

Liberty University

**Addressing the Inactivity of Youth and Young Adults
In the Church Environment**

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By

Leonard Burgest Sr.

Lynchburg, Virginia

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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

Dr. Benjamin Laird
Mentor

Dr. Jeff Johnsen
Faculty Reader

THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Leonard Burgest Sr.
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Mentor: Dr. Benjamin Laird

One of the significant components of church growth and development is having a functioning youth and young adult ministry founded on the Gospel and managed by individuals who understand youth participation in the church. Unfortunately for the black church and many others, the grim reality is that they have been suffering from the same inactive youth and young adult ministry problem for quite some time. Local churches have recently witnessed a steady decline in youth attendance due to neighborhood irregularities, parental responsibilities, and youth activities. This thesis project seeks to address and implement methods and processes that will aid in the transformation of an inactive youth and young adult ministry to one that can function alongside other ministries of the local church. This study presents a phased approach targeting church leaders, church members, and parents through personal interaction and training to develop relational unity.

The implementation of this phased approach occurred through pastors who shared different techniques that brought about positive progress in their youth ministry. In addition, church members, church leaders, and parents consented to questionnaires in which they expressed their concerns and suggestions for the youth and young adult ministry's success. Finally, research gathering allowed the church leaders, church members, and parents to treat the youth ministry as a family in three phases: belonging, learning, and developing. The result of this project revealed a much more vibrant youth ministry that is now willing to embrace the youth with the spirit of love.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

For more than 130 years, Promiseland Community Church¹ has ministered to the needs of the residents in the Oxford community with the Gospel of Christ. The connection with this residential area near the heart of downtown USA was made possible through outreach and evangelistic means to reach the lost and the unchurched. While ministry outreach is necessary for every local church, Promiseland Community Church's approach to reach out did not focus on the right target group considering the church's demographics. At the time, Promiseland should have targeted the youth and young adults. Since the church's relocation from the rural area of Summertown to the Promiseland Community in Hunter Haven, Arkansas the youth and young adult ministry has not made much progress.² Youth ministry leaders have become frustrated. As a result, they have resigned due to internal and external circumstances contributing to declining youth attendance and participation within the church.

These internal and external circumstances, such as sporting events competing with Sunday mornings, were only a few reasons the youth and young adult ministry struggled. Other contributing factors were within the framework of the church. In that, the inactivity of this ministry revealed a disconnect between the parents and the youth. Therefore, as the ministry context is examined and explained, attention will be given to the historical backdrop of the youth and young adult ministry at Promiseland Community Church to establish how the church arrived at this critical junction and the possible steps taken to address it effectively and systematically.

Ministry Context

Promiseland Community Church, a predominately African American church, has been in existence for more than 130 years, but this project will only evaluate the past 20 years. After the

¹ This is not the actual name of the church.

² This is not the actual location of the church.

relocation to the Promiseland Community in 2000, the church experienced an influx of new members and new families who made significant contributions to the life and ministry of the church.³ The church made a series of adjustments as the membership had to adapt to different ministry leadership styles. Unfortunately, these adjustments resulted in relational issues between church members and leaders. As a result, the church saw a decline in attendance, and the youth and young adult ministry suffered significantly. However, the single and most damaging change that occurred during this time was the pastoral decision to appoint a youth ministry leader without consulting the church deacons. This decision by the pastor created a divisive ripple effect that eventually impacted the entire church.

Since Promiseland Community Church is a family-oriented church, the pastor's decision faced opposition. However, he still received enough family support to select this youth and young adult ministry leader. Nevertheless, the youth and young adult ministry suffered for the next five years because some church members felt their voices were not heard. In 2005, the church experienced several transitions; the senior pastor retired, the youth and young adult ministry leader resigned due to a job relocation, and the church elected another preacher from within the church to fill the pastoral vacancy. Also, the church and the youth and young adult ministry saw a rapid decline.⁴ In May of 2011, the church elected another preacher from within the church to fill the vacancy. However, he would later break away from a decision made by the previous pastor. He recommended that the church no longer compensate the youth and young adult ministry leader but rather pray that a member would volunteer, or God would bless the church with a volunteer from

³ Information taken from Promiseland Community Church records that were based on a church census conducted for the year 2000.

⁴ Information taken from Promiseland Community Church records that were based on a church survey conducted for the year of 2010.

outside the church. After no one was willing to take ownership of the ministry, the pastor appointed someone for the position. However, like before, some in the church were unhappy with his decision.

The decision to appoint someone ultimately led to a significant internal conflict between the leadership and the membership, as no one could find common ground. However, after prayer and meditation, in November of 2013, this candidate was elected to be the next pastor of Promiseland. As a result, the church has been doing much better in spiritual, numerical, and financial growth. However, the youth and young adult ministry problems remain a challenge. Although many issues can be highlighted to address the cause of this dilemma, there are primarily two that will be addressed at this time: issues with tradition and issues with discipleship.

The Challenge of Tradition

Based on its historical pattern, the church discovered it was a program-oriented structure-orientated. This evidence surfaced as early as 2013 when past and present leaders made recommendations and suggestions about the youth solely based on traditions rather than doing what was biblically suitable for the church from God's perspective. Also, on numerous occasions, meetings had to be scheduled to right the wrongs of the leaders as many of them preferred old and outdated methodologies and practices as a means of attracting the youth and young adults as opposed to what applies to young people today. An example occurred in 2017 as an outdated approach to a youth ministry event yielded little to no results because of the decision to follow through with old methods designed for general evangelistic opportunities.

Also, since relocating to the Promiseland community, this church never really connected with many residents because a focus was not given to outreach and evangelism. This lack of outreach and evangelism led to the disconnect between the church and the community residents. In

fact, in 2015, during an evangelism campaign, it was stated by multiple residents within the Promiseland community that this instance was the first time that anyone approached them from Promiseland Community Church. Another aspect of this issue with tradition was the various internal issues that plagued the church for several years, which led to the decline of this ministry. These internal issues ranged from personality conflicts to personal feelings of alienation and isolation. These internal issues also affected how the church viewed the youth and young adults. Rather than viewing the youth as an investment into the church's future, more attention was given to the unintentional establishment of age restrictions that prevented several young people from participating in church activities. Another traditional barrier was the selection and genre of music that the older members permitted the youth and young adult choir to sing on the designated Sundays that they were involved in the worship. This traditional barrier, along with minimum to no discipleship training, led to the second issue, which is spiritual growth.

The Challenge of Spiritual Growth

Whenever there is a spiritual deficiency, such as a lack of spiritual growth and development in the church, every ministry will eventually suffer. This issue is more pronounced with the youth and young adult ministry; if the parents and other adults are not being discipled themselves, then the presence and participation of youth and young adults will quickly dissolve. Kara Powell and Steve Argue wanted to address this issue and argued that young people are drawn to the community and the relationships developed through spiritual growth and discipleship.⁵ Another reason why spiritual growth was an issue at this church was because of the lack of attention given to the youth and young adults by the ministry leaders and other members.

⁵ Kara Powell and Steve Argue, *Growing With Every Parents Guide to Helping Teenagers and Young Adults Thrive in Their Faith, Family, and Future* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 170.

Although discipleship training has taken place, the youth and young adult ministry still needed improvement. The lack of spiritual growth was due to the previous leaders not emphasizing discipleship while believing that the youth ministry would be self-sufficient. However, as the youth participation declined, neither the leadership nor the membership had any solutions to this progressive problem. Also, because no ongoing teaching or training curriculum was implemented, the members never really grasped the spiritual significance of developing young leaders. As a result, there was never a culture where the youth and young adults felt they had a standard connection spiritually and socially. During the inactivity of the youth ministry, finger-pointing and other misguided accusations all led to more frustrations because when the youth ministry was flourishing, the church overlooked the necessity of discipleship development.⁶

As this discipleship issue is discussed, the plan for addressing it should become clear to the reader. This clarity has to do with the reader understanding that for the youth and young adults to be reached, in-depth research and planning process must be discussed. Also, in terms of the budget, fiscal spending, event schedule, and outreach activities, the youth and young adults had no place or space within the church's agenda. They felt as though they did not have a role in the church and did not support them based on a poll taken two years ago.⁷ At the beginning of this study, the youth and young adults still felt the church had not done enough to make them feel included.

The Problem Presented

The problem that this project will address is the inactivity of youth and young adults between the ages of 10 to 25 in the surrounding communities of Promiseland Community Church.

⁶ Andrew Zirschky, *Beyond the Screen: Youth Ministry for the Connected but Alone Generation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 10.

⁷ Information taken from Paradise Baptist Church records that were based on a church survey conducted for the year of 2018.

Although this project has emphasized the issues present at Promiseland, this problem is visible in many other churches due to the various topics such as social distractions, family structure, parental issues, and cultural differences that young black youth face in this generation. Since the early 2000s, black churches have had a reoccurring problem establishing a lasting connection with young black churchgoers because Millennials are currently more numerous than Baby Boomers. This generation is also the most educated, racially diverse, and religiously unaffiliated generation that this nation has ever produced.⁸ The local church's role in the spiritual upbringing of black children has been significantly reduced in recent years because parents are no longer as engaged in the church's affairs as they once were. As a result of this parental disconnect, young black youth have vastly different views about religion and the church.

According to Paul Taylor and the Pew Research Center, a third of Millennials are unaffiliated with any religion, compared with nine percent of the Silent Generation, fifteen percent of Baby Boomers, and twenty-one percent of Generation Xers. Therefore, Millennials are the least religiously connected generation in modern American history.⁹ Another contributing factor that has added to the rapid decline of black youth attendance and participation in many predominately black churches has been a decline in attendance in all churches. For example, Alvin Reid states that membership in Protestant churches dropped nine and a half percent over the past decade while the U.S population grew eleven percent.¹⁰ These startling numbers point to a more significant problem that congregations have had to address that was woven into the structure of the church's ministries associated with the age ranges of the parishioners. Older communities often struggle

⁸ Joshua L. Mitchell, *Black Millennials and the Church: Meet Me Where I Am* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2018), 15.

⁹ Paul Taylor, *The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown* (Philadelphia: Perseus Books Group, 2015), 16.

¹⁰ Alvin L. Reid, *Radically Unchurched: Who They Are & How to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2002), 24.

with retaining black youth and young adults because their ministry makeup does not appeal to the younger audience. In fact, in all the smaller churches with a membership of about 200 that are in the immediate geographical area of Promiseland Community Church, they do not have worship and arts ministries; instead, they rely on women and men's ministries while only placing a secondary emphasis on the youth ministry.

Another aspect of this problem lies within the leadership of the church. Mitchell mentions that black youth are more likely to remain connected to a church where there is a sense of inclusion based upon a desire for spiritual involvement that goes beyond the walls of the church building.¹¹ Also, for black youth, there are a few factors to consider that will help with their sense of inclusion, and they are as follows: the preaching and presence of the senior pastor, the music ministry, and the character of the people who make up the congregation are some of the important factors that will aid in their spiritual formation.¹² Douglas Powe suggests that the black church is suffering because black youth are turning more and more towards churches that mimic the celebrity culture rather than those who promote the Gospel.¹³ Issues with the leadership, personality traits of the parishioners, and ministry inactivity are all reasons why Paradise and other churches have suffered significantly with a dramatic decline in the attendance and participation of the youth and young adults.

Unfortunately, this problem plagued Promiseland Community Church for several years. Although several attempts were made to address it, it was still a lingering internal and external issue in origin. The youth's lack of participation was internal due to personality conflicts and

¹¹ Mitchell, *Black Millennials and the Church*, 21.

¹² Mitchell, *Black Millennials and the Church*, 22.

¹³ F. Douglas Powe Jr., *New Wine New Wine Skins: How African American Congregations Can Reach New Generations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 14.

characteristics and exterior issues preventing the church from connecting with the young black kids in the community. These external issues ranged from some residents negatively perceiving the church to parents who were so preoccupied with economic and social constraints that church attendance had become abandoned. The reality was that church was no longer relevant to some parents. Even though local churches have been able to develop long-term solutions to this problem, based on the research conducted by Powe and Taylor, there still seems to be an influx of churches and ministries with similar dynamics that have had to face this youth inactivity problem with little to no success. However, the situation at Promiseland Community Church is unique because, without an active youth ministry leader or volunteer youth leaders, it is difficult to properly plan and effectively strategize to lead to prolonged ministry growth and establish a plan that represents the overall vision of the church.

The lack of a youth ministry leader had also created an environment where the church members did not include young people in the Sunday morning worship. This exclusion of the youth complicated the problem as the church leadership did not have a course of action to resolve this issue. Also, because the youth and young adult ministry were inactive for so long, parents were no longer supportive of the planned events and activities. In 2016 when the annual church evaluation was conducted, many of the responses were along the lines of the church not having anything for the young people to be actively engaged in that would warrant them bringing their children to church. Those issues and others, such as a lack of volunteers and outdated programs, helped contribute to the unpleasant reality present at this church for quite some time.

Lack of Volunteers

Currently, the church has almost 400 names on the membership roll, but of those 400, only about 25% to 30% attend regularly. Out of that number, many are middle-aged or elderly, or they are already serving in other roles that do not allow them to fill in the youth and young adult ministry.¹⁴

Table 1: 2018-2019 Adult Attendance at Promiseland Community Church

| Total # of adults on record | Total # of adults (anyone above 30) who attend regularly | Total # of adults who regularly participate over the age of 65 |
|-----------------------------|--|--|
| 271 | 70 | 52 |

Table 2: 2018-2019 Youth and Young Adult Attendance at Promiseland Community Church

| Total # of youth and young adults on record | Total # of youth and young adults between the ages of 5 to 10 who attend regularly | Total # of youth and young adults between the ages of 11 to 18 who attend regularly | Total # of youth and young adults between the ages of 19 to 30 who attend regularly |
|---|--|---|---|
| 49 | 16 | 7 | 5 |

One of the main issues within the church was that members only desired to come to church, listen to the choir sing, listen to the sermon, and go back home without being bothered or asked to do anything that required them to assume any responsibility. There were constant complaints about the youth ministry being inactive, but no one wanted to help to make it active. To combat this unwillingness to get involved, the leadership had to approach the membership with a systematic plan to build lasting relationships with the community to reach the youth in their journey in life by

¹⁴ The Promiseland Community Church records were based on a church evaluation conducted on October 20th, 2019. Therefore, a two percent difference is assumed with all calculations.

taking small steps that would ultimately lead to considerable progress in the future.¹⁵ These small steps resulted from intentionally establishing relationships with the youth and young adults through the vehicle of small group Bible studies and life groups. In these groups young people rather than adults, were asked to volunteer to assume the role of small group leader so that the other young people would find that connection and communication become easier due to the age of the person leading the group.

Also, the contagious attitude of not wanting to get involved in any ministry that some of the members adopted were perhaps the most significant challenge. It was not easy to move or motivate an attitude that has been entrenched in a belief that is self-interpreted to mean that they just want to come to church and enjoy the privileges of the church without working in the church. There was no lack of people; it was just a lack of people willing to participate in the ministry of Christian service. This type of behavior has a connection to being biblically illiterate, and as problematic as this issue was at Promiseland Community Church, it was not anything new.¹⁶ Being that black churches are by-products of the Protestant Reformation, the spiritual formation should be an emphasis that is placed on every ministry within the church as church growth and development is always the leading plan in the church. Therefore, because members have not practiced personal devotion or have taken the time to become learners of the Lord Jesus Christ, this behavior of non-involvement has taken the place of the attitude of being actively involved.

Outdated Programs

One of the more predominant reasons the youth and young adult ministry experienced an inactive period was that the church was trying to function with outdated methods and means while

¹⁵ Brad Fiscus and Stephanie Caro, *Smaller Church Youth Ministry: No Staff, No Money, No Problem* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 29.

¹⁶ Thabiti Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church: A Call to Reclaim A Sacred Institution* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2015), 175.

believing that success could be achieved. Some of the church's youth left Promiseland and participated in predominately white Christian congregations because of this problem.¹⁷ If this church wanted to retain the small number of black youths attending, then concentrated efforts by the pastor, church leaders, youth ministry leaders, and church members to close the proverbial back door had to be placed on the day-to-day schedule of the church. This church had to adapt and evolve with the present times. Because many young people were tech-savvy, Promiseland Community Church had to incorporate technology to respond to this complex participation problem. Social networking has become one of the best avenues of connecting with young people in relatable ways. The church had to suppress the urge to indulge in too much church talk and communicate with the youth and young adults on their level.¹⁸ This change was another aspect of relationship building that was the foundation of this assignment to address this problem to lead to long-term success.

These outdated programs began with worship actives in which the youth were only permitted to participate in three services each year actively: Resurrection Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. In each of these worship services, the child was given poems or speeches recited at specific junctures within the service then they had to go back to being silent yet again. At other times, they would participate in skits designed to re-enact the empty tomb and Calvary and Jesus being born in a stable. Unfortunately, the membership viewed these limited opportunities as satisfactory to the cause of retaining young people to maintain a high headcount. However, earlier this year, a decision was made which believed that this outdated aspect of the youth is inserted into a program to appease parents and was no longer a good direction to pursue if the goal of the child

¹⁷ Charles R. Foster and Grant S. Shockley, *Working with Black Youth: Opportunities for Christian Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 101.

¹⁸ Zirschky, *Beyond the Screen*, 65.

and young adult ministry was to establish long-term progress and success. In February, the recommendation was made to remove this element from those three worship services. For the entire month of November, December, March, and April, the youth ministry carries out most of the worship service with little to no intervention from the adults, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive.

The limited methods of the worship activities were outdated, but the educational activities for adolescents and teens were also obsolete. Even though Promiseland Community Church had teens equipped to teach and lead these two age groups, both ages were being taught by two deacons in their 60s, and because of the large age gap, they were seldom able to engage the students fully. The church was unable to relate to the younger age group and their multi-faceted lifestyle. The second issue was how the classes were structured and the curriculum. The Sunday school and Wednesday evening classes were divided by age. Ages 8-11 made up a class, and ages 12-17 consisted of the other course. The previous structure did not permit the youth and young adults to get involved by way of teaching. The deacon would go through a roll call, pray a lengthy prayer, teach for thirty to forty minutes, pray a closing prayer, and dismiss the class. When the Director of Christian education was asked to communicate with the teen attendees about the structure of the types, they all indicated that they were not being given opportunities to ask questions or comment and give feedback about the topic of discussion. This problem led to parents not bringing their children to Sunday school or Wednesday night bible study. The church scheduled a teacher's meeting to review the structure and curriculum the teachers were teaching. As Mark Devries indicated, the church understood that proper presentation and well-planned curriculums were necessary for the youth ministry to ensure that each young person was included in the learning process's scope.¹⁹

¹⁹ Mark Devries, *Sustainable Youth Ministry: Why Most Youth Ministry Doesn't Last and What Your Church Can Do About It* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 62.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research will be to seek a viable solution to the lack of participation of black youth and young adults between the ages of 10 to 25 in the surrounding communities of Promiseland Community Church. Although participation is a universal problem, this research will be focused on the steps taken to address it at Promiseland Community Church in the Promiseland community in Hunter Haven, Arkansas. Inactivity is seen in the African American Church for various reasons. The culture in the inner city and rural areas has created an environment where the church is not a high priority. Also, the faith practices of youth and young adults have broadened. Rather than being told to worship God by their parents, they now want to know and understand why they worship Him.²⁰ The other cause has to do with the church itself not providing opportunities for the youth and young adults to participate in the worship by allowing them to exercise their gifts to improve the church. These causes, coupled with older and traditionally-minded members and having little insight into how to reach the youth, added more layers to this complex problem. These attitudes and mindsets are contrary to the biblical mandate that the church has been instructed to fulfill: making disciples.

One significant benefit from this research will be the improvement of relationships between the youth and the church leaders. The pastor appealed to parents for their children to participate in a Thanksgiving meal celebration conducted this past Thanksgiving holiday. The youth were asked (with the assistance of adults) to decorate food baskets that were to be distributed to homeless and less-fortunate families within the community. This simple activity led to an increase of volunteers and parents who were excited to see their children engaged and involved in the church's work. Since the first Sunday of November 2019, the youth and young adult ministry have seen an

²⁰ Kathleen Chapman, *Teaching Kids Authentic Worship: How to Keep Them Close to God for Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 103.

increase in attendance and an improvement in parental attitudes, all because of intentional efforts to demonstrate that Promiseland is a family-friendly congregation.²¹

Basic Assumptions

As with every church, the youth and young adult ministry at this church is a ministry that should always seek to be actively involved in helping accomplish the church's mission. However, because there was a complexity of issues that were contributing to the inactivity of the youth ministry, it became difficult to make forward progress as a church, and it became impossible to solve this problem within a brief period.²² Therefore, it should not be assumed that this problem could fix itself overnight, nor was it able to become consistently active by just bringing young people to church without properly providing them with a specific assignment that was comfortable for their age and experience or teaching training them about accountability. Not only that but because every church has different demographics, it cannot be assumed that the results of this research will reveal that there is only one approach to solving this problem with the youth and young adult ministry at this church.

This research will demonstrate that once the leadership has adequately planned and organized a structured approach to developing a youth ministry team, the implementation of this approach will yield a youth ministry based on lasting relationships. Establishing a foundationally vital youth ministry must begin with having qualified ministry leaders. These ministry leaders will be equipped spiritually and mentally for the challenges presented when trying to maintain a ministry within a church environment that is accustomed to having things done a certain way. When parents begin to witness their children being integrated into the daily affairs of the church, it will encourage them to become more aware. This awareness will also involve understanding the

²¹ Doug Fields, *Your First Two Years in Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 103.

²² Devries, *Sustainable Youth Ministry*, 11.

church's attempt to demonstrate how vital the presence and participation of young people are related to the church being spiritually healthy.

Even though there has been extensive research on this subject, the assumed goal of this project will be to provide the reader with a long-term yet practical approach to addressing this inactive youth problem. This approach will be accomplished in two ways. First, through a process that applies to this ministry context and others with similar demographics. Second, by gathering information obtained through researching other sources and constructively critiquing them based on their ability to maintain a level of success over some time.

Definitions

Throughout this thesis project, terms that others have researched will be used to provide clarity to the reader so that this project will connect to others of different backgrounds and cultures. Although these terms may be familiar to some, they may create a bit of confusion if they are not correctly identified and defined. Therefore, the words that will be represented are "Christian mentor," "Millennial," "ministry," "unchurched," "spiritual growth" and "youth ministry leader."

Christian mentor. From the Christian ministry perspective, mentoring is critical to the advancement and development of younger believers. For example, in the early church, new converts were often paired with a mature Christian for a period of instruction and mentoring before their baptism on the vigil of Easter.²³ It also must be stated that although a Christian mentor has more wisdom and experience than the youth, their role goes beyond just providing answers and advice.²⁴ A Christian mentor is defined in three ways; first, the mentor possesses more

²³ Richard R. Osmer and Katherine M. Douglas, *Cultivating Teen Faith: Insights from the Confirmation Project* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 48.

²⁴ Osmer and Douglas, *Cultivating Teen Faith*, 53.

extraordinary experience or wisdom than the mentee. Second, the mentor offers guidance or instruction intended to facilitate the growth and development of the mentee. Third, there is an emotional bond between the mentor and mentee, a hallmark of which is a sense of trust.²⁵

Millennial. "Millennial," also known as Generation Y or what is referred to by Reid as the Net Generation or Bridgers, are those born between 1981 and 1996, and anyone born beyond 1996 is considered a part of the new generation.²⁶ Millennials are now one of the most discussed topics in the church because many churches, particularly in the African American community, are experiencing difficulties reaching this demographic of the church in ways that create meaningful relationships. The church needs Millennials because they currently represent the largest generational cohort in U.S. history.²⁷ Since this generation values relationships and community, the methods and practices developed from this research will be crafted to address this need.²⁸

Ministry. The term "ministry" is a term that is derived from the Greek language (*Diakonia*), meaning to serve in such a way that extends beyond the idea of just sharing the Gospel. This type of service is not relegated to pastors and church leaders only. Still, all Christian believers have a general call from God to humbly serve others by making a daily choice predicated upon God's grace.²⁹ Ministry is an ongoing and active responsibility that Christians are to uphold based on having a heart of love for all people, including children, by meeting the spiritual and practical

²⁵ Michael J. Carver and David L. DuBois, *Handbook of Youth Mentoring* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2005), 3.

²⁶ Reid, *Radically Unchurched*, 92.

²⁷ Mitchell, *Black Millennials*, 15.

²⁸ The ages of Generation X are those born between 1965 to 1980. Millennials are those born between 1981 to 1996. Net Generation and Bridgers are also referred to as Millennials. Anyone born after 1996 is known as Generation Z.

²⁹ Jared C. Wilson, *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto Against the Status Quo* (Wheaton IL: Crossway Publishers, 2015), 182.

needs (Rom 12:10-13).³⁰ Unfortunately, one of the challenges at Paradise Baptist Church is a failure to understand what ministry means. As a result, many parishioners do not have a high level of enthusiasm for performing ministry functions such as working with the youth, attending youth conferences, and volunteering for youth activities outside of the Sunday morning church setting. Unchurched. According to Reid, the “radically unchurched are those who have no clear personal understanding of the message of the gospel, and who have had little to no contact with a bible-teaching, Christ-honoring church.”³¹ Similar to the Gentiles of the first century who had no heritage of the scriptures, the unchurched of today are individuals who do not have an active and ongoing relationship with God through Jesus Christ.³² This category reflects the trend in Christianity that has dramatically affected the church negatively because what was initiated in one generation has also been maintained by another generation.

Spiritual Growth. "Spiritual growth" or "faithing" is a person's personal growth in owning and embodying their journey with God as they encounter new experiences and information.³³ Spiritual growth is the process by which a Christian develops and matures holistically over some time into a person whose outward behavior reflects their inner belief. It is a relational process based upon the personal convictions of the youth and young adults who are engaged in the community. It is also a progressive and ongoing process of becoming more and more like Jesus Christ spiritually and emotionally so that the Christian and the local church grow in a way that glorifies God while maintaining a connection to God.³⁴

³⁰ All Scriptures are taken from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

³¹ Reid, *Radically Unchurched*, 21.

³² Reid, *Radically Unchurched*, 22.

³³ Powell, *Growing With*, 139.

³⁴ Powell, *Growing With*, 140.

Youth Ministry Leader. The term "youth ministry leader" defines the individual who can connect with the youth and young adults in relatable ways.³⁵ Within the local church setting, the youth ministry leader is responsible for making and maintaining connections by being available and getting in touch with the needs of the youth.³⁶ First, this availability means that the ministry leader must be willing to be relational by meeting them where they are, and in turn, the youth are eager to respond by reaching out to the leader. Youth leader ministry plays a significant role in the black church because it gives the child an outlet to openly express themselves to establish a relationship and be mentored positively. Second, getting in touch with the needs of the youth means that the youth ministry leader faces the constant challenge of making crisis connections as many of today's youth are growing up in less than desirable environments.³⁷

The youth ministry leader must also evaluate and assess the youth ministry in a way that reflects a commitment to the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. They must be responsible enough to develop a positive plan of relational discord with the other leaders through a process of what Powell and Argue call "faithing."³⁸ Attention should be given to relationship building with the leadership and the membership.³⁹

Limitations

This project's scope is intended to cover the youth and young adult issues that are currently present within the ministry context of the Promiseland Community Church. Therefore, the results of this project will be limited to the scope of the demographics of this church and its youth and

³⁵ Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, Sandra L. Barnes and Karma D. Johnson, *Youth Ministry in the Black Church: Centered in Hope* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2013), 68.

³⁶ Wimberly, Barnes and Johnson, *Youth Ministry in the Black Church*, 71.

³⁷ Wimberly, Barnes and Johnson, *Youth Ministry in the Black Church*, 73.

³⁸ Powell and Argue, *Growing With*, 140.

³⁹ Powell and Argue, *Growing With*, 29.

young adult ministry context. Another restriction in this study is the church's relationship with the residents within the community in which the church is located. Because some residents have negative opinions about the church, there is difficulty trying to minister effectively. In addition, those residents with preconceived ideas about the church that are intrinsically derogative and demeaning will make it challenging to reach out to them with the Gospel.

Financial resources are also a limitation of this project. Even though the youth ministry budget is relatively small, the process and planning of youth ministry functions become critical to the overall success of this project. With an annual operating budget of \$325,000, less than \$5,000 was allocated for youth ministry projects. This small percentage was an indication that the church did not fully understand the need to make significant investments in the youth and young adult ministry. The other aspect of the resource limitation was the lack of participants. Without a youth ministry leader and members willing to volunteer, the youth and young adult ministry were hindered from being influential ministers to the child's needs. The problem that this dilemma presented was that it highlighted a significant issue within the church: the attitudes of the parishioners. Instead of developing a no-child-left-behind focus, there was an outdated and programmed-oriented view of ministry.⁴⁰

Delimitations

The attempt to integrate the youth into the church for discipleship in some ways hinged on the possibility of trying to convince parents to buy-in. This attempt will be a challenge because parents who left the church out of anger would have to embrace the idea that their children would have several opportunities to cultivate their faith with new leadership and strategies. It was the initial priority and focus of this researcher to emphasize to the trained volunteers that comprised

⁴⁰ Temeca L. Richardson, *Can the Black Church Save Young Black America: Closing the Educational Achievement Gap* (Ramsey, NJ: Arbor Books, 2007), 98.

the youth ministry team that limiting the target group to the immediate community of Promiseland as well as focusing on the unchurched and unsaved would be the right option for the youth ministry to be successful. Another initial priority that this researcher placed on this project was reaching out to the families who do not have any family ties to the church membership. One of the issues resided in the fact that this church was family-oriented and comprised of individuals who felt as though they had a sense of entitlement; recruiting potential families without any prior affiliation to the church will be helpful from the standpoint of having fresh ideas along with innovative thinking.

One other self-imposed limitation by this researcher will be the curriculum for this project. Throughout this ministry and church training, two eight-week discussions emphasized the importance of building relationships and building disciples. These two topics of discussion were necessary for the church membership and leadership to understand where the church went wrong and what could be done to set things on the right path so that the youth and young adults could feel welcomed and a part of the fellowship. The fact that neither of these issues has been addressed means that when the time came to highlight them, the new information that was presented caught many of the members by surprise.

Thesis Statement

The youth ministry at the Promiseland Community Church became inactive due to the residual decline of youth and young adult involvement and parental participation. This problem has created an unhealthy environment within the church where the members no longer consistently bring their children to church. In addition, youth teachers no longer attend teacher meetings because there are no youth or young adults to teach. As this church begins to reconnect with the community, parents will then feel the need to be involved by permitting their children to be a part

of a church that is genuinely concerned about everyone, including children, by implementing practices that are aimed at fostering youth and youth-adult ministry that is exciting and attractive. Therefore, because many churches are struggling with youth inactivity, this problem must be researched to benefit from reviving the church and restoring the trust of young people. It must also be examined to provide hope for the youth and young adults in an appropriate way that will keep them connected to God through service and active in the church through the ministry of discipleship for the rest of their lives. The approach and solution to this problem will be church leaders and members becoming intentional about establishing a renewed relationship with the youth that will allow them to feel accepted.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

The research presented in this study focuses on the inactivity of youth and young adults in Promiseland Community Church. However, there will be areas of discussion where other churches and ministries will apply these principles and techniques to their ministry contexts. As this chapter focuses on the relevant literature about this problem at Promiseland Community Church, the results of this research will aid in the attempt to find a practical solution to this problem. This chapter will also focus on the theoretical and theological aspects of this research to reveal the biblical basis for this research and the need to explain why this study will help other churches with similar demographics reach out to young black youth in ways that matter and are meaningful.

Review of Literature

Regarding reaching out to the black youth and young adults, some authors understand a youth ministry needs that many churches are not meeting.⁴¹ This need had to do with their ability to reach out to the youth in meaningful and relevant ways so that long-term social and spiritual relationships could be established between black churches and young black children. Reid argues that the radically unchurched come from all walks of life, ages, and races and can be found in any area of the United States. They are oblivious to the claims of Christianity, maybe even hostile toward those claims, and many churches simply do not attempt to reach these groups of people.⁴² Also, with the practical examples and academic research, Reid demonstrates that Christians can effectively reach out to those who have no concept or familiarity with the Christian message to fulfill the commands of Christ and penetrate the larger culture. This issue was dominant in the life of Promiseland Community Church, but even when the idea of building a youth ministry after prayer and planning had taken place, the youth were often viewed as a means of trying to save a

⁴¹ Fiscus and Caro, *Smaller Church Youth Ministry*, 101.

⁴² Reid, *Radically Unchurched*, 92.

church where the youth were youth attendance was steadily decreasing.⁴³ This view of the youth and young adult ministry highlights that organization becomes essential from the leaders' standpoint by starting with a clearly defined purpose.⁴⁴ Also, with this view in mind, establishing a vision for the youth ministry will help maintain a pre-determined goal so that the greater good of the church can be accomplished.⁴⁵

This research has also revealed what Jim Burns refers to as the faith factor.⁴⁶ Like Reid, his research sheds light on the importance of the faith foundation that should be a part of the home environment between parent and child. According to his research, this faith factor is important because atheism has doubled among those in Generation Z, and many young adult believers and nonbelievers have a negative outlook on the church.⁴⁷ For these reasons, establishing a faith foundation at home is essential for two reasons. First, it is necessary within the African American community because of the manufactured challenges that have been disguised as distractions to redirect the focus of the parents and youth from Sunday morning worship to Sunday morning sporting activities. The second reason is due to the self-imposed challenges that have been created because of poor decisions and impaired judgment. This review of literature will seek to reveal the commonality of this problem while at the same time highlighting the differences that scholars have in their approaches and the methods they applied to reach a logical solution. Of the various topics

⁴³ Fiscus and Caro, *Smaller Church Youth Ministry*, 48.

⁴⁴ Mike Work and Ginny Olson, *Youth Ministry Management Tools 2.0: Everything You Need to Successfully Manage Your Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 68.

⁴⁵ Work and Olson, *Youth Ministry Management Tools 2.0*, 28.

⁴⁶ Jim Burns, *Doing Life With Your Adult Children: Keep Your Mouth Shut and the Welcome Mat Out* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 63.

⁴⁷ Burns, *Doing Life With Your Adult Children*, 63.

already addressed, the following will be examined in this project chapter: building relationships, commitment, parental involvement, the challenge of absentee fathers, and technology.

Building Relationships

One of the most critical roles of the church is reaching out to the community to meet needs while demonstrating care and concern for others holistically.⁴⁸ Holistic care is vital for the church to build relationships with the youth because from a biblical standpoint, Jesus made time for young people.⁴⁹ For example, Jesus told His disciples, “*And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me*” (Matthew 18:5).⁵⁰ Not only are young people examples of humility, but they are also conduits for Christ's presence.⁵¹ Some scholars have even described the black church as dying due to the lack of concern or inability to reach out to the youth and young adults before they have been drawn away by the temptations of the streets. In his research, Thabiti Anyabwile offers three reasons he believes the black church is dying. First, conservatism is pitted against progressivism because of the notion that the black church by nature is steeped in tradition and has a progressive element.⁵² Second, the black church is no longer at the center of many black families and communities; instead, many blacks are finding provisions for their needs outside the realm of their local church environment. One such new realm is mega churches because some deem them to be the pinnacle a triumphant church.⁵³ The third reason he believes that the black church is dying

⁴⁸ Jeremy P. Myers, *Liberating Youth from Adolescence* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018), 5.

⁴⁹ Myers, *Liberating Youth from Adolescence*, 45.

⁵⁰ Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references will be taken from the King James Version.

⁵¹ Myers, *Liberating Youth from Adolescence*, 45.

⁵² Thabiti Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church: A Call to Reclaim A Sacred Institution* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2015), 2.

⁵³ Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*, 3

has to do with the prophetic witness of the black church in the past. He believes that many assume the prophetic history of the church will continue to be the driving force of the church today.

Can the black church live again? The answer is an emphatic yes. However, the key resides within the church itself. The black church can reclaim its prominent role by actively engaging in the community. The church must uphold this requirement as it becomes more intentional in building lasting relationships with families and, more importantly, with the youth.⁵⁴ Although ineffective leadership was not the case in this project's ministry context, Devries believes that certain leadership styles can adversely affect the youth ministry. However, there are times when pastors can be held accountable for the success and failure of the youth and young adult ministry program.⁵⁵ Pastors can also lead to the youth and young adults being intimidated due to the harsh reality that the church carries an uninviting spirit drenched with over twenty years of unhealthy and outdated practices and being too program-oriented.⁵⁶ Wilson makes the appeal that churches must do more related to ministry involvement and structure to become more appealing and attractive to the younger generation.⁵⁷ The Generation that Wilson refers to is the same Generation that Reid discusses as he mentions generations X and Y because how the church treats the youth often determines their view.

Generation X, Z, and the Net Generation are also within the target groups in this project. The literature and methodologies conducted by F. Douglas Powe, Joshua L. Mitchell, and Thabiti Anyabwile made this target group apparent. They have researched this problem in church settings like the ministry context at Promiseland Community Church. It was also revealed that meaningful

⁵⁴ Wimberly, *Youth Ministry in the Black Church*, 20.

⁵⁵ Devries, *Sustainable Youth Ministry*, 13.

⁵⁶ Anne E. Streaty Wimberly and Sarah Frances Farmer, *Raising Hope: Four Paths to Courageous Living for Black Youth* (Nashville: Wesley's Foundery Books, 2017), 10.

⁵⁷ Wilson, *The Prodigal Church*, 179.

progress was made when black churches could connect with this age group by implementing a systems approach to their youth and young adult ministries that focused on including their social and educational lives.⁵⁸ As described by Devries, this systems approach refers to pastors and youth ministry leaders who no longer focused on the conflict that this problem created but rather on the issues that surrounded the inactive youth problem in the first place. By understanding this dynamic of building relationships with the young black youth, the church can better apply the principles of ministry and discipleship to begin a revival in the black church as the church's level of commitment improves for church growth and service.

Commitment

Since church growth and service are measurable outcomes that can be attained, then a high level of commitment must exist within the membership and leadership. For this reason, the church must become more committed to the God-given pastoral vision of embracing the youth ministry while understanding that discipleship takes place over a process of time rather than immediately and overnight.⁵⁹ This level of commitment is a spiritual call that God has placed upon the church as a means of being accountable to Him and one another so that the church can experience the true nature of being a witness in the world.⁶⁰ The commitment that Larry McSwain and Wilson Shurden discuss coincides with the spiritual development that Myers mentions that will be accomplished when the church ministers to the needs of the youth in ways that foster growth

⁵⁸ Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, "A Mandate for Action: The Church's Ministry With Urban Black Youth" *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, 40 (2014), 22-30, Accessed September 5, 2020, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

⁵⁹Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost a Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6.

⁶⁰ Larry L. McSwain and Wilson Shurden, *Call Waiting: God's Invitation to Youth* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2005), 10.

which will lead to Christian service.⁶¹ The research conducted by Dean Hoge and Gregory Petrillo suggests that what Foster says about working with black youth is all the more critical as it relates to the opportunities presented from helping and allowing the youth to develop a relationship with God that is relevant their context.⁶²

Also, according to Hoge and Petrillo, an emphasis must be placed on the church leadership's qualities and characteristics in giving the youth opportunities to mature in their relationship with God.⁶³ This emphasis is important because it was revealed through Hoge and Petrillo's research that the attitudes of church rejection that some young people express are often attributed to a dislike of past religious training and a perception that church leaders were unapproachable and insincere.⁶⁴ Their research also revealed that the attitudes of rejection from many church youth groups were mainly traced to experiences of being snubbed or rejected by the other youth to peer pressures contrary to their church youth program participation.⁶⁵ Charles Foster's goal of highlighting the importance of the black church reaching out to the youth in the black community means that it would be reasonable to believe that youth ministries will encounter an identity crisis.⁶⁶ However, it must be viewed from two spectrums to solve this issue. First, from the church's standpoint, it must be the initiator and leader in this process of attempting to change the spiritual trajectory of the youth and young adult ministry. Second, the church's commitment to

⁶¹ Myers, *Liberating Youth from Adolescence*, 133.

⁶² Dean R. Hoge and Gregory H. Petrillo, "Determinants of Church Participation and Attitudes Among High School Youth," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 17 (1978): 360-371, Accessed August 1, 2020, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu>.

⁶³ Hoge and Petrillo, "Determinants of Church Participation and Attitudes Among High School Youth," 361.

⁶⁴ Hoge and Petrillo, "Determinants of Church Participation and Attitudes Among High School Youth," 376.

⁶⁵ Hoge and Petrillo, "Determinants of Church Participation and Attitudes Among High School Youth," 377.

⁶⁶ Charles R. Foster and Grant S. Shockley, *Working with Black Youth: Opportunities for Christian Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 74.

investing in the lives of the youth must be equally met by the promise of the parents who are also actively engaged in the social and spiritual areas of their children's lives so that patterns are created that result in a long-term commitment by their children to the ministry of the church.

Parental Involvement

Another component of this project is the unpleasant reality that parental involvement or the lack thereof is partially the blame for young black boys and girls not having God as a high priority in their lives. Outside the church setting, parents are present in many of their children's daily activities. However, when contrasted to the parental support garnered for church functions, that support decreases dramatically.⁶⁷ Powell and Argue agree that today's parent's role is more critical in their children's lives than twenty years ago.⁶⁸ However, according to Hoge and Petrillo, their research surprisingly discovered that parents strongly influence their children's church attendance but almost no effect on their children's attitudes toward the church and church youth programs.⁶⁹ For this reason, parents may or may not try to pass their religious beliefs on to their children; some may even choose to let their children work out spiritual matters on their own, without parental supervision because they sense that their children may become defensive which may ultimately lead to a fierce rejection of the church. Nevertheless, Christian Smith believes that the parents are the single and most significant influencer of religion to their children, which means that their presence has a tremendous value in their children's spiritual and religious maturation process.⁷⁰

The presence of the parents is critical to the spiritual success of many young people in different black communities due to the various distractions that have already claimed the attention

⁶⁷ Zirschky, *Beyond the Screen*, 63.

⁶⁸ Powell and Argue, *Growing With*, 41.

⁶⁹ Hoge and Petrillo, "Determinants of Church Participation," 376.

⁷⁰ Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 261.

and focus of so many youths because of the noninvolvement of the parents. Many youths today are growing up in home environments where the father is absent. Therefore, the church must reach out with the Gospel to both the youth and the black males who are fathers but are not functioning in their God-ordained role of a father. Anyabwile cites that there are currently more black males between the ages of seventeen to thirty-five who are in jail or prison than there are in college or in church.⁷¹ The black church must challenge this reality. However, for most black youth, especially young black boys, there is a unique connection when they see black men involved in the affairs of the church, being actively involved in the affairs of their lives, and setting public and positive examples in society that will create a high level of motivation for them to strive to do better.

Mothers also play a significant role in the spiritual formation of their children in the African American community due to issues and circumstances that occur that are beyond the mother's control. For example, many black mothers are crippled by disadvantages such as fathers not being present, financial issues, social issues, and educational issues due to getting pregnant early. Once some of these obstacles have been conquered, these mothers begin to face a new set of challenges created to keep them dependant on the government and always need some assistance to assist with the rearing of their children. There must be a concerted effort by the parents, the church, and other residents in the community from every beginning because the formation of a child's faith often begins at baptism and is built upon at home.⁷² Even from an academic point of view, the parents of young black boys and girls must do a better job of refocusing their attention back to the youth in this chaotic society.⁷³

⁷¹ Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*, 210.

⁷² Osmer and Douglas, *Cultivating Teen Faith*, 90.

⁷³ Richardson, *Closing the Educational Achievement Gap*, 4.

The Challenge of Absentee Fathers

This literature review has uncovered a challenge within the church that has been visible all along yet hidden at the same time. Of the youth and young adults who are currently attending the church, about twenty-one percent of them do not have a father or a father figure who is actively involved in the affairs of their lives.

Table 3: 2018-2019 Youth and Young Adult Attendance at Promiseland Community Church

| Total # of youth & young adults on record | Total # of youth and young adults who attend regularly | Total # of youth and young adults who participate with a father figure | Total # of youth and young adults who join without a father or father figure |
|---|--|--|--|
| 49 | 28 | 12 | 16 |

There are a variety of reasons as to why this number is so low.⁷⁴ Mass incarcerations of young black males below the age of 30, gang violence, death, divorce, and men who become fathers but are not responsible enough to be a consistent provider for the family. Also, some fathers who are physically in the house with their children are not there with their children spiritually. Finally, some parents rarely play a role in their child's life because they spend majority of their time working multiple low-paying jobs that only allow them to provide the basic necessities for their children. As a result, Mothers are stranded on an island to provide a spiritual foundation for her children.

These issues are a few of the many that arise from children not having a male presence in their lives. There should be a male who can be trusted to provide spiritual guidance and direction at critical stages. Father figures are important because early childhood and adolescence are stages

⁷⁴ Information taken from the Promiseland Community Church records that were based on a church evaluation that was conducted on October 20, 2019. A two percent difference is assumed with all calculations.

in which parents, especially men, can play a significant role in the spiritual formation of a child.⁷⁵ This critical element is essential because, for any child, especially those growing up in black communities, the male presence of a father figure can make a difference in terms of discipline, accountability, pride, and patience. For these reasons, the Promiseland Community Church has implemented a strategy entitled "Connect to Communicate." This strategy will allow the men's ministry team during the Fall to initiate a focused effort to go out weekly into the surrounding communities outside of the Promiseland area to build relationships with the young black youth and their parents. There will also be a targeted attempt to connect men and young boys for the purpose of establishing a connection and a line of communication to develop a sense of belonging.

The attempt by the church and the men's ministry team to reach out to black men and the youth outside of the Promiseland area is viewed by Richardson as a type of boys-to-men mentoring program in which mature males mentor younger males to help them grow holistically.⁷⁶ Through consistent teaching, many of the current men in the church are eager to start this initiative because they believe that when men are visible and active in the church that will eventually lead to the youth and young adult ministry being revived.⁷⁷ Powell also adds that the spiritual formation of youth and young adults can be significantly enhanced when both parents are involved in the lives of the church's youth through participation and programming. Unfortunately, this problem persists within Promiseland Community Church because most of the children who attend miss a sense of belonging from home due to their parents being separated, divorced, or absent. Therefore, the church is then obligated to become a spiritual surrogate family to these young people as a means of

⁷⁵ Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 203.

⁷⁶ Richardson, *Can the Black Church Save Young Black America*, 131.

⁷⁷ Powell, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies*, 206.

helping the mother develop her children with care and compassion by providing a meaningful relationship.

Technology

It is not assumed that technology will fix youth participation nor motivate current members to be more active. Still, it is considered that technology will allow a bridge to be developed between the leaders and the members. Regarding technology, Matthew Brain believes that one of the hallmarks of youth is perceived proficiency in accessing and using technology in their daily lives.⁷⁸ For Promiseland Community Church, the issue of technology has been an ongoing battle with the members and with some of the leaders due to their view of the church and how they cannot seem to move beyond the past mentally. This consistent problem dates back to 2004 until April 2019. The church never really grasped the importance of having and maintaining youth and young adult ministry that reflects a pattern in line with scripture.

In April of 2019, a local pastor who was leading another church was invited to come to Promiseland to establish a partnership with a neighboring elementary and high school to provide tutoring and access to a computer lab to help with the career and the college entrance process. As he met with this student and the other leaders of the church, he intended to help the church see the need for youth ministry outreach and to get the church to understand that a priority must be placed on technology as he posed six critical questions to the group, and they are as follows:

Question 1 *What sacrifices are you willing to make to ensure that this partnership becomes successful?*

Question 2 *What is your purpose for establishing this partnership?*

Question 3 *How will the church and the youth and young adult ministry benefit from this partnership?*

Question 4 *How is the church currently utilizing technology to reach young people?*

⁷⁸ Matthew Brain, "Offering Faith to Youth in a Digital World," St. Marks Review 233 (2015), 104, Accessed December 6.

Question 5 *What are the social media platforms that the church has available to assist with being able to relate to young people?*

Question 6 *Since many young people are tech-savvy, has the church considered performing more ministry-related functions online?*

The pastor struggled with inner embarrassment from this meeting as each closed-minded answer was given in response to these sincere yet thought-provoking questions. For example, in response to question one, one of the leaders responded by saying that for this partnership to become successful, the church will have to spend a lot of money which is not available. Not only that, but because the church will be functioning practically every day, the church can expect to see an increase in the electric bill. This response indicated that some leaders did not fully understand the importance of having an effective youth and young adult ministry. Their inability to be open-minded about one of the most critical ministries in the church demonstrated their lack of commitment to addressing the needs of the youth and young adult ministry by attempting a meaningful act of change to produce positive results.

The response to the second question also revealed a lack of understanding as well because the reply was focused on church growth rather than viewing the purpose of the partnership as a means of being actively engaged in outreach within the community, which was something that the church had rarely performed before the election of this pastor. Instead of having an open-minded response, the reply to this question was over the concern of having to designate someone to monitor the children and teenagers from 4:30 PM to 7:00 PM, Monday through Thursday. This unpleasant reality is why Wimberly states that "If the church is to connect with today's youth, we must be ready to make high-tech connections."⁷⁹ However, not all of the leaders shared this mentality because to the third question, one leader responded by saying that this partnership would allow the church to have an opportunity to form relationships with new families constructively and

⁷⁹ Wimberly, *Youth Ministry in the Black Church*, 133.

openly in a social manner by assisting their children through tutoring and providing teenagers whose parents may not be able to afford internet services a chance to develop professional skills and online access for their educational pursuits. The previous teaching of this pastor was beginning to manifest itself in the mind of others.

Concerning the responses to questions four and five, the reply from the deacon ministry leader was that the church has a website, which was developed under the leadership of this pastor after three lengthy church meetings. However, although a church website has been created, not many members have been accessing it because many of them are older and getting online is not something they regularly do. Also, the website did not say much about the youth ministry because of the inactive status of the youth and young adult ministry. Nevertheless, the church and youth ministry could benefit significantly from the website because on it can be placed the youth activities and events, the youth and young adult ministry schedule, the youth ministry leadership team, links to newsletters, pictures of the youth, and an online form for parents, members, guests, and visitors to provide feedback.⁸⁰ Outside of the website, Promiseland Community Church now has a social media presence that allows the church to network socially by advertising, promoting the church and youth activities, recording services, and other functions intended to portray the church as a place that is inclusive, loving, and Christ-centered. After the reply from the deacon ministry leader, a conversation was discussed about the intent to add projection screens in the sanctuary as well as in the three youth classrooms and fellowship hall to enhance the Sunday morning worship setting and modernize the church's approach to ministry in a way that catches the attention of members, guests, and visitors.

Based on the demographics of Promiseland and the way that some local churches have trended, technology has been a valuable tool for connecting with the youth and young adults. Two

⁸⁰ Wimberly, *Youth Ministry in the Black Church*, 138.

local churches have emphasized implementing technology to increase youth and young adult participation in the church. At Grace Church in Hunter Haven, the leadership utilized social media to successfully interact with the youth and young adults by creating a Facebook page that allowed the youth to be involved through ZOOM meetings.⁸¹ Also, through social media, these youth groups promoted their activities and highlighted their curriculum by sharing it with their friends.

According to Grace Church's current pastor, this single implementation led to increased membership support and parental involvement in the youth and young adult ministry. Hopewell Ministries which had an inactive youth ministry also saw an improvement in the youth's response.⁸² Their approach to this participation problem caused them to reevaluate their youth ministry by polling the congregation about the use of technology. Social media was already an element of their web design for their ministry context, but it was not used in conjunction with the youth and young adult ministry. After Hopewell's pastor decided to hire a youth pastor, the youth pastor challenged the parents in a contest to create a youth ministry page attached to the church's website. After the winner was announced and the youth projects and events were shared on social media and in the community, the youth ministry began to improve attendance and participation, leading to youth ministry growth.

As stated in response to the fourth question, outside of the church website, the church's only social media platform currently being used was Facebook. Since more and more youth are magnetized to social media and even though social media changes as often as technology changes, the church, and the leadership had to understand that despite how they felt about social media personally, the reality was that youth and young people of today are using it not only to stay

⁸¹ Grace Church is not the actual name of the church.

⁸² Hopewell Ministries is not the actual name of the church.

connected with the church, but they are also using social media to stay connected to one another.⁸³ Not only that, but because the youth ministry leader vacancy was announced on the church's Facebook page recently, two potential candidates have inquired, and interviews are pending as a result.

As the guest pastor asked the sixth and final question, this student decided to address the question from the church's standpoint, first understanding the importance of incorporating the resource of technology into the daily functioning of the church to establish relationships. Some of the members of Promiseland Community Church have yet to fully understand the positive dimensions of having online aspects of the church geared toward attracting the younger crowd by enhancing the worship experience, which was why they wished to create a website. However, due to the economic struggles of some black families, internet access can be difficult. Therefore, the church should be familiar with modern technology to build relationships. Brain states that "within the context of those of the digital generation, an adequate theology of the transmission of faith must have an explicit place for their family and friends."⁸⁴ In response to Brain's assessment, Promiseland is now beginning to experience more youth and adult engagement now that the church webpage has been created. Now that the website is up and functioning, the second phase of having the media ministry develop youth and young adult pages that outline the youth ministry's mission, purpose, and function can be implemented. Also, on October 5, 2019, from 8 AM to 12 PM, a representative from a local church media resource company used Promiseland Community Church as a host site to teach surrounding churches about using technology in worship, outreach, and in various ministries in a manner that would enhance the church and expand the overall methods in which the church could better serve the community.

⁸³ Zirschky, *Beyond the Screen*, 14.

⁸⁴ Brain, "Offering Faith to Youth in a Digital World," 111.

This literature review was used to help discover an underlying problem that existed at this church that many of the authors and scholars did not elaborate a great deal on that is also connected to the issue of the inactivity of the youth and young adult ministry. This discovery has to do with the reality that Promiseland Community Church comprises middle-aged to much older members who have never really experienced an impactful relationship with young people. This researcher and his wife and kids, along with four other couples, are the only members who are consistent enough to be considered and associated with those who share a positive attitude and are encouraged with what the future holds for the youth and young adult ministry. Unfortunately, since these members are much older, they have developed a view that they feel they have nothing significant to offer young people. This attitude caused them to behave in a way that made the youth feel unwelcome, unwanted, and unappreciated. After a while, they ultimately left the church because of the barriers created by those who did not believe that young people were a priority in this church.

Theological Foundations

As stated earlier in chapter one, the rationale for this assignment is relationship building due to the inactivity of the youth and young adults. This rationale needed to be restated because the God of all creation is a relational God who seeks intimacy with His creation consistently through the lens of love (Matt 22:37-40). There must also be a foundation of faith established through regular worship, meditation, and scriptural study gleaned from a disciplined lifestyle. Finally, this type of lifestyle must be predicated on being a learner of the Lord Jesus Christ and following His example (Rom 8:38-39), ultimately leading to excellent levels of fellowship and relationship.⁸⁵ Even though Promiseland Community Church has progressed within the past five years, more

⁸⁵ Fiscus and Caro, *Smaller Church Youth Ministry*, 118.

spiritual progress needs to be made (Rev 3:8). According to Revelation 3:15-18, whenever a church is spiritually stagnated, it describes a lukewarm church. Therefore, a biblical examination is necessary when considering the theological foundations for this study. This faith foundation also must be followed up by a belief that with the help of God and the assistance of the Holy Spirit, great things will eventually happen in this youth and young adult ministry that will create an atmosphere enhanced by God's presence.⁸⁶ Paul wanted Timothy to understand that growing in faith was a discipline (I Tim 4:7). As the church focuses on the spiritual formation of the youth, the church has discovered through research that small group Bible studies will aid in the naturalization of the fear and identity crisis that most children have regarding reading out loud, praying out loud, and being more assertive in their approach to open up publically about where they are spiritually in their walk with God.⁸⁷ This spiritual foundation and development hinges on two biblical themes of interest to young people: love and trust.

Love

Since love is a part of God's divine character (I John 4:8), this characteristic should also be descriptive of men, women, and children who profess hope in Him today. The Bible reveals God's love in ways that should inspire Christians to pattern His love by the way they treat one another and their children. For example, in the Gospel of Luke, as the prodigal son returned home to his father, after realizing how irresponsible he was, he was lovingly and joyfully received (Luke 15:11-32). The ensuing celebration that occurred demonstrated the reaction that the church should have in response to the involvement of young people who want to connect with the church. This spirit of love should also be visible in the home. The Apostle Paul discusses this topic in his letter

⁸⁶ Fiscus and Caro, *Smaller Church Youth Ministry*, 118.

⁸⁷ Kara E. Powell, Brad M. Griffin, and Cheryl A. Crawford, *Sticky Faith: Practical Ideas to Nurture Long-term Faith in Teenagers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 51.

to the Colossians as he encourages husbands, wives, and children to be guided by love so that the home life will be pleasing in the sight of God (Col 3:17-21). This theological foundation is critical to the success of young black youth in the community where Promiseland Community Church is located because young people need to be loved in ways that lead them to have hope for a positive future. To this point, Foster states that "a primary goal of the church's ministry to black youth must be to connect them to a viable future. This problem can only be solved after an incisive analysis of the problems they face and an identification of the quicksand and landmines they confront as they move from early childhood through adolescence."⁸⁸

This entire project can only be successful if genuine love rests on the hearts and minds of everyone involved in the youth ministry and if the church leaders and members can be trusted. From a theological perspective, the results of this research have led to the discovery that young people are concerned about being loved and being able to trust other believers and church leaders.⁸⁹ The theme of love is echoed throughout scripture, from God creating humanity in the Garden of Eden to God sending His Son Jesus Christ to rescue, restore, and redeem humanity from the power, penalty, and ultimately the presence of sin, all the way to Calvary's cross. Since love was a central theme in the teachings of Jesus (Matt 22:37, 39), this biblical theme should also be a significant part of the curriculum that will be focused on the centrality of love for the youth and young adult ministry. Lessons about love can help stem the participation problem by creating avenues in which young people can feel accepted rather than rejected, just as God selflessly loves His creation. In John Chapter 13, Jesus told His disciples, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (v. 34). Just as this

⁸⁸ Foster and Shockley, *Working with Black Youth*, 48.

⁸⁹ Foster and Shockley, *Working with Black Youth*, 35.

scripture is applied individually, it can also be used collectively to a church setting because the same way that Christ demonstrated His love should be the same way the church should show its love for children.

Trust

The theme of trust is another theological issue that plays a role in the youth and young adult ministry. Rather than discussing faith, young people are more prone to relate to the word "trust" instead. Kara Powell, Brad Griffin, and Cheryl Crawford address this theme as they state that, in Galatians 5:5, the Greek word translated as faith is *pisteuo*.⁹⁰ This word is used throughout the New Testament and can be translated as four different but closely related words: faith, belief, confidence, or trust.⁹¹ Suppose there is a lack of trust from the youth toward the church leaders. In that case, the youth and young adult ministry will never materialize into an effective ministry that seeks to grow young disciples while meeting the needs of others.

Trust was also an issue when the youth and young adults were not on the same page. There were times when the youth had reservations about the intentions of the adults because they did not clearly understand the ministry concepts associated with being in the young ministry. These reservations were a result of the children not understanding instruction from the ministry leader. In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus encountered this problem as those who were listening to Him did not fully comprehend His teaching (Matt 11:16-19). These misunderstandings often led to differences of opinion between the youth ministry leader and the teen small group leaders because their trust was diminished. Youth must understand that their trust should always be God-centered because the element of faith should always begin and end with God (Prov 3:1-5).

⁹⁰ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 512.

⁹¹ Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 35.

Parental Initiative

Parents must understand that words do matter concerning parental involvement is a part of the theological foundation. Therefore, as the church ministered to them, it became the church's responsibility to instruct the parents about the power of the tongue (Jas 3:10).⁹² Verbal connections are equally as crucial as social connections. Another aspect that must be taken into consideration is that when a child abandons their faith, it becomes an incredible frustration to the parent, especially to those who did attempt to lead their children down the right paths in life (Prov 22:6). Parental involvement plays a significant role in the home life, as favoritism, heated disagreements, and sibling rivalries are all issues in which the Bible can provide directional clarity. For example, Moses writes in Genesis that there was friction in the home of Rebekah and Isaac over their two sons as Rebekah loved Jacob, but Isaac loved Esau (Gen 25:21-34). This favoritism is what led to the unity in the family being separated. This same separation continued to create friction within the home life today as parents often treat their children in ways that appear partial.

Another responsibility that the parents must undertake in making the youth and young adult ministry at this church active and successful is learning to apply the teachings of Deuteronomy 6 and Ephesians 5 and 6. In Deuteronomy 6, parents are admonished to teach their children in such a way that they do not deviate from showing reverence to God and keeping His commandments which is a task that many families are failing to include on their parental agenda for rearing their children, which is critical to the young black youth understanding their heritage.⁹³ Cameron Cole mentions that the verbs "teach" and "talk" (Deut 6:7) carries the force of the commands to the

⁹² Burns, *Doing Life with Your Adult Children*, 45.

⁹³ Foster and Shockley, *Working with Black Youth*, 64.

parents not to tell their children about the Lord merely but to deliberately structure their family life around worship so that the Lord's management would be engraved on their children's hearts.⁹⁴ The authors also mention the Apostle Paul's epistle to the believers at Ephesus outlines the general family structure by explaining that the family should always be a reflection of God's fatherly love being put on display because the family should reflect the gospel to children.⁹⁵

Fernando Arzola and Brain Cosby remind the church that, “in Deuteronomy 6, God commands the older generation of grandparents, parents, and the faith community as a whole to exercise generational discipleship by example and diligent instruction, and not to delegate this role to anyone else.”⁹⁶ By highlighting Deuteronomy 6, the authors refer to this concept as D6, which portrays God's plan for generational discipleship that includes the home and the church because the reality is, it all starts at home.⁹⁷ This concept or model suggests that the youth ministry must work in an inclusive environment with other church ministries to the extent that a robust and unified foundation is developed for the benefit of growing young disciples for Christ. Regarding this youth discipleship concept by Arzola and Cosby, creating an environment in the church where young people feel accepted, embraced, and welcomed begins when adults have realized the role that God has for young people and when young leaders emerge as young disciples who are willing to learn (1 Tim 4:12).

⁹⁴ Cameron Cole and Jon Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry: A Practical Guide* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 92.

⁹⁵ Cole and Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 92.

⁹⁶ Arzola, Cosby, and Hunter, *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*, 148.

⁹⁷ Arzola, Cosby, and Hunter, *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*, 148.

Preaching and Teaching

As with every ministry within the context of the church, the preaching and teaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ are paramount, especially in the case with the youth and young adult ministry. The theology of the youth ministry, according to Foster, involves a three-fold task. First, it determines the essentials of the Christian faith. Second, it teaches and explains the meaning and requirements of the Christian faith. Third, it differentiates a first century world view from the current contemporary world view.⁹⁸ As children mature and grow older, if there is a lack of consistent sound biblical teaching at church and if there is a void in their spiritual relationship with their parents, they will drift away from the church slowly.⁹⁹

Theoretical Foundations

The question, “can the black church live again?” was asked in the previous section of this thesis project as it coincides with the actual reason for this research. To this question, Joel C. Gregory writes:

Where is the obituary? I do not know any organization in America today that has the vitality of the black church. Lodges are dying, civic clubs are filled with octogenarians, volunteer organizations are languishing, and even the academy has to prove the worth of a degree. The government is divided, the schoolroom has become a war zone, mainline denominations are staggering, and evangelical megachurch juggernauts show signs of lagging. Yet, above all this entropy stands one institution that is more vital than ever: the praising, preaching, and empowering black church.¹⁰⁰

Black youth are indeed affected by the issues that trouble black churches. Anyabwile believes that the one thing that can rejuvenate black youth and young adult ministries across

⁹⁸ Foster and Shockley, *Working with Black Youth*, 56.

⁹⁹ Fernando Arzola and Brian Cosby and Ron Hunter, *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century: Five Views* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 149.

¹⁰⁰ Joel C. Gregory, "The Black Church: Alive and Well," Huffington Post, (May 5, 2010), Accessed January 30, 2020, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-black-church-alive-an_b_565411.

America is disciplined studies in the scriptures. He compares inactive youth ministries and the black church to the dry bones of Ezekiel's vision in Ezekiel 37.¹⁰¹ Although Promiseland Community Church was not dead, it was not spiritually healthy either.¹⁰² This unhealthy condition could only be remedied by God and a unified dedication to finding a solution to this youth and young adult problem plaguing the church. Just as the circumstances had to change in the valley of dry bones, the direction of the youth ministry at Promiseland must change as well. In other words, there had to be an inward focus on oneself before there could be an outward focus on everyone and everything else. As a result of this unhealthy condition disrupting the church's positive potential, the youth ministry went from being semi-active to completely inactive as more and more time passed. For this reason, this section of this research will seek to provide the reader with an awareness of what others have said and discovered about this lack of participation problem in the church.

In his attempt to answer questions relevant to this inactivity problem in many churches today, Anyabwile draws from his personal experiences in the church that he once attended in his youth. After studying the trends and patterns of black youth, he discovered the churches that had the most success in retaining the youth were churches that emphasized preaching, teaching, and discipleship training.¹⁰³ In his approach, he addresses this problem holistically by discussing slavery and its lingering generational impact on the black church. He states that as illiterate people (slaves) encountered the Holy Scriptures, their illiteracy was forced upon them through the cruel oppressions of slavery and self-interested slave owners who often used the Bible to justify

¹⁰¹ Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*, 5.

¹⁰² Information taken from a church evaluation conducted by the membership of the Paradise Baptist Church in 2017, as eighty percent of the church indicated that the church was currently healthy due to a lack of ministry support and the inactivity of the youth and young adult ministry.

¹⁰³ Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*, 20.

their enslavement of Africans.¹⁰⁴

Older black churches in the South with similar demographics as Promiseland that have been in existence for 100 years or more are made up of members who experienced some of the horrors of Jim Crow and still show mental scars that cause the youth to feel alienated and isolated. This alienation and isolation eventually lead to the child becoming uninterested in the church's functioning. The older members want the youth to sit in silence as they were forced to do so many years prior. In her interview with the pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, Barnes is given a solution to this isolation problem. At this church, the concept of being village-minded is what allowed the church to overcome the inactivity of the youth and young adults that it experienced in two years.¹⁰⁵ This concept of being village-minded reflects the belief and behavior of a community of compassionate, committed, and prepared adults, including parents, extended family, educators, other caregivers, and community allies who are all willing to put the needs of the youth at the forefront of the church.¹⁰⁶ The research of Barnes also caused her to recognize the ongoing influence contemporary black churches have had on the lives of black youth and young adults.¹⁰⁷ Just as parents provide loving care for their children, it is also true that it takes a caring and compassionate church to create an atmosphere where young people feel welcomed, included, and accepted.

The results of the research conducted by Barnes and Wimberly suggest that "black churches that cultivate nurturing, supportive environments for youth and provide a variety of

¹⁰⁴ Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church*, 17.

¹⁰⁵ Sandra L. Barnes and Anne Streaty Wimberly, *Empowering Black Youth of Promise: Education and Socialization in the Village-minded Black Church* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 3.

¹⁰⁶ Barnes and Wimberly, *Empowering Black Youth of Promise*, 3.

¹⁰⁷ Barnes and Wimberly, *Empowering Black Youth of Promise*, 3.

programs to educate and socialize them more broadly demonstrate both village-mindedness and child-centeredness. In other words, black churches that can attract and retain youth are considered alive, growing, and vibrant."¹⁰⁸ They also state that black youth who participate in church-sponsored programs are more apt to regularly attend church and say they enjoy it, believe that their lives are better for it, and have increased odds of high school completion and college enrollment.¹⁰⁹ Baptists have an excellent history of youth and young adult involvement in the church compared to other denominations. The following table shows the results of Barnes and Wimberly's study.¹¹⁰

Table 4: Black Church Youth Programs By Denomination

| Denomination | Average # youth programs | Average # youth in Sunday School | Average # youth in Bible Study | # Churches without any youth programs |
|--------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| AME | 4 | 36 | 24 | 8 |
| AMEZ | 3 | 28 | 11 | 7 |
| Baptist | 5 | 66 | 41 | 14 |
| COGIC | 4 | 54 | 35 | 14 |
| CME | 3 | 21 | 13 | 14 |
| Presbyterian | 3 | 21 | 10 | 9 |
| UM | 2 | 25 | 16 | 35 |
| Lutheran | 4 | 27 | 15 | 19 |
| Total | | | | 120 |

This research has revealed that it is critical for black churches to incorporate lively programs for the youth that are designed to create and foster relationships that will continue to develop as the participation of the youth and young adults increase. For this reason, Foster and Shockley both discuss how gospel-centered churches can weather the storms of the mass youth exodus that many black churches have experienced in the past 20 years. They also discuss that

¹⁰⁸ Barnes and Wimberly, *Empowering Black Youth of Promise*, 31.

¹⁰⁹ Barnes and Wimberly, *Empowering Black Youth of Promise*, 33.

¹¹⁰ The results of this study taken in March of 2012 were based on surveying churches with an enrollment of 250 or less.

by allowing the youth to take ownership of the ministries, they believe that ownership will result in accountability. The level of responsibility they mention reflects an inclusive church family life, which is why they state that the survival of America's black youth depends on the protection of the extended family and the bridging of the boundaries of class and caste.¹¹¹

From the results of the studies that have been mentioned thus far, Promiseland Community Church will continue to attempt to reach out to the youth in meaningful ways that will ultimately lead to effective, long-lasting relationships. First, however, the church must be prepared for the challenges that the youth and young adult ministry will face as progress is made. Therefore, having a firm spiritual foundation will be necessary for the youth and young adult ministry to be effective in its attempt to combat these challenges. For example, many young people openly express hesitation about God based on the social negativity and suffering they witness in the world today.¹¹² Teenagers can lack an accurate understanding of the source of truth, which is why Genesis 3 is so important to the spiritual formation of young people.¹¹³ Many of today's youth have an inaccurate understanding of the source of truth, but they also have a false view of themselves, which leads to having a wrong idea of God.¹¹⁴

To correct this false view, the current youth and young adults would need to understand through the means of initiation, identifying, and invasion as Jesus did in John 4 with the Samaritan woman. Initiation refers to initiating the contact to connect and communicate. Identifying means having the ability to identify with the needs of others, and invasion means allowing God to invade the reins of one's heart for transformation and spiritual formation. Based on previous research and

¹¹¹ Foster and Shockley, *Working with Black Youth*, 83.

¹¹² Cole and Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 27.

¹¹³ Cole and Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 27.

¹¹⁴ Cole and Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 29.

studies by Anyabwile, Barnes and Wimberly, and Foster and Shockley, this thesis has attempted to address the lack of participation problem black churches are having so that the youth and young adult ministries can ultimately move beyond the level of irrelevancy that they have experienced for years. Considering what has been attempted by others of this problem, this student has come to realize that because people are different and that people respond differently, the methods and means that were developed by others may or may not fit the dynamics of Promiseland due to various personnel and system factors.

Chapter 3: Methodology

It is no secret that having an active youth and young adult ministry is an essential aspect of the local church, being that every church is constantly aging. Therefore, the connection between the youth and the adults must be maintained through in-reach and outreach activities. Evangelism, discipleship, and training are the elements that will ensure the youth and young adult ministry will transition from being inactive to one that will function effectively within the context of the church. Although the youth and young adult ministry are currently idle in Promiseland Community Church, steps will be taken to address this participation problem systematically. This phased approach will be based on the cohesion of the church leaders, ministry leaders, youth ministry volunteers, church members, and parents, and their ability to view this youth and young adult inactivity problem as a chance to compel the parents to support what the youth ministry has to offer. The phased approach to address the youth and young adult ministry was accomplished in three phases: belonging, learning, and developing.

The first phase of this approach took place at Promiseland Community Church in February of 2020 before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This belonging phase began as the church leaders and members became intentional to create a welcoming environment where the youth and young adults had a sense of involvement. This phase included the youth and young adults pairing up with three adult members to develop a small group. As the groundbreaking phase, the adults were able to interact with the youth on personal levels that enabled them to reach the youth spiritually, making a significant difference in how the youth began to view the church. The learning phase was like the belonging phase as both were reduced to small groups. However, the difference between both phases was the learning phase gave the youth and young adults

opportunities to be engaged with the adults in a learning setting. This experience was also helpful to the adult members who were willing to share with the youth in a meaningful way. The adult instruction was designed to be implemented for this phase, but also created avenues for which the adult members could reach their parents to develop a line of open communication with them. In the developing phase, the youth and young adults were mentored by local police officers who were asked to participate in an extensive big brother/big sister campaign on Saturday mornings via Zoom meetings due to COVID. They were also collectively taught by the pastor via Zoom meetings on social issues relevant to their current environment that ranged from the Black Lives Matter movement of the matters with social injustices and open discussions about racism and its history in America.

The purpose of this phased approach was to create an environment in Promiseland where critical thinking enabled the church leaders, ministry leaders, youth ministry volunteers, church members, and parents to reason about the structure of a youth ministry that connects, grows, and serves. It would grow into youth and young adult ministry that would connect with the other ministries in the church and with the church members by extending horizontally (with God) and vertically (with others). It has also become a youth and young adult ministry that has served to reflect humility and gratitude. This intervention process has been developed to address the needs of Paradise by creating opportunities for church leaders, ministry leaders, youth ministry volunteers, church members, and parents to work together in harmony and unity.

Intervention Design

The objective for this intervention process is to ultimately provide youth and young adult ministry at the Promiseland Community Church that is attractive and God-honoring. Therefore, this process will consist of three ten-question pastoral interviews, a fourteen-question church

member survey, followed by a nine-question church member interview. As this intervention process progresses, there will be a one-month leadership training session taught in four weeks and followed up by a three-month leadership training session. There will then be four-planned leadership meetings. The final element of this intervention process will be an eight-week Bible study curriculum designed to develop a unified approach to addressing this inactivity problem with youth and young adults.

The other objective of this intervention process will be that this lack of participation problem will become less and less relevant as each segment is accomplished. This objective will be performed by addressing the leadership issues that have led to the inactivity of the youth and young adult ministry and the poor attendance of young people. In addition, since many of the members have publicly and privately stated that the lack of teaching and training has contributed to this participation problem, this intervention process will include several combined and congruent weeks of study designed to address the youth ministry's directional aspects. This intervention will be initiated by discussing the philosophy of youth ministry and the philosophy of leadership during the church member survey process because people need to know why they do what they do.¹¹⁵

Pastoral Interviews

This researcher believes that analyzing models from other churches can be beneficial for this youth and young adult ministry problem to be addressed effectively. Therefore, these pastoral interviews were administered with seasoned pastors who led their perspective churches for at least fifteen years. With time, these pastors addressed this lack of participation problem in the youth ministry by developing practical approaches that led to positive outcomes for the youth ministry and the churches where they served. Therefore, these interviews served as a means of helping this

¹¹⁵ Work and Olson, *Youth Ministry Management Tools*, 12.

research arrive at a reasonable conclusion that seeks to solve this problem at Promiseland Community Church. Also, being that this problem is universal, this course of action can be taken by other churches as well. These three interviews consisted of 10 questions, and each interview was independent of the other and was scheduled to last up to two hours each. The following were the questions that were asked during each pastoral interview.

1. How were you able to keep parents actively engaged in the youth ministry?
2. What are some of the methods you incorporated into the youth ministry that were successful in their implementation?
3. What were some of the hindrances that you/the church experienced while implementing these methodologies?
4. How would you rate the overall success of the current youth ministry?
5. Were the youth and young adults excited and eager to learn in terms of the curriculum?
6. What has been the relationship between the senior pastor and the youth pastor/youth ministry leader?
7. How long did it take for you to convince the church leadership to "buy in" to your vision for the youth ministry?
8. What are the current demographics of the youth ministry?
9. How often does the youth ministry function within the immediate community with regards to outreach?
10. How receptive are the current members toward the involvement of the youth and young adults in the worship services?

Church Member Surveys

This intervention method is critical because it incorporated the involvement and participation of the current membership in a practical way. This dialogue that was created allowed for both sides to offer input and to listen.¹¹⁶ Those who participated were subjected to an evaluation process. They were required to answer and sign off on fourteen questions that pertained to the youth ministry at Promiseland Community Church. These surveys asked specific questions geared toward engaging the church to develop a practical solution to the lack of participation problem with the youth and young adults. Once the questions were answered, it gave the leadership an indication of who wanted the youth and young adult ministry to be successful. This

¹¹⁶ Powe, *New Wine new Wine Skins*, 53.

aspect of the intervention process was to help the members change their view of the youth and young adult ministry because the past perception was unclear. The budget reflected this issue, as well as the annual event planning and the daily functioning of the church. The two outcomes of these church surveys were aimed at redirecting the members' focus and getting them to understand the spiritual significance of having and maintaining an effective youth and young adult ministry.

The questions are as follows:

1. How important do you feel the youth and young adult ministry is to the church's overall mission?
2. How has the church demonstrated that it is concerned about young people?
3. How often are the youth invited or asked to participate in the Sunday morning worship experience?
4. What are the benefits of having a thriving youth ministry?
5. How do the youth leaders interact with the church leaders and vice versa?
6. How often is the pastor acknowledged and recognized youth and young adults?
7. What do you understand the role of the youth ministry leader to be?
8. What is your relationship with the youth that you are not related to?
9. What is your expectation of the youth and young adult ministry?
10. Since the decline of the youth and young adult ministry, what has been your input regarding this issue?
11. What are your suggestions and recommendations to address this problem in a way that leads to relationship building?
12. When considering the church budget, are the youth and young adult ministry a focus?
13. In your opinion, what are the contributing factors that have led to the decline of the youth ministry?
14. What are your views concerning the curriculum for the youth and young adults?

After making an announcement four weeks prior, this researcher shared these fourteen proposed survey questions with the church after a Sunday morning worship service. Each member was given the survey handout. At this time, the pastor thoroughly explained the reason, importance, purpose, and expected outcome of the evaluation. To highlight transparency and promote unity, the *reason* for the surveys was to give the church members a sense of involvement. The surveys were vital because they initially set the stage for the adults and seasoned members to consider the actual purpose of the youth and young adult ministry. Regarding the *purpose* and

expected outcome, the surveys were stepping stones to the overall solution as the member's participation was to foster a sense of concern. These surveys led to a different perspective and outlook for the youth ministry, which is why the expected outcome hinged on the support and involvement of the leadership and membership. As the pastor, this researcher intended to entertain any questions that may have surfaced and any concerns that may have developed because of these fourteen questions.

This researcher believed that a sufficient time for a starting point for the church member surveys at Promiseland Community Church would be during the first quarter of 2020. After researching other sources as discussed in chapter two, enough data was gathered to assist in developing a plan that was suitable for Promiseland Community Church. Each member had two weeks to respond to the fourteen-question survey. Upon their receipt, the leadership and the pastor reviewed the responses and began the follow-up process based on the content of the individual responses. The follow-up process involved three categories: relational, educational, and recreational. For example, if one of the responses addressed how the church interacted with the current youth and young adults, then that question would have been placed in the relational category. The responses determined the specific need that each member had and their opinion as to how that need could be addressed. Once the leadership completed the survey follow-up process, the church leaders and the pastor began interviewing members who no longer brought their children to church due to the inactivity of the youth and young adult ministry.

Church Member Interviews

The nine-question church member interviews were limited to one-hour sessions at Promiseland Community Church and consisted of the leaders acknowledging the youth and young adult ministry problem. These interviews also covered questions of the youth ministry's inability to

develop into a vibrant and robust ministry and seek to establish a cohesive relationship with the members and leaders of the church. These interviews created opportunities for the church to build a relationship and partnership with the youth through the parents by demonstrating ownership of the problem. They also presented a systematic plan for regaining the parent's confidence that the church is concerned about meeting youth and young adults' spiritual and social needs. These interviews also served as a measuring rod to determine if the church was trending in a direction that would produce young leaders who can be guided and are willing to be committed to serving as well.¹¹⁷ Since creating a feeling of inclusion was the priority, the idea of partnership was to prove to the parents and the young adults that their voice and presence matter in the church.¹¹⁸ The other goal of these interviews was to explain the purpose and present the vision and mission statements to the parents, and they are as follows:

Purpose: The purpose of the youth and young adult ministry at Promiseland Community Church is to provide opportunities for young people to grow and live out their faith in Jesus Christ by serving Him, worshipping Him, and making Him known to others.

Vision: The vision of the youth and young adult ministry is to minister to the needs of the youth in ways that are meaningful and relevant and to seek to establish a partnership that allows the youth to feel welcomed to express their faith.

Mission: The mission of the youth and young adult ministry entails developing young people into disciples for Christ through preaching, teaching, training, and outreach in a way that reflects the character of Christ.

The following are the church member interview questions that will be asked to each member/parent:

1. What is your current view of the youth and young adult ministry?
2. In terms of communication, what do you believe are essential elements to building a lasting partnership with the youth and young adults?
3. In your opinion, where has the church failed to develop programs that are designed to educate the youth?

¹¹⁷Everett Fritz, *The Art of Forming Young Disciples: Why Youth Ministries aren't working and what to do about it* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2018), 40.

¹¹⁸ Fritz, *The Art of Forming Young Disciples*, 14.

4. What were the issues in the church that led you to bring your child/children to church no longer?
5. If asked, would you consider volunteering to assist the youth ministry workers and worship team?
6. How would you describe your child's relationship with the other church youth?
7. In what ways can the youth ministry serve you and your family?
8. Outside of the church environment/setting, how can the youth and young adult ministry become more active socially?
9. What are your views concerning the visibility of the youth during Sunday morning worship?

One-Month Leadership Training Increment

The follow-up phase of the church member interviews encompassed the church leaders and the pastor gathering for a four-week study increment. This study aimed to promote the youth ministry and stress the need for an active ministry that is God-honoring. The objective was to move the church from complacency to develop a sense of ownership of the problem and assist in providing a solution. The weekly training increments were divided into five pillars and were scheduled each Saturday morning with a one-hour timeframe, with pillars four and five being taught in week four. These increments were based upon Chapter 7 of *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*.¹¹⁹ There are five pillars that the author discusses as it relates to having a biblical perspective of the youth ministry, and they are as follows:

1. Pillar #1 Gospel Centrality
2. Pillar #2 Theological Depth Through Expository, Biblical Preaching
3. Pillar #3 Relational Discipleship
4. Pillar #4 Partnership With Parents
5. Pillar #5 Intergenerational Integration

Three-month Leadership Training Increment

The one-month leadership training increment for the church leaders is designed to be a precursor to another training increment that will involve both the church leadership team and the

¹¹⁹ Michael McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry: Teenagers in the life of the Church* (Nashville: Randlehouse, 2019), 129.

youth leadership team. This second increment will explain the purpose of the youth ministry in terms of ministry functioning and overall church growth. This second increment will be necessary so that the perception of the youth and young adult ministry can be changed. This second session training increment will cover three months, covering each lesson within one month. A successful outcome of this training increment will be the consistent demonstration of the church leaders interacting with the youth and young adult leaders and developing an intentional approach to recognizing the worth of the youth and young adults by investing in their schedule to be productive. In addition, these increments will explain how and why the youth are needed and valued in the church. This increment will also serve as a tool to assist the church with accomplishing the Great Commission. The lessons are as follows:

1. The biblical perspective of the youth ministry.
2. The church, the youth, and the community.
3. The relationship and fellowship of the church and the youth.

Four Planned Leadership Meetings

Another integral aspect of this intervention process will be the church leaders and the ministry leaders' willingness to work together. Not only is teamwork critical for the success of the youth and young adult ministry, but it is also critical for the overall health of Promiseland Community Church. To this end, the pastor will schedule four planned leadership meetings with the deacons to strategize and discuss a plan for creating an atmosphere within the church that is attractive to the parents and the youth. The purpose of these meetings will be to evaluate the responses from the church member surveys, the church member interviews, and the results from the previous training increments so that the church leaders and the ministry leaders can approach the youth ministry with the same objectives mind. These four planned leadership meetings will also connect with an eight-week bible study lesson series to develop a unified approach to

addressing this youth ministry problem. Each of the scheduled meetings will be held at Promiseland Community Church inside the fellowship hall on Friday evenings, and they will be scheduled to last no longer than two hours. The pastor will oversee each meeting, and a designated deacon will be asked to maintain the minutes from the forum for record-keeping purposes.

Planned Leadership Meeting I

As the evaluation is conducted of the responses and results from the church members, each deacon will be assigned two separate parents from different homes for establishing a personal relationship with the youth through the parent's connection. This evaluation will be followed up with a forty-five-minute open dialogue for any questions or comments from the deacons. The following will be the agenda for the first planned meeting:

1. Scripture and prayer
2. Opening comments
3. Review of responses and results
4. Assign deacons to parents
5. Assign categories for research
6. Open dialogue
7. Closing prayer

This meeting will be critical to the success of this intervention process because the need for follow-up will hinge upon how well the leadership assesses the responses and results from the members. The leaders will also need to properly categorize these responses to strategize a plan for the youth and young adults. Finally, this attempt will be accomplished in a way that builds a lasting relationship spiritually and socially so that a bridge can be developed between the home and the church.

Planned Leadership Meeting II

Unlike the first meeting, this meeting will primarily cover two areas. In the first hour, the results gathered from the deacon/parent partnership and a discussion of the responses and results

from the members will take place. Then, in the second hour, the meeting will cover the development of a curriculum that will be specifically tailored to motivate and excite the youth and young adults by utilizing youth teachers who can relate to the students based on their age, childhood experiences, demographics, and those who have been attending regularly.¹²⁰ The expected goal of this curriculum will be intended to transform the youth ministry into an inclusive ministry as this type and method of teaching will incorporate the home and parents.¹²¹ Since young people are an attachment to the family unit, meeting the entire family's needs becomes just as important as prioritizing the youth. Therefore, the transformation to an inclusive ministry will incorporate the youth volunteer workers developing a strategy that will encompass every aspect of the family while reminding parents of their spiritual obligation to their children. This strategy will require the parents or guardians to participate through in-home lessons for supplemental enrichment. The National Baptist Sunday School Publishing Board will provide these lessons monthly. This second Planned Leadership Meeting will then conclude with an open dialogue in which the church leaders will review any areas of concern and the development of the curriculum and begin to plan for the next meeting. The agenda for this meeting will be as follows:

- I. Scripture and prayer
- II. Opening comments
- III. Deacon/parent partnership update and response and result discussion
- IV. Developing curriculum
- V. Open dialogue
- VI. Closing prayer

Planned Leadership Meeting III and IV

These two meetings will focus on the volunteer youth workers and youth ministry leaders who are already serving and those who have desires to serve. This opportunity will allow for the pastor and deacons to examine the youth leadership while also examining other facets of the youth

¹²⁰ Arzola, Cosby, and Hunter, *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*, 42.

¹²¹ Arzola, Cosby, and Hunter, *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*, 15.

and young adult ministry to obtain any feedback that will allow the ministry to operate and function in a capacity that will generate a high level of excitement and enthusiasm throughout the church. The schedule for both meetings will be as follows:

- I. Scripture and prayer
- II. Opening comments
- III. Youth ministry leader function and role discussion
- IV. Curriculum feedback
- V. Youth activity planning and budgeting
- VI. Open dialogue
- VII. Closing prayer

The need for young people to be understood will be the driving force of these two meetings.¹²² This will present an opportunity for the youth ministry leaders to be vocal about their desires and aspirations for this ministry. Still, it will also help move the church toward giving the youth a greater level of inclusion. From these two meetings, youth ministry leaders will better understand and appreciate their roles and functions in the total church program while also giving input regarding the very ministry they have been allowed to lead. These meetings will be designed to enable the young people to be invested in this ministry through planning and scheduling events and inclusion in the budget forecasting so that they can become compelled to serve.

Eight-Week Bible Study

After the four planned leadership meetings, the final phase of the intervention process will be the implementation of an eight-week Bible study lesson series that will be taught by the pastor each Wednesday evening. These lessons will focus on God's view of the church and God's view of children because the youth and young adult ministry must always remain undergirded by the word of God.¹²³ These lessons are paramount for the success of this ministry, and it will aid in addressing this complex youth ministry problem in a way that will involve everyone playing a role.

¹²² Fritz, *The Art of Forming Young Disciples*, 32.

¹²³ Cole and Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 30.

This study will also provide the members with the biblical and social elements necessary for personal enrichment. Therefore, this researcher will be responsible for leading the membership to a place of mutual understanding about this youth ministry problem that changes minds while motivating individuals to get involved through support and participation. This eight-week bible study lesson series will encompass understanding the purpose, place, priority, functioning, focus, fellowship, witness, and the worship of the youth and young adult ministry and its relation to the gospel.

Understanding the Purpose of the Youth Ministry

This initial lesson will focus on the purpose that the youth ministry has in the daily functioning of the church. The members must come to the reality that young people matter to God and that they have a function in the church as well. This lesson will examine the youth ministry's role in worship, evangelism, outreach, and service. The pastor will begin this lesson by asking the question, "If God were to grade the church on how well you have trained and disciplined young people, would you receive a passing grade?" According to many of the current members, effectively ministering to the needs of the youth and young adults has been absent in Promiseland Community Church for many years. Other areas of the church have been affected as well. Like every other ministry, the youth and young adults cannot properly function without discipleship.¹²⁴

This lesson will also help with the members understanding about the youth's role in worship, evangelism, outreach, and service because as young people are being disciplined by the adults, there should be three priorities in mind: the love of Jesus, the love of others, and the love of mission.¹²⁵ This is why the church must develop a holistic approach to maintaining its youth and

¹²⁴ Sandra L. Barnes and Anne Streaty Wimberly, *Empowering Black Youth of Promise: Education and Socialization in the Village-minded Black Church* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 31.

¹²⁵ Cole and Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 49.

young adult ministry.¹²⁶ The youth being involved in all four of these areas means that the church is following God's plan of exercising its gifts by allowing the youth to participate in the edifying nature of the body of Christ as each ministry has a role and function (Rom 12: 4,5). The youth ministry's role in worship is God's desire to be worshipped by all His creation (Col 1:16).

Understanding the Place of the Youth Ministry

This lesson will be designed to answer the question, where does the youth ministry fit within the church structure? The relevancy of this ministry creates a high level of inclusion for all age groups. As stated in the previous lesson, each ministry has a role and function within the church, and because of this, the church must understand that young people have an integral part in the total church program. The importance of this ministry is its ability to operate within the boundaries of God's Word inside and outside the church through serving in the capacity of a group that understands its place in the makeup of the church. This lesson will also address the youth ministry and the youth ministry leader's ability to lead this ministry in a way that mirrors a pattern of spiritual formation to build a relationship that breeds a level of confidence in God.

Understanding the Priority of the Youth Ministry

In terms of the church setting, the priority of this ministry is discipleship and relationships. Communicating and connecting with the youth in meaningful ways allows them to feel welcomed and a part of a community. This has been the most significant hindrance between the church, leaders, and the youth and young adult ministry team. There has not been much of a priority given to the direction of the youth and young ministry. Because of this gap and lack of understanding by the more seasoned members, the youth ministry has not made any progress. Since the priority of this ministry is discipleship and relationships, there must be a concentrated effort to prioritize this ministry in terms of fiscal spending, event planning, and networking through various planned and

¹²⁶ Cole and Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 33.

scheduled activities such as youth programs, essay contests for scholarships, supporting non-church related events, guest speakers, and black history celebrations.¹²⁷

Understanding the Functioning of the Youth Ministry

The goal of this lesson is to make sure that the church realizes that the youth and young adult ministry is not to be treated as a low-level ministry that only serves to add numbers to the church, but that this is a ministry that is to function daily and weekly by keeping the parents and children involved. This involvement will include serving the parents while serving and training their children. This is to have courses and small groups for parents to learn and implement tools at home that will allow them to lead their children more effectively. The idea of understanding the functioning of the youth ministry means that the church must understand the need for there to be a degree of sacrifice by the church laity and leadership regarding shared responsibility. The youth must be allowed to make mistakes while also being given the necessary time to grow and develop. The Millennials must be entitled to help the youth become the leaders of today and tomorrow.¹²⁸

Understanding the Focus of the Youth Ministry

The fundamental objective of this lesson is to address the necessity of giving the time, resources, and attention to the youth and young adult ministry in a way that breeds a level of excitement throughout the church. This lesson will also review portions of the discourse about understanding the priority of the youth ministry. It will also be based on an accurate theology of the youth and young adult ministry within the local church setting. This will help change the mindset that is more focused on nonessential issues rather than giving them the time, resources, and attention required for an effective youth ministry that is attractive. According to McGarry, "children should be viewed as members in waiting because the biblical witness consistently

¹²⁷ Barnes and Wimberly, *Empowering Black Youth of Promise*, 81.

¹²⁸ Mitchell, *Black Millennials & the Church*, 49.

affirms their value and reflects a shared commitment by the community of faith toward the next generation."¹²⁹

Understanding the Fellowship of the Youth Ministry

This lesson will re-examine lesson three. However, unlike lesson three, this lesson is unique in that it addresses the priority of the relationship between the youth leaders and the church leadership team. The church leadership team will be reminded of the need to serve the church by helping the youth through mentorship roles. In addition, the church will be instructed about the importance of establishing a relationship with the youth that goes beyond Sunday morning to be actively involved and supportive socially. Based on the low attendance on Sunday mornings, it is no surprise that several churches are competing with many other youth programs and activities outside of the church. This is expected since so many youths enjoy sleeping in on Sunday morning. The constant need to fellowship with black youth becomes paramount because many young black boys are susceptible to crime and violence in the surrounding community. At an alarming rate, the black youth are falling victim to parents' bad decisions, a flawed justice system that is operated by injustice, and their own choices to succumb to the negative influences of street life. This fellowship should become a routine aspect of the church for the Glory of God and the benefit of other youth and adults.

Understanding the Witness of the Youth Ministry

This lesson will aim to create awareness of the youth ministry's critical nature with outreach and evangelism. The church is obligated to train the youth and young adults to become excellent recruiters in recruiting other potential young people for discipleship for the advancement of God's kingdom on earth. Like every other ministry within the church, the youth and young adult ministry should have a strong testimony that speaks of their moral and ethical behavior. When this

¹²⁹ McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 56.

critical element is omitted, it lessens the opportunities for outreach and evangelism.¹³⁰ This is why the need for influential youth ministry leaders and workers is essential so that they can help to create situations where the church can incorporate programs that will be designed to properly train and employ the youth and young adults for soul-winning crusades.

Understanding the Worship of the Youth Ministry

To conclude this lesson series, Promiseland Community Church has never fully viewed the youth ministry as a part of the worship program. Therefore, this lesson will be tailored to teach the membership that God desires for all of humanity to worship Him, including children. Arozla, Cosby, and Hunter claim that, "God will continue to make an excellent name for Himself, and he uses the various ministries of the church, including the youth ministry."¹³¹ The members must also understand that children worshipping God goes beyond simply having a Sunday school class or Bible study session, but that their worship should coincide with the adult worship. This final lesson highlights the church's need to be intentionally inclusive in its Sunday morning schedule of activities. The active and ongoing involvement of the youth and young adults will only enhance the church's attempt to praise God sufficiently, but this will require a change in the traditional way worship is conducted to a more blended approach that allows the youth to have a role in the worship service.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

As this research reflects on the reality that this youth ministry problem has existed for well over ten years, a reasonable trial period to evaluate the totality of the intervention process will last no longer than one year. This amount of time will be necessary when considering the dynamics of

¹³⁰ Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside The World of Today's Teenagers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 144.

¹³¹ Arzola, Cosby, and Hunter, *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*, 37.

the members, the results of the surveys, the current climate of the coronavirus (COVID-19), and how well the leadership is consistent in their follow-up with the membership. Due to the nature of this youth ministry problem, the dynamics are critical because this problem has been ongoing for so long. From a pastoral standpoint, a systematic approach that often requires time and patience will benefit this process to yield positive results. Also, because this entire intervention process will be a new experience to a heavily traditional and program-oriented church, issues may surface as this design is implemented. This is one of the underlying issues that this intervention process seeks to expose and address over time.

One of the goals of this implementation process is to assist in the removal of the issues that led to this youth ministry problem. The other goal is to influence the members to view the youth ministry more positively as a sense of ownership is created through communication with the leadership. Also, proper teaching that is relevant to the success of the youth and young adult ministry will allow this implementation process to develop a motivation for change among the members. It must also be stated that from May to August, this student has seen a development within the church body at Promiseland Community Church. Some of the instrumental members in creating this existing problem are now beginning to see the vision that the pastor has been consistently sharing with the church to transform the inactive youth and young adult ministry into a vibrant, attractive, and exciting ministry. However, even though there appears to be moving in the right direction, the implementation of this process is still much needed and necessary. Therefore, within these 12 months, the hope is for a majority of the church members, including the leaders, to feel a sense of investment in the youth and young ministry. This is to be done by understanding that it is not just an inactive youth ministry problem but also a church problem.

The church must also realize that the youth ministry team will need the support and cooperation of the members and parents to move from inactivity to being active in a meaningful way. The results from the pastoral interviews as to what other churches attempted that brought about significant improvement within the ministry will be critical to understanding what will work for Promiseland Community Church. In addition, the church leadership training increments designed to explain the purpose of the youth ministry in terms of ministry functioning and overall church growth will also be vital for setting the course for this youth ministry to become fully functional by the implementation of these results.

Chapter 4: Results

What began in February 2020 with the belonging phase has now resulted in an extensive process of information that has been gathered for 12 months. Along the way, this researcher discovered what it took to make an inactive youth and young adult ministry activities for the glory of God and the good of Promiseland Community Church. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Purpose for this phased approach was to create an environment in Promiseland where critical thinking enabled the church leaders, ministry leaders, youth ministry volunteers, church members, and parents to reason about the structure of a youth ministry that connects, grows, and serves. In this chapter, there will be a discussion and examination of the results of the implementation process and the positive potential that each element would possibly have on the youth and young adult ministry of Promiseland Community Church.

Pastoral Interview Results

Interview One

As stated in the intervention design, this process began with three pastoral interviews of pastors who led churches with similar demographics and addressed the universal challenges that this inactivity problem presented to them in their ministry context. As each pastor was asked the same ten questions, their detailed responses provided a proper course of action for this research project. Again, the questions are as follows:

1. How were you able to keep parents actively engaged in the youth ministry?
2. What are some of the methods you incorporated into the youth ministry that were successful in their implementation?
3. What were some of the hindrances that you/the church experienced while implementing these methodologies?
4. How would you rate the overall success of the current youth ministry?
5. Were the youth and young adults excited and eager to learn in terms of the curriculum?
6. What has been the relationship between the senior pastor and the youth pastor/youth ministry leader?

7. How long did it take for you to convince the church leadership to "buy in" to your vision for the youth ministry?
8. What are the current demographics of the youth ministry?
9. How often does the youth ministry function within the immediate community with regards to outreach?
10. How receptive are the current members toward the involvement of the youth and young adults in the worship services?

Pastor A of church one has been pastoring for over 30 years. According to him, church 1 began to experience problems with inactivity within the youth and young adult ministry in February of 2010 when the youth ministry leader abruptly resigned amid personal problems. As a result of the resignation and the absence of a trained assistant, the youth ministry quickly began to decline due to membership concerns about the direction of the youth ministry. Pastor A decided to meet with the church leadership team to discuss possible solutions. After meeting with the team in March of 2010 and with the entire church, Pastor A decided to implement a progressive plan for the youth ministry. Based on the demographics of church 1, with the youth ministry having about 20 more children and teenagers than Promiseland and its location in the inner-city area, Pastor A organized and launched a youth ministry initiative. This initiative was used to describe the characteristics of the individuals who served as volunteers on the youth and young adult ministry. It was also made up of positive-minded, outgoing, working, encourager oriented, and relational people which is what the acronym P.O.W.E.R stands for.

This initiative allowed the church to maintain an active and ongoing connection with the parents. Because all the parents except for two were members of the church, the pastor was able to keep them engaged by recruiting the parents to become active participants in the youth and young adult ministry by volunteering in various roles. The pastor of church 1 understood that there needed to be a strong connection between the church and the youth that would become a source of inspiration to make advancements in their lives in the years to come. Given the fact that many

black families must cope with social stressors like economic and racial inequalities, the need for black youth to have an active role in the church is what prompted Pastor A to develop this initiative with the intent of making the youth ministry inclusive to the parents through their ongoing participation. Some of the parents participated as youth and young adult teachers, others assisted with youth programs that helped the youth cope with loneliness and isolation, and some were willing to organize an afterschool ministry. In addition, some volunteered to help with the worship activities on youth Sundays (the fourth Sunday of each month).

According to Pastor A, the key to obtaining the support of the parents was bringing outside speakers from local black youth organizations that specialized in training, supporting, and encouraging parents to get their children involved in community-related activities that are designed to build relationships between the youth, the parents, the church, and the community. These activities included: homeless visitation, involvement with the Habitat for Humanity, partnering with the local Boys and Girls Club of America, and partnering with a local boys-to-men mentoring program. The other important factor in implementing this initiative was the positive and receptive attitude of the parents and the church members. Their ability to show support for the presented plan was a significant factor in the progress of this initiative. The implementation of this initiative was greatly received because the church leaders and members were in mutual agreement that this was the right direction for the youth and young adult ministry. In this interview, the pastor referenced a resource he used during a four-week Bible study series before the church collectively arrived at this conclusion for the youth and young adult ministry to move forward. He noted that "church members have a responsibility and that responsibility is to be a source of unity."¹³² He also stated that "without church members understanding the necessity of having an active and God-

¹³² Thom S. Rainer, *I Am A Church Member: Discovering the Attitude that Makes the Difference* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2013), 23.

honoring youth ministry in the black church, especially when so many black youths are resorting to crime which leads to the penitentiary, then youth ministries in the black church will become obsolete."¹³³

The only hindrance for the ministry context at church 1 was the financial limitations. Like other churches that are similar in demographics, this church faced the challenge of having very little in terms of financial resources for the youth and young adult ministry. According to the pastor, the church never really budgeted for the youth ministry. In the previous approach, the youth ministry leaders would submit a request for the church to purchase whatever was needed at that time. Even though this approach was somewhat unorthodox, it was an effective way to financially manage the ministry in a way that met their needs. He stated that although finances were an issue, the members understood that the more significant issue was reviving a deteriorating youth and young adult ministry to a level where the youth were not feeling isolated. In addition, the parents were not viewing their efforts as a waste of time. This was essential because the pastor pointed out that there were areas within the community where the youth ministry was involved before the nonfunctioning youth ministry. However, after the issue with the ministry leader, that project was canceled after two months.

After implementing this initiative, many members were determined to carry out the church's vision statement, which is being spiritual by being social. According to the pastor, the members "grabbed the bull by the horns," meaning that they understood the need for incorporating youth and young adults into every aspect of the church as well as getting them involved through their participation. There were initial stumbling blocks and hurdles to overcome as with any ministry. The pastor stated that after the first two months, it appeared that the parents were still

¹³³ Notes are taken from the first Pastoral Interview on June 27, 2020, with Pastor A of Church 1 about question two.

somewhat reluctant about allowing their children to participate in this initiative. The reason for this was the skepticism over the age gap between the pastor and the youth. They were mutually concerned about the pastor's ability to be relatable, given that there was no youth ministry leader to manage the ministry. This is one of the threats that pose a challenge for Fellowship and unity in the church between the adults and the youth. The age gap and the level of spiritual maturity between the adult leaders and the youth leaders are always fundamentally different.¹³⁴ However, over time this feeling eroded as many of the parents who were also members trusted that the pastor was taking the right course of action and that God was also leading him as he was leading them. Not only that, but two teenagers were willing to be volunteer teachers for the 8 to 12 age range and the 13 to 18 age range. To answer the question about the overall success of the current youth ministry, the pastor believed that on a scale of one to ten, with one being a failure and ten being exceptional, he gave the present ministry a seven. This was because he knew the members' potential and the ministry, and he felt as though it was not where God wanted it to be at the time of the interview.

The four-week Bible study comprised three topics that ranged from relationship building, community involvement, and an afterschool enrichment class. Out of this curriculum, much of the excitement from the youth and young adults arose from their eagerness to be involved at the beginning of something new. For them, this was a new direction. Unlike the reluctance of the adults, being that this was a new initiative, the young adults, especially the teenagers, quickly volunteered to participate in whatever role they could, and according to the pastor, their contagious demeanor allowed them to be great recruiters in school and the community as well. These teenage volunteer leaders were called Young Soldiers for Christ as they were partnered up with adults for training, discipline, and relationship building. This title was given to the youth leaders because it

¹³⁴ Ed Newton and R. Scott Pace, *Student Ministry by the Book: Biblical Foundations of Student Ministry* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2019), 54.

reflected the youth ministry's vision statement, "future leaders leading today." The relationship-building aspect led to the continued success of this youth and young adult ministry. According to research on the biblical foundations for student and youth ministry, the key to cultivating community is considering the normative factors that make the youth individually unique and collectively diverse such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.¹³⁵

To conclude the first interview, the pastor brought out some underlying issues that he considered to be obstacles that African American youth must overcome in becoming an effective ministry. He cited some statistics that often lead to why youth and young adults do not actively participate in church. First, he discussed that when he presented his youth ministry plan to the church leaders, he researched what the Pew Research Center revealed as they conducted a religious landscape study about the state of blacks and religion in America. At the time of his research, it was reported that over 80 percent of African Americans who were surveyed said that they believed in God.¹³⁶

Interview Two

Unlike Pastor A of church 1, Pastor B of church two has been pastoring for 15 years. He preached his initial sermon in April of 2005. At the time, the church had 37 members with only four youth, and they were all under the age of 10. From 2005 to 2013, the church saw very little growth, and as a result, the pastor became depressed and contemplated resigning. Then, in the summer of 2013, while on vacation in Georgia, Pastor B and his family were invited by a former seminary classmate to attend the three-day Atlanta Youth Conference from August 9-11. At this conference, Pastor B decided to take a different approach in terms of leading the church and

¹³⁵ Newton and Pace, *Student Ministry by the Book*, 54.

¹³⁶ <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/racial-and-ethnic-composition/black>.

organizing a youth ministry. He stated that he simply needed to allow the youth coming every week to be more involved in the church. He went on to say that this simple adjustment led to a positive change in how the members viewed and valued the youth. This change affected the church numerically as well.

From 2014 to 2019, Pastor B witnessed the youth and young adult ministry grow from just a few children to over 50. He credited this gradual increase in youth attendance and participation to three factors in the interview. The first factor was the leadership's decision to hire a full-time youth pastor, someone to assume the responsibility of organizing a youth and young adult ministry team. This would also be someone who would be dedicated to maintaining an ongoing relationship between the church members and the youth by ensuring that many of the adult members are engaged. The second contributing factor was when the church established an afterschool program with a local elementary/junior high school during the Fall of 2014. This connection was made when one of the church members became employed by the elementary school as a substitute teacher. The member met with the district Superintendent about the possibility of the school partnering with the church. The purpose of this was to have access to additional tutoring, training, and internet resources. This connection became a pathway for the church to reach the parents or caregivers uniquely by creating a level of trust as the church ministered holistically to the needs of the children. The final factor was training the two teenagers who were members of the church to be entrusted with more responsibility.

Pastor B also stated that "the youth pastor was willing to take a reduction in pay because his passion was not in the pursuit of padding his pockets but in the pursuit of padding the pews

with young disciples."¹³⁷ This was a refreshing relationship for Pastor B because it was evidence that the Lord had answered his prayers concerning sending someone who would be qualified and willing to embrace his vision for the youth ministry. This issue concerned the pastor. He was worried about hiring someone who would be the right fit for the church and the youth ministry. This concern grew from previous experiences where the volunteers and the members could not work together without there being sharp disagreements. Whenever there is a vacancy at a church, the general concern is often the inability to connect with the members and leaders because of unspoken expectations and the intended or desired direction that the youth and young adult ministry should take. These unspoken expectations often make the ability to connect even more complex.¹³⁸

Pastor B believes that parental engagement and involvement is always critical component to the overall long-term success of the youth and young adult ministry. He met with the church leadership team to develop a strategy for making the parents the targets of his youth ministry resurrection project. He gave his plan this title because the youth ministry at this church was a nonfactor in several ways. It was never apart from the annual budget, there were no youth or young adult classes or curriculum in place, and there was only one teacher who only taught the youth Sunday school class. All these factors, along with there being little to no youth who attended the church consistently, led to the pastor making this decision. To him, the idea to target the parents seemed very logical given the church's demographics. In the spring of 2014, as the school year was ending, Pastor B began his recruitment process for the parents. He had the church secretary perform a church census and send out information and upcoming announcements to each church

¹³⁷ Notes are taken from the second Pastoral Interview on June 27, 2020, with Pastor B of Church 2 about question three.

¹³⁸ Doug Fields, *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry: 9 Essential Foundations For Healthy Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 31.

member about his intentions for establishing an active youth ministry at the church. He wanted inactive and former members to be notified of his intentions since some of the former left the church because the youth and young adult ministry was idle. Of the 87 pamphlets that were mailed out to the members who were parents, legal guardians, or members who knew others who were parents, 69 responded.¹³⁹

This was a surprise to the pastor, but it also spoke to the reality of the church. These pamphlets contained questions that ranged from the parents having to write a 500-word essay or less asking them to tell the church about their children to ask them to explain what they would like the youth ministry to look like. This pamphlet also contained a survey asking the parents to rate their spiritual leadership in the home. Pastor B wanted the survey added because he believes that what children learn at church should supplement what they are taught in the home setting. After talking with some of the parents, the pastor realized that many of them were becoming irritated with the leader's inability to reach out to them and their children. The parent's frustration with the church leaders stemmed from what they perceived to be a generational gap between the church's leaders and the church's youth.¹⁴⁰

This generational gap was something that the pastor wanted to devote an ample amount of time to be that it was the parents' biggest concern. Pastor B believes that how this church got started is part of why this gap exists. Back in 2003, when this church was organized, there were no children. When pastor B reviewed the church records, the youngest member was 31. In 2005, a family of six united with the church. The four children's ages were four, seven, nine, and 13.

¹³⁹ Notes are taken from the second Pastoral Interview on June 27, 2020, with Pastor B of Church 2 about a follow-up question to question one.

¹⁴⁰ Stan Belyshev, *Generation Gap: Raising The Next Generation of Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 11.

However, in August of 2005, this family relocated to another state. Between the relocation and pastor B being elected as the next pastor, another family of six united with the church in March 2006. They also had four children, but they were all under the age of 10.

When asked about parental involvement and their engagement with the youth and young adult ministry, Pastor B mentioned that the parents initiated the discussion. The parents were waiting for the church leadership to engage them for assistance with trying to solve the problem of getting the youth, teenagers, and young adults more involved in the church. Pastor B believed that this was God's way of working behind the scenes by using the members' frustrations to bring unity between the leadership and the membership. This was also how the pastor could keep the members engaged because before he attempted any outreach evangelism, he wanted the Focus to be inward. Therefore, he desired for the parents, through their willingness, to be the key to the success of the youth and young adult ministry.¹⁴¹ For Pastor B, his strategy was for the parents to assist with closing the generational gap and organizing the youth ministry. As volunteers, they were responsible for working with the existing young people by helping them through training, teaching, and being more active. This was accomplished by the parents and other adult members relinquishing some of their duties to allow the youth to feel more involved by showing them or introducing them to Jesus through in-reach.¹⁴²

The methods and curriculum for the youth and young adult ministry resulted from the parents and the two teenage youth leaders scheduling two meetings with the newly hired youth pastor in the Spring of 2014. The first meeting was to discuss a projected plan for youth ministry growth and development with the parents and other members who would be willing to help. In this

¹⁴¹ Newton and Pace, *Student Ministry by the Book*, 67.

¹⁴² Rick Lawrence, *Jesus Centered Youth Ministry: Moving from Jesus-Plus to Jesus-only* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 3.

meeting, the youth pastor revealed a five-year plan to implement a structured youth and young adult ministry. According to the pastor, this plan involved quarterly assignments that had to be turned in by the two youth leaders. It also required the parents having to bring their children, grandchildren, and any children within the community for six months. The youth pastor's purpose was to create an attendance pattern that could easily be maintained.

This plan was also designed to improve the relationship between the leaders and the youth and focus on the relationship that the church had established with the local elementary/junior high school. The second meeting was simply a follow-up to the first meeting and to check the progress made. This was also a time to develop ways that the youth ministry could reach out to those who could not attend church for various reasons. This was important because the church must show compassion to those who are unable to participate.¹⁴³ The youth pastor's vision was for the youth ministry to become active and, more importantly, to create a connection with the current youth that would inspire others to engage.

The hindrances that existed during this transformational period were primarily the generational gap that prevented the youth and young adult ministry from advancing. Although the generational gap continued to live, how the church dealt with and managed it made it appear less significant. Once the five-year plan was put in Place by the youth pastor, the two youth leaders, and the parents, the members began to embrace it because they saw the momentum the youth ministry was building. During the third year of the implementation of this plan, things started to change. The enthusiasm of the parents and members spilled over into the streets. This change began to manifest itself in the summer of 2017 when the two lone youth leaders thought of organizing a youth camp for youths in the neighboring community. They challenged the local

¹⁴³ Mark Oestreicher, *Youth Ministry in this Season of Disruption* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2020), 67.

teenagers to attend church for two months while also inviting two of their friends to attend. They met every Saturday from 8 AM to 11 AM during the camp. The schedule consisted of an opening prayer, breakfast, introductions; then, everyone was separated into two groups for breakout sessions that lasted an hour. The breakout sessions were taught by both church's youth leaders, which allowed them to advertise the youth ministry. They also introduced their lessons with the theme of Jesus and His love for the youth. When the 2017-2018 school year began, the following were the results of the youth summer camp. The church had a total of 17 youths with ages that ranged from 13 to 18. Of those 17, 11 united with the church and were baptized, and the other six came in support of their friends.

When asked about the current demographics of the youth and young adult ministry, pastor B stated that it is roughly 50/50 in gender as of June of 2020. In addition, of the 52 youth currently a part of the youth ministry, the majority are below 12.¹⁴⁴ The other ages range from 15 to 24, with about 60% female and 40% male. According to the pastor, this demographic created several opportunities for the youth and young adults to exercise their gifts and develop a sense of inclusion concerning worship and the church's work. The pastor also stated that even during the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, the demographics of the youth and young adult ministry remained consistent through regularly scheduled zoom meetings and the church's ability to utilize virtual platforms to keep the youth informed and engaged. As unfortunate and unpredictable as COVID-19 was for church 2, it allowed the leadership to explore digital and other social media outlets to keep the church relevant during this season of disruption.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Notes are taken from the second Pastoral Interview on June 27, 2020, with Pastor B of Church 2 about question eight.

¹⁴⁵ Oestreicher, *Youth Ministry in this Season of Disruption*, 47.

In the summer of 2019, the youth and young adult ministry of church 2 spent a significant amount of time making investments in the community where the church is located. In terms of outreach, the youth and young adults of church 2 picked up trash, cut grass, and washed the automobiles of some of the residents while passing out information about the church and gospel tracks. This simple act of caring and sharing spoke volumes to the community residents as it created a connection between the youth of the church and those who did not have an affiliation with the church 2. According to Pastor B, this connection between the youth and community residents brought about a change in how some residents viewed the church. They begin to inquire about the church by making phone calls and filling out the pamphlets passed out by the youth. As a result, more viewers began to watch the Sunday morning worship service on the website and through their social media outlets, and the Lord added two souls to the church as well. The pastor credited this success to the youth leaders' ability to encourage the youth to take on the personality of Jesus by allowing the Holy Spirit to be their teacher and guide.¹⁴⁶

As mentioned earlier, from 2014 to 2019, pastor B witnessed the youth and young adult ministry grow from just a few children to well over 50. Not only was this growth the result of the three factors that he credited, but it was also due to the member's willingness to embrace the contributions that the youth and young adult ministry was making to the church. One of these contributions was to the Sunday morning worship service. In 2015 the adult music ministry leader began working with a small group of youth who wanted to sing during the worship service. They believed that their involvement in the worship could enhance service and allow them to exercise their spiritual gifts. Also, due to the connection that the youth pastor established with the members, the inclusion of the youth and young adults was a welcomed addition to the Sunday morning worship experience as the youth were given a chance to display their love for the Lord.

¹⁴⁶ Lawrence, *Jesus Centered Youth Ministry*, 127.

Interview Three

In the final interview with Pastor C of church 3, he accredited the youth and young adult ministry accomplishments to proper teaching and parental involvement. He prioritized and highlighted these two areas for the ministry leaders to give attention to. Pastor C has been pastoring church 3 for seven years. During that time, the youth and young adult ministry only experienced one temporary setback, with the youth ministry leader having to relocate due to military obligations. However, beyond that brief interruption, the youth and young adult ministry were successful in numerical and spiritual growth. Since parental involvement was one of the two areas that he emphasized, their participation and prayerful support were critical to the success of this ministry. According to Pastor C, he stated that he had always believed that parental involvement is very significant in helping to develop the religious lives of children.¹⁴⁷ For this reason, he heavily recruited parents to be actively involved in the spiritual formation of their children and the church for their congregational education.¹⁴⁸ In his response to the first question about parental involvement, Pastor C said that what made the difference was teaching the parents to be teachers of their faith and development. Through small group studies, he, along with the ministry leaders, prepared the parents for the importance of sharing their faith stories about God's involvement in their lives with their children. These small group studies took Place every Tuesday evening for two consecutive years.

Pastor C believes that for any youth and young adult ministry to be effective in today's church, the presence of the parents strengthens the chances of the ministry being maintained over the long haul. The benefit of these small group studies was that they gave the parents several

¹⁴⁷ Dean, *Almost a Christian*, 112.

¹⁴⁸ Dean, *Almost a Christian*, 112.

opportunities to practice sharing their faith outside of the home environment. He highlighted the book of Acts as a reference to the parents evangelizing their children or what Greg Stier refers to as *gospelizing* their children.¹⁴⁹ When parents share the gospel with their children with the intent that their children will share the gospel with others, they are gospelizing their children. Having the ability to reach the youth and the younger generation means the parents must establish a credible testimony of their own. This testimony must be one that will compel their children, especially teenagers, to accept Christ, follow Christ, and share Christ.

The implemented methods were the small group studies that took Place every Tuesday evening for two consecutive years during the summer months. According to Pastor C, even though this implementation was something new, implementing these small group studies to help the parents was a smooth process. After praying and fasting along with the ministry leaders, the pastor proposed this series of small group lessons to encourage the parents to be better presenters of their faith stories to their children. These small groups also assisted the parents with being more comfortable with discussing the importance of prayer and helping their children develop a commitment to the Word of God.¹⁵⁰

This implementation began with only three ministry leaders (two middle school leaders and one high school age leader). Still, because Pastor C was intentional in promoting this ministry, seven other volunteers stepped up, which allowed him to keep the middle school group and the high school group separated. Pastor C credits the success of this implementation process to two things; being intentional about targeting the parents and providing the youth and young adults with a proverbial seat at the table. Providing the youth and young adults with access or enabling them to

¹⁴⁹ Greg Stier, *Gospelize Your Youth Ministry: A Spicy New Philosophy of Youth Ministry That's 2,000 Years old* (Arvada, CO: D2S Publishing, 2015), 21.

¹⁵⁰ Stier, *Gospelize Your Youth Ministry*, 21.

participate in the worship service and Sunday school gave them a level of comfort in their relationships with the adults and helped them spiritually through their knowledge through personal experience.

As with some churches, this implementation process was not void of problems. One of the problems arose from a few parents being uncomfortable with sharing their faith stories in a small group setting. They preferred to practice at home for two months before gathering in a small group environment. This activity is one area where parents who are not accustomed to in-house evangelizing struggle with the idea of sharing their faith, even though it is with their children. So for pastor C, the initial obstacle to overcome was helping the parents ease their anxiety about opening to strengthen the youth and young adult ministry. To combat this hesitancy of the parents, Pastor C and the youth pastor became intentional about leading the parents through this period of uneasiness by sharing with them the four most important goals of the youth and young adult ministry as indicated by the Barna Group.¹⁵¹ The first goal is discipleship and spiritual formation. Goal number two is building relationships, the third goal is evangelism and outreach to other young people, and the fourth goal is parental involvement.¹⁵² Although there are other goals in this ministry that are to be accomplished, these four met the immediate and long-term needs of the church.

Pastor C stated that at the end of the two years of training the parents in 2013, the youth and young adult ministry began making strides toward being more organized and more active within the community. The success of this ministry was so impactful that many of the parents and the church members became enthusiastic about the excitement generated by the growing youth and

¹⁵¹ These are the common goals of youth ministries that senior pastors and youth pastors share that are designed to establish the core principles of the youth ministry and church mission.

¹⁵² Terry Linhart, *The State of Youth Ministry: How Churches Research Today's Teens and Parents Think About It* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2016), 19.

young adult ministry. In 2018 this ministry saw the most significant improvement in numerical growth and faithfulness. Although Duffy Robbins states that consistent attendance does not always equate to consistent commitment, Pastor C said that was not the case at church 3.¹⁵³ This case was present because the youth pastor's vision for the youth and young adult ministry was one that the parents and the parishioners willingly embraced as their relationships grew more substantial. However, the parents and church members' expectations caused them to evaluate themselves. This was due to the parents' teaching during the small group sessions when the pastor suggested that they ask themselves a personal question. This question was, "is your presence and participation a hindrance or a help to the youth and young adult ministry?" The parents' and the church member's expectations of the youth pastor reflected what they expected from themselves.¹⁵⁴

As the youth and young adult ministry at church 3 grew, so did the level of excitement. What began as a vision to improve the youth ministry evolved into one of the leading ministries within the church. This level of excitement was seen in the young people as they were willing to be trained and taught along with the parents who offered their support. This enthusiasm was visible throughout the church because the members "bought into" the vision and realized that a growing youth and young adult ministry meant an increasing church as well.¹⁵⁵ During the interview with Pastor C, it became clear that he enjoyed the relationship that he had established with the youth pastor and the youth ministry leaders. He stated that their relationship is critical to the success of this ministry because the parishioners will often be able to detect if any friction is present between the two of them. Going back to the four goals of the youth and young adult ministry, Pastor C and the youth pastor's views of the ministry were closely aligned. This effort yielded a relationship

¹⁵³ Duffy Robbins, *Building A Youth Ministry That Builds Disciples* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 123.

¹⁵⁴ Linhart, *The State of Youth Ministry*, 18.

¹⁵⁵ Robbins, *Building A Youth Ministry That Builds Disciples*, 100.

where both men trusted and respected each other's opinions and ideologies.¹⁵⁶ Also, their ability to articulate the things that will be required and what is to be expected of those who desire to be a part of the youth ministry were similar because they both wanted the same thing for the church. One other point to acknowledge about the pastor's response to question six was that he mentioned the Apostle Paul's epistle to the believers in Ephesus (Eph 4).

During his reply to question seven, Pastor C stated that after the first year of teaching and meeting with the parents, some church leaders began to recognize that a spiritual change was taking place in the people's lives. This change and the youth pastor's determination to promote his vision led to the leaders' acceptance of the overwhelming evidence that the youth and young adult ministry was becoming something special at church 3. Pastor C gave credit for this spiritual change to the dynamics of the Holy Spirit. He believes that the Holy Spirit and His ability to maintain unity within the church led to the leadership's decision to trust the youth pastor's vision. According to the pastor, it was not a question of how long it took for buy-in; for him, the question was in the leader's choice to follow the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit. The example that the church leaders set in following the guidance of the Holy Spirit demonstrated to the youth and young adults that they too must allow the Holy Spirit to operate in their lives.¹⁵⁷

The current demographics of the youth and young adult ministry at church three primarily comprise teenagers ranging from 12 years old to 19. That age group makes up about 60 percent of the youth ministry. With 37 youth and young adults on the church's role, there are five above 19, and the remaining ten are less than 12. There are also nine whose ages range from nine months to four years of age who were not included in the overall number because their parents rarely attend. As far as the gender and ethnicity of the youth and young adult ministry, there are 18 females and

¹⁵⁶ Linhart, *The State of Youth Ministry*, 14.

¹⁵⁷ Robbins, *Jesus Centered Youth Ministry*, 108.

19 males. As for the race of the youth and young adults, there are three whites, seven Hispanics, and the remaining 27 are all blacks.¹⁵⁸ According to Pastor C, with many youth and young adults, the youth ministry was able to go out into the community along with the adult church members on four different occasions before the pandemic shutting everything down. Among these outreach activities, the youth and young adult ministry organized a community fest in 2018. The youth pastor coordinated with local vendors that offered several services and opportunities for parents and their children. This single event generated an immediate response from some of the community residents. This community fest was so impactful that it led to a family of four uniting with the church, and they have been faithfully serving ever since.

To date, the youth and young adult ministry at church three have become very popular in the eyesight of the current members. Everyone is intrigued by what has happened in this ministry within the past few years. Even during this current season of disruption with COVID-19 and the new Delta Variant, the current members have embraced the youth and young adult ministry because it has become an extension of the core values of church 3.¹⁵⁹ The youth pastor has done a great job establishing a Christ-centered youth ministry that seeks to serve the Lord by becoming His disciples.¹⁶⁰ The church leadership and membership have witnessed the evidence of this upward shift to the point that they have openly offered their support through their prayers and participation because the youth ministry will only be what the church allows it to be. Keeping the members and parents interested in this ministry has been a high priority for Pastor C and the youth pastor.

¹⁵⁸ Information is taken from the church census taken by church 3 in the last quarter of 2019 that was shared by Pastor C during pastoral interview three.

¹⁵⁹ Oestreicher, *Youth Ministry in this Season of Disruption*, 61.

¹⁶⁰ Fields, *Purpose Driven Youth Ministry*, 71.

Church Member Survey Results

As stated during the implementation section, the two outcomes of these church surveys were aimed at redirecting the Focus of the members and understanding the spiritual significance of having and maintaining an effective youth and young adult ministry at Promiseland Community Church. Also, to reiterate the time frame, each member had two weeks to respond to the 14-question survey. Upon their receipt, the leadership and the pastor reviewed the responses and began the follow-up process based on the content of the individual responses. The follow-up process involved three categories: relational, educational, and recreational. Again, the 14 questions are as follows:

1. How important do you feel the youth and young adult ministry is to the church's overall mission?
2. How has the church demonstrated that it is concerned about young people?
3. How often are the youth invited or asked to participate in the Sunday morning worship experience?
4. What are the benefits of having a thriving youth ministry?
5. How do the youth leaders interact with the church leaders and vice versa?
6. How often is the pastor acknowledged or recognized youth and young adults?
7. What do you understand the role of the youth ministry leader to be?
8. What is your relationship with the youth that you are not related to?
9. What is your expectation of the youth and young adult ministry?
10. Since the decline of the youth and young adult ministry, what has been your input regarding this issue?
11. What are your suggestions and recommendations to address this problem in a way that leads to relationship building?
12. When considering the church budget, are the youth and young adult ministry a focus?
13. In your opinion, what are the contributing factors that have led to the decline of the youth ministry?
14. What are your views concerning the curriculum for the youth and young adults?

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak in March of 2020, there were a few delays in the members returning the surveys within the two-week timeframe, so a one-week extension was given to each member. Out of the 141 surveys given out, only 123 were produced within the allotted time, and from the remaining 18, only ten were created. This result gave an initial indication of which

members were willing to get involved in this process by sharing their concerns and opinions about the inactive status of the youth ministry. As for the members who did not participate, up to this point, the church has yet to receive their completed survey questions. When they were contacted via phone conversation, some stated that due to the pandemic, the church membership survey was no longer a priority at present. To an extent, this result was understandable because from March to May of 2020, Promiseland Community Church lost eight members to COVID-19. The church leaders suggested that the members be lenient due to this unprecedented pandemic. After the church member survey questions were reviewed and evaluated, the following chart is a brief breakdown of the member's responses to the questions and any comments they may have had.

Table 4: Church Member Survey Responses

| | Favorable View | Unfavorable View | Neutral or Unconcerned View | Personal Comments |
|------------|---|---|---|--|
| Question 1 | 115 members said that the youth ministry is essential to the church's mission. | Eight members said that the youth ministry is not crucial to the church's mission. | 10 members said they were not sure how important the youth ministry is to the church. | |
| Question 2 | 124 members said that the church had demonstrated its concern through teaching. | Three members said that the church had not shown concern about the youth ministry. | six members said that they were neutral on this issue. | |
| Question 3 | 130 members said the youth were often allowed to participate in the worship. | Three members said the youth were not allowed to participate in the worship. | | |
| Question 4 | 133 members said there were several benefits to having a thriving youth ministry. | | | These benefits include; strong relationships, discipleship growth, and a sense of inclusion. |
| Question 5 | 117 members said the youth leaders and church leaders have a good relationship. | Four members said the youth leaders and church leaders do not have a good relationship. | 12 members said that they were not sure. | |
| Question 6 | 133 members said the pastor acknowledges the youth and young | | | |

| | | | | |
|-------------|---|--|--|--|
| Question 7 | adults. 98 members said they understand the role of the youth ministry leader. | 24 members said they do not understand the part of the youth ministry leader. | 11 members said that they were not sure about the role of the youth ministry leader. | |
| Question 8 | 112 members said their relationship with the youth was good. | 17 members said their relationship with the youth could be better. | four members said they do not have a relationship with the youth and young adults. | These four members are in nursing homes. |
| Question 9 | 127 members said their expectation was for the youth ministry to enhance the church. | | six members said they were not sure about their expectations for the youth ministry. | |
| Question 10 | 104 members said they were concerned about the decline and spoke about it with a church leader. | 29 members said they were worried about the plunge but have not talked to anyone about it. | | |
| Question 11 | 116 members suggested having a meeting with the parents and the youth. | Nine members said the church needs to do more to attract youth to the church. | Eight members said they do not know what needs to be done. | |
| Question 12 | 112 members said it should be a focus. | 18 members said it depends on what the youth ministry wants to do. | three members said they are not sure. | |
| Question 13 | | 55 members said the frequent change in senior pastors. | 78 members said the church had nothing for the young people to do. | |
| Question 14 | 119 members said the materials were suitable but could be improved upon. | Four members said the curriculum was not age-specific. | 10 members said they were not sure about the curriculum. | |

After a careful review of these survey responses, the church leaders and the pastor who is the researcher of this project realized that the proposed phased approach to addressing this inactive youth problem was the best course of action. Based on the responses, the members are not only aware of the problem, but they also desire that the church leadership take some type of action. However, what was not considered was the critical role they had to play in resolving this inactive youth and young adult problem at Promiseland Community Church. These surveys also revealed that relationship building and having the proper resources would be critical to achieving the level

of success that the pastor, the church leaders, and the youth pastor envisioned for this ministry. One other point of emphasis from these 14-question survey results was that the members recognized that the parents have a vital role in creating an environment where the youth and young adults will feel welcomed. Now that the survey results have been received, the follow-up phase will continue until the designated time for the nine-question church member interviews.

As stated previously in this chapter, the follow-up process involved three categories: relational, educational, and recreational. Based on the individual responses from the members of the three categories, the two most common were relational and educational. The members' primary concern was establishing an ongoing relationship with the youth and young adults and teaching them in a way that would lead to spiritual growth and development. Matt Moore mentions four relationships that must be maintained for substantive change to take place in the life of the church, and they are as follows:¹⁶¹

- Relationships with God
- Relationships with Peers
- Mentor Relationships
- Mentee Relationships

More than anything else, encouraging vertical relationships with God is an essential element in this quest to build healthy relationships between the pastor/church leaders, the youth pastor and the youth ministry leaders, and the church members/parents. The need to develop an environment where the youth and young adults feel comfortable interacting with the adult members and leaders will make it easier to break through the teaching barrier. The youth and young adults will be more inclined to listen to instruction if they have established a sense of trust with the church leaders. Since there were few responses by the members that fell into the

¹⁶¹ Matt Moore, *Intentional Youth Ministry: Going Beyond Impression to Impact* (Carol Stream, IL: NavPress Publishing Group, 2019), 77.

recreational category, the pastor and church leaders decided to address that category during the nine-question church member interviews.

Church Member Interview Results

As the pastor and researcher for this project, along with the church leaders, the decision was made to initially interview the eight members who did not return the church member surveys first. There were a few reasons why this decision was made. First, it was because COVID-19 had become a considerable disruption for several senior members, as six of the eight were old members. The other two were members who were residing in another state. The second reason was that these members were not familiar with emailing or utilizing computers. To keep them engaged and connected, the church leaders reached out to them first. After two days of making contact, the leadership conducted the interviews with these eight members, followed by those who had already turned theirs in. Between the church leaders and the pastor, who was also the researcher for this project, 145 church members were interviewed. Again, the following are the church member interview questions that were asked to each church member/parent:

1. What is your current view of the youth and young adult ministry?
2. In terms of communication, what do you believe are essential elements to building a lasting partnership with the youth and young adults?
3. In your opinion, where has the church failed to develop programs that are designed to educate the youth?
4. What were the issues in the church that led you to bring your child/children to church no longer?
5. If asked, would you consider volunteering to assist the youth ministry workers and worship team?
6. How would you describe your child's relationship with the other church youth?
7. In what ways can the youth ministry serve you and your family?
8. Outside of the church environment/setting, how can the youth and young adult ministry become more active socially?
9. What are your views concerning the visibility of the youth during Sunday morning worship?

Table 5: Church Member Interview Responses

| | Positive Response | Negative Response | Neutral Response | Personal Comments |
|------------|---|--|---|--|
| Question 1 | Of the 145 members who were interviewed, 129 had a positive view of the youth ministry. | 6 members had a negative view of the youth ministry. | 10 members had a neutral view of the youth ministry. | Those with a neutral view are also members who seldom attend regular worship. |
| Question 2 | Of the 145 members who were interviewed, 137 said that being transparent, open to the opinions of the youth and young adults. | | 8 members said that having regular meetings with the youth ministry leaders would help. | |
| Question 3 | Of the 145 members who were interviewed, 134 said not giving the youth and young adults enough opportunities to show their value to the church's functioning. | 3 members indicated that they thought the church had already done enough and had not failed the youth. | 8 members stated that they believed the parents were the ones who failed, not the church. | |
| Question 4 | Of the 145 members, 129 said that it was nothing for the youth to do. | 16 members said it was due to the lack of youth teachers and the type/style of teaching. | | |
| Question 5 | Of the 145 members who were interviewed, 119 said they would volunteer. | 4 members said they would not volunteer. | 22 members said they would volunteer if they were adequately trained first. | |
| Question 6 | Of the 145 members who were interviewed, 143 said their children have a good relationship with the other kids. | | 2 members were unsure because they seldom attend church. | |
| Question 7 | Of the 145 members who were interviewed, 141 said they would rather the youth serve in the community instead. | | 4 members said they could be served by asking the youth to pray for them. | |
| Question 8 | Of the 145 members who were interviewed, 145 said by were more involved and visible in the community. | | | Some members suggested that the youth recruit their friends from within the community. |

| | | |
|------------|---|---|
| Question 9 | Of the 145 members who were interviewed, 140 said they would enjoy seeing the youth multiple Sundays every month. | 5 members said they would like to see the youth participate one Sunday every month. |
|------------|---|---|

Based on the results from the church member interviews, the church members' perception concerning the youth and young adult ministry was mostly positive. However, because establishing a connection with the youth and young adults was a concern, many of their responses in either the recognition or relationship category. Recognition meant that overall, the entire church needed to do a better job of acknowledging the presence and participation of the youth ministry. Some areas of Promiseland Community Church that needed to be restructured. One of those areas included restructuring the 4 to 10, the 11 to 18, and the 19 to 30 age range Sunday school small group classes. Since there were two new Sunday school volunteer teachers, these two classes were restructured so that youth teachers could split time teaching each lesson. The youth Sunday school curriculum was also changed to accommodate the attendees by making the subject matter more relevant. This change was another means of recognizing the youth and young adults by giving attention to these two small groups. However, during the nationwide shutdown and due to the pandemic, these two classes became virtual. The surprise in this restructuring process was from April to August of 2020, the attendance in both virtual settings grew, as reflected in the following table. This platform allowed the congregation to pursue other avenues of instruction as well, especially as the church was becoming aware of the significance of this inactive youth problem.

Table 6: Youth and Young Adult Sunday School Virtual Attendance from April to August of 2020

| | Number of participants pre-pandemic | Number of participants post-pandemic |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Class 1 4 to 10 years of age | 9 | 13 |
| Class 2 11 to 18 years of age | 7 | 10 |
| Class 3 19 to 30 years of age | 10 | 16 |

Not only was recognition a category, but the relationship was the other category where many of the member's responses were grouped. This result was not a surprise given the previous inactivity of the youth and young adults. With 137 members stating that being transparent and open to the opinions of the youth were essential elements to building lasting partnerships with them, this response to the question was an indicator that relationship building was going to be necessary. This category helped lead the church leaders in the direction of having an awareness of the importance of understanding the ever-changing culture of the youth and young adults.¹⁶² From the standpoint of being relatable, that was the element lacking from some of the church leaders. Also, due to cultural differences, the church leaders had to adjust their approach to doing ministry with the youth and young adults. With the assistance of the youth pastor and the youth ministry leaders, the church leaders collectively came together to become more open-minded towards the youth and young adults. This change was very helpful for the church leaders because the reality was that they just did not do much in terms of interaction with the youth ministry leaders, especially after the youth pastor was hired. Even though it was not one of the responses to question

¹⁶² Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside The World of Today's Teenagers*, 198.

two, giving the Holy Spirit room to work is also essential to building a lasting partnership with the youth and young adults.¹⁶³

The church member interviews also revealed that they and the parents also made it known they desired for the youth and young adults to be more engaged and actively involved in the Sunday morning worship. However, the problem revealed from the interviews was that the parents/guardians did not mention much in terms of their involvement. Therefore, the pastor, church leaders, and youth pastor made it a priority to associate the parents with accountability. As it has already been said, this problem does not only affect the senior pastor, church leader, or youth pastor problem; this problem affects all members of Promiseland Community Church. With the right vision and organizational plan, the youth pastor, after reviewing these membership interview results, decided to challenge the parents by asking them to volunteer to be youth and young adult teachers. Not only would this change ensure their involvement, but they would also be a path through which the church leaders could reach the youth of the church, especially those who were no longer bringing their children to church. This sense of engagement was the spark the youth and young adult ministry needed as the youth pastor, youth ministry leaders, and church leaders began to tackle this inactive youth problem in a way that created a spirit of enthusiasm.

This level of enthusiasm is why 140 members stated that they would enjoy seeing the youth and young adults more frequently. This newfound spirit of excitement was moving through the church at a rapid rate. Parents who were no longer bringing their children to church started inquiring about the virtual classrooms set up during the pandemic. Suddenly, the social media environment became a valuable resource of recruitment and advertisement for the church and the youth and young adult ministry. It was unexpected because the church leaders have consistently demonstrated hesitancy whenever they were approached about the idea of incorporating the use of

¹⁶³ Platt, *Follow Me* (Nashville, LifeWay Publishers, 2013), 50.

technology or social media platforms into the worship setting.¹⁶⁴ However, this season of interruption and disruption has caused the church leaders to re-think the idea and relevance of having an online and virtual presence because of the positive impact that it has had on the youth and young adult ministry.

The other goal of these interviews was to explain the purpose, vision, and mission statements to the parents, and as previously mentioned, they are as follows:

Purpose: The Purpose of the youth and young adult ministry at Promiseland Community Church is to provide opportunities for young people to grow and live out their faith in Jesus Christ by serving Him, worshipping Him, and making Him known to others.

Vision: The vision of the youth and young adult ministry is to minister to the needs of the youth in ways that are meaningful and relevant and to seek to establish a partnership that allows the youth to feel welcomed to express their faith.

Mission: The mission of the youth and young adult ministry entails developing young people into disciples for Christ through preaching, teaching, training, and outreach in a way that reflects the character of Christ.

The interviews with the members were a good time to interject the Purpose, vision, and mission statements for the youth and young adult ministry because it gave the parents a clear explanation for this ministry exists. The *purpose* is to promote the youth through progression; the *vision* is to promote the youth through partnership, and the *mission* is to promote the youth through practice. Progression means that as the youth and young adults grow and develop in their faith through teaching, discipleship, and life experiences; there will be pieces of evidence of the progression in their faith walk with God. The partnership aspect means the ongoing relationship that the youth and young adults have developed with the church leaders and members has enhanced the overall perception of how Promiseland Community Church views the youth ministry. Finally, the practice is the Christian discipline that the youth and young adults have been taught to demonstrate in their lives daily by remembering who they are and who they serve.

¹⁶⁴ Oestreicher, *Youth Ministry in this Season of Disruption*, 91.

One-Month Leadership Training Increment Results

After the church member interviews, the pastor, who was also the researcher for this project, and the church leaders came together each week for four weeks. The Purpose of these church leadership meetings was for the church leaders to help the church members understand that this inactive youth problem was a Promiseland Community Church problem and not just a pastor or church leader problem. Knowing the reality of this problem was necessary because some of the members never really showed much concern about the youth and young adults included in the worship service. Creating awareness was essential for the members and parents to accept the current inactive state of the youth ministry. The other Purpose of these increments was to make it known to the church leaders that the involvement of the youth and young adults goes beyond Sunday morning attendance.¹⁶⁵ Also, being that most of the church membership is African American, the church leaders had to convey to the parents the pitfalls and dangers of holding on to outdated traditions that place limitations on the involvement of young people.¹⁶⁶

These weekly training increments were divided into five pillars and were scheduled each Saturday morning with a one-hour timeframe, with pillars four and five being taught in week four. These increments were based upon Chapter seven of *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*.¹⁶⁷ There are five pillars that the author discusses as it relates to having a biblical perspective of the youth ministry, and they are as follows:

1. Pillar #1 Gospel Centrality
2. Pillar #2 Theological Depth Through Expository, Biblical Preaching
3. Pillar #3 Relational Discipleship
4. Pillar #4 Partnership With Parents

¹⁶⁵ Almeda M. Wright, *The Spiritual Lives of Youth African Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 20.

¹⁶⁶ Wright, *The Spiritual Lives of Youth African Americans*, 18.

¹⁶⁷ Michael McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry: Teenagers in the life of the Church* (Nashville: Randlehouse, 2019), 129.

5. Pillar #5 Intergenerational Integration

The goal of this research project has been to establish a youth and young adult ministry that is God-honoring and one where the youth are involved and feel accepted. To be God-honoring means that the Gospel and the Word of God must be the driving force that undergirds this ministry. Understanding the Bible and its place in the youth and young adult ministry has been one of the keys to revitalizing this ministry to lively and growing due to the gospel and the Holy Spirit at work in the lives of the youth.¹⁶⁸ Like every other ministry in the Promiseland Community Church, the youth and young adult ministry's strength should be based on the theological principles found in scripture. Therefore, helping the church leaders understand these principles will also help the church develop the same philosophy. This philosophy is being able to grasp these biblical principles in a way that unites the parents, youth, church leaders, and church members through the teaching of the Gospel, and this philosophy was the overall Purpose of these five increments.

Although each pillar was integral to the success of the youth and young adult ministry, pillars one, three, four, and five were instrumental in creating an engaging environment where the church leaders were compelled to become proactive. Since having a gospel-centered youth ministry was the priority, the ministry of teaching the good news of the story of Jesus Christ became the hinge upon which the door the youth ministry swung on. Developing youth, and young adult ministry from a biblical perspective became the dynamic that had been missing over the past seven years. In pillar one, the discussion about the gospel was necessary to establish a starting point for the church leaders. Understanding the grace of God is paramount to being Christ-centered. Because that is the fundamental truth of scripture, the church leader's attitudes toward the gospel had to be one that motivated them to value the presence and participation of the youth. Understanding God's grace allowed the church leaders to connect with the youth and young adults

¹⁶⁸ McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 128.

by publicly demonstrating their reliance on God while worshipping Him holistically. The church leader's public example of allowing the younger people to see them living out their faith in God created an atmosphere of community between the youth ministry leaders and the youth and young adults.¹⁶⁹

Another result of pillar one was that it helped the youth and young adults better understand their level of spirituality. This result occurred because the church leaders decided to prioritize sharing with the youth leaders the meaning of church membership. Based on the interviews with some of the parents, they believed that a part of why the youth participation problem existed had to do with the youth's misunderstanding about church membership. Unfortunately, they believed that their spirituality was based upon church attendance.¹⁷⁰ Even more unfortunate was that pillar one also revealed that some adults thought there was a correlation between church attendance and their spiritual maturity. In terms of the church leaders, the challenge was two-fold. First, to use the gospel to teach adults that there is a distinction between church attendance and spiritual growth. Then the challenge was to use the gospel to help the youth and young adults discover their spiritual identity related to being a Christian.¹⁷¹ This challenge was essential because, for some of the teenagers, their thinking was that due to their poverty, that God had forsaken them. In the final 15 minutes of pillar one, the church leaders continued this discussion by encouraging the youth and young adults about God's presence in their lives. They were encouraged that God's grace was not limited to just white people and those with wealth, but His grace has been extended to all who genuinely believe in Him and walk by faith rather than sight.

¹⁶⁹ McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 130.

¹⁷⁰ Wright, *The Spiritual Lives of Youth African Americans*, 20.

¹⁷¹ Wright, *The Spiritual Lives of Youth African Americans*, 21.

In pillars three through five, the emphasis was relationship building. After meeting with the church leaders and reminding them of Promiseland Community Church's objectives concerning the youth and young adult ministry, this researcher wanted to ensure that the church leaders understood their roles. These pillars revealed the need for inclusion in the church. As the young people were transitioning from their teens to becoming young adults, they needed to recognize the reality of partnership in the church. The dynamics of this partnership required active parental involvement and encouragement. For the church leaders, this change meant that they had to be more engaged with the youth leaders because the youth and young adults viewed the youth leaders as mentors.¹⁷² This combination of church and youth leaders being on one accord allowed the youth ministry to develop a level of cohesiveness absent since the youth ministry was initially organized several years ago. However, this combination also meant that the partnership with the parents had to become fruitful as the church leaders explored new methods and approaches to family ministry that was designed to be sustainable.¹⁷³ From the fourth pillar, the church leaders began to visualize the intent that this researcher had in mind for the goal of relationship building the way that Christ intended it to be.

Even though some of the church leaders expressed concerns for doing too much in terms of parental recruitment, their willingness to be proactive paid dividends for the youth and young adult ministry. Even during this pandemic, optimism increased for both the parents and the church leaders. The parents became enthusiastic about the possibility of having an ongoing youth ministry that was not just a group of young people but a group of young people who were motivated to serve others. The parents' enthusiasm helped to generate more views on social media on the Sunday mornings that the youth and young adults were involved in the worship experience. The

¹⁷² McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 135.

¹⁷³ McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 136.

exciting thing about the fourth pillar was that it helped to create a sense of trust as many of the parents did not yield to their concerns about the direction of the youth and young adult ministry; they simply trusted that the church leaders whom they selected themselves were not going to jeopardize the progress that had already been made by the pastor and youth pastor.

In the fifth and final pillar, the church leaders were taught the importance of family worship. So often in the Sunday morning church setting, the children are disenfranchised from their parents due to Sunday school, small life groups, or children's church for infants and toddlers. The opportunity for family worship is lost. Even though attempts are made to incorporate the family, there are no substitutes for the chances to worship together as a family. Therefore, not only must the youth and young adults be taught the gospel, but they must also be taught how to effectively live out the gospel through relationships and family-oriented Worship because God is a relational God.¹⁷⁴ During the discussion about this pillar, the Sunday school class format was mentioned. Since there were age divisions in the classroom assignments, it was critical to ensure that the youth and young adults were even chances to worship with their parents. Because of this pillar, the church leaders met with the youth pastor, and they decided to continue the children's church, but at the same time, develop ways in which the youth could play a role in the regular worship. Intergenerational integration is making sure that the youth and young adults do not feel a sense of isolation but a sense of inclusion.¹⁷⁵ After these pillars, it became clear that when the adults started showing consistent interest in the lives of the youth by making the gospel relevant, the youth and young adults became motivated to make investments in the lives of other young people.

¹⁷⁴ McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 137.

¹⁷⁵ McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 137.

Three-month Leadership Training Increment Results

As the one-month leadership training increment was concluded, it was now time for the three-month leadership training increment to begin. The one-month increment involved the pastor who is the researcher for this project and the church leaders, whereas this three-month increment involved the church leaders and the youth ministry leaders. As a result of the church member interviews and the information presented to the church leaders, the perception of the youth and young adult ministry was beginning to change. The hope and goal for these three months were to advance the agenda of the youth ministry in a way that was productive and enhanced the overall perception of Promiseland Community Church. With the Great Commission as the road map, the church leaders taught three monthly lessons that caused the youth ministry leaders to understand their worth and value as young members of the church. The three lessons that were taught are as follows:

1. The biblical perspective of the youth ministry.
2. The church, the youth, and the community.
3. The relationship and Fellowship of the church and the youth.

At the end of the first month, the youth ministry leaders had reached a place of encouragement. They were excited to learn that the church leaders were showing a united solid willingness to be engaged in the affairs of the youth's lives. While relying on the scriptures, the church leaders presented the case for the youth and young adults having a biblical awareness of why they were needed and included in the Worship of God. First, the church leaders apologized to the youth ministry leaders for the neglect, lack of attention, and engagement that contributed to the inactive youth problem at the Promiseland Community Church. The youth ministry leaders appreciated the candid openness of the church leaders. As the first increment progressed, they revealed that the transparency of the church leaders helped transition them from being reserved to

being more open themselves. The church leaders were genuine and sincere, and desired to be more open to the desires of the youth and young adults.

From a biblical perspective, the church leader's initial plan focused on living as Christian disciples.¹⁷⁶ Christian discipleship is the only way the church can reach and help the younger generation grow and thrive as believers. Therefore, making sure that the youth ministry leaders were equipped to handle the challenges of biblical leadership became a point of emphasis for the church leaders. While using the story of David, the church leader's ability to be intentional about the youth ministry climaxed with the youth ministry leaders deciding to honor God through their service at the church and their attitude toward others. The church leaders helped them understand by surveying David's early life. He did not rise to prominence overnight. David spent a lot of time hiding in caves while learning the lessons of the kingship before he officially became king. Also, based on I John 2:12-14, the church leaders mentioned that the Apostle John highlighted the different stages of a believer's growth; availability, accountability, and ability.¹⁷⁷

As the next two months transpired, the relationships between the church leaders and the youth ministry leaders grew stronger. There was finally a sense of accomplishment from the youth ministry leaders having a level of trust in the church leader's intent to create a youth and young adult ministry that was Christ-centered and gospel-centered. Also, during these two months, the church leaders asked the youth ministry leaders on numerous occasions to develop a schedule for their involvement in the church and community. Through this avenue, the youth ministry leaders could have direct relationships with the adult members by establishing their presence and imprint on the church's functioning. This in-reach effort by the church leaders was also accompanied by

¹⁷⁶ David Canales, "The biblical-hermeneutical model for youth ministry: four scriptural and Pedagogical Approaches for Youth Workers" *The Bible Today*, 31-33 (2013), 245-248, Accessed May 14.

¹⁷⁷ Roger Glidewell, *Regroup: How To Build Youth Ministry From The Bible Up* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2019), 12.

helping the youth and young adults realize the role that they would play in ministry outreach.

Serving the community has always been a responsibility of the church. To offer an opportunity for inclusion and involvement, the youth ministry leaders approached the youth ministry team about the idea of serving some of the residents in the community. This change would prove to be a recruiting tool as well as the presence of the young people in the community gave the residents a sense of joy in knowing that not all the black youth are on paths that lead to prison.

During the second and third months of this increment, the church leaders also decided to utilize the fellowship hall and the classrooms of the church for the youth ministry leaders to hold any future meetings with the youth and young adults. This gesture spoke volumes to the parents and the young people because it was an indication that the church leaders were beginning to understand the value and importance of the youth in the church. However, they had to be aware of the cultural changes of the youth and young adults.¹⁷⁸ These changes were challenges for some church leaders due to the age gap between them. However, they could adjust to those changes by giving the youth ministry leaders more responsibility, which dispelled any trust issues that the youth and young adults had concerning the church leaders and was noticed by the youth ministry leaders. This new shift in the church also became noticeable to the parents as they attributed it to the Holy Spirit creating unity through change. It was now possible for relationships to grow and develop while the Fellowship grew stronger during months two and three of this increment.

Four Planned Leadership Meetings Results

The goal of these four planned leadership meetings between the pastor and the deacons of Promiseland Community Church was to move to mutual agreement on how the youth ministry was to function. These meetings not only gave attention to the inactive youth problem but also aimed at giving attention to the spiritual health and well-being of the church. Even though attempts had

¹⁷⁸ Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside The World of Today's Teenagers*, 198.

already been made to target the parents of the inactive youth, one of the problems of that approach was that some of the parents were inactive themselves. These planned meetings were designed to strategize an attractive approach to this inactive youth problem that would result in both the parents and the youth and young adults being energized to make the youth ministry a success. As stated before, the purpose of these meetings was to evaluate the responses from the church member surveys, the church member interviews, and the results from the previous training increments so that the church leaders and the ministry leaders could approach the youth ministry with the same objectives in mind. In essence, it was time to put it all together.

The church deacons had been left out of this research project until this point. This exclusion was intentional due to their role and function in the church and their relationship with the pastor. The plan was for them to continue to alleviate the pastor by maintaining the church's material care, especially during the pandemic, so the pastor could focus more on addressing the inactive youth ministry problem. However, for the parents to be more informed and better engaged, the deacons were assigned a group of members based on their geographical location. The first planned leadership meeting involved making a connection between home life and the church to create and maintain unity. Based on the responses from the church member surveys and interviews, establishing a social connection with the parents paved the way for the spiritual connection to be built. This researcher had entrusted the deacons with the task of making that spiritual connection by assisting the pastor and assisting the ministry leaders with the enhancement of the spirituality of the church. The deacons were given additional responsibility by being involved in the process of spiritual growth and development as well. The deacons collectively met

with the ministry leaders after each planned leadership meeting to forecast their objectives for the church to become a place where the glory of God would be on display.¹⁷⁹

Since the planned leadership meetings covered two hours, the second planned meeting was split into two sections. In the first hour, the deacons and the parents met to discuss the responses and results from the previous meeting with the members. Partnering the deacons with the parents was met with little to no resistance. One reason was four of the deacons being related or being good friends with some of the parents. The other reason was that the remaining three deacons were already connected to many parents through previous experiences and relationships. This partnership became known as the deacon family ministry. Due to the membership size at Promiseland Community Church, each of the seven deacons was assigned 20 members. Also, each member or family lived within a five-mile radius of the deacon to whom they were transferred. That deacon became their spiritual caregiver and a point of contact for the church. The deacons could become more engaged with the children of those members. Focusing on the entire family created a holistic method of family ministry that reflected the ministry of Jesus Christ.

In the second hour, the meeting covered the development of a youth ministry curriculum. This curriculum was designed to motivate and excite the youth and young adults by utilizing youth teachers who could relate to the students based on their age, childhood experiences, demographics, and those who had been attending church regularly. This curriculum was primarily geared toward relationships and responsibility. For the youth and young adults, the relationship aspect covered Christ, Church, and Community. The responsibility aspect, which was for the parents, covered encouragement, engagement, and education. It also required parental interaction. For some of the parents, this change was challenging because their work schedules did not allow them the proper amount of time to help equip their children spiritually. The other challenge was that some parents

¹⁷⁹ James MacDonald, *Vertical Church* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2012), 83.

had simply lost interest in the youth and young adult ministry.¹⁸⁰ This challenge resulted from the previous years of inactivity and what appeared to be a lack of concern by the church's leadership.

In the final two planned leadership meetings, the primary task was youth and young adult inclusion and clearly defining the function of the youth ministry leader. The other important part of these two meetings was creating an attractive environment where the youth and young adults felt excited about being a part of this ministry. As this researcher met with the deacons, one of the most significant issues concerning the inactivity of the youth in the church was many of them felt like the church did not want them involved in anything at all. More evidence of this issue was the results of the surveys and member interviews. The members also indicated that there was nothing for the young people to do, but for some of the youth, they felt as though they did not fit into the church's life. To combat this problem and provide hope to the youth and young adults, the deacons decided to expand the responsibility of the youth ministry leaders by giving them opportunities to structure the youth ministry based on input from a former youth pastor from another church. With the involvement of the youth pastor, the young people had someone relatable and reliable. Even before these meetings were planned, the youth pastor initiated a process that ultimately led to the inclusion within the youth and young adult ministry.

The process that the youth pastor initiated was simply training youth ministry leaders to view ministry as a process. The youth ministry leaders' perception about their ministry was clouded because they never actually had a clear vision or mission. For years, the youth and young adult ministry lacked the details and specifics necessary to succeed.¹⁸¹ If the youth ministry leaders

¹⁸⁰ Andrew Root, *The End of Youth Ministry: Why Parents Don't Care about Youth Groups and What Youth Workers Should Do About It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), 10.

¹⁸¹ Work and Olson, *Youth Ministry Management Tools 2.0*, 156.

could not answer specific questions about the youth ministry, then the planning process needed to be reviewed. The following are some of the questions that the youth ministry leaders had to answer when they planned to organize any youth activities and events:¹⁸²

- What is the event?
- What is the Purpose of the event?
- Where is the event?
- When is the deadline to sign up for the event?
- Who is the contact person for more information?
- What are the times of the event (begin and end times)?

Through the leadership of this researcher and the former youth pastor, the process of youth and young adult inclusion began to manifest itself. As stated earlier, the role and function of the youth ministry leader needed to be appropriately defined as well. The youth ministry leader is not only one who is responsible for maintaining an ongoing connection between adults and the youth, but they are also one who is responsible for making and maintaining connections by being available and by getting in touch with the needs of the youth.¹⁸³ This responsibility also involves coordinating youth and young adult activities with the church leaders. With all that has taken place in the youth and young adult ministry so far, there is still much work to be done in terms of consistency. However, with the parental presence and the involvement of other church members, this youth ministry has become one on the path to success. This researcher, along with the deacons, concluded these planned meetings by being fierce promoters of the youth and young adult ministry. The deacons committed themselves to be advocates and team players for the young people of Promiseland Community Church.

¹⁸² Work and Olson, *Youth Ministry Management Tools 2.0*, 156.

¹⁸³ Wimberly, Barnes and Johnson, *Youth Ministry in the Black Church*, 68.

Eight-Week Bible Study Results

Up to this point, the results of this project have been mainly positive. The church leaders, youth ministry leaders, and church members have all had opportunities to voice their opinions, offer suggestions and criticisms, and even get involved. Now, as the final phase of this implementation process began, it became the sole responsibility of this researcher to ensure that this project crosses the finish line. After the four planned leadership meetings, an eight-week Bible study lesson series was taught by this researcher every Wednesday evening. As previously mentioned, these lessons focused on God's view of the church and God's view of children because the youth and young adult ministry must always remain undergirded by the word of God. This study also provided the church members with the biblical and social elements necessary for personal enrichment. The goal of this series of lessons was to lead the membership to a place of mutual understanding about this youth ministry problem that would possibly change their minds and motivate the adults to get involved through support and participation. This lesson series covered the following areas and how they related to the gospel:

- Understanding the Purpose of the youth ministry.
- Understanding the Place of the youth ministry.
- It understands the priority of the youth ministry.
- Understanding the Functioning of the youth ministry.
- Understanding the Focus of the youth ministry.
- Understanding the Fellowship of the youth ministry.
- Understanding the Witness of the youth ministry.
- Understanding the worship of the youth ministry.

In the first week of instruction, the *Purpose* of the youth ministry in the church's daily functioning was the lesson's focal point. To be clear, the purpose of the youth ministry is to promote the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The youth ministry accomplishes this goal through the lives of youth and young adults who practice spiritual disciplines that allow them to live Christ-centered lives. This lesson also examined the youth ministry's role in worship, evangelism, outreach, and

service. The youth and young adult ministry at the Promiseland Community Church were being built to last to use a metaphor. Therefore, a solid foundation had to be appropriately laid first for that to happen. Understanding the Purpose of the youth ministry gave the members of the church an idea and spiritual perspective of what the youth ministry should look like in terms of being gospel-centered and Christ-centered. Also, the church members now realize the importance of allowing the young people to play a role in the total church program. Examining the youth and young adults' involvement in worship, evangelism, outreach, and service contributed to an even greater level of appreciation for the youth ministry and what it had to offer the church. Now the time had come to continue this youth ministry building process through the ministry of teaching. With all that had been implemented to this point, being taught the foundational aspects of this ministry provided more clarity for the church members.

As the first week ended, one of the church members raised the following question, "why do the youth and young adult ministry need to have a role in worship, evangelism, outreach, and the service of the church?" As odd as this question was, neither this researcher nor the church leaders or deacons were caught off guard. One of the deacons responded by saying that their role in the total church program is just as relevant as the adults. He went on to say that God desires all who are aware of Him and believe in Him to worship Him.¹⁸⁴ Not only that, but evangelism, outreach, and service are all areas where the youth and young adults can be included as their presence means a lot as attempts are made to glorify God. For the first session, the goal of this researcher was accomplished as the foundational building process began with a clear definition of the Purpose of this ministry and its connection to the purpose statement.

Purpose: The Purpose of the youth and young adult ministry at Promiseland Community Church is to provide opportunities for young people to grow and live out their faith in Jesus Christ by serving Him, worshipping Him, and making Him known to others.

¹⁸⁴ Cole and Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 24.

For the purpose statement to be fulfilled, there had to be both head and heart change in the youth and young adults and in the parents and church members.¹⁸⁵ Positive attitudes and thought processes allow periods of spiritual transition to be smoother when evidence that heart and head changes have taken place. This achievement was completed over time as Promiseland Community Church became receptive to being in a partnership with the youth and young adults. In weeks two and three, the lessons covered the *Place* and *priority* of the youth ministry. Just as in week one, weeks two, and three saw continued success. The parents and the church members had already begun to understand the legitimacy of the youth and young adult ministry. Their acceptance of the young people's contributions in the church solidified the youth and young adult ministry's *Place* within the church environment. Like all other ministries in the church, the youth ministry required prayerful support and participation from the pastor, church leaders and members, and especially the parents. It was no secret to anyone within Promiseland Community Church that the youth and young adult ministry became the priority over all other ministries in the church. Jesus never neglected young people or children. His sacrificial and atoning death on the cross was not just for adults only, Christ died one time for all, and now through the activity of the Holy Spirit, believers are to love and support the youth and young adults.¹⁸⁶

Another reason why the youth ministry became a priority was due to issues concerning some of the youth outside of the church setting. These issues ranged from the typical adolescent rebellion to gang involvement after blaming God for losing a parent in an automobile accident. Two young adults were on the verge of giving up on God and the church when this project began, but after counseling with them and meeting with the mother, a ray of hope began to shine through

¹⁸⁵ Cole and Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 25.

¹⁸⁶ Cole and Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 25.

the clouds of youth inactivity. Once an explanation was given about making the youth and young adult ministry a priority in the church, the mother of those two boys was able to influence them to give the youth with ministry a try. Since discipleship and relationships were a part of the priority of the youth and young adult ministry, organizing and hosting social events on the church property became excellent ways to build and strengthen internal and external relationships with the youth in the church and the youth in the community. The social events that were planned included community festivals, back-to-school supply giveaways, community outreach, and youth carnivals. These events and activities were also discipleship opportunities because through the involvement of the youth, they were able to learn the spiritual discipline of service and serving others.

For weeks four through six, the lessons had to be taught in person and through Zoom due to COVID-19. The *functioning*, *Focus*, and *Fellowship* of the youth and young adult ministry were the topics because the church members needed to understand four things about the youth ministry. First, they needed to understand that the youth ministry was not just a low-level ministry. Second, they needed to understand that the youth ministry is a ministry that is to function daily and weekly by keeping the parents and children involved. Third, they needed to understand that the youth ministry is a ministry that would indirectly cause the adults to come to terms with the sacrifices they would need to make regarding shared responsibility. The fourth thing that the church members needed to understand was that the youth ministry would grow either by being planted or by being pruned.¹⁸⁷ Youth ministry growth and development at Promiseland Community Church would be contingent upon the willingness of the laity and leadership to get involved while realizing that the youth and young adults would make mistakes along the way.

The *Focus* and *Fellowship* of the youth ministry had to do with the church leaders and members' acknowledgment that time, resources, and attention had to be given to the youth and

¹⁸⁷ Mark DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 98.

young adults so that progress could be made, and the youth could have a level of excitement. Much like the lens of a camera, it was not until the church leadership, membership, and parents re-adjusted their way of thinking that they could see the value of gospel-centered youth and young adult ministry. The Focus of the youth ministry comes after the youth, and young adult ministry has become a priority. This lesson sought to prove what many in the church were beginning to accept and embrace themselves that the youths and young adults matter. They matter to God, and they should also matter to those who are people of God. It was at this stage in these Bible study lessons that unity and Fellowship were not just words, but they became the very fabric of which the youth ministry was being woven upon. The fellowship aspect of this lesson yielded positive results that were visible on the outside of the church as well. The Greek word *Koinonia* means Fellowship with God and the people of God in a way that pleases God. This experience occurred each time the youth and young adults connected with the adult members of the church in worship.

The final two weeks of these lessons covered the *witness* and *worship* of the youth and young adult ministry. The youth ministry's witness was anemic four years ago; however, by the time this Bible study lesson series began it was becoming stronger and more robust in terms of its structure and organization. The foundation is the gospel, and the building blocks are the commitment by the youth ministry leaders, support and participation from the parents and other church members, and discipleship and discipleship training by the church leaders and ministry leaders. With these blocks being laid strategically, the witness of the youth and young adult ministry was no longer a liability but an asset. Of the many components that have contributed to the improvements of the youth ministry, being gospel-centered is what brought about many of these improvements. Understanding the scriptures and their impact on young people is essential for the spiritual uplifting of a ministry that has seen little in terms of progress. This researcher and the

church leaders were willing to share much of their time with the youth and young adults in Bible study (Prov 15:22).¹⁸⁸

The worship of the youth ministry is like the witness of the youth ministry in that God intends for all His creation to worship Him and witness for Him. In the last session of this eight-week series, the desired goal was making worship inclusive and welcoming to the youth and young adults. Their involvement in the worship became a necessity rather than an option (Heb 13:15-17). If Promiseland Community Church wanted this ministry to be Gospel-centered, then the church had to consider implementing worship opportunities for the young people strongly. Even the Apostle Paul, in his letters to the believers in Ephesus, Paul knew that the Worship of God included children (Eph 4:12-13). Worship in the early church included all generations.¹⁸⁹ The leadership and membership of Promiseland needed to understand that if children were a gift given from God, then as a gift, they should be permitted to worship the giver of that gift. As this week's Bible study series closed, some of the church members approached the pastor in a spirit of humility. They apologized for their past actions that contributed to the inactive youth problem that was stunting the growth of Promiseland Community Church.

¹⁸⁸ Cole and Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 156.

¹⁸⁹ Cole and Nielson, *Gospel-Centered Youth Ministry*, 104.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

When this project began, the expectations were great, and the hopes were high. Considering where the youth and young adult ministry was before this project began, credit must be given to the Holy Spirit for the changes that have developed. Amid frustrations and resignations, the resuscitation of this ministry has created positive energy within the body of believers at Promiseland Community Church. Although progress has been made, this journey is far from being complete. The challenge will now become maintaining the momentum that has been created from the implementation of this project as the youth, and young adult ministry is no longer experiencing a spiritual flat line, but it now has a pulse. With that being said, the conclusion of this work has also brought about some questions that will now be answered.

Now that the implementation has occurred, one of the closing questions has become, "where do we go from here?" Based on the research conducted for this project and discussions with other pastors, this researcher believes that the problem with youth inactivity that existed at Promiseland Community Church will continue to occur in other churches. Parents nationwide are not doing their due diligence when sharing their faith with their children regularly. This negative trend was mentioned by all three pastors during the pastoral interviews. Since this inactive youth problem was common among many churches in the black community and other communities, the research about this problem will be of ongoing relevance. For some people and some churches, the youth ministry is not very high on their list of priorities. Evidence of this problem often becomes visible during church meetings when specific questions are raised. Questions about youth ministry budgeting, youth project planning, community presence, youth evangelism, and youth involvement in the church often reveal other underlying issues. When questions like these are asked and answered without much thought or not answered at all, then the youth ministry will be on the verge

of a spiritual flat line. Not only that, but the unfortunate reality is that there are those in the church who have never given much credence to the youth and young adult ministry at all.

For Promiseland Community Church, this researcher believes that it would benefit the church significantly if more time, effort, and energy were given to ultimately making this inactive youth problem nonexistent. An excellent place to continue would be from the standpoint of more pastoral interviews from pastors who led churches with similar dynamics and demographics as Promiseland. Understanding what other pastors attempted that worked well or did not work at all will continue to be one of the best external approaches to deciding what type of action plan will yield the best results—in conjunction with the pastoral interview approach, continuing to research what other churches and ministries have done to minimize the negative impact that this inactive youth problem continues to have on churches will be important as well.

Continuing to study the unfortunate trend within the black church and community, which is the unnecessary and senseless violence in the streets every day. More must be done in terms of church engagement with the youth and young adults in the community. Young black men between the ages of 15 to 35 are being incarcerated at an alarming rate across the nation for various reasons. If black lives do not matter to other black lives, black lives will become irrelevant. Therefore, this researcher is cautiously optimistic and concerned at the same time. Yes, significant progress has been made at Paradise, and there is evidence that attitudes and mindsets have been altered. Still, this researcher is concerned about two specific challenges that continue to plague Promiseland Community Church. These challenges are the high rate of incarcerations of young black men and the absent father syndrome. Until the youth and young adult ministry are viewed as a family ministry, these problems will continue to plague the church.

During the pastoral interviews, all three pastors expressed their concerns about the increasing black-on-black crimes that have and continue to happen within black communities. These senseless, tragic, and unnecessary acts of violence indirectly affect the church in ways that hinder youth participation and parental involvement. Churches should consider and prioritize the presence of the youth and young adult ministry. If churches can do a better job of reaching children with the Gospel while they are children and then disciplining them as they matriculate through grade school on to high school, the odds of avoiding crime and prison will be reduced. Dating back to the 1950s and 1960s, the black church has always been instrumental in black communities, so with this type of rich history; the black church needs to be re-engaged so that relationships with the youth can be established. Promiseland Community Church intends to address this youth crime issue by hosting a town hall with the residents, parents, youth and young adults, and law enforcement once many of the pandemic protocols have been lifted. The purpose of this town hall will be to address the crime problem and to develop an action plan that will give churches opportunities to engage the youth through outreach programs.

After this research, the other challenge for Promiseland will be the lingering absent father syndrome. Like many other churches, a percentage of the youth and young adults do not have fathers who are active in their lives. This inactivity of the fathers also contributes to the inaction of the young people in the church. To provide a method for other churches to model, the process that has been discussed by the parents and youth volunteers at Promiseland to addressing this challenge will be attempting to encourage and equip fathers to be better leaders in the home. The plan will partner with local parental support groups that specialize in assisting fathers in communication, leadership, and relationship building. One of the reasons fathers neglect their responsibilities to their children is that they do not know how to communicate properly and effectively. By

partnering with these support groups, churches can recommend professional guidance that fathers need to help them become comfortable at being a father. These support groups will tap into the root causes while addressing the symptoms that often lead to men having trouble in expressing themselves to their children. Promiseland Community Church plans to coordinate father and son activities and events shortly as a means of creating environments where fathers and sons will be able to work and worship together.

After examining the results from the implementation of this project and an analysis of the research done to obtain those results, this researcher believes that the plan and path that Promiseland Community Church is pursuing will continue to yield positive results. The most common problem for many churches was the youth and young adults' need for inclusion and acceptance. Alienation and isolation are two reasons why churches and ministries have struggling youth and young adult ministries. Also, as these two issues are allowed to continue in the church, it will become challenging to derail them over time. Engagement and encouragement have always been components that have contributed to long-term group or organizational success in a way that generated long-term growth. The common factor in churches that we're able to overcome and conquer this inactive youth problem established and maintained a positive yet constructive relationship with their youth and young adults. Another common factor among these churches was that they also offered their support moving forward because they realized the value of the youth and young adults. For Promiseland to demonstrate to the youth that they are determined to create an environment where they feel encouraged and embraced, there will have to be an internal focus that will lead to an external response.

After COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted and when people feel more comfortable returning to church, internally for in-person worship, Promiseland Community Church will begin

what church leaders and youth volunteer workers have labeled Operation U.P.S.T.A.R.T (Uniting People Strategically Through Action, Recruitment, and Training). This result came about near the end of this project, and after this researcher asked the church leaders and youth volunteer workers to develop a plan for the youth people while asking God to get involved. This plan was initiated by making the second Sunday of every month youth Sunday. The young people will be responsible for scripture reading, praying, welcoming guests and visitors, and praising and worshiping on that Sunday.

The hope for this internal adjustment will be that the role and responsibility of young people in the worship will change the dynamics of the church in a positive way. Also, the message that this change will send to the youth and their parents is that they matter to the church, and the ripple effect of this internal adjustment will motivate the hearts and minds of the church members. Now that there is a new energy in the church, the focus will shift to being outside the church. This project can assist other churches of similar demographics struggling with the same inactive youth problem. As progress begins to be made within the church's youth and young adult ministry, the arms of outreach will start to extend beyond the internal to the external. This should be the hope of every church that the overflow of the youth ministry progress seen on the inside will spill over into communities and neighborhoods surrounding the church on the outside.

Another aspect of the youth and young adult outreach will be accomplished through the support of the parents and church members. Due to the challenging reality of youth extracurricular activities, such as sports that compete with the church on many occasions, the church must still make every effort available to offer their support to the youth. Youth outreach through the means of technology will be critical for the advancement of this ministry. The youth volunteer workers have encouraged small youth groups to organize on Tuesday evenings from 6:00 PM to 7:30 PM to

have "Youth Talk" sessions. These sessions will be designed to create an open line of communication and help the youth feel comfortable dialoguing with each other as they will serve as support groups. Also, Promiseland Community Church is currently working on a partnership with a local elementary school to provide meals for the children once a month to have a presence at the school and utilize it as a tool for recruiting. Churches struggling with this inactive youth problem can consider this approach moving forward. Another factor to keep in mind as remedies for this problem are attempted is that it is vital to remember to "work where God is working."¹⁹⁰ The activity of God during the youth and young adult ministry is a must. This entire project will only go so far without God being involved in the inner and outer workings of the church and the youth ministry. Since the God we serve is a relational God, it seems logical that He is concerned about the blended secular and sacred aspects of the lives of the youth and young adults. Therefore, with the understanding that no positive progress will occur without God's inclusion, the aim of every youth and young adult ministry should always be targeted at making God the focal point. As God is included in the workings of this ministry, this will hopefully motivate the adults to have the children in the inner workings of the church.

The need for inclusion and acceptance has become even more critical in the church today, and there are several reasons why. There is the recent rise in suicides among teenagers, the issues dealing with opioids and other drugs among teens, mental health problems because of the pandemic, crime and unnecessary acts of violence, and the pressures that come along with choosing to live a homosexual or transgender lifestyle. These issues, along with other underlining problems, are reasons why churches like Promiseland and a host of others must strive to make meaningful connections to young people. Although Promiseland will not be able to reach

¹⁹⁰ A quote was taken from Pastor C of church three during the third pastoral interview.

everyone, the motto that the church has developed throughout this project is, "start where you are, use what you have, and do what you can." Yes, there are challenges, but based on the results so far from this research project, these challenges have become a platform for the Holy Spirit to be active in the inactivity of the youth and young adults. Not only has the Holy Spirit been involved, but the church leaders, members, and parents have also recognized the power of God's grace at work in their lives.¹⁹¹ His power to change hearts and transform minds for the glory of God had manifested itself within the Promiseland family.

In retrospect, the pastoral interviews and the church member interviews helped reduce the tensions between the church leaders and some of the parents. The most crucial factor gleaned from the pastoral interviews was the need for youth leadership and a plan for training those leaders. Youth leadership in Promiseland Community Church was filled with mountain top experiences as well as valley experiences. These experiences led to other issues that culminated in the youth and young adult ministry becoming a liability in the church. Although much of the problem stemmed from the parents and the unfortunate realities in home life, there was still a lack of youth leadership. This problem initially crippled the ability of the church leaders to reach the youths but what countered this crippling condition was the input that the parents and church members gave by way of the interviews. The participation of the parents and church members helped to bring about a newfound motivation for the youth and young adults. The fresh optimism that ensued in the pastoral and church member interviews led to the groundbreaking excitement in the youth ministry. Even as COVID-19 is still problematic, there are more engagement, appreciation, and discipleship opportunities for the youth and young adults to grow in their faith.

The input from the three pastoral interviews allowed this researcher to have a different perspective about having the proper approach to this inactive youth ministry problem. For many

¹⁹¹ DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 161.

years, the youth and young adult ministry at Promiseland Community Church experienced a decline. Even though there have been other churches that went through similar issues, the stories of these three pastors served as a remedy for an ongoing illness. The pastoral interview with Pastor C of church 3 made the most significant impact on this researcher because of his attention to proper teaching and the need for a solid parental presence. This researcher has always believed that for the youth and young adult ministry at Promiseland Community Church to be gospel-centered, there had to be a heavy dose of sound biblical teaching. Biblical teaching undergirded every part of the implementation process for this project. Hearing and seeing evidence that teaching the gospel works aided in removing a considerable weight that seemed to be around the neck of this researcher. Unfortunately, it is sometimes during these moments of frustration that some resort to gimmicks and schemes as a means of luring children, youth, and young adults into thinking that these temporary band-aides will heal or even cure a terrible and deep wound.

The ministry of teaching the Word of God became paramount to this researcher. As this research project continued to make progress, the church leaders, deacons, and ministry leaders became aware of what this researcher was attempting to accomplish through the ministry of teaching. The other positive takeaway from pastor C was the attention he gave to parental involvement. From the literature review to this pastoral interview, this researcher has always known that parental involvement in the lives of young people is critical to the youth and young adults' spiritual growth and development. Not only did the church member interviews mention the role of parents, but the membership surveys suggested to many people that young people need the continual presence of a parent or guardian who is serious about the advancement of the youth and young adults' faith walk with God. Just as there is no substitute for the Scriptures, there is also no substitute for the presence of a loving parent who is willing to be there for their children or the gift

that God gave them. These newly motivated parents also became excellent recruiters for the youth and young adult ministry. Once the parents became committed to the vision and direction of the youth ministry, they started reaching out to other parents whose children needed to develop a level of spiritual development while serving God.

Finally, this researcher believes that this implementation process could also work for a church in decline or a ministry that is on the verge of collapsing from carrying the weight associated with an inactivity issue. Just as this researcher discovered after carrying out this project, the ministry of teaching cannot be forgotten. Neither can the Holy Spirit be hindered from having the freedom to change hearts and transform minds. Although progress has been achieved, there is still much work to do in updates, follow-up, evangelism, and discipleship. This researcher has seen where this youth ministry came from, and now the positive strides that have been made will ease the anxieties and stresses that caused some youth leaders to resign. This researcher is thankful for the opportunity to work with young people and parents who have been willing to be instructed and led for spiritual growth and development. For the youth and young adult, ministry to be effective at Promiseland Community Church, having a good formula while practicing spiritual discipline will make the difference as God is glorified.

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