., 10.

¹²³ Clark, *Deep Justice*, 122.

revitalize or rethink church and ministries to re-engage emerging adults. Emerging adults want to be involved with influencing culture and not avoiding it. They want to influence others in secular business, entertainment, government, media, and education. They want to see where they belong, how they can fit in, how they can influence, and how they can use the gifts and talents that they must be major influencers or enhancers within these areas.¹²⁴ Deep Justice is a kingdom strategy that helps children and emerging adults to see, think, and act spiritually and with a kingdom mind-set in secular environments. That means to influence having a godly kingdom mindset outside of the church building into the world.

Discipleship

There are many ways to disciple the next generation and for parents to teach faith and building a personal relationship with Christ to their children. Discipleship is not a “one-size-fits-all” strategy.¹²⁵ There are some ministries that teach the theology of discipleship to disciple, there are some ministries that gather a group of leaders and appoint them certain people in the congregation to mentor and train, and there are some ministries that evangelize to reach those who have left the church and those who are unchurched and then disciple them.¹²⁶ Some churches would rather have an event where they can develop and cultivate relationships as opposed to teaching a class on discipleship. Then there are churches that want to teach the purpose for discipleship and how to disciple rather than cultivate organic relationships haphazardly.¹²⁷ The point is that discipleship strategies may look different for many different churches.

¹²⁴ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 106.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 33.

¹²⁶ Mueller, “Some Thoughts About the Attractional”, 126-127.

¹²⁷ DeVries, *Sustainable Young Adult Ministry*, 158.

The previous Scriptures showed how Jesus was called rabbi or teacher, and his disciples were his followers. Jesus had a relationship with his disciples; he mentored, taught, trained, disciplined, and loved them as he showed them how to be more like him. Jesus taught the disciples how to be disciples and how to become disciple-makers. Discipling emerging adults and teaching them how to become disciple-makers is the most powerful way to re-engage them and to help them to make an impact in the world around them. Discipleship can help emerging adults to discover their identity, make godly decisions, deal with crisis, pain, and trauma, to identify their strengths and weaknesses, to determine their spiritual gifts and talents, and how to use their gifts and talents as they fit into God's story.¹²⁸

Adoptive Church

Chap Clark developed a discipleship strategy called Adoptive Church, which involves the integration of family, youth, and the church. Adoptive youth ministry is a discipleship youth ministry model that fosters creating relationships between parents, the church and the youth. It is like how God adopted believers into his family, that the church adopts every youth into a family dynamic. "The point of adoptive youth ministry is to help young people see that by faith in Christ they are part of a new family. Our role in this is to create an environment and employ strategies that will not only introduce adolescents and emerging adults to faith in Jesus Christ but also to help them live out that faith as participants and contributors to the family of God."¹²⁹ In this strategy Clark teaches the youth how to disciple their siblings by teaching them to follow Christ, teaching them to love Christ, being in relationships with their siblings to help them to

¹²⁸ Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*, 40.

¹²⁹ Chap Clark, *Adoptive Church: Creating an Environment Where Emerging Generations Belong* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 34.

grow in every area of their lives.¹³⁰ Clark teaches the whole church how to connect with the youth and to serve with the youth, creating intergenerational relationships.¹³¹

Discipleship Through Mentoring and Small Groups

Kauffman completed qualitative and quantitative studies on the effects of evangelism and discipleship of emerging adults across the churches of Virginia Mennonite Conference.

Kauffman's research also suggested that emerging adults dropping out of church has increased over the past several years. Kauffman stated that the emerging adult dropout for the churches of Virginia Mennonite Conference had declined by 20 percent in the past several decades. The shortage of emerging adults had reduced faster in the Mennonite than any other denomination.¹³² Kauffman states that nearly 200 congregations in 2009 were studied to determine the effectiveness of churches focusing on reconnecting and re-engaging emerging adults. The results were that emerging adults were connected to these churches and ministries because they implemented small cell groups to create deeper relationships. A faith community feels that emerging adults felt the importance of being involved in community service, the constant use of technology, designing and developing intergenerational relationships, authenticity, conversational and genuine teaching on how the Scriptures can be applied into everyday life allow emerging adults to lead in ministries.¹³³

Kauffman's research concluded that churches and ministries successfully reconnect and re-engage emerging adults through mentoring relationships that help emerging adults grow in

¹³⁰ Clark, *Adoptive Church*, 51.

¹³¹ Ibid., 84.

¹³² Aaron M Kauffman, "Thriving: Effective Strategies for The Evangelism and Discipleship of Emerging Adults", (Ph.D. diss., Ashbury Seminary, 2019): 3-4.

¹³³ Clark, *Adoptive Church*., 70

their relationship with Christ through coaching and training of older adults. The implementation of smaller groups or cell groups, was another way the discipleship plan was effective because small groups created a more personal feel. In smaller groups, it makes individuals who are shy more comfortable and helps everyone to feel included. Another method that added to the effectiveness of the discipleship plan was including a rigorous Bible study. The Bible study was set at a specific time, and emphasis was placed on implementing accurate study and devotion times.¹³⁴

An Integrative Model for Discipleship

The integrative model for discipleship focuses on teaching and applying practical ways to create disciples and to help those individuals to become disciple-makers. The goal is to practice spiritual formation – the transformation of being Christlike in every aspect of ministry including servanthood, evangelism, worship, teaching, ministry, fellowship, family, personal relationships, and groups.¹³⁵

The development of spiritual formation is done by teaching and showing that the mind must first change in a believer. The mind must be renewed, and the believer must be taught and shown how to have the mind of Christ. The next phase of spiritual formation is that the believer is taught and shown how-to live-in Christ. In other words, how to demonstrate this new mindset in their everyday lives. “Jesus states that spiritual formation is dependent upon this sustaining relationship, one in which the disciple receives a constant flow of spiritual nourishment from the divine source. Without this nourishment, the disciple is incapable of any growth and devoid of

¹³⁴ Kauffman, “Thriving”, 133.

¹³⁵ Shirley, “It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple”, 223.

spiritual power.”¹³⁶

Spiritual formation is also demonstrated in showing God’s love in personal relationships and in groups. Spiritual formation is demonstrated in servanthood. A pivotal part of the growth process as a disciple is to labor for the kingdom of God. Another way to say this is to use spiritual gifts and the fruit of the spirit to serve in God’s kingdom helping others to learn, grow, and love Christ. Spiritual formation is shown through evangelism. Evangelism is sharing the Gospel of Christ with others because this is the responsibility of a believer in Christ to share their experience with others. Spiritual formation is taught and shown through worship. Worship is not something that is done on Sunday morning or whichever day that a person observes as their spiritual training. Instead, worship is giving adoration, praise, and celebration to God through many forms such as music, giving and service. Worship is using time, treasure, and talent to celebrate and thank God. Spiritual formation is taught and practiced through teaching. The disciple is taught and shown how to teach, encourage, and discipline one another in the process of spiritual maturity. Lastly, spiritual formation is shown and practiced through fellowship. Fellowship is developing relationships with others and demonstrating God’s love and character throughout those relationships.¹³⁷ The integrative model takes all the characteristics of spiritual formation and merges them into all the areas of ministry that were previously mentioned. It is in this model that discipleship is demonstrated through teaching, missions, ministry, family, and mentoring.

¹³⁶ Shirley, “It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple”, 214.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 215, 217-222.

Jude 3 Project

Jude 3 Project is a parachurch ministry that helps emerging adults understand what they believe and why they believe it. This parachurch ministry is founded by Lisa Fields, a Christian apologist and graduate of Liberty University. Field's primary mission was to help Black emerging adults reconnect with true biblical-based churches, rediscover their love for God, and help them understand their faith and how it applies to their everyday lives. Fields' parachurch ministry began with YouTube videos of a roundtable discussion about why emerging adults have left the church. Field was the moderator and had a panel of about four to five emerging adults who would describe their experiences with church and why they left the church. Field's also offers various information about the importance and relevancy of church, apologetics, evangelism, and discipleship through a series of YouTube videos and podcasts.

The parachurch ministry provides a wide array of successful pastors, theologians, and Christian apologetics that hold seminars and discussion panels at various Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) worldwide. The message is to show the church's importance and relevancy, the church's mission, the Bible, and participating in church ministries. This project has been successful because it started with its website in 2014 that provided information and authentic teachings to emerging adults. It then has increased to offering podcasts, worldwide seminars and discussions, YouTube panels, and online courses that teach emerging adults on various teachings of the church, hermeneutics, contributions of the Black church, and theology through the eyes of Black people.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ *Jude 3 Project*, 2021, accessed on May 9, 2021, <https://jude3project.org>.

Evaluating Discipleship Plans

A study was conducted to report if pastors were seeing an impact of the discipleship programs within their churches. Approximately 43 percent of the pastors that were polled stated that their church evaluates their discipleship progress within their congregations frequently. About 90 percent of the pastors polled stated that they believe their congregation is making is making spiritual progress in their discipleship programs, but only half were satisfied with the spiritual formation in the discipleship programs.¹³⁹

Discipleship programs are difficult to evaluate because it is challenging to try to measure the success of a program by number of people in the program. Most churches and ministries do not have an effective plan in place to measure the success of their discipleship programs. The focus of discipleship is to make sure that disciples are maturing in their faith, applying biblical principles in every area of their lives, serving in ministries involved with the communities, continuing to foster healthy relationships with other adult members, and preparing to become disciple makers. Creating a successful online discipleship program involves combining the strategies of each of the above discipleship plans. Each plan includes effective principles for discipleship such as small groups, mentoring, the use of technology, spiritual formation, and intergenerational relationships.

Theological and Theoretical Foundation Conclusion

Jesus spoke of seeking and saving the lost in Luke 19:10. Jesus was concerned about the individual's soul being lost. Lost meaning that the individual's soul was disconnected from God. Emerging adults who have left the church after graduating high school and are not returning may have disconnected themselves from God. The Bible tells every Christian that it is important and a

¹³⁹ Brosius, "Culture and The Church's Discipleship Strategy, 140.

mandate to go and to seek those who are disconnected from God, teach them to live according to God's ways and to disciple them. Discipleship is the very foundation of reaching out to those who are lost and helping them to find their way back into a relationship with Christ. Discipleship is for everyone, not just the church leaders, but for parents as well.

There are many churches and ministries that have created various strategies to reconnect with emerging adults. Some churches and ministries have changed their church format, worship style, and have added attractions to attract and reconnect with emerging adults that have left the church. Discipleship is the biblical strategy that several churches and ministries have used to reconnect with emerging adults through developing intergenerational relationships. The three churches and ministries that were discussed above created an outside-of -the-box method of discipleship to reconnect with emerging adults because they understood the importance of creating relationships. Therefore, one way to seek and save the lost and to fulfill the mandate that Jesus gave to every Christian is to recognize the importance of discipleship and creating relationships with emerging adults that will help them to grow spiritually.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The problem is that emerging adults of this current generation have left the religious institutions they attended as children as soon as they graduated high school. Many are not returning, and some emerging adults have abandoned their spiritual beliefs. This doctoral ministry research examines if the reasoning behind the current generation of emerging adults who have left the church is the same reasoning that earlier generations of young adults have abandoned church. Also, to explore other reasons emerging adults have abandoned church and if a discipleship mentoring strategy would guide them to return to church.

The following sections include a detailed intervention design that addresses how this problem was studied, the research method used to show how it was learned, who participated in the study, and how their experience relates to the implementation design. This section also includes the implementation design that will show the ministry strategy implemented to attempt to solve the problem addressed in this study.

Research Intervention Design

For this research study the qualitative research method was used. “Qualitative research systematically seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings.”¹ Qualitative research and the various practices used to collect, code, and interpret data results have been successful and critical in producing results that helps churches and the church leaders to better understand the problem and the intervention implemented to solve the problem. The qualitative practices that were used for this study was a focus discussion group and individual interviews. The participants selected for this research

¹ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Thesis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock 2011), P56.

study were randomly selected from Facebook, and some of the participants from the research study were selected to participate in the discipleship mentoring program. The findings from the research study aided the researcher with information to further explore if a discipleship mentoring program is what is needed to help emerging adults to grow spiritually and return to church or religious institutions.

Research Participant Groups

Group A Senior and Youth Pastors

Three participants groups were used for this research study and will be referred as Groups A, B, and C. Group A was a focus group panel discussion with three Christian church senior pastors, one Christian church youth pastor and one youth pastor from a parachurch ministry. Group A took place in a closed Zoom meeting for 1 ½ hours on September 18th at 11.a.m.

The group discussion panel of senior pastors and youth ministry pastors were necessary for this research because the church leaders are affected by the decline in church participation and by emerging adults abandoning their religious practices and beliefs. The leaders of the church are shepherds that have lost their sheep. The Bible calls pastors and leaders to be shepherds, to lead and guide the sheep by preaching and teaching God's word and helping the sheep to stay on course with their relationship with God and his word to guide their lives. When the sheep or emerging adults decline participation with the church, organized religion, and faith, it should hurt the church community. The church community lives and thrives on influencing the world by spreading the Gospel of Jesus and by teaching everyone how to integrate God's kingdom in their lives. If emerging adults or the next generation youth continue to decline participation in church and their faith and disassociate themselves with their religious beliefs, then it hinders the advancement of God's kingdom and God's authority and power in their lives.

Group A's Research Study Recruitment Process

All three of the participant groups were randomly recruited via a Facebook post that the researcher posted. The Facebook recruitment post for Group A included a brief introduction of the study, requirements of the participant recruits, and how the study would be conducted. Here is a sample Facebook post for Group A:

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS: I am conducting a scholarly research study as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree at Liberty University. My research aims to understand why young adults between the ages of 18-29 have left and are still leaving churches. Also, to understand why many young adults are refusing to return to church or institutionalized religion. I am looking for 3 Senior pastors and 2 Youth pastors that would like to participate in a one-time panel discussion on this subject.

To participate you must meet the following criteria:

Must be at least 25 years of age or older

Must be an active Christian senior or lead pastor of a church (no specific denomination required)

Must be an active Youth pastor that has at least 2 years of experience working with teenagers or young adults in a Christian church (no specific denomination required)

Must have the availability to take part in an online 1 1/2-hour group discussion on a Saturday afternoon or Evening

If you are interested in helping me with this study to understand why young adults are leaving churches and have been leaving churches and meet the criteria above please leave your name, email address and phone number in my messenger inbox and I will call you to answer a few quick questions to make sure you meet the criteria and then proceed with participating in the study.

A few days after the initial Group A post, several pastors reached out to the researcher leaving messages in the researcher's inbox that they would like to participate in the research study. The researcher selected five recruits and each recruit received a recruitment email containing the length of time, location, and date of the group interview. The pastor recruits were informed that the research study was completely voluntary and that their participation would be upon them signing the consent form that was attached in the email in pdf format and returned to

the researcher. The pastor recruits were also informed that pseudonyms would be provided for them throughout the research study.

The attached consent form (see appendix A) provided detailed information of the research study, information on the Zoom recording, and that all information will be kept confidential and locked on a password-protected computer. Once the participant's agreed to the consent form and returned it to the researcher they received a follow-up email of the Zoom meeting passcode to participate in the research study held on September 18th at 11a.m.

Group A's Focus Group Questions

During the focus group interview each of the pastors were asked nine questions concerning ministry, teaching, church events and activities, and discipleship. The pastors were also asked questions about whether they believed the current generation of emerging adults will have a similar behavior about church then the earlier generation of young adults. Each pastor was given the opportunity to answer each questions and to go in-depth with their experiences, education, and ministries.

1. Do you and your church practice evangelism and discipleship, and how?
2. Does your church have a young adult ministry? What is the range (quantity) of young adults that attend the ministry? Does the church engage and minister to young adults that are still in church and those that have left the church?
3. What do you believe about what young adults are learning about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit's importance? Do you think that young adults are being taught the true gospel and the kingdom of God for transformation, or are they being taught a watered-down version of the gospel?
4. Does the church have outlets or ministry events where they listen to what young adults are saying or express themselves in ways in ministry such as rap or poetry? How is this done?

5. Are you aware that many emerging adults have left the church? Has this affected your church attendance and ministries? Are many young adults missing from your church or ministry? When did you notice there was a problem (if you believe there is a problem)? Has the situation worsened due to Covid?
6. Do you believe that this generation of young adults will return as previous generations have? Why or why not?
7. What factors do you believe are causing young adults to leave church, organized or institutionalized religion? What are some of the factors that you think causing emerging adults to identify as “none” rather than say they are a part of a particular religion?
8. Are the young adults that have left church today after graduating high school and who have been in church all their life among single family households or 2 parent households? Do you believe that the family dynamics have a role to play in young adults leaving church? Why or why not?
9. What does is your church or ministry doing to either disciple, revive, or educate young adults today to either return to church or grow in their relationship with God?

Group B Parents of Emerging Adult Children

The second group, Group B was individual interviews with five parents of emerging adult children. Group B’s parent interviews were 1 1/2 hours in a closed online Zoom meeting room that ranged from September 4th through September 18th throughout various times of the day. The researcher conducted the individual interviews based on the availability of the participants.

The parents of emerging adults are considered stakeholders. The parents have been given the assignment to manage and lead their children in their lives. The parents should influence and guide their children about faith, establishing and maintaining a relationship with God, and helping the church to integrate their lives and the kingdom of God for advancement. In chapter 2 it was mentioned that many emerging adults continue the faith that they were raised with. Parents’ faith and religion are crucial to emerging adults, and this is the reason parents would have a stake in this research study.

Group B's Research Study Recruitment Process

The recruitment process was the same for Group B as it was for Group A. Group B's recruitment was also posted on Facebook, however, after several days there was no response. Therefore, the researcher sent the post to the messenger mailbox of several parents that were friends of friends and parents that belonged to the researcher's previous churches. After two days the researcher received several responses to parents of emerging adults that were willing to be a part of the research study.

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS: I am conducting a scholarly research study as part of the requirements for a Doctorate in Ministry degree at Liberty University. My research aims to understand why young adults between the ages of 18-29 have left and are still leaving churches. Parents, if willing, will be asked to participate in a one-time 2-hour individual interview on Zoom. If you would like to participate and meet the criteria below, please send me a message for more information.

To Participate, The parent must be 25 years of age or older
Parent participants must be currently attending church either frequently or occasionally
The parent must have a young adult child between the ages of 18-29
No specific denomination required
Must be open to take part in a 1 1/2 hour Zoom individual interview
Must provide a valid email and telephone number to the researcher

The researcher selected five participant recruits for individual interviews and sent the recruitment letter and consent form. The letter for this group provided a detailed narrative of the research study's focus for the individual interviews. Each parent recruit was informed in the email of the length of time, location and to select a date and time that they would be available to do the individual interviews. Group B was informed that the research study was completely voluntary, and their participation would be upon them signing the consent form that was attached in the email in pdf format and returned to the researcher. The parent recruits were informed that pseudonyms would be provided throughout the remainder of the research study. The attached consent form (see appendix B) provided detailed information of the research study, information

on the Zoom recording, and that all information would be kept confidential and locked on a password-protected computer. Once the parent participant agreed to the consent form and returned it to the researcher, they will receive a follow-up email of the Zoom meeting passcode to participate in the research study.

Group B's Individual Interview Questions

Each of the parent participants were also provided a series of nine questions pertaining to their parents' religious practices, their religious practices as a child, their religious practices as an adult, and the religious practices they did or did not participate with their own children. The parent participants cameras were not on during the Zoom meeting as to protect their identities and for their comfortability to provide sincere and honest answers.

1. Please describe your parents' religious affiliation. Did they practice? Why or why not?
Did your parent(s) practice religion or study with you as a child? Why or why not?
2. How many emerging adult children do you have? What are the ages of your emerging adult children?
3. Are you saved, and have you been baptized? At what age did this take place? If you were younger when you were saved and baptized, did you understand what was taking place, or did you do it for other reasons? If you were saved or baptized for varied reasons, what were they?
4. How often do you currently attend religious services (regularly, once a week, or not often)? Why?
5. How often did you and your children attend church or service when they were younger?
6. How often or not do you study the Bible outside of church? Why or why not?
7. How often did you pray with your child when they were younger? Why or why not?
8. Does your young adult continue to attend church? If yes, how often do they attend? If no, when did you notice that your child stopped attending? Why?
9. Did your young adult child have a mentor when they were younger? Does your young adult child have a mentor currently? What are your thoughts about a discipleship

mentoring program where spiritually mature adults would coach and guide your adult child in various areas of their lives? What program would you want to participate in as a volunteer mentor to mentor other young adults? Do you think this would be a helpful program for your young adult to be mentored by an older adult?

Group C Emerging Adults

The final group in the research study was Group C. Group C contained interviews of five emerging adults ranging between the ages of 18-29. Group C's interviews were also held online in a closed meeting on Zoom and the interviews were at the discretion of the participants and ranged between the dates of September 4th to September 18th with a variety of times of the day and night. Group C's individual interviews were 1 ½ hours each.

Emerging adults would have a stake in this research study because the study is about their faith, lives, and spiritual journeys. Many emerging adults across the world leave their churches upon high school graduation. Like many generations, it is common for emerging adults to enter the world and thought of adulthood and begin to separate from some things that they may have been raised in. However, many earlier generation emerging adults return to church after they begin families. This generation of emerging adults are different, and this may be because of the various major cultural shifts that have taken place over the years. Some of the major cultural shifts that may be affecting this generation of emerging adults are technology, sexual orientation, identity changes, major political, economic and social changes and injustices; this was also discussed in early chapters. These changes may have caused a decline in church participation and faith and hindered the advancement of God's kingdom. Therefore, this generation emerging adults are affected by this research study.

Group C's Research Study Recruitment Process

The recruitment process was the same for Group C as it was for Group A and B. Group C's recruitment was also posted on Facebook, however, after several days there was no response. Therefore, the researcher sent the post to the messenger mailbox of several emerging adults that were friends of friends and associates. After a week, the researcher received several responses from emerging adults that were willing to participate in the research study.

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS: I am conducting a scholarly research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate in Ministry degree at Liberty University. My research aims to understand why young adults between the ages of 18-29 have left and are still leaving churches. Young adults, if willing, will be asked to participate in a one-time 2-hour individual discussion on Zoom. If you would like to participate and meet the criteria below, please send me a message for more information.

To participate, Must be an emerging adult between the ages of 18-25
3 must have attended a Christian church either frequently or occasionally when they were younger but have discontinued attending when they graduated high school
2 must still attend a Christian church either frequently or occasionally after graduating high school
No specific denomination required
Must be open to take part in a 1 1/2 hour Zoom individual interview
Must provide a valid email and telephone number to the researcher

The researcher selected five emerging adult recruits for individual interviews, and they were emailed the recruitment letter and consent form. Each recruit was informed in the email of the length of time, location and they were informed to select a date and time that they would be available to do the individual interviews. Group C was informed that the research study was completely voluntary, and their participation would be upon them signing the consent form that was attached in the email in pdf format and returned to the researcher. Group C was also informed that pseudonyms would be provided throughout the remainder of the research study. The attached consent form (see appendix C) provided detailed information of the research study, information on the Zoom recording, and that all information will be kept confidential and locked on a password-protected computer. Once the participant agreed to the consent form and returned

it to the researcher, they received a follow-up email of the Zoom meeting passcode to participate in the research study.

Group C's Individual Interview Questions

Group C participants were asked a series of nine questions within each of their individual interviews. The questions for this group pertained to their parent's religious practices, their current church status, previous church status, and their religious beliefs and faith moving forward with or without church. Each of the emerging adults were asked to keep their cameras off during the interviews to protect their identities and for them to provide honest and sincere responses to the questions.

1. Describe how active your parents were/are in attending church. Did they often attend, frequently, or not at all?
2. Did you attend church services with your parents when you were younger? If not, then why? If so, then how often?
3. How often did your parent(s) study the Bible with you when you were younger?
4. Why did you leave the church community?
5. How do you feel about the church today?
6. Why do you think other millennials or young adults today no longer attending church?
7. Describe your relationship with God. For example, do you believe in God, trust God, love God, follow God's teachings?
8. What will it take for you to reconnect with the church community?
9. Did you have a spiritual mentor or teacher when you were younger? Do you have a spiritual mentor or teacher now?

Discipleship Mentoring Program Implementation Design

The discipleship mentoring program was conducted over the internet and the plan focused on mentoring emerging adults. One reason that this discipleship plan was conducted

over the internet was because of COVID-19. COVID-19 forced churches to close their doors, altering their regular routines, especially how they evangelize, disciple, and hold services.

The second reason that the discipleship mentoring plan was conducted online was to display to emerging adults that discipleship does not have to stay within the walls of a church building. The discipleship mentoring program being held online removes the borders of religious institutions for emerging adults and provides a way for diversity in discipleship.

The discipleship plan allows for discipleship to take place globally because it is on the internet. The volunteer mentors and emerging adults do not have to be local. The discipleship mentoring program will help emerging adults reconnect with the church community through relationships that will impart spiritual truths, godly wisdom and place importance on God's word and the power of the Holy Spirit to help emerging adults grow spiritually, and guide them to eventually return to church.

The researcher selected four participants that were part of the research study that stated that they wanted to be a part of the discipleship mentoring program. The participants were selected for the discipleship mentoring program based on their responses to the last question of the interviewing process about if they wanted to participate in the online discipleship mentoring program. The participants selected were informed that they would receive a recruitment email with more instructions on how they can take part in the program.

Adult Mentor Recruitment Email

The first phase of the discipleship mentoring program began with the researcher emailing the adult mentor recruits detailed information about the program. The letter informed the mentoring recruits that the online discipleship mentoring process is a four-week program with a 2- hour orientation and training class. The 2- hour mentoring orientation and training class would

be in a Zoom meeting with no cameras available for the recruits. The adult mentors were provided with a mentoring manual as a guide to use throughout the mentoring process. Also, the adult mentors received information about completing weekly evaluations to assess the progress of the mentoring relationship, and as a tool for the researcher to keep track of the progress of spiritual growth for the emerging adults.

Lastly, the recruitment email informed the adult volunteer mentors about withdrawing from the program if needed. The adult volunteer mentors were advised that the research and discipleship plan is voluntary, which means that mentors can leave or withdraw at any time. The mentor was advised that all documentation provided will be kept on file for a minimum of one year. The information would be secured on the researcher's password-protected computer. Lastly, the mentor and mentee's assessment and progress, if there is any, would still be used in published content. The mentor and the mentee's confidentiality will continue to be maintained.

Adult Mentoring Follow-Up Email

The follow-up email provided the timeframe of the online discipleship process. The adult volunteer mentor was informed of the orientation and training class on Zoom. The follow-up email consisted of the dates, time, and the Zoom meeting passcode. The researcher attached the syllabus for 2-hour online mentoring orientation and training class, the mentor program manual, and the ethical consent form.

Mentor Ethical Consent Covenant Form

The ethical consent covenant form (see appendix D) was attached to the follow-up email, along with the syllabus (see appendix E) for the online mentor training classes and the mentor training manual (see appendix F). The ethical consent covenant form was a pdf format. The

mentors had the ability to e-sign the ethical consent form and return it to the researcher before the online mentor training class.

Online Discipleship Mentoring Orientation and Training Class

The online discipleship mentoring orientation and training class for mentors was held on Saturday, October 9th at 9 am. The beginning of the class was an introduction to online discipleship mentoring that took approximately fifteen minutes. The researcher gave an introduction of the research study and informed the four participants to read the syllabus while the researcher highlighted brief points in the training manual and how to use the training manual to aid in the discipleship mentoring process. Adult volunteer mentors received information for dropping out of the program. Because this is a voluntary study and strategy, the mentors had the ability to leave or drop out at any time. The mentors were provided with the researcher's contact information to contact the researcher and inform that they want to drop out. The mentors were also informed that there would be 2- ten-minute breaks in-between teaching.

5 Stages of Discipleship

The researcher spent thirty minutes discussing discipleship and the five stages of discipleship. The five stages of discipleship are: spiritually dead, infant, child, young adult, and parent. The spiritually dead is a potential disciple who has not accepted or received salvation. The spiritually dead disciple may be atheists, agnostics, or hold some other religious worldview such as humanism. The spiritually dead may be disciples that do not believe in God, or the authority of the Bible. Therefore, mentoring this type of disciple will require a lot of prayer and asking the Holy Spirit for a desire to want to know God, patience, and maybe some knowledge of apologetics.²

² Jim Putnam, Bobby Harrington, and Robert E. Coleman, *Discipleshift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 60-61.

The second stage is called the infant. The infant stage are disciples that have accepted salvation, but that is as far as their spiritual life has gotten. The infant does have a desire to know God, but they are still considered babies. The infant does not know what it means to follow Christ submit to God or resist the devil yet.³

The third stage is the child stage. The child disciple also has a desire to follow Christ and they are familiar with some of the basic Christian language. The child disciple may be a new Christian and the child can also be an individual that has been going to church for years. The child disciples may understand some of the teachings that are taught in children's ministry, such as Bible stories and understanding the importance of applying The Bible to their lives.⁴

The fourth stage is the young adult stage. The young adult stage is a disciple that wants to serve God. This disciples have made the transition from serving self to serving God. In this stage the disciple may understand and know what their spiritual gifts are and want to understand how they can use those gifts and serve in a variety of areas.⁵ Serving does not just exist at church, but servanthood can take place at work, school, with family and friends.

The final stage is the parent stage. The parent stage is a stage that is ready for leadership training. The parent disciple understands the importance of leading and being an example of Christ in every area of their lives. The parent disciple understands that they are not just being examples of Jesus in their lives just for their benefit, but so that others may see Jesus in many ways and then desire to follow.⁶ The parent disciple is one who teaches others how to be leaders

³ Putnam, *Discipleshift*, 63-64.

⁴ Ibid., 65-66.

⁵ Ibid., 67-68.

⁶ Ibid., 69-70.

and how to share their faith without fear. The stages of discipleship are important for each mentor to understand and to identify what stage their mentees are in so that they can create a goal or vision that will be influential, impactful, and helpful to assist the mentee into moving to the next stage.

Mentoring

The researcher spent forty minutes discussing the process of mentoring. The mentoring training portion was thirty minutes in length. The mentor's learning what their personality style, determining the style of character of their mentee, and learning how to effectively communicate with others. There are four personality style using the DISC assessments. The four styles are dominant, interactive, supportive, and conscientious. The dominant personalities are driven and direct. The Interactive personalities are more inspirational, influential, and interactive. The supportive personality styles are social, sincere, and sympathetic. The last style is conscientious, and this personality style is cautious, careful, and correct. It is possible for people to have a combination of the DISC traits, but the assessments will help the adult volunteer mentor to determine which style is their dominant style and what are their dominant character traits.⁷ The adult volunteer mentor would be able to determine from the DISC personality traits their style of teaching, mentoring and leading and how they can effectively communicate with mentees that have the same style or a different dominant personality style.

Final Portion of Orientation and Training

The final portion of the orientation and training class was fifteen minutes in length. The remaining portion of the orientation and training was a brief discussion on leadership, and how to

⁷ Merrick Rosenberg and Daniel Silvert, *Taking Flight: Master the DISC Styles to Transform Your Career, Your Relationships Your Life* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Taking Flight Partners, LLC., 2013), 123.

effectively communicate. The adult volunteer mentors would learn the several types of Christian leaders, such as: Servant leader, Credible leader, and a Followed leader. The servant leader is one who teaches others to serve by leading by example of serving. Servant leaders are humble, compassionate, understand the importance of service, and love to help others. Servant leaders serve with a grateful heart and serves with pure motives.⁸ A credible leader is one that is trustworthy, authentic, are people of good character.⁹ A followed leader is one that understands the importance of being influential in the lives of those they are leading. A followed leaders understands that to lead they must have followers.¹⁰ Each of these leaders should possess the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22. “But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

Finally, the adult mentors received the names of the emerging adult that they will be mentoring. The mentors were informed that the program manual would provide them on how to proceed with the mentoring process. The mentor would complete an assessment (see appendix G) each week of the spiritual growth progress of their mentees.

Emerging Adult Mentoring Process

There were four emerging adults that agreed to participate in the online discipleship mentoring program from the individual research interviews. The four participant mentees were informed of the next step of the online mentoring program that consisted of receiving the recruitment email, consent form, and information for the 2- hour orientation class.

⁸ Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 33-37.

⁹ Ibid., 49-51.

¹⁰ Ibid, 119-122.

The recruitment letter for the emerging adult group included detailed information on the research discipleship mentoring program. The first part of the letter states the requirements of the emerging adult mentee, and the second part of the letter provides information about the discipleship mentoring process. The discipleship mentoring process would be online on Zoom, and the mentee would commit to communicating with an adult volunteer mentor at least once a week.

The recruitment email informed the emerging adult mentee about withdrawing from the program. If an emerging adult mentee chooses to withdraw from the program, the mentee must contact the researcher by phone or email to notify of the withdrawal. The mentee would be advised that all documentation provided by the mentor and the mentee would be kept on file for a minimum of one year. The information would be secured on the researcher's password-protected computer. Lastly, the mentor and mentee's assessment and progress, if there is any, will still be used in published content. The mentor and the mentee's confidentiality will continue to be maintained.

The follow-up email will provide information on the one online Zoom orientation class led by the researcher. Each of the four emerging adult mentees will participate in a 2- hour online orientation class. The meeting time, dates, and passcodes will be supplied in the follow-up email. The emerging adult mentee will also receive an ethical consent and covenant document attached to the follow-up email (see appendix H). Lastly, The emerging adult will also be paired with an adult volunteer mentor during the orientation class.

Emerging Adult Follow-Up Email

A follow-up email was sent to the four emerging adult mentees and included the next steps to participate in the online discipleship mentoring program. The follow-up email included

the date, time, and Zoom passcode for the orientation class. The follow-up email also included an orientation class syllabus (see appendix I).

Emerging Adult Orientation Class Syllabus

The emerging adult orientation class was held on Sunday, October 10th at 11 am. The orientation class time length was 2-hours long. The syllabus provided a brief detail of the contents for the orientation class that will be led by the researcher. The first part of the class was an introduction of the researcher and the online discipleship mentoring program. The introduction lasted five minutes in length. The mentees were informed that they would have a ten-minute intermission in the middle of the orientation class.

The second part of the class was a thirty-minute discussion focusing on effective communication. Effective communication means learning how to listen instead of just hearing. Listening implies that the individual effectively hears what is being said without thinking about their response while the person is talking.¹¹ Effective listening also means repeating back to the communicator what the listener believes they heard. When the listener can accurately repeat what the communicator said, the communicator can make sure that the listener understood what was being communicated.¹²

The third part of the class was a twenty-minute discussion on journaling and creating visions and goals. The journaling process is essential because it allows the emerging adult mentee to write down their thoughts, opinions, fears, doubts, and insecurities. The journaling process also allows the emerging adult mentee to write the vision and goal that they want to set for spiritual growth for that week. Setting goals and writing a vision helps the mentee stay

¹¹ James C. Petersen, *Why Don't We Listen Better? Communicating & Connecting in Relationships* (Portland, OR: Petersen Publications, 2015), 6-8.

¹² Ibid., 17-18.

focused on what they want to accomplish and grow spiritually. The journaling process is also good for the mentee to write down prayer, affirmations, and any revelations and thoughts from Scripture passages that they need to meditate on. The journaling process helps the mentee see their growth and development in certain areas and see what areas need improvement.

The fourth part of the mentee orientation was approximately fifteen minutes to go over the already signed ethical consent and covenant form. The researcher informed the mentees that all communication must be holy, sincere, honest, and genuine. The mentee must be respectful and have respectful communication with the mentor. The consent form informed the mentee that if a conflict in the mentoring relationship arises to contact the researcher immediately to end the mentoring relationship. Also, during this time the researcher went over the weekly evaluations that the mentees must complete (see appendix J). The mentees were informed that the evaluations were to be emailed back to the researcher at the end of each week during the four-week online discipleship mentoring program.

The final fifteen minutes of the orientation was spent asking and answering any questions that the mentees had. Then the mentees received the name of the mentor that they were paired with. The mentees were informed that the online discipleship mentoring program week 1 would begin on Monday, October 11th and would continue through Saturday, November 6th. The fourth week assessment would be due to be emailed to the researcher no later than November 11th.

Measuring Success

Each of the mentors and mentees were required to complete an assessment to gauge the spiritual growth or any challenges of the mentoring session each week for four weeks. The results would determine if and what changes were needed for the mentoring process, and the success or failure of the online discipleship mentoring program. The mentor assessment

worksheet (see appendix G) was emailed to the mentors during the orientation and training class and was expected to be returned to the researcher at the end of each of the four weeks. The mentee assessment (see appendix J) was emailed to the mentees during their orientation class and the mentees were also informed that they were to email their weekly assessments back to the researcher at the end of each of the four weeks. At the end of the four weeks the researcher grouped the mentors and mentees assessments together to extract the research data from them.

Conclusion

The problem is that emerging adults of this current generation have left the religious institutions they attended as children as soon as they graduated high school. Many are not returning, and some emerging adults have abandoned their spiritual beliefs. This doctoral ministry research examined if the reasoning behind the current generation of emerging adults who have left the church is the same reasoning that earlier generations of young adults have abandoned church. Also, to explore other reasons emerging adults have abandoned church and if a discipleship mentoring strategy would guide them to return to church eventually.

The research methodology used was the qualitative method where the researcher would obtain data from a focus group of senior and youth pastors, individual interviews with parents of emerging adults, and individual interviews with emerging adults. The participants were recruited from a Facebook post. There were three Facebook posts for each participant group that included a narrative of the study and the requirements for participants to take part in the research study. The participants that answered the Facebook posts received a recruitment email that provided them with more details of the research study along with the consent form that each participant would sign and return to the researcher. The recruitment email also supplied the time and date of the Zoom meetings. The time that was set for the senior pastor and youth pastor focus group had

a 2-hour period on September 18th. The individual interviews were set to the discretion of the individual, but the dates ranged from September 4th to September 18th.

After the group and individual interviews, the researcher selected four participants that agreed to take part in the online discipleship mentoring program as well. The four mentors and mentee participants received an email that described the discipleship mentoring program in detail including the 2-hour training class for the mentors and the 2-hour orientation class for the mentees. The training class for the mentors allowed the mentors to learn effective communication skills, listening skills, and send evaluations for each week of mentoring for the month-long mentoring program. The orientation class for the mentees provided the mentees with information on respect, effective listening, and sending weekly evaluations. Every week the researcher received the evaluations until the completion of the discipleship mentoring program and then compiled the data together to obtain the results of each of the mentee evaluations.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this research study was to examine if the reasoning behind the current generation of emerging adults who have left the church is the same reasoning that earlier generations of young adults have abandoned church. Also, to explore other reasons emerging adults have abandoned church and if a discipleship mentoring strategy would guide them to return to church.

Coding Data

The preferred research methodology used in this study was the qualitative data collection method. The data collection types used was a focus group panel discussion and one-on-one interviews. The focus group panel discussion was made up of five senior and youth pastors. The individual interviews were made up of five parents of emerging adults and five emerging adults.

The pastors in the discussion group panel and each person in the individual interviews were asked questions to supply in-depth responses from their experience, education, teaching, family life, and ministry. Although the interviews were conducted online through a Zoom meeting, the interview questions and responses were typed into a file and compiled into field notes. After collecting the field notes, the researcher placed the field notes into one file. The questions from each of the participant interviews were grouped into categories. The pastor's group interviews were grouped into four questions categories, the parent's interviews were grouped into five questions categories, and the emerging adult interviews were grouped into three question categories.

The discipleship mentoring program participants completed weekly mentoring evaluations that were emailed back to the researcher. The online discipleship mentor and mentee

evaluations were collected and were placed into one file. Next, through a concept called coding, the researcher extracted five themes from the findings of the qualitative interviews and the discipleship mentoring evaluations. The five themes emerged from the coding process: parental influence, absentee fathers, cultural events of this generation, intergenerational relationships, and church flaws.

Ethical Considerations

The role of the researcher was to uphold professional ethics and accountability. Each participant was made aware of the ethical considerations for this research study and was provided consent forms giving the participants informed consent to participate in the research study.

Confidentiality

Each participant was made aware in the consent form that pseudonyms would be provided to protect their confidentiality. Any personal details or sensitive information that was provided to the researcher throughout the research study was kept confidential. The researcher not only used pseudonyms but also made sure that during the focus group and individual interviews that participants had the choice to keep their cameras turned off. Participants were aware of confidentiality using pseudonyms and that all field notes and transcribed data would be kept on the researcher's password-protected computer in the consent forms.

Senior Pastors' Group Interview Results

The researcher held an online Zoom group panel interview with 5 Senior level pastors and youth pastors for two hours on September 18th at 11 a.m. See Table 2 for a list of the Senior Pastor and Youth Pastor's interview demographics.

Table 2. Senior Pastor and Youth Pastor's Demographics

Participant Name	Age Range	Position	Denomination	No. of Congregants	Years Served
Pastor Larry	40-45	Senior Pastor	COGIC	Below 50	22
Pastor Henry	50-55	Bishop	Non-Denominational	250 +	35
Pastor Paul	50-55	Senior Pastor	Pentecostal	100-150	32
Pastor Ken	35-40	Youth Pastor	Hebrew-Israelite	Below 50	20
Pastor Joe	40-45	Young Adult Pastor	Para-church Ministry	Below 50	13

Each senior and youth pastor were asked nine question in the focus group interview. For this research study the questions were grouped into four major categories that included: church discipleship, young adult ministry, their beliefs on earlier generations of emerging adults that have left church, and reasons why emerging adults have left church and why many of them are not returning and have abandoned their religious beliefs.

Question 1: Does the church practice discipleship?

The researcher asked the group of pastors if their church practiced discipleship and if so, what did their discipleship practice look like. The results were 5 out of the 5 pastors said that their church practiced discipleship. Pastor Larry is the pastor of a COGIC church of no more than 50 members, and he stipulated that his church is in the process of practicing discipleship by teaching what is a disciple and the process of discipleship through bible study and group discussion classes with his church leaders and administration. Afterward each leader and administrator would demonstrate discipleship throughout their individual ministries. To some churches discipleship can be more like evangelism, worship, bible studies, or small group ministries. So far there is one discipleship class of leaders and due to Covid-19 the class had to be postponed until the church reopened. However, once the church reopened in 2021 the class

resumed and so far, the class has been a length of one year. The class teaches the leaders through a series of discipleship books what discipleship is and how to be a disciple. The pastor said that upon completion of the class the leaders will be assigned a certain number of constituents in the ministries that they head to be their disciples. Although Pastor Larry has been a pastor for 22 years, he admitted that his congregation had suffered several problems with changing of leadership and changing of church locations over the years and that his church did not have many ministries and did not provide discipleship. However, he knows the importance of discipleship and is now teaching a discipleship class to his leaders so that they can eventually minister to a group of people on their own.

Pastor Henry's church has a physical location, but they also have a heavy presence on the internet. Pastor Henry said even before COVID-19 shutdown all the churches and forced many to practice their services online that his church was streaming their services online prior to 2020. He has online ministry groups called Life Groups and each group has a pastor that discipled and ministers to the participants of that group. The group sometimes have meetings for those who live in the same area so that they can fellowship together. The group's pastors or leaders usually discuss spiritual formation, character building, discipleship and more.

Pastor Paul's discipleship practice is through weekly bible study and Sunday school classes. Yet, pastor Paul and pastor Joe indicated that they did not have a discipleship strategy in process other than bible studies and just mentoring members of their church and ministries. Therefore, each agreed that discipleship works differently in various churches. Also, they agreed that Black churches did not always have discipleship, it really became a new concept in the 21st century. Although Matthew 28:19-20 has been preached in many churches and the concept of discipleship derived from this Scripture and from Jesus' works in the Bible, discipleship is still

relatively new. Many pastors and churches do not practice discipleship and the ones that do it appears differently for each church.

Question 2: Does the church have a young adult ministry?

Question two resulted in-depth conversation directed to each of the pastors was if they have a ministry directly geared toward emerging adults or young adults in their churches and ministers. Many churches have children ministries, but not many churches have a ministry specifically geared toward emerging adults between the ages of 18-29 years old. The results were 2 out of 5 of the pastors actually had young adult ministries that were geared toward emerging adults. Pastor Henry started an online young adult ministry that is geared towards young adult conversations, bible study, and worship. The young adults can connect with each other through social media and email.

Pastor Joe ministers to young adults daily via social media and invites them to visit his parachurch ministry. Pastor Joe talks to young adults about the dangers of following along with everything they see on social media and in society today. Pastor Joe said that he ministers to young adults no matter their sexual orientation or gender, because he believes that God loves everyone including those who are in the LGBTQ community. Pastor Joe says that too many young adults feel that churches condemn them, make them feel unsafe, not loved, and not accepted, and that is why he has a ministry that is geared towards talking to all young adults about Jesus.

Question 3: Do you believe that this generation of emerging adults will return as earlier generation of emerging adults have and why is this generation of emerging adults abandoning institutionalized religion?

Question three created in-depth conversation was their beliefs if emerging adults of this generation would return to church as the emerging adults of earlier generations have done, and

what reasons are emerging adults abandoning institutionalized religion. The results were 2 out of the 5 pastors believed that emerging adults of this generation were the same as previous generation and that they would return to church. Pastor Henry has been in ministry for 35 years and over the course of that time has seen a lot with different generations of emerging adults leaving church when they reach the age of independence. He stated that primarily he has seen many leave because of attending colleges in other states, entering the workforce, and starting families. Although these are the same reasons that earlier generations of emerging adults have left church that the Holy Spirit will draw these young people back to church too.

Pastor Ken is a Christian, but he is also a Hebrew-Israelite. Pastor Ken disagreed and said that the current generation of emerging adults are beginning to see religious institutions as frauds, too many rules, condemning, offensive and angry people, and that many emerging adults are seeking something that is authentic, genuine, and that will provide answers to their questions about identity, life, and purpose. Pastor Ken believes that these are the reasons that many emerging adults have left churches and institutionalized religion and many of them may not return for those same reasons.

Pastor Joe expressed that from his experience he has seen an increase in absentee fathers, increased presence of social media, emerging adults have lost hope, emerging adults have been abandoned and rejected, and many emerging adults no longer believe or have faith in the things they were taught in church when they were younger. Pastor Joe agrees that this generation of emerging adults may not return to church until the church has made some changes. All the pastors agreed with the fact that there has been an increase in social media presence and that social media and technology has taken over the minds of children and emerging adults of this generation.

Question 4: Would you take part in discipleship by being an online mentor?

The final question that was asked of the group of pastors were if they would want to take part in the online discipleship mentoring program by being a mentor. The researcher explained that the mentor would help a mentee with spiritual formation, character building and growing spiritually for four weeks. The mentor would contact the mentee by video phone or Zoom online once or twice a week and then complete weekly evaluations for four weeks to assess the mentees spiritual growth. One out of the five had schedules that would allow them to do so. All the pastors agreed that mentoring was a great idea, but four of the five pastors had a busy schedule. Pastor Joe said that he works with young adults so he would not have a problem taking part in the online discipleship mentoring plan.

Parents of Emerging Adult Interview Results

The research study for parents was a 2-hour individual interview held on Zoom with five parents of emerging adults that were held at the discretion of each parent from September 4th to September 18th. The interview was with two parents of emerging adults that still attend church often, one parent whose emerging adult child stopped attending church, two parents of emerging adults that occasionally attend church, and one parent of an emerging adult that hardly attends church. The breakdown of the parent interview demographics can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Parent Demographics

Names	No. of Emerging Adult Children	Frequency of Current Church Status	Ages of Children	Frequency of Current Children Church Status
Tasha	3	Occasionally	19, 20, 22	Stopped
Leonard	2	Frequently	23, 26	Occasionally
Manny	1	Occasionally	25	Frequently
Louis	1	Stopped	24	Occasionally
Marie	1	Frequently	19	Occasionally

There were several questions that were asked of each of the five parent participants and there were five questions that after being transcribed and reviewed that emerged from the list of questions. The five questions were about their parents' religious status, if they lived with both parents, their current church status, their emerging adult children's status and if they would further participate in this study by being an online discipleship mentor.

Question 1: Did your parents attend church when you were younger?

Each of the parents were asked about their family's religious background and more specifically if their parents attended church when they were younger.

When Tasha was younger, her mother was frequently attending church. Her mother was in a couple of ministries from her memory, such as choir and greeting ministries. As Tasha grew of age, her mother's attendance became more infrequent, and she remembers her mother only attending church when she either felt she needed to spend time with God or if she had a problem, she needed prayer for. Tasha was not raised with her father in the household and never had the opportunity to know her father, so she did not know his religious affiliation.

On the other hand, Leonard was not raised by his father, but he did see him occasionally after his parent's divorce. What Leonard remembers about his father was that he was an occasional churchgoer. Leonard's father went to church on holidays, special services, and when he wanted to go. Leonard's mother was a minister in the local church, so he recalls attending church day and night because he was always in church.

Manny's parents were different because his father is Muslim and currently attends the Mosque, and his mother is a Christian that presently attends a local church. Manny's parents never married, but he did spend a lot of time with his father, so he did attend the Mosque occasionally. However, his mother attended the local Pentecostal church regularly.

Question 2: Were both parents present in the home?

In the individual interviews, each of the parents was asked to describe the structure of their home when they were children. Tasha was raised in a single-parent household with her mother as her sole caregiver. Leonard's parents divorced when he was in his teenage years, and his mother became his sole caregiver. Manny was raised by his mother and did not have the opportunity to have a relationship with his father until he was a teenager. Manny revealed that he knew of his father because he is named after him, but his father never expressed an interest in spending time with him until he turned 16. Louis described his family structure as a two-parent household. His mother and father never married, but his father married his stepmother. Louis lived with his father and stepmother but was close with his biological mother. Marie described her family structure as growing up in a two-parent household. Marie said that her mother and father were married and divorced when she turned 18 years old.

Question 3: Are you current in church now?

In the individual interviews, the parents' next question was, are they current in church now. This question was asked to identify their current church attendance status.

Tasha attended church frequently until she enrolled in a weekend nursing program two years ago. After the nursing program, Tasha moved to another state and admitted that she wanted to attend church pre-covid but had not successfully located a church in her area. Tasha has gotten to the point where she now likes sleeping in on Sundays but desires to return to church eventually.

Leonard is in leadership at his local church and attends church frequently. Leonard loves attending church because of the family dynamic. To Leonard, his church is his family, and his pastors are his spiritual family. Leonard also loves going to church because it has helped him grow closer to God, and thus his church experience has transformed his character and life.

Manny did not attend church often when he was a child because his mother never forced him to go. As a child, he saw his friends going to church with their families while he stayed home to play alone. Manny did not grow up seeing a need for church, nor did he understand the reason for going to church. Although Manny is still a non-church goer, he may occasionally attend if a friend asks him to go.

Louis was not forced to go to church as a child, but his father and stepmother were occasional churchgoers, while his biological mother attended church more frequently. His stepmother and father allowed him to decide on going to church independently. Therefore, Louis attended church occasionally when he was a child. When he got married in his early twenties, he attended church more frequently. However, he left the church for a while after his divorce. Louis started attending church frequently again before the pandemic, but once the pandemic occurred, he has stopped attending church altogether.

Marie attended church often with her mother when she was younger. Marie's mother was a Christian, but her father was a Jehovah's Witness. Marie's father frequently attended the Jehovah's Witness Hall when she was younger. Marie occasionally participated in the Hall when she was younger but liked going to church with her mother. Marie does attend church frequently now and loves going because she believes attending church has made her grow in her spiritual life.

Question 4: Does your Emerging Adult Child Attend Church Today?

The next question that was asked pertained to the current church attendance of their emerging adult children. This question was asked to examine the view of the parents on their children's current church attendance.

Tasha has three emerging adult children, 19, 20, and 22 years of age. Tasha said that all three of them were going to church with her when she went when they were younger, but they have all stopped when they got older. Tasha said that her 22-year-old stopped because she left state to go to college. Her 20-year-old stopped going to church because of her work schedule. Her 19-year-old stopped going to church because she no longer believes in God. Her 19-year-old told her that she started doubting the existence of God when she was younger, and she watches a lot of TikTok videos that she thinks has influenced her on that decision. Tasha said that her two older emerging adults still believe in God and prays but just do not have the time to go to church.

Leonard has two emerging adult children, 23 and 26. Leonard says that both of his girls attend church frequently. Leonard believes that it is possible that they attended church frequently because he is in leadership, and he attends frequently. However, it can also be because both of his children have experienced God's presence in their lives and they both absolutely love going to church because of the family dynamic and because they are growing spiritually.

Manny has one emerging adult child that is 25 years old. Manny said that his son grew up with his mother and she was a frequent churchgoer and forced him to go when he was younger. Manny believes because his son was forced to go to church by his mother that this is the reason that stopped attending church when he reached the age of independence. Manny says that he does not go so he does not believe a child should be forced to go, but he does talk to his child about thanking God for health and strength.

Louis has one emerging adult child that is 24 years old. Louis said that his child was going to church frequently when he was married. However, his child stopped going to church when she reached the age of independence. Louis says he is not sure why she stopped going but he believes that she does not see the need for church when you can love God from home.

Marie has one emerging adult child that is 19. Marie said that her daughter is a frequent churchgoer. Marie said that she has tried to instill in her daughter the importance of community worship and community fellowship. Marie said that she has also instilled in her daughter that with her church she has able to work in ministry and that will help her to find her identity and purpose in her life and she can show service to others. Marie believes that her daughter loves church because of these reasons.

Question 5: Will you take part in being an online discipleship mentor?

The researcher asked the parents in the individual interviews if they would want to take part in being an online mentor to other emerging adults to connect with them and to see if they could help these emerging adults grow spiritually. The results from this question afforded the researcher the opportunity to select participants that would be mentors in the discipleship plan and to evaluate discipleship mentoring with emerging adults.

Tasha said that she did understand the importance of helping emerging adults to grow spiritually. Tasha wanted to take part in being a mentor in the research study because she believed it would not only help someone else, but it may help her to learn how to disciple her adult children and may help her to grow spiritually. Leonard was excited about mentoring and discipleship. Leonard stated that he has ministered to many of his child's friends over the years as they came to his house. Leonard would not miss the opportunity to help another emerging adult to grow spiritually. Marie absolutely loved the idea of mentoring an emerging adult. Marie also believes that this would benefit her spiritual growth as well as helping another individual to spiritually grow.

It was from the interviews that the researcher was able to select Leonard, Marie and Tasha to participate in the online discipleship mentoring plan. After the interview, these

participants were informed that they would receive an email with more details about the mentoring class, with the syllabus, and a consent form to sign and return to the researcher.

Emerging Adult Interview Results

The emerging adult interviews were similar to the parent interviews. The emerging adult interviews were also individual interviews conducted in a closed Zoom meeting at the discretion of the participant from September 4th to September 18th at varying times of the day and night. More details of the emerging adult research interview demographics are in Table 4.

Table 4. Emerging Adult Research Interview Demographics

Names	Age	Frequency of Current Church Status
Destiny	22	Occasionally
Jarron	23	Stopped
Moe	25	Frequently
Markita	26	Frequently
Dez	19	Stopped

The emerging adult participants were asked nine questions and those questions were grouped into three categories. The categories are the participant's parent's religion or relationship with church, the participant's current church attendance, being involved in further research of discipleship mentoring.

Question 1: Describe your parent's relationship with church or religion?

Each emerging adult in individual interviews were asked to describe their parent's religious beliefs or their relationship with church or religion. Like the question that was asked of

the parents of emerging adults, this question for emerging adults was to examine if there was an influence on the emerging adult from their parents.

Destiny is a 22-year-old emerging adult, and she said she does not know about her father's beliefs or status in the church because her father has never been present in her life. Destiny said that her mother frequently attended church when she was a child and frequently attends church today. Destiny said that her mother is a Christian that attends a non-denominational church.

Jarron is 23 years old and said that his father was not present in his life. Jaron noted that his mother occasionally attended church when he was younger, but she has frequently been attending church as of late. Jarron said that his mother sings with the praise and worship team and hears a non-denominational church.

Moe is 25 years old, and he said that his father rarely attended church and his mother frequently attends church. Moe described his father's relationship with God as a good one, but he does not believe that he should have to attend church often. Moe said his father also works on Sundays so that also prevents him from attending church with his mother. However, his mother has always been a frequent churchgoer and she attends an Apostolic church.

Markita is 26 years old and did not live with either one of her parents when she was younger. Her grandparents raised Markita, and they sent her to church every Sunday. Markita said that she does not recall if her grandparents ever attended church, but they would send her with her aunt every Sunday. Markita began to develop a relationship with her father when she became a teenager, and he was occasionally attending church. Today her father is a frequent member of a non-denominational church. Markita did not develop a relationship with her mother until she turned 20 years old, and her mother never attended church. Still, she knows that her

mother is a Christian because she watches church services every day on television. Markita believes that her mother's relationship with God was developed through television ministries.

Dez is 19 years old and does not know her father and recalls that her mother went occasionally when she was younger, and she still goes occasionally. Dez does not know why her mother does not attend church more frequently or why she attends at all.

Question 2: Are you currently attending church?

Another question that was asked of the emerging adults in their individual interviews was to describe their church status and their current religious beliefs.

Destiny said that her mother would force her to attend church when she was younger. Although Destiny was forced to participate, she liked that the church she attended felt like family. She had fun and enjoyed doing various events with her friends and family at the church. Destiny said she does not recall all the Bible stories that were taught, but she did not know whether she believed what was being taught or not. Destiny said today she occasionally attends because of her work schedule. Destiny believes that God is real, but she does not think or know anything other than that. Destiny does not pray or read the Bible outside of the church.

Jarron does not currently attend church, and he stopped when he turned 17 years old. Jaron says that his mother does ask him every Sunday, but he makes excuses. When Jaron was younger, he was forced to go to church, and he loved the family atmosphere, he loved being with his friends, and the Bible stories were fascinating. However, he did not think that what he was being told or taught was true as he got older. Jaron believes in God, but he also believes that everyone has free will and there are no such things as miracles or blessings, that God does not intervene with humanity but that everything that happens by the will of the people.

Moe said that he was forced to go to church when he was younger as well. Moe said that he stopped going to church when he turned 23. Moe attended many churches with his mother, and he loved every one of them except the last church she was hearing. Moe said he began to see that the pastor was a bully, forcing people to give money they did not have for frivolous things such as his birthday or any holiday or event of the pastor. Moe said that he also stopped because the people were very judgmental and began to see that it was more like a cult than anything. Moe believes in God profoundly and continues to pray, but he is unsure whether he will return to church. Markita said again that she did go to church when she was younger.

Markita said again that she did go to church when she was younger. Markita loved being with her friends at church. Also, being at church gave her something to do on Sundays. Markita does not recall but a few Bible stories but nothing substantial. However, when Markita turned 22 years old, she frequently attended church. Markita says that she desires to grow spiritually and discover her life's purpose.

Dez said that she stopped going to church right before COVID-19. Dez went to church when he was younger, and he was forced to go. Dez said that his family attended church occasionally. Dez stopped because she did not believe the truth was being taught. Dez thinks that religion is white-washed, and the true history of Black people has not been accurately depicted in church, religion, or the Bible. Dez believes that some changed the Bible to promote white people's agenda. Dez is a gay emerging adult and acknowledges that churches have not entirely accepted gay people and those who have only done so because of society forcing them to do so.

Question 3: Would you like to have a discipleship mentor?

The final question asked of the emerging adults was if they wanted a discipleship mentor to help them grow spiritually. This question would allow the researcher to determine if the

emerging adults would like to participate in the online discipleship mentoring plan and evaluate their spiritual growth. Four out of the five emerging adults accepted and participated in the discipleship mentoring plan.

Destiny said she would prefer to have a mentor because she wants to know her life's purpose and if what she heard about in church is authentic. Jarron said that he would like a mentor to help him guide him in his life and that he does love God and wants to know the truth. Moe said that he has a lot going on in his life with dealing with some challenges, so he would prefer to have a mentor that would help him make better choices and allow him to grow spiritually. Markita said that she would like to have a mentor because she has never had a mentor at church, and she wants someone to help her grow spiritually.

Emergent Themes

Another part of the researcher's coding process was to extract similar themes or patterns that emerged from the interviews that were asked of the fifteen participants. Upon analysis of the data, there was the identification of five emergent themes:

1. Parental Influence
2. Absentee Fathers
3. Cultural Events of This Generation
4. Intergenerational Relationships
5. Church Flaws

Parental Influence

During their interview, the parents and the emerging adult groups were asked several questions regarding the frequency of church attendance, religious affiliation, and outside-of-church discussions. The participants were asked these questions to establish a longitudinal

connection of pastoral and church patterns among most families and if there were a correlation to the role that church would play in the life of their emerging adult child. Parents participants were asked to describe their parent's religious affiliation. Many of the parent participants stated that their mothers and fathers were continually active, but as the parent participants got older, the frequency of their parent's church status changed. Many of the parents indicated that their families did not have outside bible studies or discussions with their children unless it was to help them to uphold specific religious, traditional values and standards.

The parents were asked the same questions about their own religious affiliation, frequency of church attendance, and if there were any outside discussions or bible studies with their children. A couple of the parents attended church frequently until Covid-19 but still stream church services online. A couple of the parents often participated at one point but attend less regularly now, and one parent has discontinued attending church. All the parents still maintain their faith in God, and most of the parents did teach and train their children in spiritual matters and the Bible.

Absentee Fathers

From both the group interview and the individual interviews, it is apparent that each participant mentioned the fact that their family structure had changed over the years. From the emerging adult interviews, the researcher discovered that many emerging adults did not have fathers present in their lives. Many emerging adults did not have a male role model for example in their lives. When the emerging adults were asked about their parent's religious affiliation, many if not all of them were able to tell of their mother's religious affiliation but did not know of their fathers. A few emerging adults stated that they did not know anything about their fathers. Now, of course, it cannot be determined if a father stayed in their child's life or children that this

child or children would grow up to continue to go to church. It also cannot be determined if the father was present that the child or children would go to church continually if the father were attending church or if the father was of another religion. It cannot be determined if absentee fathers would affect church retention. However, some of the pastors thought that this was the case. Pastor Ken stated that the role of a father is also the head of the household and that as the head of the household, his role is to ensure that his children follow God and make wise decisions. How is this done if there is not a man in the house leading and guiding their children.

Cultural Events Of This Generation

Earlier generations had several major cultural events and shifts in their lives when they were children and young adults of their generations. Some of these cultural shifts were discussed in Chapter 1 were the rise of immigrants, increase in interracial marriages, advancement in manufacturing and technology, change of the American family dynamics, recessions, and civil and economic movements, to name a few. Major cultural shifts and trends have influenced habits, mindsets, and lifestyles of the people that have experienced these shifts and trends. It is possible that cultural shifts and trends of this generation of emerging adults have been affected by major shifts and trends as well, even to the extent of whether they want to attend church or even continue to be religious.

COVID-19 or Corona Virus

COVID-19, a worldwide virus that has taken the lives of millions of people worldwide, began in the latter part of 2019. No one knew where the virus came from, and many doubted the validity until January and February of 2020. In March of 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the deadly flu-like respiratory infectious virus a global pandemic. This

pandemic came out of nowhere. It had the entire world at a standstill for over a year.¹ In 2022, there are still some effects of the virus that are currently ongoing due to the original Coronavirus constantly mutating. Millions of people in early 2020 were forced by the government to stay in their houses for months at a time, except for those whose employment was deemed essential. Millions of people lost their jobs and had to wait on the government and other resources to provide for themselves and their families. Thousands of people were instructed to work from home, and many churches and businesses were closed. The global pandemic caused many anxieties, stress, depression, and nightmares. Loved ones were dying, hospitals were overcrowded, there were not enough workers to care for the overloaded hospital patients, grocery store shelves were completely bare. The government issued a social-distancing mandate and the wearing of masks to aid in preserving millions of lives due to this global pandemic. Many people are isolated, restricted, and can no longer hug or touch others or loved ones.

The global pandemic in 2021 is still affecting millions, even though vaccinations were created to prevent the spread of the virus. In 2021, Coronavirus caused some effects that have changed or shifted the minds of emerging adults. It did not help that all the churches were closed for several months, and many churches had to switch to having sermons and events on the internet. Many emerging adults had already checked out of religious institutions by this time. That is not to say that Covid-19 caused many emerging adults to abandon the church because some did before the pandemic. Three out of the five emerging adults from this research study stopped attending church before the pandemic. Two of the emerging adults were attending church services frequently, and one still attends frequently in-person and online, while the other attends in-person occasionally.

¹ Cristina Marogna, Emanuele Montanari, Silvio Contiero, et.al., “Dreaming During Covid-19: The Effects of a World Trauma”, *Research in Psychotherapy: Psychopathology, Process and Outcome*, Vol 24 (2021), 188.

Social Injustices

Another major cultural shift was the rise of police brutality and inequality against Black people. Systemic racism, police brutality, and social and economic disparities have occurred throughout previous generations; however, there seemed to be an increase in systemic racism and police brutality during the pandemic. George Floyd was an African American man murdered by a police officer during an arrest in Minnesota in 2020 after being suspected of using a counterfeit bill in a store by a white store clerk. Floyd's death sparked outrage with many across the nation, specific anger with many emerging adults. The police killed 164 Black people in 2020. In Florida, a Hispanic man killed Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old boy, because he thought the young boy looked too suspicious in his upscale neighborhood. Ahmad Arbery was falsely imprisoned and killed by white men while jogging.²

Many emerging adults had taken to the streets to protest, riot and loot because of the outrage and anger for police brutality and inequality. Just as the baby boomers sparked the civil rights movements, this generation of millennials or emerging adults has sparked another civil rights movement called Black Lives Matter (BLM). Of course, more than just Black people supported the fight against unfair treatment and brutality against Black people. "Many Americans have reported that, as a result of Floyd's murder, they have had conversations about race, posted on social media sites about Black Lives Matter, donated to social justice organizations, and wrote/contacted their elected public officials."³ However, few churches were seen actively involved in the fight against social injustices.

² Eddy Ng and Andrew Lam, "Black Lives Matter: On the Denial of Systemic Racism, White Liberals, and Polite Racism", Bucknell Digital Commons (2020), 729-730.

³ Ibid., 729-730.

Between 2020-2021 there have been over 9,000 anti-Asian hate incidents reported. Many of those attacks have been against Asian women, and many Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have faced verbal abuse incidents. On March 16th, six Asian women were shot dead in Atlanta in a spa. Police departments and lawmakers have created a hotline and a task force to prevent anti-Asian attacks. Many community members across various states have organized demonstrations, protests, and neighborhood watch programs to stop the attacks against Asians.⁴

All the emerging adult participants expressed concern about how they believe that many churches were not actively involved in social justice issues. Moe and Markita are still attending churches in-person again, but both expressed that their local churches never discussed being involved in social justice. Two of the emerging adult participants that stopped attending church before the pandemic stated that they did not recall their local churches being involved in social justice.

Social Media

The increase in social media has been a concern for parents. Many parents can ban and restrict what their children can access on the internet. The restrictions are that social media and the Internet have become a source of good and evil, entertainment and information. It is good that social media is used to stay connected with others worldwide. It is good that social media is the method that many churches use to preach the Gospel, especially when the world was on lockdown due to Covid-19. However, social media has become inundated with pornography, murder and violence, and more. “Social media is robbing us of trust and comfort we once placed in one another...it robs us from self-control and from the ability to think independently and

⁴ Elinor Aspegren, “Not Going Away: More Than 9k Anti-Asian Hate Incidents Since Covid Pandemic Began”, *USA Today* (August 12, 2021), accessed on January 26, 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2021/08/12/asian-american-hate-crimes-not-slowng-down/8116540002/>.

instead makes us gullible to join any group that posts perverse messages that tickle our ear and amuse our senses without evaluating the consequences.”⁵ One can find many negative videos when just browsing YouTube about churches and church leaders. Some emerging adults use YouTube and TikTok as their sources of information about God, church, and religion. There on YouTube and TikTok, there is good teaching, and then there are teachings that encourage postmodern, atheist, and agnostic viewpoints.

All the parents of emerging adult participants stated that their emerging adult children watched a lot of social media, and many of them believed everything that they saw on social media. The emerging adult participants admitted that they believed most of what they had seen and heard on social media platforms.

Between Covid-19, police brutality and racism, and the increase of negative influences on social media, many of the interviewed pastors and parents believed that many emerging adults had abandoned church because of these cultural changes. Many of the parents of emerging adults discussed with the researcher how much technology and social media play a part in their children's lives. Many of the parents saw that the beliefs and ideologies of their emerging adult children shifted because of what they had learned and seen on social media. Some emerging adults even agreed that social media had played an essential role in their lives and many of their peers because they were raised with social media, which is paramount in their culture.

Intergenerational Relationships

All the emerging adult participants agreed that they would not mind having a relationship with older adults. Many of them decided that having a relationship with an older adult would

⁵ Jacob Amedia, “The Impact of Social Media on Society”, *Pop Culture Intersections* 2 (2015), 3.

help guide them in their life's journey. A couple of the emerging adult participants stated that having a relationship with an older adult did not mean they wanted to be preached at or judged. One of the emerging adult participants indicated that they did not want anyone to try to change them, but instead, they wanted a mentor that would help them understand life and help them learn what they did not learn in church.

Church Flaws

From many individual interviews with both parents of emerging adults and emerging adults going to church was forced upon them when they were younger. Even though this is the case with many young children, some have had positive experiences with church and ministry. However, as they grew up, they began to see and experience church differently.

In the interview with Destiny, she mentioned that many of her friends are atheists and have other religious beliefs because of their experience with going to church. Destiny's friend told her that church people are very judgmental. Destiny mentioned that she also had faced judgment in the church that she attended with her aunt or mother. The judgmental attitudes of many of the church members are one reason that Destiny says that she does not attend church often.

Jarron discussed in his interview that his experience with church people was their unauthenticity. In Jarron's experience, he has witnessed many people who were devout in church but do not act the same way outside the church. Jarron said that in his church experience, he had witnessed nasty and ugly attitudes of church members and some church leaders. Jarron said that this type of behavior is one of the main reasons he stopped attending church. Jefferson Bethke authored a poem titled "Why I Hate Religion, But Love Jesus."⁶ It was in this poem that Bethke

⁶ Riley Ferguson, "Where Are We Going? A Critical Analysis of Millennials and the Traditional Church", diss. Augustana College, Rock Island, IL, (2018), 4.

wrote that the church is unwilling and unprepared to change. Many emerging adults, including the participants that were interviewed, did not state that they did not love God, but that they left the church and religious institutions because they were tired of religion. Therefore, four out of the five emerging adult participants agreed to be a part of the discipleship mentoring plan.

Discipleship Mentoring Assessments

As stated in chapter 3, one of the pastors and three of the parents of emerging adults agreed to participate as mentors in the discipleship mentoring plan and how each were paired is shown in Table 5. The four mentors were emailed the mentor recruitment email containing more information about the discipleship plan, 2 hour Zoom orientation class, ethical consent form, and follow-up email about the time and date of the orientation class. The five mentors met on a Zoom orientation class that was held on October 9th. The mentors remained anonymous because their cameras remained off and the only camera that was showing during the class was the researcher's. Within the 2-hour class the mentors signed the ethical consent form and returned it to the researcher by email and the researcher went over the orientation syllabus. The researcher discussed with the mentors how the mentoring process would go and that they would receive an email with the name of their mentees on October 10th and begin the first week of mentoring on Monday, October 11th.

The orientation class for the mentees was held on Sunday October 10th on Zoom. Prior to the orientation class the mentees that were participants from the individual interviews were provided a recruitment email, and follow-up email giving them the time and date of the Zoom meeting. Again, to continue anonymity the mentees were also told to keep their cameras off during the Zoom orientation. During the 1 ½ hour orientation with the mentees they were provided information on the process of the mentoring plan. The mentees were also provided the

names, telephone numbers and email addresses of their mentors, see Table 5 for Mentor and Mentee Pairings. The mentees were told that the mentors would reach out to them and begin the mentoring process during week one beginning Monday, October 11th.

Table 5. Mentor and Mentee Discipleship Pairings

Mentor	Mentee
Pastor Joe	Moe
Leonard (Parent)	Jarron
Marie (Parent)	Destiny
Tasha (Parent)	Markita

The discipleship mentoring plan was a 4-week plan and each of the participants were to email the researcher with their weekly evaluations for all parties involved to determine the growth and effectiveness of the discipleship mentoring plan. The mentors were provided the names of their mentees during their orientation and training class that was held on Saturday, October 10th. The mentors were instructed that the mentoring sessions week 1 would begin on Monday, October 11th thru Saturday, October 16th. Week 2 session would begin Sunday, October 17th thru Saturday, October 23rd. Week 3 session would begin Sunday, October 24th thru Saturday, October 30th. The final session would begin on Sunday, October 31st thru Saturday, November 6th. The mentors were instructed that they would have to reach out to their mentees and introduce themselves in the first week and have a conversation to get to know their mentees do determine how they would want to move forward with helping them to grow spiritually. The mentors were also instructed to pray consistently outside of the mentoring program for their mentees and that they will be able to help them to grow spiritually. Lastly, the mentors were

instructed to contact the mentees through telephone calls, facetime, Google Duo, or email. Email would be the form of communication if it is difficult to use the other modes of communication with the mentee, or if there was a time constraint involved on either side.

The mentees were provided with the similar instructions in their mentee orientation class that was held on Sunday, October 10th. The mentees were instructed by the researcher who their mentors were and that their mentors would be contacting them week one between Monday, October 11th thru Saturday, October 16th. The mentees were informed that they must communicate with their mentors at least once a week. The weekly evaluations were emailed to both mentor and mentee at the beginning of each week and were to be completed by both mentee and mentor at the end of each week and returned to the researcher by email.

Mentor Joe and Mentee Moe's Evaluation Results

Pastor Joe was paired with emerging adult Moe from the research study. Pastor Joe reached out to Moe on Friday of week 1 and they communicated every Friday by Facetime during the evening hours (see appendix K for results chart). Pastor Joe works as a schoolteacher, so he informed Moe that Fridays were better days for him to contact Moe. Moe stated to Joe in their first communication that he was unemployed and had been since December of 2021 due to Covid-19. Moe stated that he was on unemployment, but his benefits were cut by the government in mid-July of 2021. Moe was struggling to survive because he lived on his own and he has a 2-year-old daughter that he provides for. Moe informed Joe during their weekly conversations that he was dealing with anger issues and that he plays video games to try to deal with his anger. Joe stated in his week 1 evaluation that he was able to discern that Moe not only had anger issues but that by the things that Moe was speaking to him that Moe was battling depression because he has not been able to take care of his bills and his daughter. Joe informed Moe in the week 1

conversation that he has dealt with similar issues of unemployment when he was younger and that he also struggled to provide for his family. Joe was able to mentor Moe with learning how to meditate, specifically breathing exercises to refrain from getting upset. Joe explained that the breathing exercises helped him to push his anger down and clear his mind to make wiser decisions. Joe also explained to Moe how to pray, study Philippians 4:6, to write his own prayers and recite them, and to trust God when he deals with situations that he could not handle. Both stated that they trusted each other and did not have any challenges in the mentoring process. During the four-week period both agreed that Moe was able to grow in character. Moe was able to find employment during his mentoring process and was incredibly grateful for Pastor Joe taking the time to help him navigate through his emotions.

Mentor Leonard and Mentee Jarron's Evaluation Results

Leonard and Jarron were paired together from the research study. Leonard reached out to Jarron on Friday evening of week 1 (see appendix L for results chart). Their communication was also held on Friday evenings because of both of their heavy work schedules throughout the week. Leonard reached out to Jarron using Facetime during each of their conversations. Leonard detected during the first week that Jarron was shy and was not very forthcoming, but he also saw that through their once-a-week conversations that Jarron began to warm up to him. Jarron still lives at home with his mother, and he does not have any communication with his father. Jarron was raised by a single parent and his two younger siblings. Jarron believes that he makes the wrong decisions because he always finds himself in bad situations. Jarron did not go into detail about his situations with Leonard, but Leonard mentored Jarron about making wiser decisions for the four weeks of the discipleship mentoring process. Leonard discussed with Jarron to avoid making emotional decisions by praying and relying on God to provide an answer to him.

Leonard was able to gather in their communication that Jarron did know God, but he did not pray very often. That what something that Leonard wanted to address was for Jarron to pray more. Leonard provided Jarron with a prayer guide using Matthew 6:10-14. Both stated that they established trust and they did not have any challenges. Both mentor and mentee agreed that Jarron did grow in his character and spiritually by learning to pray more and trust God. Jarron also learned to be more patient and to weigh his options before making decisions. Jarron agreed that discipleship mentoring was helpful to him because he never had a male figure to help guide him.

Mentor Marie and Mentee Destiny's Evaluation Results

Marie and Destiny were paired together from the research study. Marie reached out to destiny on week 1 on Tuesday evening (see appendix M for results chart). Afterwards their conversations were very brief but were conducted on Saturday mornings using facetime. Marie stated in her week 1 evaluation that Destiny had a very lackadaisical personality, and the mentoring process was challenging. Destiny stated to Marie in their week 1 mentoring that she was not sure if she believed in God completely. Therefore, Marie listed Destiny's goal or vision as getting to know God and acknowledging his presence in her life. Marie had several talks with Destiny during their once a week mentoring sessions about acknowledging God in nature, in small miracles of waking up in the morning, and that God watches over her to protect her. Marie's assignment to Destiny in each of the week's sessions was to pray and ask God to reveal himself to her. Destiny stated that she did try to do the assignment but at the end of the four weeks she was still unable to determine if God was real or present. Marie stated at the end of the four weeks that she may not have been equipped to mentor Destiny because of her lackadaisical attitude. Both parties agreed that there was no spiritual growth in this mentoring process.

Mentor Tasha and Markita's Evaluation Results

Tasha a parent from the parents' research study was paired with Markita an emerging adult from the research study (see appendix N for results chart). Tasha reached out to Markita on Wednesday of week 1 and they continued their mentoring sessions every Wednesday evening using Google Duo for Android cell phone users. Markita was very forthcoming with the fact that she wanted to grow closer to God. Tasha consulted with Markita about the power of fasting, praying, and studying Scriptures. Tasha informed Markita on how to do intermittent fasting or fasting from morning to afternoon with just liquids until she's able to fast morning to evening using just liquids. Markita completed her first week of fasting and praying per the assignment provided to her. Markita stated that she was interested in fasting from social media as well during week 2 because of how she was able to get closer to God during week 1. Markita informed Tasha that she wanted to overcome various temptations in her life. Therefore, Tasha provided Markita was a few Scriptures that she could study while fasting in week 2. Tasha also gave Markita the assignment of journaling her vices and googling to obtain more Scriptures to meditate on during her fast. During the last week conversation Markita was excited about her growth over the past few weeks and wanted to continue with fasting, praying, and studying Scriptures. Tasha informed Markita that she could do a daily devotion using the Bible application on her phone. Both parties agreed that the mentoring relationship had trust, no challenges, and that Markita did grow spiritually during this mentoring process.

Online Discipleship Mentoring Conclusion

The purpose of the four-week online discipleship mentoring program was to establish intergenerational relationships by pairing spiritually mature Christian adults with emerging adults who desire to grow and change spiritually. The four emerging adults that agreed to

participate in the online discipleship mentoring program expressed an interest in wanting to grow spiritually in their lives. The four mentors that agreed to participate expressed an interest in wanting to help emerging adults to grow spiritually and to help guide their mentees to return to church service. The hope was that all the mentees would become more Christlike and grow spiritually. However, only one out of the four did not experience any growth.

After the researcher received the weekly evaluations from each of the eight participants, the results were tabulated into an excel spreadsheet and then extracted into the graphs shown in the appendices. It was from the research interviews and the discipleship mentoring program that the five themes were extracted. The themes were parental influence, absentee fathers, cultural events of this generation, intergenerational relationships, and church flaws. The analysis of the five themes is provided in chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The problem that this research study addressed is that many emerging adults have left the church after graduating high school, and many of them have not returned or have abandoned their spiritual practices or beliefs. The purpose of this research study was to (1) explore the similarities and differences of the current emerging adults from the earlier generation of young adults, (2) discover other reasons why emerging adults have abandoned church and some childhood beliefs, and (3) to determine if a discipleship mentoring program would guide emerging adults to return to church.

In addressing whether emerging adults are like previous generations in terms of mindsets, lifestyle, habits, and church behavior, the answer is they are not. Emerging adults are different than previous generations, and it is a possibility that the culture has been shifting because of some of the significant cultural changes and trends.¹ Emerging adults are also called millennials or young adults in the generation Y and Z era. The term emerging adults is different because these are young adults that are no longer teenagers but have not yet transitioned into full adulthood. Many emerging adults' life stage transitioning periods are longer. They typically get married and enter parenthood later in life, and they live with their parents longer, they are in school longer and take longer to transition into stable work life."²

Looking at previous generations, there was a rise in church attendance with baby boomers at one point from 1955-1958. However, during the mid-1960's the baby boomer

¹ Mark DeVries and Scott Pontier, *Sustainable Young Adult Ministry: Making it Work, Making it Last* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 10, 23-24.

² Jeffrey Jensen Arnett. *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 7.

generation experienced a decline in observing religious institutions and many rejected traditional religious practices that the individuals in the silent generation practiced.³ Many of the individuals that were young adults in the generation x era experienced more of a decline in church attendance further rejecting traditional religious practices, and some of the individuals from the generation x era have become atheists, agnostics, other worldviews, and become "nones" (not affiliated with any particular religion but still spiritual).⁴ Even though the baby boomer's generation showed a steady decline in church attendance, some of the baby boomers returned to church as they got older, entered into parenthood and marriage, or to seek solace and refuge from some of the difficult culture changes that affected their culture.⁵

The findings of this research study supports the trend that emerging adults have continued to decline in church attendance. In fact, research has shown that many emerging adults have not been returning to church, and have instead elected to observe religious practices from home, not associate themselves with any one particular religion, or not be associated with religion at all.⁶ Although some young adults in baby boomer's generation may have returned to church as they got older many of the emerging adult's generation have left and have not returned to church.

³ "Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z, and Gen A explained", *The Kasasa Exchange* (07/06/2021), accessed on December 2, 2021, <https://www.kasasa.com/exchange/articles/generations/gen-x-gen-y-gen-z>.

⁴ Stanley J. Menking, "Generation X: The First Post-Christendom Generation", *Quarterly Review* 19, no 2 (Summer 1999): 153-155.

⁵ Jean-Anne Sutherland, Margaret M. Paloma, and Brian F. Pendleton, "Religion, Spirituality, and Alternative Health Practices: The Baby Boomer and Cold War Cohorts", *Journal of Religion and Health* Vol. 42, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 319.

⁶ Sarah Guldalian, "The Millennials: Reflecting on Reaching a Lost Generation for Christ", *Missio Apostolica* (January 1, 2013): 42.

Some religious leaders and religious institutions have made many attempts to gain the attention of the emerging adults that have left churches and religious institutions. Some religious leaders are using an attractional approach, which means they have instituted changes in their churches and ministries to attract emerging adults. Some religious leaders have built more prominent churches with theme parks, bowling alleys, bookstores, cafés, and coffee shops. Some religious leaders have altered their style of dress and music. Some religious leaders have even changed their style they used to deliver their sermons to make the message more appealing. Also, some religious leaders understand the importance of discipleship and have implemented some form of discipleship practice within their church or religious institution. Regardless of the attempts to retain membership or regain the attention of emerging adults who have left churches, the number of emerging adults that are abandoning church and religious institutions are still increasing and this fact may show that emerging adults may not be like the previous generation of young adults.

Research Methodology and Implementation Results

The research method that was used for this research study and plan implementation is called the qualitative research method. The qualitative research method included a focus group study of five senior pastors, individual interviews of five parents of emerging adults and individual interviews of five emerging adults. The senior pastors, youth pastors, parents of emerging adults and emerging adults were the stakeholders because the information that was obtained from these participants helped the researcher gain more insight into how emerging adults are different than previous generation young adults and what is making many emerging adults abandon church and preventing many from returning to religious institutions.

From the focus group interview and the individual interviews that were conducted four of the adult participants and four of the emerging adult participants expressed a desire take part in the online discipleship mentoring program for further research. The researcher used a method of coding that included highlighting and categorizing specific themes that resulted from the participant interviews and the results from the online discipleship mentoring program.

Themes Analyzed

Upon analysis of the data, five emergent themes were identified. The five themes were introduced in Chapter 4; however, this chapter will provide a more detailed analysis of the five themes that emerged and how they may explain why many emerging adults have abandoned church and other religious institutions and why some emerging adults are abandoning their spiritual practices. The five emergent themes are parental influence, absentee fathers, cultural events of this generation, and intergenerational relationships.

Parental Influence

In the focus group interview the pastors expressed the importance of the influence that parent have over their children. The pastors stated that parents are the first teachers of their children. In fact, the bible also mentions the influence that parents have over their children.

“So commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these words of mine. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up” (Deut. 11:18-19).

God is giving parents the responsibility of teaching their children to fear God and to never forget the experiences that they had and to make sure that their children knew of their experiences with God. God instructed parents to teach their children everywhere they go.

Author Larry Nelson believes that, “In order to understand fully the role of parents in the religious and spiritual development of their emerging-adult children, it is important to examine

aspects of parental religiousness, parenting, and the parent-child relationship during earlier development periods that have been linked to their children's religious and spiritual development.”⁷ In the parent of emerging adult interviews the parents were asked their observations of their parents religious practices and beliefs as well as their own with their children. Many of the parents indicated that they were raised to go to church and that some were taught lessons outside of church. However, many of the parents of emerging adults did not continue that same practice with their children. The bible instructs parents to put into practice what they have learned and to continue these same practices with their children.

But watch out! Be careful never to forget what you yourself have seen. Do not let these memories escape from your mind as long as you live! And be sure to pass them on to your children and grandchildren. Never forget the day when you stood before the Lord your God at Mount Sinai, where he told me, “Summon the people before me, and I will personally instruct them Then they will learn to fear me as long as they live, and they will teach their children to fear me also” (Deut. 4:9-10).

However, it can still be widely debated if parental influence truly makes a difference in the continued spiritual life of their children. There are some children that continue to attend church even when their parents were not faithful. There are some children that discontinue attending church when their parents are very faithful. The research study showed a little of both sides of this spectrum. In this research study two of the parents that were faithful in church had emerging adult children that attended church frequently. However, that is not the case for all parents who were frequently attending church. It is difficult to know if the emerging adults that still attend church frequently are attending because they have been taught to do so by their

⁷ Larry J. Nelson, *Emerging Adults' Religiousness and Spirituality: Meaning-Making in an Age of Transition* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 60.

parents, and it is difficult to know if the emerging adults that continue to attend church frequently do so because of how they were raised by their parents.⁸

Of course, God's design is for parents to raise their children to fear the Lord as they themselves have been taught. Some emerging adults that want to learn and grow on their own and make their own decisions about their faith and spirituality. Some emerging adult children have expressed that their parents can be overbearing about religion and spirituality, and some have expressed concern that their parents make them feel guilty for their lack of religion and spirituality or if they do not believe exactly what they believe. These feelings can negatively impact emerging adult children from religious institutions and or practicing religion.⁹ Either way, it is possible that parents have some type of influence on their children's spiritual or religious life. "The family is central to the spiritual formation of any child (regardless of age); but if parents lack the passion and drive to live it and teach it, then the world will ultimately shape our children."¹⁰

Absentee Fathers

The research study concluded that many of the emerging adult participants grew up without fathers present in their lives. The marriage rate has declined significantly, and this has created more single-parent households, no-parent households, child abandonment, and even an increase in domestic relationships. This has led to many single mothers cohabitating with the fathers and domestic living partners. This family breakdown has also led to many absentee fathers.

⁸ Nelson, *Emerging Adults' Religiousness and Spirituality*, 59.

⁹ Megan Brown, "Relationships Matter: The Impact of Relationship Upon Emerging Adult Retention", *Christian Education Journal* 13, no 1 (Spring 2016), 8.

¹⁰ Alex McFarland and Jason Jimenez, *Abandoned Faith: Why Millennials Are Walking Away and How You Can Lead Them Home* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2017), 14.

Growing up without a father can create significant stress and challenges in the lives of children. “Almost one in four children today grow up without a father in the home. For African Americans, it is some 65 percent of children.”¹¹ Absentee fathers is serious because, in some families, it creates a dysfunctional family structure. A fatherless household has been attributed to higher crime rates, truancy issues, promiscuity, rape, psychological issues, domestic violence, and more. Fatherlessness has also caused some children to seek out a father placeholder, and sometimes that can turn out to be toxic.¹²

Absentee fathers may be or may not be the single reason that emerging adults have abandoned church and religious institutions. Another topic can be debated and further researched to determine if absentee fathers have anything to do with emerging adults leaving church and religious institutions.

Cultural Events of This Generation

Every generation has had their own challenges from major historical or cultural shifts that have taken place that have impacted and influenced their habits, mindsets, and lifestyles. Older generations dealt with wars, segregation, the Great Depression, racism, feminism, manufacturing, interracial relationships, 9/11, rise in technology, gay and lesbian marriage, and more. This generation has had to deal with COVID-19 global pandemic, systemic racism, rise in police brutality, and positive and negative influences and information on social media. Many of the cultural events of this generation were described in detail in Chapter 4.

¹¹ Mary Eberstadt, “First Things First: The Fury of the Fatherless”, *A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* (Dec. 2020), 42.

¹² Ibid., 42.

Global Pandemic

In an article printed on July 8, 2020, during the global pandemic, Barna Group conducted a study to highlight the trends of church attendance among churchgoers, practicing Christians, and those who have stopped going completely in this Church digital age. The global pandemic caused many churches to shut their doors in 2020 and stream their church services over the internet. Barna Group states that over 53 percent of practicing Christians, who believe their faith is important to them and attended church frequently pre-COVID, still listen to church services through online streaming. Another 34 percent of practicing Christians admit to streaming different church services online instead of their church services. However, 32 percent of practicing Christians acknowledge that they have not streamed online church services. Practicing Christian millennials were asked if they had attended online church services within March through April, and 50 percent of the millennials admitted that they did not. Generation X and Boomers percentages are 35 percent and 26 percent, respectively, among those who stopped attending church online during the global pandemic. The article does not state reasons why more millennials who were once frequent practicing Christians and churchgoers stopped attending church services online at a higher rate than previous generations had.¹³

The Barna Group suggests that the global pandemic and the increase of technology and social media have influenced and impacted emerging adults' mindsets and lifestyles. The worldwide pandemic of 2020 forced many churches to close their doors and prohibited in-person services. A variant strain of COVID called the Delta variant in 2021 caused many religious leaders to continue to provide online sermons rather than in-person meetings because this strain of the virus was just as deadly. In the latter part of 2021 until the current year 2022, another

¹³ Barna Group, "State of the Church 2020", *Faith & Christianity* (July 8, 2020), Accessed on January 26, 2022, <https://www.barna.group.com/stateofthechurch/.com>.

strain of the virus circulated among every country called Omicron. This strain has not been as deadly as the previous strains have been, but millions are still affected by it. Many religious leaders have decided to continue to offer online services, while some have opened their doors cautiously for in-person services. However, many people, including emerging adults, still fear in-person attending services because of the fear of the virus.

Internet and Social Media

Internet and social media sites allow people to connect to many people across the world with just the click of a button or connecting to the internet. Social media has tremendous impact on the minds, lifestyles and choices of many emerging adults. Many emerging adults become victims of the pervasive influence that social media has in music, entertainment, news, and media. This world, more specifically the internet and social media has become saturated with sexually explicit content and information that is driven to influence and impact the minds and lifestyles of those who chose to indulge in the information presented.¹⁴ Many people use the internet as their main source for obtaining information and wisdom and many accept the ideologies of others without verifying if this information is accurate or true. In fact, “The torrent of information now at our disposal is often little more than endless volleys of nonsense folly and rumor masquerading as knowledge, wisdom, and even truth.”¹⁵

Social media and Internet can play a negative role in emerging adult’s leaving the church and many of them changing their beliefs. Unfortunately, there are many negative stories and videos that highlight the downfall of many churches and church leaders. One video that surfaced

¹⁴ David P. Setran and Chris A. Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 231.

¹⁵ James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post Christian World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 44.

just recently entailed a pastor communicating his message by spitting in his hand and wiping his saliva on the face of one of the men in the church. Another video that surfaced on the internet showed pastor bathing members of his congregations. It is images such as these that make it difficult for emerging adults to want to return to church or believe that many churches have taken a turn for the worse.

Another negative aspect of social media and the Internet is how the church may seem to be competing for the attention and time of emerging adults amid the other information that emerging adults can receive from social media and the Internet. Several of the responses from emerging adults and the parents of emerging adult's interviews stated that they spend many hours watching social media and that they believe just about all information that is presented on social media. "For better or worse, they are sensing, perceiving, and interpreting the world- and their faith and spirituality – through screens."¹⁶

One of the positive aspects of technology and social media is that it can be a tool for many churches to keep believers involved with their learning and growing in Christ. Many emerging adults can watch their local pastors or obtain messages from any pastor anytime day or night. Facebook and YouTube aids in this process because it allows individuals to watch pre-recorded sermons any day and not just on Sundays. More churches and religious institutions are using social media and the Internet to live stream and record their services both during the global pandemic and afterwards. This affords churches and religious institutions with the opportunity to now spread God's message outside of the church walls and into a global network. Internet and

¹⁶ David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church...and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 40.

social media is a way for churches to reach more people, including emerging adults that do not want to wake up early on worship days to get dressed to attend regular services in person.

Intergenerational Relationships

Intergenerational relationships again are relationships between older adults and younger adults. Research showed from Chapter 2 that many emerging adults value relationships with older adults. Emerging adults want relationships and want to communicate with older adults to help guide them and advise them in their lives. Some of the emerging adults that have abandoned church and religious institutions suggested that they were tired of being preached to in church by older adults. “Millennials are craving relationships such as mentorship and discipleship rather than being preached at.”¹⁷

After evaluating the online discipleship mentor evaluations, I discovered that three out of the four mentees were grateful for their mentoring experience. Three of the mentees decided to continue their mentoring beyond this research study. Markita said in her last evaluation that she never had anyone that wanted to help her with spiritual formation and growing spiritually. Moe said that a single parent raised him, and he was not close to his father, so he did not learn about being a man. Moe expressed to his mentor that he was stressed and dealing with anger, frustration, and depression. Moe wrote in his final evaluation that he had an incredible experience with his mentor. Moe was grateful for the experience with his mentor because his mentor provided him with coping techniques. Therefore, the online discipleship mentoring plan created intergenerational relationships that were helpful and positive experiences for emerging adults.

¹⁷ Sam Eaton, “12 Reasons Millennials Are Over Church” (September 29, 2016), accessed on September 21, 2021, <https://www.recklesslyalive.com/12-reasons-millennials-are-over-church/>.

What can help the church re-engage with emerging adults is discipleship mentoring with spiritually mature older adults. Emerging adults want friends and family relationships, and they are not just looking for a friendly place to go. Emerging adults want people that will guide them from their experiences without being judged and condemned. Emerging adults wish to “cultivate a new sphere of belonging and impact...instead of focusing on programs for young adults. Let’s start by focusing on building solid on-ramps to the multi-generational community for young adults.”¹⁸

Church Flaws

Martin Luther, a 16th-century theologian and religious reformer, provided a clear definition of "church". Luther wrote that the church is individuals that gather in a community to become integrated by the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ The church and other religious institutions bring people of faith together as a community to spread the message of the gospel, and to integrate God’s characteristics into the world around them.²⁰ The church was relevant and significant because it was a way of bringing God into people’s lives and stories and provided a theological perspective of the way the world operates and how to operate within the world.²¹ However, the relevance of church and religious institutions and their purpose and goal has changed for many, especially many emerging adults.

¹⁸ DeVries, *Sustainable Young Adult Ministries*, 118,120.

¹⁹ Cheryl M. Peterson, “Does the Church Still Matter?” A Lutheran Perspective on The Church’s Relevance Today”, *Word and World* 40, no (Winter 2020): 5.

²⁰ White, *Meet Generation Z*, 94.

²¹ Paul Mueller, “Some Thoughts About the Attractional, Sending, and Engaged Church”, *Missio Apostolica* 19, (Nov. 2011), 125.

Many people today do not think that church has any relevancy and that many people now choose to be “Nones” and “Dones”.²² The “Nones”, as was defined in the literature review in Chapter 2 are those who choose not to identify with any specific religion or church organization. The “Dones” are those who are just done with church.²³ The research from the literature review and from the results of this research study shows that there are many reasons why many emerging adults have left church and are not returning, and church flaws is one of the reasons.

Author Isaac Breese created an online survey that provides several reasons that emerging adults have abandoned church and some abandoned their childhood religious beliefs. In the online study emerging adults were asked to identify flaws that they have either seen or experienced in their time attending church as a youth. The church flaws that Breese provided that make them no longer want to attend church and what suggestions they could give churches that would have for them to return to church. The results from the online survey suggest the following reasons: some churches are too traditional, church people are too judgmental, the teachings are not relevant, and that church should not be mandatory.²⁴ The majority of the results from the online survey matches the results from this research study, but this research also adds one more reason how church may appear to be a flaw for emerging adults, and that is that many churches are not active in social justice.

²² Eaton, “*12 Reasons Millennials Are Over Church*”

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Isaac Breese, “8 Things Millennials Say Would Bring Them Back to Church: The Ultimate Guide for the Church to Capture Millennials”, *Publishous* (December 27, 2019), accessed on January 24, 2022, 8 Things Millennials Say Would Bring Them Back to Church | by Isaac Breese | Publishous | Medium.

Traditional Church

One common comment from the interviewees taking the online survey provided by Breese was that emerging adults would return to church if the church would be willing to make changes that would help them to feel connected, comfortable, and accepted. The traditional church has been “traditional” for an exceptionally long time.²⁵ One pastor admitted in the research interviews that when he took over one church, he saw that the church was very traditional and of mostly older congregants. The pastor met with the church board to discuss many ways to evangelize to attract a younger crowd, the mostly more senior board members were in an uproar. The board members did not like change and did not want their church structure and dynamic to change with a younger crowd.

Unfortunately, situations and mindsets such as this prevent emerging adults from wanting to return to church. That is not to say that many churches have not changed their mindsets, structure, dynamics, music, dress code, etc. In fact, in an online news article, one pastor says that he started using social media platforms that most emerging adults use to give his messages. Another pastor said that he’d shortened his messages, added more energy, and also engaged in an open discussion with his messages. This pastor said that the church should be a haven for people to express how they feel and share an understanding. Many emerging adults have navigated to his church and website to do so.²⁶ Although, many churches continue to have a traditional mindset and do not want to change, this is what prevents emerging adults from wanting to return to many religious institutions.

²⁵ Breese, “8 Things Millennials Say Would Bring Them Back to Church”.

²⁶ Seema Mody, “Millennials Lead Shift Away from Organized Religion as Pandemic Tests American’s Faith”, CNBC (December 31, 2021) accessed on January 24, 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/12/29/millennials-lead-shift-away-from-organized-religion-as-pandemic-tests-faith.html>.

Exclusivity

Change also includes the church being inclusive of all people, not just the ones that fit into their traditional church agenda. Being exclusive is another church flaw that many emerging adults mention, including those interviewed for this research study. Sexuality and identity are difficult conversations for most people in and out of the church. One of the largest groups that feel excluded from church is the LGBTQ group. Many members of the LGBTQ community have stated that the traditional church is entirely against them. Therefore, the LGBTQ individuals have created their own non-judgmental community where they can feel safe.

Jackie Hill Perry is an author, minister, and former member of the LGBTQ community. Hill wrote in her book that she struggled with being a gay Christian for many years. Perry struggled with homosexual feelings at an incredibly early age. Perry was raised by a single parent, father who abandoned her, and molested by a family member. Perry said in her book that she knew God wanted her affections, but she could not leave the feelings that she was having for a same-sex relationship. Years later after being in a long-term same-sex relationship Perry allowed God to enter her life and her desires slowly changed. What kept Perry from returning to her previous lifestyle was the discipleship mentoring relationship she had with another young Christian woman.²⁷

Judgmental

Millennials have been saying throughout many generations that church people are very judgmental. Emerging adults of this generation are still saying the same thing. A story was floating around churches a few years ago of a young man whose appearance suggested that he was homeless. He attended a church service one day, and when he came in, he sat on the church

²⁷ Jackie Hill Perry, *Gay Girl, Good God* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018), 1, 67, 151, 182.

floor. This church was a little traditional, and the ushers were angered by his appearance and actions and asked the young man to leave not to disturb those who were worshipping. The young man told the ushers that he came to worship as well, so they left him alone. However, many of the congregants were staring at him while he worshiped in such a strange way. When the part of the worship segment of the service was over, one of the elders of the church came to the microphone and stated that they were waiting on their new pastor to come. As he looked across the congregation, he saw the young man sitting on the floor, dressed like a homeless person, and pointed to the new pastor. That traditional church learned at the time to not judge a book by its cover or, to put it simply, do not be so judgmental.

Relevant Teaching

Another major topic that falls under church flaws is making the teachings relevant to emerging adults. If emerging adults continue to hear the same Bible stories that they heard when they were younger and do not hear anything that pertains to their lives today, it prevents them from seeing the relevancy of returning to church.²⁸ Emerging adults want to hear about how they can deal with financial stress, peer pressure, personal stress, and single parents raising children at a young age, etc. If the teachings and sermons are outdated and the teachings do not have real-world applications, then they will not desire to return to church.

A Concern for Social Justice

A couple of the emerging adults that were interviewed for this research study admitted that for them that many churches have become too involved in politics. Now there maybe two sides to this topic. On the one hand emerging adults want to be a part of organizations that are involved with social justice. For instance, in the CNBC article Reverent Jacqui Lewis of Middle

²⁸ Breese, "8 Things Millennials Say Would Bring Them Back to the Church".

Collegiate Church has gotten many emerging adults involved in taking a stand on many political issues. Lewis' church sermons include women's right to choose, racial justice, the right to vote, and immigrant rights. Lewis stated that her teachings are inspired by the Bible, but she does place spirituality and community over just reading scripture. Lewis stated that she's "getting God out of the box".²⁹ In the literature review in chapter 2, research indicated that many emerging adults want to be affiliated with organizations that are more involved in community and social justice issues.

Many emerging adults want to be a part of a movement against social injustice, racially charged acts of violence that is seen on social media. There are social media programs that are geared towards highlighting injustices and violent racial acts. Many emerging adults are outraged and want to be a part of a change culture rather than do nothing to change the culture. This is one of the reasons why Black Lives Matter movement was created and why many emerging adults have been protesting to voice their concerns about racism and injustices. Some emerging adults have used rioting to voice their outrage and anger about social injustices. Many emerging adults want to be heard and want honest communication and dialogue that will help change and fight against the social injustices that concern them and do not want to be associated with institutions that do not help them to do so. "When young people's churches (especially predominantly white churches) say nothing in response, that silence speaks volumes."³⁰ Discipleship is a way for older Christian adults to explore, empathize, and guide emerging adults in their lives. Discipleship is also a way to open the dialogue with emerging adults on advocating against social issues that concerns them.

²⁹ Mody, "Millennials Lead Shift Away from Organized Religion as Pandemic Tests American's Faith."

³⁰ Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 250.

Summary

Although the five themes are not the only reasons emerging adults have abandoned church and have chosen to stay away, further research can be done to discover even more ways. However, five themes showed from this research study has shown that discipleship is evident for emerging adults. As stated in the theoretical foundation portion of Chapter 3, there are many ways that a church can practice discipleship. Some churches hold classes where they discuss what a disciple is; some churches focus on worship as discipleship; some churches break into smaller group or cell groups, and more.

The Jude 3 project, adoptive church, and the integrative discipleship models are practical ways that discipleship can be done. The online discipleship mentoring plan is also a practical method of re-engaging with emerging adults and helping them to practice spiritual formation and grow spiritually. The purpose of the discipleship mentoring program was to help emerging adults to create intergenerational relationships and to use those relationships to help them to grow spiritually. The results from the assessments from the online discipleship mentoring program showed that three out of the four participant emerging adults did experience some type of growth. From the assessments the emerging adults showed that providing them with a mentor, role model, or older spiritually mature adult can help them to grow spiritually or in their character in their lives. As shown above, the discipleship mentoring program helps to address some of the issues and concerns that emerging adults have with church and other religious institutions. "As men and women who care about what abandonment has done to our young, we have the opportunity to make a significant difference if we but realize that the biggest need every student has is satisfied in an adult who is there for him or her."³¹

³¹ Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 190-191.

Further Research

This research study did not include a longitudinal study on the lives of emerging adults as a child or teenager as they attended church. Although, research has shown that parents play a significant role in the lives of their children, it may be beneficial to conduct a quantitative study with parents and their children to examine and explore other ways parents and absentee fathers may have on emerging adults abandoning church and other religious institutions.

Although, the results of the online discipleship mentoring program were positive, there is still more research that can be done to determine why emerging adults are abandoning church and some of their childhood religious practices and beliefs. Further research can also be completed to determine if discipleship mentoring is a strategy that more churches and religious institutions can use to foster intergenerational relationships and help the emerging adults that have left church return to church.

August 5, 2021

Acquenetta Thompson
Dr. Ramon Carillo-Moran

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-883 An Online Discipleship Plan For Emerging Adults That Have Left The Church

Dear Acquenetta Thompson, Ramon Carillo-Moran,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Bibliography

- Amedia, Jacob. "The Impact of Social Media on Society". *Pop Culture Intersections* 2 (2015): 3.
- Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen and Lene Arnett Jensen. "A Congregation of One: Individualized Religious Beliefs Among Emerging Adults". *Journal of Adolescent Research* September 2002: 451-462.
- Arnett, Jeffrey Jensen. *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Aspegren, Elinor. "Not Going Away: More Than 9k Anti-Asian Hate Incidents Since Covid Pandemic Began". *USA Today*, August 12, 2021. Accessed on January 26, 2021, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2021/08/12/asian-american-hate-crimes-not-slowing-down/8116540002/>.
- "Baby Boomers Rediscover Church". *Christianity Today* 34 no 15 (Oct 22, 1990): 58.
- Barna Group. "State of the Church 2020". *Faith & Christianity* (July 8, 2020), Accessed on January 26, 2022, <https://www.barna.group.com/stateofthechurch/.com>.
- Barnes, Albert. *Barnes' Notes on the Old Testament*. Wordsearch Corp. 2010.
- Blank, Les. and J. Mark Ballard. "Revival of Hope: A Critical Generation for The Church". *Christian Education Journal* 6, no 2 (Fall 2002): 7-28.
- Boehme, Armand. J. "The Church and The Culture of The Millennials – the Best Or Worst Of Times?". *Missio Apostolica* 21, no 1 (May 2013): 95-124.
- "Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z, and Gen A explained", *The Kasasa Exchange* (07/06/2021), Accessed on December 2, 2021, <https://www.kasasa.com/exchange/articles/generations/gen-x-gen-y-gen-z>.
- Breese, Isaac. "8 things Millennials Say Would Bring Them Back to Church: The Ultimate Guide for the Church to Capture Millennials". Publishous (December 27, 2019). Accessed on January 24, 2022, 8 Things Millennials Say Would Bring Them Back to Church | by Isaac Breese | Publishous | Medium.
- Brosius, KM. "Culture and the Church's Discipleship Strategy". *Journal of Ministry & Theology* (2017): 127-161.
- Brown, Megan. "Relationships Matter: The Impact of Relationship Upon Emerging Adult Retention". *Christian Education Journal* 13, no 1 (Spring 2016): 7-27.
- Butler, Trent C. *Holman New Testament Commentary: Luke*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005.

- Campolo, Anthony. *Why I left, Why I Stayed: Conversations on Christianity between an Evangelical Father and His Humanist Son*. New York: Harper One, 2017.
- Carlson, Kit. "Equipping the Next Generations to Speak Their Faith Aloud". *Anglican Theological Review* 98, no 4 (Fall 2016): 703-713.
- "Church Dropouts Have Risen To 64 percent- But What About Those Who Stay?", *Research Release In Faith & Christianity* (September 4, 2019), accessed on April 25, 2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/resilient-disciples/>.
- Clark, Chap. *Adoptive Church: Creating an Environment Where Emerging Generations Belong*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018.
- Clark, Chap and Kara E. Powell. *Deep Justice in a Broken World: Helping Your Kids Serve Others and Right the Wrongs Around Them*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007.
- Clark, Chap. *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011.
- Clayton, M. Dewey. "Black Lives Matter and The Civil Rights Movement: A Comparative Analysis of Two Social Movements in The United States". *Journal of Black Studies* Volume 49, no 5 (2018): 448-480.
- Cobb, John B. Jr. "God and Universities". *Journal for the Study of Religion* 31, no 1 (2018): 260-275.
- Crafts, Nicholas and Peter Fearon. "Lessons from the 1930s Great Depression". *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* Volume 26, Number 3 (2010): 285-317.
- Dean, Kenda Creasy. *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- DeVries, Mark and Scott Pontier. *Sustainable Young Adult Ministry: Making it Work, Making it Last*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019.
- Dimock, Michael. "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins". *Pew Research Center* (3/17/19). Accessed on April 26, 2021, <https://www.tony-silva.com/eslefl/miscstudent/downloadpagearticles/defgenerations-pew.pdf>.
- Drissi, Ani Ghazaryan. "What Is Transforming Discipleship?". *The Ecumenical Review* 71, no 1-2 (Jan -Apr 2019): 216-224.
- Dunn, Richard R., and Jana L. Sundene. *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults: Life-Giving Rhythms for Spiritual Transformation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012.

- Dyck, Drew. "The Leavers: More Than in Previous Generations, 20 – and 30- Somethings are Abandoning the Faith: Why?". *Christianity Today* 54, no 11 (Nov 2010): 40-44.
- Earley, David and David Wheeler. *Everyday Series: Evangelism*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2016.
- Eaton, Sam. "12 Reasons Millennials Are Over Church" (September 29, 2016). Accessed on September 21, 2021, <https://www.recklesslyalive.com/12-reasons-millennials-are-over-church/>.
- Eberstadt, Mary First Things First: The Fury of the Fatherless, *A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*; New York, Dec 2020, 41-46
- Evans, Tony. *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary: Advancing God's Kingdom Agenda*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019.
- Ferguson, Riley. "Where Are We Going? A Critical Analysis of Millennials and the Traditional Church", diss. Augustana College, Rock Island, IL, (2018), 4.
- "Generational Differences Chart". University of South Florida, Accessed on January 26, 2021. <https://www.usf.edu/hr-training/documents/lunch-bytes/generationaldifferenceschart.pdf>.
- Gouger, David. "To Evangelize Youths Who Have Drifted from Church, Go 'Where They Are'". *National Catholic Reporter* 49, no 12 (March 29- April 11, 2013): 7.
- Guldalian, Sarah. "The Millennials: Reflecting on Reaching a Lost Generation For Christ". *Missio Apostolica*, (January 1, 2013): 42.
- Ham Ken, Britt Beemer and Todd Hillard. *Already Gone: Why Your Kids Will Quit Church and What You Can Do to Stop It*. Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2010.
- Impact Lab. "On The Cusp of Adulthood and Facing An Uncertain Future: What We Know About Gen Z So Far". Accessed on April 26, 2021, <https://www.impactlab.com/2020/06/09/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far/>
- Ji, Chang-Ho C., and Tevita Tameifuna. "Youth Pastor, Youth Ministry and Youth Attitude Toward the Church". *Review of Religious Research* 52, no. 3 (Mar. 2011): 306-322.
- Jude 3 Project, 2021. Accessed on May 9, 2021. <https://jude3project.org>.
- Kauffman, Aaron M. "Thriving: Effective Strategies for the Evangelism and Discipleship of Emerging Adults". PhD., Ashbury Seminary, 2019.
- Kiessling, Mark and Julianna Shults. "The Search for Young People 2017 Research of Millennials and the LCMS". *Concordia Journal* 44 no 4 (Fall 2018): 19-32.

- Kinnaman, David and Aly Hawkins. *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church...and Rethinking Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011.
- Lackey, Russell L. "High Hopes in a Grim World: Why Emerging Adults Need the Church". *Word & World* 40, no 1 (Wint 2020): 71-79.
- Lakies, Chad. "Candy Machine God, Or, Going to Church Without Going To Church: Millennials and The Future of The Christian Faith". *Missio Apostolica* 21, no 1 (May 2013): 14-30.
- Maiden, Michael. *Turn the World Upside Down: Discipling the Nations with the Seven Mountain Strategy*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc., 2011.
- Malphurs, Aubrey. *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 33-37.
- Marogna, Cristina, Emanuele Montanari, Silvio Contiero, et.al., "Dreaming During Covid-19: The Effects of a World Trauma", *Research in Psychotherapy: Psychopathology, Process and Outcome*, Vol 24 (2021), 188.
- Masback, Skip. "Twin Calamities: Declining Churches, Struggling Youth". PhD., Yale, 2015. Reviewed on April 21, 2021. [Twin_calamities_reflections.pdf](#).
- McFarland, Alex & Jason Jimenez. *Abandoned Faith: Why Millennials are Walking Away and How You Can Lead Them Home*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2017.
- Menking, Stanley J. "Generation X: The First Post-Christendom Generation". *Quarterly Review* 19, no 2 (Summer 1999): 153-166.
- Mody, Seema. "Millennials Lead Shift Away from Organized Religion as Pandemic Tests American's Faith". CNBC (December 31, 2021). Accessed on January 24, 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/12/29/millennials-lead-shift-away-from-organized-religion-as-pandemic-tests-faith.html>.
- Morgan, Tony and the Unstuck Group. *Reaching and Leading Millennials: Practical Conversations to Get (You) Unstuck*. The Unstuck Group, 2015.
- Mueller, Paul. "Some Thoughts About the Attractional, Sending, and Engaged Church". *Missio Apostolica* 19, no. 2 (Nov. 2011): 123-134.
- Neff, LaVonne. "How to Raise an Adult: Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kid for Success". *The Christian Century* 132, no 23 (Nov 11, 2015): 36-37.
- Nelson, Larry J. *Emerging Adults' Religiousness and Spirituality: Meaning-Making in an Age of Transition*. Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014.

- Newhouse, Catherine. "The Forgotten Millennials: More Noncollege-bound Young Adults Seek Direction, and More Ministries Are Poised to Help". *Christianity Today* 57, no. 5 (Jun. 2013): 15-17.
- Ng, Eddy and Andrew Lam. "Black Lives Matter: On the Denial of Systemic Racism, White Liberals, and Polite Racism", *Bucknell Digital Commons* (2020): 729-730.
- Perry, Jackie Hill. *Gay Girl, Good God*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2018.
- Petersen, James C. *Why Don't We Listen Better? Communicating & Connecting in Relationships*. Portland, OR: Petersen Publications, 2015.
- Peterson, Cheryl M. "Does The Church Still Matter?" A Lutheran Perspective on The Church's Relevance Today", *Word and World* 40, no (Winter 2020): 3-11.
- Pokluda, Jonathan "JP" & Luke Frieson. *Welcoming the Future Church: How to Reach, Teach, and Engage Young Adults*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020.
- Powell, Kara, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin. *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016.
- Putnam, Jim, Bobby Harrington, and Robert E. Coleman. *Discipleshift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013.
- Richardson, Rick. *You Found Me: New Research on How Unchurched Nones, Millennials, and Irreligious Are Surprisingly Open to Christian Faith*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019.
- Rosenberg, Merrick and Daniel Silvert. *Taking Flight: Master the DISC Styles to Transform Your Career, Your Relationships...Your Life*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Taking Flight Partners, LLC., 2013.
- Sargeant, Kimon Howland. *Seeker Churches: Promoting a Traditional Religion in a Nontraditional Way*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000.
- Sensing, Tim. *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011.
- Setran, David P. and Chris A. Kiesling. *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013.
- Shen, Anyuan. "Religious Attendance, Healthy Lifestyles, and Perceived Health: A Comparison of Baby Boomers with the Silent Generation". *Journal of Religion and Health* 58, no 4 (August 2019): 1235-1245.

- Shirley, Chris. "It Takes a Church to Make a Disciple: An Integrative Model of Discipleship for the Local Church". *Southwestern Journal of Theology* Volume 50, No 2 (Spring 2008): 207-224.
- Stack, Judith. "The New Testament's Gentiles and Jeremiah's Good Figs: Biblical Paradigms for God's Presence among the 'Nones' and 'Dones'", *Word and World* 39, no 4 (Fall 2019): 329.
- Stanley, Andy. *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016.
- Sutherland, Jean-Anne, Margaret M. Paloma, and Brian F. Pendleton, "Religion, Spirituality, and Alternative Health Practices: The Baby Boomer and Cold War Cohorts", *Journal of Religion and Health* Vol. 42, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 315-338.
- Taylor, Paul. "The Well-Being of Young Adults in the "Next America". *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* no 5 (Suppl): S4-13.
- Tolbize, Anick. "Generational Differences in the Workplace". *Research and Training Center on Community Living*. Ph.D., University of Minnesota, August 16, 2008.
- "Twentysomethings Struggle to Find Their Place In Christian Churches", *Research Release In Millennials & Generations* (September 24, 2003), accessed on 4/24/2021, <https://www.barna.com/research/twentysomethings-struggle-to-find-their-place-in-christian-churches/>.
- United States Census Bureau. "U.S. Census Bureau Releases CPS Estimates of Same-Sex Households", (November 19, 2019). Accessed on April 29, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2019/same-sex-households.html>
- Weber, Stuart K. *Holman New Testament Commentary: Matthew*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000.
- Wendland, Paul O. "Postmodernism and the Millennial Worldview". *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 113, no. 3 (Sum. 2016): 210-234.
- White, James Emery. *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post Christian World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017.
- White, James Emery. *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014.

Appendix A

Pastors and Church Leaders Research Study Consent Form

Title of the Project: Discipleship Mentoring Program for Emerging Adults That Have Abandoned Church

Principal Investigator: Acquenetta Thompson, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in this research study. Participants must be at least 25 years of age, an active senior pastor or youth pastor of a church, parachurch, or a ministry of any denomination. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this research is to discover if the reasons that emerging adults have been abandoning churches and religious institutions are similar to earlier generations. To determine why emerging adults are not returning to churches and religious institutions. Lastly, to implement an online discipleship mentoring program that will aid emerging adults in grow spiritually until they decide to return to church or religious institutions.

What will happen if you take part in this group discussion?

If you agree to be in this study:

1. You will be asked to participate in a one-time 1 1/2-hour group discussion with various pastors and church leaders using the online application Zoom with your computer camera off.
2. You will be a part of an open group discussion where everyone involved will have an opportunity to express their concerns, experience and ideas with respect, honesty, and integrity.
3. You are not required to answer or have a comment about every question, but you are required to participate in discussing some questions.
4. If the researcher sees that the discussion is going off topic, the researcher reserves the right to interject and steer the discussion back to the topic.
5. This will be a locked Zoom meeting, so no outsiders will be able to join. You will be in the waiting room until the researcher enables you to join, so no outsiders will be able to join.
6. The Zoom meeting's audio and video will be recorded, and the research investigator will take notes to ensure the accuracy of the information be presented.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The benefits that you can expect to receive from this group discussion are to uncover new reasons why emerging adults have left churches and to gain insight from your peers on various solutions that may help with reconnecting emerging adults that have left the church and do not plan to return.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data shared.

- Participants will be in a locked Zoom meeting so that outsiders are not able to join or overhear the conversation.
- The Zoom meeting will be audio and video recorded. The Zoom recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer for three years and then deleted. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Handwritten notes will be transcribed into typed notes and placed in a secure folder on the password-protected laptop. After which the handwritten notes will be shredded.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in a focus group setting. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Acquenetta Thompson. If you have any questions you are encouraged to contact me at [REDACTED] or email me at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Ramon Moran, at [REDACTED]

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Participant's Name

Signature & Date

Appendix B

Parent Research Study Consent Form

Title of the Project: Discipleship Mentoring Program for Emerging Adults That Have Abandoned Church

Principal Investigator: Acquenetta Thompson, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in this research study. Participants must be a parent or legal guardian of a young adult between the ages of 18-29 that is either still involved in church or that has left the church. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this research is to discover if the reasons that emerging adults have been abandoning churches and religious institutions are similar to earlier generations. To determine why emerging adults are not returning to churches and religious institutions. Lastly, to implement an online discipleship mentoring program that will aid emerging adults in grow spiritually until they decide to return to church or religious institutions.

What will happen if you take part in this group discussion?

If you agree to be in this study:

1. You will be asked to participate in a one-time 1 1/2-hour individual discussion with the research investigator on Zoom with your computer camera off.
2. You will have the ability to express your honest concerns, experience, and ideas in a safe environment where the information provided will be treated with respect.
3. This will be a locked Zoom meeting, so no outsiders will be able to join.
4. The Zoom meeting's audio and video will be recorded, and the research investigator will take notes to ensure the accuracy of the information be presented.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

This study is beneficial to parents of emerging adults by learning why many emerging adults are not returning to church. There is a focus to create a resolution that will reconnect emerging adults with the faith community and help emerging adults strengthen their relationship with God other older adults.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participants will be in a locked Zoom meeting so that outsiders are not able to join or overhear the conversation.
- The Zoom meeting will be audio and video recorded. The Zoom recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer for three years and then deleted. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Handwritten notes will be transcribed into typed notes and placed in a secure folder on the password-protected laptop. After which the handwritten notes will be shredded.
- A pseudonym will be provided to ensure confidentiality.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contribution will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Acquenetta Thompson. If you have any questions you are encouraged to contact me at [REDACTED] or email me at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Ramon Moran, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at irb@liberty.edu

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Participant's Name

Signature & Date

Appendix C

Emerging Adult Research Study Consent Form

Title of the Project: Discipleship Mentoring Program for Emerging Adults That Have Abandoned Church

Principal Investigator: Acquenetta Thompson, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in this research study. Participants must be between the ages of 18-29, and you must have attended or been a member of a church.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this research is to discover if the reasons that emerging adults have been abandoning churches and religious institutions are similar to earlier generations. To determine why emerging adults are not returning to churches and religious institutions. Lastly, to implement an online discipleship mentoring program that will aid emerging adults in grow spiritually until they decide to return to church or religious institutions.

What will happen if you take part in this group discussion?

If you agree to be in this study:

1. You will be asked to participate in a one-time 1 1/2-hour individual discussion with the research investigator on Zoom with your computer camera off.
2. You will have the ability to express your honest concerns, experience, and ideas in a safe environment where the information provided will be treated with respect.
3. This will be a locked Zoom meeting, so no outsiders will be able to join.
4. The Zoom meeting's audio and video will be recorded, and the research investigator will take notes to ensure the accuracy of the information be presented.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

This study is beneficial because it shows that there is a focus to create a resolution that will reconnect emerging adults with the faith community and help emerging adults strengthen their relationship with God other older adults.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participants will be in a locked Zoom meeting so that outsiders are not able to join or overhear the conversation.
- The Zoom meeting will be audio and video recorded. The Zoom recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer for three years and then deleted. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Handwritten notes will be transcribed into typed notes and placed in a secure folder on the password-protected laptop. After which the handwritten notes will be shredded.
- A pseudonym will be provided to ensure confidentiality.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Acquenetta Thompson. If you have any questions you are encouraged to contact me at [REDACTED] or email me at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Ramon Moran, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Participant's Name

Signature & Date

Appendix D

Mentor Ethical Consent Covenant

I understand that the mentoring sessions consist of communicating with a mentee at least once a week. I understand that as the mentor I may provide assignments during the mentoring sessions that may involve spiritual disciplines such as: praying, journaling, reading and studying the Bible.

I am responsible for helping the one mentee set goals with the above spiritual disciplines that will aid them in growing in their faith. I am responsible for my own words and actions and will act and talk in a manner that pleases God. I declare that I will be honest in my communication with the mentee.

I understand that I must be authentic, genuine, transparent, accountable and holy in all communication with the mentee and with the assessments. Any personal information will be at the discretion of both parties and the researcher. Any information that the mentee provides to the mentor that brings harm to the mentee or others the mentor will report to the researcher immediately.

I understand I and the mentee may withdraw from the mentoring relationship at any time by contacting the researcher. I also understand that if a conflict arises during the mentoring relationship to contact the researcher immediately for termination of the mentoring relationship.

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix E

Adult Volunteer Mentoring Class Syllabus

Introductions

Discussion of the Ethical Consent Covenant Form

Information on dropping out of the program

Learning the meaning of what a disciple is

Learning the 5 stages of discipleship

Learning how to create a vision or mission statement for you and your mentee

Learning the 4 DISC styles

Discussion on leadership

What is an effective leader

What are the traits of an effective leader

Determining your leadership style

How Galatians 5:22 relates to leadership

Questions and Answers

Going over the Mentor Program Manual

Prayer

Mentor-Mentee Pairings

Appendix F

Adult Mentor Discipleship Training Manual

Determining the Discipleship Level

In the mentoring process the mentor will ask the mentee various questions to determine what stage of the discipleship process the mentee is in (spiritually dead, infant, children, young adult, or parent). Ask the mentee questions concerning their relationship with God, their relationship with church, their relationship with their family, and their relationship with the world to determine the mentee's discipleship stage. The mentor will rate the relationship that the mentee provided on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the relationship is solid. The relationship that needs the most work or growth will be the first goal and vision for the first week of mentoring.

Setting Goals and Visions

The mentor will inform the mentee at this point they would need to keep a journal. The mentor will ask the mentee to create a vision statement on how they want to improve in the relationship (God, church, family, world) for the week. The vision statement should state how they imagine or envision the relationship. The mentee would also write down any roadblocks that may come up as they are writing their vision, such as: fear, doubt, disbelief, resistance to change, or lack of clarity. After writing down the roadblocks the mentor will pray with the mentee and then conclude the first communication.

After the first communication and the mentee has written down their vision and the roadblocks, the mentor will pray to ask the Holy Spirit to guide the mentor to obtain a prayer, affirmation, or passage of Scripture that the mentee can meditate on.

During the next communication, the mentor will provide the mentee with the prayer, affirmation or passage of Scripture that the mentee will meditate on. The mentor will inform the mentee that meditation means that they speak the prayer, affirmation, or passage continuously and constantly. The mentor will provide the mentee with a goal that will help the mentee to grow in the relationship and meet the vision that the mentor stated for the week.

This process of writing a vision, setting goals, and meditating on prayers, daily affirmations or studying Scripture passages will continue throughout the 60-day mentoring process. If the mentor determines that the mentee needs more time to develop and show growth in the relationship sphere, then the mentor can continue to work with the mentee on that relationship for another week or two.

If the mentor states that the mentee should meditate on daily affirmations, then the mentor should provide an example of some affirmations and inform the mentee to recite the affirmations at least three times a day. If the mentor provides Scripture passages to the mentee, then the mentor should invite the mentee to read the passage several times a day and write down in their journal a thought or revelation that they obtained from the passage. The mentee would also write down any questions that they have from the passage to bring to the mentor to help clarify. The mentee should also be instructed to write their own prayer in their journal concerning the relationship or something that the mentee wants to learn.

Each week the mentee should be provided with a vision and goal to journal, asked to journal any thoughts, questions, fears, and to meditate on affirmations, passages, and prayers as requested.

Appendix G

Weekly Mentor Assessment

1. List all the days and times that you and the mentor communicated. Also, list the method of communication that occurred each day. Communication methods can be phone call, email, text message, Apple Facetime, Google Duo, or WhatsApp.
2. Did you provide the mentee with a weekly goal or vision? If so, what was the weekly goal or vision?
3. Was meeting the weekly goal or vision obtainable for the mentee? Was it an easy or a challenge? How and why?
4. How was the mentoring time spent? What format did the mentor provide? For example., did they start with prayer or end with Bible study.
5. Did you provide Scriptures to help you apply to your life?
6. Did you teach the mentee anything new? What did the mentee learn that was new?
7. Do you believe that the mentee is growing daily? In what ways?
8. Has trust been established with the mentee?
9. Do you feel comfortable with the mentee? Why or why not?
10. List any challenges and/or difficulties in the mentoring process.

Appendix H

Mentor Ethical Consent Covenant

I understand that the mentoring sessions consist of communicating with my mentor at least once a week. I understand that as the mentee I will be provided assignments during the mentoring sessions that may involve spiritual disciplines such as: praying, journaling, reading and studying the Bible.

I am responsible for setting goals with the above spiritual disciplines that will aid spiritual growth. I am responsible for my own words and actions and will act and talk in a manner that pleases God. I declare that I will be honest in my communication with the mentor.

I understand that both mentor and mentee will take notes during the mentoring sessions, complete weekly mentoring assessments and a final assessment that will be emailed to the researcher and these notes will be kept strictly confidential and in a confidential location by the researcher.

I understand that I must be authentic, genuine, transparent, accountable and holy in all communication with the mentee and with the assessments. Any personal information will be at the discretion of both parties and the researcher. Any information that the mentor provides to the mentee that brings harm to the mentee or others will report to the researcher immediately.

I understand I may withdraw from the mentoring relationship at any time by contacting the researcher. I also understand that if a conflict arises during the mentoring relationship to contact the researcher immediately for termination of the mentoring relationship.

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix I

Emerging Adult Mentee Orientation Class Syllabus

Introduction of the researcher and a more detailed overview of the discipleship mentoring program

The importance of listening better

The importance of journaling

The importance of writing a vision and setting goals

Ethical Considerations and Covenant Document

Appendix J

Weekly Mentee Assessment

1. Were you provided with a weekly goal or vision? If so, what was the weekly goal or vision?
2. Was meeting the weekly goal or vision obtainable? Was it an easy or a challenge? How and why?
3. How was the mentoring time useful or helpful, for example was the Scripture or affirmation provided helpful?
4. Were you provided Scriptures to help you apply to your life?
5. Did you learn anything new from the mentor? What did you learn that was new?
6. Do you believe that you are growing daily? In what ways?
7. Has trust been established with the mentor?
8. Do you feel comfortable with the mentor? Why or why not?
9. List any challenges and/or difficulties in the mentoring process.

Appendix K

Mentor Joe and Mentee Moe's Evaluation Results

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Days/Times meet and how did you communicate	Friday 4:30 – 5:30 p.m. FaceTime	Friday 6:00 – 7:00 pm FaceTime	Friday 4:00 – 5:00 pm FaceTime	Friday 4:45 – 6:00 pm FaceTime
Weekly goal or vision provided	Goal: To remove anger	Goal: Handling Depression	Goal: Living a Happier Life	Goal: To recap what he's learned already
Was the goal or vision attainable	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
How mentoring time was spent	Discussion on some issues that angered Moe and using meditation breathing techniques, walking away from the person that is angering you, and step aside and pray and to study Philippians 4:6.	Discussing how Moe has been out of work for a while and he was looking for a job and was behind in his bills, so he began to get depressed, and this is also where the anger came from, still using meditation and breathing techniques and to pray	Discussion on how to encourage himself and to be happy is a determination that he must make every day. Moe was told to write himself a prayer and to continue to play his video games to relive stress.	Discussion on the meditation breathing exercises has worked and if he was able to prevent himself from getting stressed. Discussion on how writing and reading the prayer has worked. Moe was able to pray and trust God and have confidence in God to help in situations that he cannot control. Moe learned many ways to encourage himself such as praying, playing his video games, and trusting God.
Did the mentee grow spiritually	Not spiritually but the growth was in his character	Not spiritually but in his character	Yes, Spiritually and in his character	
Was trust established	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Were both comfortable with each other	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Challenges	None	None	None	None
Further comments	None	None	None	None

Appendix L

Mentor Leonard and Mentee Jarron's Evaluation Results

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Days/Times meet and how did you communicate	Friday 6:30 – 7:30 pm FaceTime	Friday 6:30 – 7:30 pm FaceTime	Friday 6:30 – 7:30 pm FaceTime	Friday 6:30 – 7:30 pm FaceTime
Weekly goal or vision provided	Goal: Make wiser decisions by trusting God	Goal: Make wiser decisions by prayer	Goal: Make wiser decisions by prayer	Goal: Make wiser decisions by prayer
Was the goal or vision attainable				
How mentoring time was spent	Discussion on how he makes decisions currently through emotions. Leonard talked with Jarron on the effects of him making decisions based on his emotions. Leonard also talked with Jarron on does he trust God through prayer and Jarron said he did not know. Leonard discussed with Jarron his experiences on trusting God through prayer.	Discussion about the last time they talked and if Jarron wanted to pray and trust God. Jarron decided that he would pray. Leonard provided Jarron with studying Matthew 6:10-14 and to pray that Scripture and they would discuss it more next time.	Discussion about Jesus' prayer in Matthew 6:10-14 and discussed the prayer line by line with Jarron. Leonard gave Jarron the homework assignment of taking at least 5 minutes a day to pray and to open his heart to trust God.	Leonard reviewed with Jarron the power of prayer and trusting God when making decisions instead of making decisions emotionally.
Did the mentee grow spiritually	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Was trust established	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Were both comfortable with each other	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Challenges	None	None	None	None
Further comments	None	None	None	None

Appendix M

Mentor Marie and Mentee Destiny's Evaluation Results

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Days/Times meet and how did you communicate	Tuesday 6 – 6:30 pm FaceTime	Saturday 11 - 11:30 am FaceTime	Saturday 11 - 11:30 am FaceTime	Saturday 10 - 10:30 am FaceTime
Weekly goal or vision provided	Goal: To get to know God being acknowledging His Presence	Goal: To get to know God through various signs	Goal: To get to know God through prayer	Review of what was already taught
Was the goal or vision attainable	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
How mentoring time was spent	Discussion on what she's learned in church about God. Destiny believes in God, but she is not sure about that. Asking God in prayer to reveal himself to Destiny	Discussion on signs that God is present. Destiny does not see signs that God is present. Marie informed Destiny to notice nature, that she wakes up every morning, and how God protects her every day.	Discussion on praying. Destiny said that she does not pray often because she does not know how to pray or if anyone is listening. Marie told Destiny that God is listening, and that prayer is having a personal conversation with God.	Review discussion on seeing God through nature and her own experience. Destiny admitted that she still did not see God's presence, but she did try to pray a few times last week. Destiny would continue to look for God's presence and will try to make time to pray more
Did the mentee grow spiritually	No	No	No	No
Was trust established	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Were both comfortable with each other	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Challenges	Mentor noticed that the conversation with Destiny was rushed, as though she was in a hurry to get off the phone	Mentor noticed this week that Destiny was more observant to the conversation, but she still seems lackadaisical about life in general	Mentor noticed that this week she seemed a little more interested in the conversation. Although Destiny does not seem to have an interest in doing anything with her life other than work.	Mentor noticed that Destiny said she will try to pray more but the mentor is doubtful that she really will

Further comments	Mentor does not believe that Destiny will really try to get closer to God	Mentor is still unsure whether Destiny is really trying to get closer to God or if that is something she is just saying that she wants to do.	Destiny is still showing some signs of being lackadaisical	Mentor is not sure that the mentoring process was helpful to her. Destiny believes that the mentoring process was helpful.
------------------	---	---	--	--

Appendix N

Mentor Tasha and Mentee Markita's Evaluation Results

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Days/Times meet and how did you communicate	Wednesday 8:00 – 8:40 pm Google Duo	Wednesday 8:00 – 8:40 pm Google Duo	Wednesday 8:00 – 8:40 pm Google Duo	Wednesday 8:00 – 8:40 pm Google Duo
Weekly goal or vision provided	Vision: To get closer to God. Fasting, praying, Studying Scripture	Goal: To get closer to God by praying studying Scripture	Goal: To get closer to God by studying Scripture	Was Markita able to get closer to God within the 4 weeks
Was the goal or vision attainable	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
How mentoring time was spent	Goal is to do all liquid fast for a week while writing down various vices that she wants to overcome. Ended the conversation in prayer from Tasha. Scriptures to meditate on Matthew 26:41, James 1:13-15, and 1 Corinthians 10:13.	Discussion on how the fast went. Markita was able to continue the fast for a week, and she wrote in her journal the vices she wants to overcome but did not tell the vices to the mentor. Tasha taught on how to Google Scriptures on her vices and to being to study the Scriptures and pray. Ended the conversation in prayer by Tasha.	Continue studying Scripture. Markita said that she lapsed in studying her Scriptures a couple of days this last week and noticed that her day was not the same. Markita wanted to fast from social media for a week to get closer to God. Began the conversation with prayer from Tasha.	Discussion on a review of what Markita has learned so far. Markita said that she knows the power of fasting in her life, how to Google Scriptures to study and the importance of studying the Bible and praying to grow closer to God. Ended the mentoring with prayer by Tasha. Encouraged to download the Bible application on phone and select a monthly devotion to aid with getting closer to God.
Did the mentee grow spiritually	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Was trust established	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Were both comfortable with each other	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Challenges	No	No	No	No
Further comments	None	None	None	None

